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Cascade Engineering's Sustainability Crossroads: Staying True to Purpose

On June 1, 2023, Christina Keller looked up from her desk and the view of the evening sky through her office window took her attention away from her work. Tall dark clouds were building on the horizon, and that meant one thing in western Michigan this time of year—a storm was coming. She slid back in her chair and turned to watch. As the storm clouds gathered in the distance, she began to think about the impending decisions she faced as CEO of Cascade Engineering.

Cascade was founded by her father, Fred P. Keller, in 1973 on the idea that a business could be both profitable *and* socially and environmentally responsible. He would work to build Cascade on these core principles into an enterprise that, by 2015, produced over \$380 million in annual revenue (see **Exhibit 1**) and employed over 1,700 people. Throughout this growth, Cascade remained true to Keller's vision of embedding a triple bottom line philosophy across its operations. This philosophy aspired to treat people, planet, and profit as equal considerations in a business's success.¹

Christina Keller was proud to be the second generation of the family to lead Cascade with the same values upon which her father had founded the company. She had joined the business in 2009 and became CEO in 2018. She had made tough leadership decisions and successfully led the company through the widespread supply chain disruptions and labor challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic that had been particularly taxing for the manufacturing sector. Then in July 2022, she made the difficult decision to divest one of the most significant parts of Cascade—a strategic move that would shape the future direction of the company.²

CK Technologies (CKT) had been the largest business unit within Cascade Engineering, and it was a leading manufacturer of plastic molded parts for the commercial trucking and bus industry. CKT was formed as a joint venture with Kline Holdings in Montpelier, Ohio, in 2002, and became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Cascade in 2008. By 2022, CKT had grown to produce over \$180 million in annual revenue and employed

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