



CHRISTIE OVERHEAD DOOR...

A Love Story



Andrew and Carla Cimmino,
Owners of Christie Overhead Door
151 Industrial Loop,
Staten Island, NY 10309





*The
full crew
of Christie
Overhead Door,
Staten Island,
New York*

When Andrew Cimmino broke the news to his wife of five years that he was going to acquire his own door company, young Carla was thrilled.

"I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do more than spend every day of my life with my husband," she said.

A cynic might assign such a comment to youthful exuberance, but the cynic would be wrong.

The former high school sweethearts, then and still husband and wife, and now longtime business partners, Andrew and Carla Cimmino still spend every day of their lives together, and both say they couldn't be happier.

While the struggles of running a small business in a hotbed of competition, working 12-hour days and never quite being able to separate work from marriage can be challenging for any couple, it's all worked for the owners of Christie Overhead Door in Staten Island, New York. To this day, their desks touch one another in their building's second floor Office suite where the administrative side of the business lives, just above the warehouse where the doors come and go.

Getting Started

Andrew Cimmino began life as a door man at 23, becoming the installer for Christie Overhead Door. The Brooklyn-based company had been established by the Christie family in 1945. By the early 1990s, Andrew was the firm's lead installer and Service Technician.

He took to the work easily.

The grandson of a builder, construction was in his blood.

He is a carpenter by trade and grew up the son of an engineer from whom he learned his mechanical and electronics skills from early childhood.

"With all of the background I had from my father and my carpentry training, a garage door system was easy," Andrew recalled. "My father was a civil engineer and he was extremely mechanically inclined. Everyone from the neighborhood would come to him to fix something or solve some problem they had. I spent a lot of time with him building gas powered Go-Karts, watching him design, build and fly radio controlled model planes, and learning electronic circuitry which was one of my father's passions. I absorbed his understanding of electronics and mechanical engineering. In fact, I'm still challenged by his knowledge to this day."

Five years into his door career, the Christie brothers were ready to retire. Having no immediate family who desired to acquire the business, they offered it to Andrew. Terms were reached with the Christies and on April 23rd 1993 a new life had begun.

His bride, Carla, left her job at a health club where she assisted the club's manager and spent her first week in business with the previous office manager of Christie's Overhead Doors before being left on her own. While it

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Carla Cimmino



Andrew Cimmino



Customer Service, Data, Laura Fodor



Assistant Bookkeeper, Crystal Giubino



Warehouse Manager, Louis Jorden, Jr.

Christie Overhead Door - At A Glance

Company Name:
Christie Overhead Door

Company Address:
151 Industrial Loop,
Staten Island, NY 10309

Company Contact Information:
• Telephone: 718-967-8858
• Fax: 718-967-4162
• Email: Andrew@christiedoor.com
• Website: www.christieoverheaddoor.com

Primary Personnel & Titles:
• Andrew Cimmino, President/CEO
• Carla Cimmino, Vice President

Number of Years in Business: 23

Sales in 2015: \$1,250,000

Primary Products:
• Residential Garage Doors
• Commercial Doors
• Operators
• Access Controls

Primary Product Providers:
CHI, Linear and DoorKing

Number of Personnel: 9

Number of Trucks & Vehicles: 4

IDA Member: Yes

IDEA Accredited: Yes

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would take longer than a week, Carla eventually became the inside master of the company while Andrew handled the installations and repairs in the field. Relying on her experiences at the health club, the brief door company training, and her own shrewd sense of how things should be done, Carla ultimately took care of every administrative function in the company.

Importantly, as the business grew, a remarkable and valuable dynamic between the Cimmino couple revealed itself. They were now in this together and if they didn't already know it, they found that in running a business, they were polar opposites, but in a good way.

Yin and Yang

Andrew and Carla Cimmino, together, are outgoing and easily mix with others. The couple has been active in door organizations in the Northeast for the past 20 years and count many of their competitors as friends. At door events, you can see them always together, usually in a crowd, and the crowd is typically making a lot of noise – having fun.

Taken individually, however, the two possess very different strengths and contrasting personalities.

"Andrew is the diplomat," Carla offers. "He handles business development and making sure our strategies are working. Whenever there is a problem with a job, or a client needs some custom traffic control design, Andrew is the guy who designs and builds or fixes it, with his customers' satisfaction as his only goal. Nobody handles people better than Andrew," she said.

