

WORDS DAYNA CAMILLERI CLARKE

# BANKING ON SUCCESS: MEET CAROLINE VAN MARCKE

**IL-BIZZILLA RECENTLY HAD THE PLEASURE OF SITTING DOWN WITH ENTREPRENEUR CAROLINE VAN MARCKE, THE CEO OF A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL FAMILY-OWNED MULTINATIONAL GROUP, CHAIR OF MALTA-BASED IZOLA BANK PLC, AND A WOMAN PASSIONATE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT, STRATEGIC INNOVATION AND HER TEAM.**

In 2014 Caroline Van Marcke became the CEO and Executive Director of the Van Marcke Group, as well as the majority shareholder. The group is a family-owned business founded in 1929. It owns and manages 30 operational companies in 7 countries and has 1600 full-time staff. Van Marcke specialises in the wholesaling, retailing and distribution of energy-efficient heating, sanitary ware and plumbing supplies for both the B2B and B2C markets and is also active in the manufacturing and real estate industries. The group also owns Malta-based Izola Bank plc.

**IZOLA BANK'S ROOTS ARE FIRMLY EMBEDDED IN FAMILY BUSINESS. IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE THREE THINGS THAT MAKE THIS UNIQUE?**

Many family run businesses, with the right counsel, communication and shared ambitions have thrived for generations. The Van Marcke Group and in turn Izola Bank is one of those success stories. When my grandfather founded Van Marcke in 1929 he created a legacy for the family's future generations. My father, Carl Van Marcke, ensured that the Group continued to evolve as market and consumer demands have guided us over the decades and today our eyes are set firmly on sustainability and accessibility to warmth and water for all. Being the visionary he was, he founded Izola Bank to offer business and personal customers products and services that really unburden their operations and support their ambitions for growth. It's a changing world and we strive to find the balance between digitalisation and offering customers what we know they want – a human touch.

**IZOLA BANK WILL SOON BE MOVING OFFICES IN MALTA TO CASTILLE SQUARE; WHAT LED TO THIS MOVE?**

Valletta has always been a love story for our family. We adore the history, architecture, culture and the atmosphere. In fact, when my father first thought of opening a bank in Malta, it was a given

that the offices would be in Valletta. The move to Castille Square follows the bank's growth in recent years, giving us more space to realise our ambitions. East Street, where the bank is currently located has been fantastic, but as our product line grows and we diversify our portfolio it's also time to give Izola Bank more visibility. The investment made in the property at Castille was part of our ambition to help preserve the beauty and heritage of the capital city. We're excited about the move and can't wait to open our doors in early 2023.

**IN TERMS OF "FUTURE PROOFING" THE BANK, WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS FOR FAMILY BUSINESSES TO DO WHEN GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF EXPANSION, SUCH AS IZOLA BANK, TO PRESERVE THEIR ROOTS AND CULTURE BUT MAKE SPACE FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE?**

Growth is fantastic, but as a family-owned bank, it's of the uttermost importance for us never to forget our roots. I can't tell you there is a one-size-fits-all formula or secret to preserving a company's culture as it grows, but we do pay special attention to the type of team we hire, that we all feel and share the same values of togetherness and respect. There are some traditions we'll always keep and some that evolve with time. The bank has a very open and collaborative culture, which I believe helps. Working with people who are passionate about what they do feeds into the brand and company and makes it an exciting place to be.

**BUSINESS LEADERS OFTEN USE THE WORD "CULTURE" TO DESCRIBE WHAT MAKES THEIR ENTITY UNIQUE FOR THEM AND THOSE WHO WORK FOR THEM (AND OFTEN CUSTOMERS AND CLIENTS TOO). IN PRACTICAL TERMS, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CULTURE AT IZOLA BANK?**

It's highly collaborative, with a positively charged atmosphere. We look for people who bring that passion for excellence in their work. ➤



*Caroline Van Marcke*



I suppose that the element of being a family-owned business means we're more supportive and welcoming towards each other. Whilst the atmosphere is fast-paced, we believe in giving our team as much room to grow and learn at a personal level as possible. So it's not just about the bank's success, but a collaborative journey of success for everyone involved.

**VAN MARCKE, THE GROUP BEHIND IZOLA BANK, IS A BRAND DEDICATED TO PROVIDING A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE THROUGH ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY AND SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTS; HOW IS THIS IMPLEMENTED, AND WHY IS DOES IT MATTER?**

As the Van Marcke Group sells products related to water consumption and heating, we feel socially responsible to propose solutions that are the most energy and water efficient. Over the years I've looked at ways on how to make all of our businesses more sustainable. From launching new e-commerce channels to green-inspired concept showrooms and managing the educational shift to get our clients to choose more environmentally friendly products, putting the planet first is a personal value I try to instil in every company within the Group. In 2019 I realised my vision of building a fully carbon neutral distribution centre in Belgium with 518 geothermal drillings and 14,000 solar panels on its roof. It was a dream come true and helps us become more futureproof as the impact of climate change and geopolitical risk becomes more evident. The bank focuses on purpose-driven business, supporting corporate customers whose business offering positively impacts the community, the environment, or both. Izola Bank also promotes economic growth through the continued support of SMEs with products and services that unburden their operations and help them achieve their ambitions. We're also exploring ways to make our new offices in Castille Square carbon neutral. By remaining agile and responsive, we can meet the new demands in the market and strive to continue offering products, services and solutions through innovation that fully respects the environment.

**IS DIGITALISATION IMPORTANT FOR IZOLA BANK? HOW IMPORTANT IS INNOVATION TO THE BANK?**

The Covid-19 pandemic has fast-forwarded us into a world that

not only wants more digital services and experiences, but is demanding them at a pace never seen before. Izola Bank was ahead in this area a long time before this unprecedented event. We have always valued the importance of exceptional digital services and invested heavily in finding the right partners to give us just that over the years. Niche but valuable products powered by technology that unburdens our customers is how we have continuously operated. And that in turn, leads us to consider innovation constantly. Ultimately being smaller makes us faster, more responsive and able to stay relevant.

**WHAT'S THE VISION FOR IZOLA BANK WITHIN MALTA IN THE COMING YEARS?**

Our vision is to offer highly personal digital-based solutions that positively impact our customers by supporting their ambitions and unburdening their operations. This means we often partner with fintech entities with product offerings that complement our own. We're different because our customers tell us we are. We are physically present and available as our customers need us to be. Teamed with just the right technology and niche product lines, that human touch makes us who we are. We also place importance on supporting the local community. This is why we have supported Foodbank Lifeline Foundation since its formation, helping them to feed thousands of people yearly, as we believe every person should have the right to food on their table. We also believe in helping individuals or couples acquire their first property and gain a foothold on the property ladder. Which is why we again diversified our portfolio this year and began offering home loans to the local market. It's an exciting time. By embracing digitalisation, remembering who we are and what our values are and bringing the right team members on board, I know Izola Bank will continue to grow from success to success. ✱