

# CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT **Distribution**

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## **FEMALE EQUIPMENT EXECUTIVE SELLS MACHINERY WORTH \$1 MILLION TO CHINA'S YUNNAN PROVINCE**

*Musya Tumanyan of Hoffman International Inc. used skills and experience to complete major export project.*

It's a world away from an equipment-crowded showroom in Piscataway, N.J., to the high country of China's Yunnan Province. But for Musya Tumanyan of Hoffman International Inc., traveling from the first locale to the second to sell road-building equipment was a fascinating and productive adventure.

Her story is all the more remarkable when you consider that she is a woman in an almost exclusively male industry-heavy equipment sales-and that she traveled alone to the People's Republic of China, a land where women executives are virtually unknown. But then, Tumanyan has lived a remarkable life.

Born in Russia, Tumanyan graduated from a Russian university and emigrated to the United States 23 years ago. Here, she studied at the Latin American Institute, New York (a part of the University of Texas), taking the International Marketing and Trade Program. Next, she spent eight years at a trading company in New York. A resident of Princeton, N.J., she joined Hoffman International Inc. in 1988, specializing in overseas sales of heavy road construction, lifting and material-handling equipment.

### **INTERCULTURALISM ESSENTIAL**

"The fact that I speak fluent Russian is often helpful in my work, but language is only one element in the total experience needed for international sales," Tumanyan says of her working methods. "You can market without language knowledge, as I did in China. Translators can manage that, as they did there. But you must have an intercultural understanding. This means genuine respect for customs not your own. It means a willingness to try new things-even exotic foods such as fried bumblebees-gracefully and without fuss. It means doing everything possible to make your potential buyers comfortable in explaining their needs to you, and in being assured that you

understand those needs, and that you have the means to fulfill them. You must be willing to do what is asked. If that calls for a trip deep into the center of China, that's what you do."

Tumanyan's China trip took place after the fourth and final Chinese trade delegation visited the Piscataway showrooms of Hoffman International. The four delegations, consisting of high-ranking executives from the Transportation Department for Yunnan Province, visited between April 1998 and February 1999.

"With each group of visitors in search of equipment, we worked to learn the issues that concerned them so we could address them," Tumanyan says. "Each delegation was impressed and said to the next, 'You must include Hoffman in your itinerary'-or words to that effect. By the time we met the fourth group, they told us to prepare an initial proposal for road repair equipment. By then, we had the input needed to make recommendations."

### **LONG TRIP, LONGER NEGOTIATIONS**

Ensuring the equipment was right for the job called for seeing how the gear would be used. This meant a trip that would have even the most confident salesperson fearing the worst.

The first leg of Tumanyan's solo adventure was a 14-hour flight to Beijing and an overnight stay at the International Hotel. Since train travel to Yunnan would have taken a week (with luck), a three-hour flight southwest to the Yunnan Province near the Laotian border was the only practical way to finish the trip.

"I was amazed by the universality of the bicycle, by the vastness, the sheer size, the numbers of people," Tumanyan says. "There are 75 million in Yunnan Province alone, five million in the city of Kunming. I was also impressed with the fact that, more than 30 years after his visit, President Nixon is still revered for having established U.S.-Chinese trade relations."

Because oil is scarce and costly in China, the highway infrastructure is primarily concrete. It is drastically in need of repair if the province is to ship more of its main crop-fresh produce-to market. The budget for infrastructure repairs in Yunnan Province is \$20 billion.

"Much of Yunnan Province is 1,894 meters, or nearly 6,000 feet, above sea level," Tumanyan says. "This elevation makes it hard to use tractors for agriculture. Also, by tradition, everything is done by hand, as it always has been. If you visit a factory, you see hundreds, even thousands, of people

doing by hand what a dozen or two workers operating machines do in the West. It was a revelation."

The Chinese highway administrators, local officials and what seemed to her like a good many of China's 1.4 billion people were quite excited when Tumanyan arrived to see several job sites and to help the Chinese officials determine how well the proposed equipment would work on the job. "There are more than 130 Chinese dialects, and I must have heard quite a few of them," she says. "Finally, when local people exchanged opinions in their language, my hosts said to the local officials, 'You must speak in Mandarin (the official language). Otherwise, you will have to hire another translator!'"

During her visit, Tumanyan was so welcomed that she received the ultimate compliment. "I was privileged to be invited to peoples' homes for meals and social visits," she says.

Following is the road-building and repair equipment in the contract:

- A Bartmill 60-inch drum crawler milling machine capable of traversing hefty slopes and rough terrain;
- A 35-inch drum milling machine specially modified with a conveyor for slope and grade control;
- Two large crawlers, and two medium crawlers with 7-meter conveyor belts;
- A LeeBoy asphalt maintainer with a 60-centimeter drum and 2.5-ton hopper, equipped to perform multiple functions.

All the units were selected for reliability, proven by Hoffman's experience in parts of the world where repairs are difficult. The order is valued at more than \$1 million.

"For four days during the trip, and afterward by telex and fax, we had incredible negotiations," Tumanyan says. "There were times when we exchanged whole messages over the meaning of only one word. But eventually, the trust and good feeling we had worked hard to establish on both sides came through, and we did the deal."

As a final step before emerging from the deep woods of negotiation, the Chinese insisted that the equipment be delivered through the mainland port of Behei. "We had to go through several freight forwarders to find one who

had even heard of it," Tumanyan says. "But, like every other part of the trip, this turned out well, too."

Since the contract signing, Yunnan Province has signed another \$1-million order with Hoffman. Because of these successes, Hoffman met with 15 highway executives from the Gansu Province in northwest China to discuss a similar deal. Hoffman is also in preliminary negotiations with the Wuhan Province in central east China.