This ability to effectively interact with customers is important for a company that does 75% of its business in customized doors and parking control. Every customer needs or wants something specific and each job is unique in its design, requiring a high level of customer interaction. From concept to presentation, sale and installation, Andrew personally oversees the process and conveys to all his installers the importance of pride in their work and a level of excellence required in the custom market. In some cases the project requires equipment that is not readily available to buy. Andrew will design and build full custom controls for

his door systems. Seeing each job through to his customer's vision, and facing all the challenges that come with very custom designed applications.

That being the case, someone in the business needs to collect and pay the bills, schedule jobs for demanding customers and maintain internal and external standards upon which all businesses must operate. To that end, Carla is the Yin to Andrew's Yang. Carla was born in Italy as the youngest of 10 children. The family moved to New York City when Carla was still a baby, but she grew up in a crowd of strong-minded Italians with solid family values that are rarely seen today. In the course of maturing, she developed skills and traits that enabled her to enforce her will with skill and composure. She uses tone over volume as her means of persuasion.

"She frees me to go out and do what I do best," Andrew said of his wife. "She's more of an enforcer when she needs to be. She makes sure everything in the office runs efficiently and delinquent accounts get paid without compromising the relationships. She manages the things I don't, so that gives me the time to focus on our clients, our field staff and getting projects done on time and on budget."

With Carla thoughtfully nodding in agreement, Andrew summarized the success formula of their business and personal partnership:

"The hardest thing to do in a husband and wife company is separating the business from the marriage. Carla and I have a very strong, personal bond. We are very different in the way we think and in our personalities, so rather than allow those things to conflict with one another, we rely on each other's strengths. We always make sure our focus is on the same thing and never try to get our way over the greater good of the company. By capitalizing on our differences, it strengthens our business and our personal lives. When we lock the office up at night EVERYTHING stays there till morning."

In 1998 Andrew acquired one of his competitors in the area Diamond Door Systems, a similar size company with a 30 year presence. Things were moving along nicely and growing according to plan. The combined company moved

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into a 5000 square foot facility that was built by Andrew’s grandfather and still remains in the family. While the company is doing exceptionally well today, that division of personality strengths – coupled with some solid financial consulting from an industry advisor – may have saved Christie Overhead Door during the grueling recession that kicked into high gear in 2008.

Working through Hard Times

As with almost every door dealer in the United States, the recession that began in 2007-08 hit Christie Overhead Door hard. Though the company was not over-invested in new housing construction, the custom door market in the local New York area was hard hit by the overall economic conditions that began when the housing market crashed. The Cimminos found themselves working at a much slower pace as custom door sales dropped off and Carla began to see a cash flow trend that worried her.

The couple reached out to their advisor, industry financial consultant – and regular IDA Expo seminar presenter – Bruce McConnell. The former Raynor executive is a longstanding consultant to the door industry, whose niche is helping dealers better manage their businesses by understanding the financial statements as it relates to their daily operations. Bruce and the Cimminos had been working together for many years and it was time for a “Bruce-induced Christie Re-Build ”

Following extensive consultative evaluations, it was time to act on what Carla and Andrew knew but were not ready for: “We’ve got to downsize,” she told him. “Then we’ve got to move.”

McConnell told the couple he agreed with this assessment. The 5,000 square foot Brooklyn facility was too much. The overhead was too high. Andrew was shaken. It was devastating for him to absorb the news that the company he continued to build for the past 14 years, in the community it had developed a name and reputation since the end of World War II...was essentially going to have to redesign itself to compete and be successful in this new economic climate.

The couple lived in Staten Island, and endured typical two hour commutes, so they found a Staten Island based facility that would suit their downsized needs, ten minutes from home. The core staff were mostly Staten Island residents, so they had a company meeting and explained to everyone their plan. Keeping only those who were absolutely essential, and making sure the others were re-located to new companies, the stream-lined crew packed up everything and left Brooklyn.

Andrew was even more distraught when the reality hit him; the company had to fit 5000 square feet of business into a 1,500 square foot warehouse, and 500 square foot office.

Andrew recalled: “It was 1 AM when we unloaded the last of it and I’m looking at my stuff, stacked up in this little area after all those years in a warehouse more than three times that size, and I’m thinking this isn’t a warehouse, this is a closet. I just kind of broke down at that point.”

But then, with a glance in Carla’s direction, exhausted and overwhelmed they embraced and assured each other that they were going to make it, he added: “It was the best thing we ever could have done.” A new business model rose from the fragments in the simple words of their trusted friend and confidant Bruce “Make more with less” and that they did.

An Artist in the Big City

Christie Overhead Door is Five Star Dealer of CHI Overhead Door products, which fits the business model Andrew follows. Due to the high percentage of custom doors he sells, he finds the CHI team ideal for his innovative style of business.

Christie Overhead Door serves all five of the New York City Burroughs, encompassing Manhattan, the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Staten Island, and now sections of New Jersey. The diversity of doors in the historic melting pot is as varied as its population. Manhattan, Bronx and Queens are primarily a commercial market for Christie Overhead Door, whereas in Brooklyn row houses and high end Co-Op buildings are more common residential structures.

“You have these (row) houses all crammed together, and every one of them is different,” Andrew explained. Some openings aren’t more than five-feet wide and others use lifts to create a two-car garage where the opening would only account for one. We have even designed entire walls that swing out of the way so when the door is up a car could turn into tight driveways”

“If you can install in New York City, you can install anywhere,” Andrew said.

The Staten Island residential and commercial market is far different than in the other four Burroughs. Walkable neighborhoods with sidewalk cafés, large custom detached homes and standard garage doors are far more prevalent. It’s become the community of choice for many people who want to work in Manhattan, but live in a less congested area. This has brought business growth in recent years that has enabled Christie Overhead Door to capture a niche for specialty and customized residential and commercial doors.

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Andrew Cimmino, a classically trained Norwegian carver, displays one of his works of art, commemorating his company.

Custom Full view doors, particularly, have become popular among restaurants and bars that want to take advantage of nice weather, and have been a growing segment of the company's business. Other areas of opportunity have been found in higher end aesthetic doors, both residential and commercial.

Andrew, in addition to his door expertise, is an accomplished designer. He can create his vision for a customer using AUTO-CAD, a skill taught to him also by his father, and then have that door built to spec. He is also, notably, a self-taught classical woodworker and Norwegian style wood carver of the Victorian period. Though he laughs when asked if he has ever carved a garage door for anyone, he isn't bashful about saying that he is an artisan. Most impressive is all his hand carved furniture has been made from salvaged mahogany garage doors; one project can even be seen on you-tube as he recorded the entire process on his smart phone in his shop. When he gets a customer looking for something unique, he lets his artist loose.

"My greatest satisfaction is when I have a customer who wants something unique that they can't find," Andrew said. "By the time they come to me, they have been told that it can't be done, and they are expecting to compromise. When I can take that customer's vision and create something for them, the look on their face of appreciation makes my day...that's what I love about this business the most. Making someone's vision a reality after they'd given up hope is a great feeling."

Industry Involvement is a Key Part of Their Success

Andrew and Carla also credit IDA and IDEA as partners in their business ventures. The couple became active in local door industry groups and has attended the IDA Expo regularly, and you will always see them hand in hand together. Andrew has been a featured presenter on multiple occasions at the IDA Expo, about which he says, despite not being a public speaker, it comes easily to him.



The entrance to the company's Staten Island warehouse.

"I don't worry about stage fright, because if I believe in something, and I'm passionate about it, talking about it comes easily for me," he said. "It's the same with sales. I believe in my products. If I'm competing against another manufacturer's door, it's not my job to go find that door and try to sell it for less than my competition. It's my job to sell my products because I believe in them."

"We have learned so much from going to Expo, from the magazine and from being involved in the affiliate groups here in the northeast," he continued. "When I got involved in my industry is when I really started to understand how to be a professional door dealer."

As New York City's only accredited door dealer, Andrew is so dedicated to the concept of professionalism in our industry that he uses certification as part of his promotion protocol within the company ranks. At Christie Overhead Door, Certification patches are worn like a badge of honor among all the technicians. This promotes healthy competition and focus on elevating their skill sets. He uses those credentials in everything that goes out the front door of his business. The credentialing logos are on every proposal, advertisement, work shirt, truck and invoice that is produced.

Andrew and Carla Cimmino learned the basics of running a business a long time ago. Working hard to make customers happy, treating employees as valuable assets to the company, and taking advantage of opportunities made available through industry groups, is among the fundamentals the close-knit couple has taken to heart.

But more than any other single part of the success of Christie Overhead Door, Andrew and Carla believe in each other. Both are smart, talented and strong willed. But because they recognize their differences as strengths, they continue not only to succeed in business, but as two people who genuinely enjoy being together... every day of their lives. Andrew made it clear "when you find true love, you want to spend the rest of your life with that person... I am really blessed to be able to literally spend every day with the love of my life."

