



# FROM CLASSROOM TO COLD CHAIN

*Meet Sara Stickler, GCCA's new President and CEO.*

**H**urricane Helene was not the backdrop that anyone would have chosen for the first month as the President and CEO of the Global Cold Chain Alliance. Still, Sara Stickler showed the clear, calm and decisive leadership qualities that made her stand out in the selection process. She and the team delivered a successful GCCA Convention. Stickler talks to Cold Facts about her career journey and her ambitions for the GCCA.

**COLD FACTS (CF):** Sara, welcome to GCCA! Can you tell us what your first impressions are of the organization you lead?

**Sara Stickler (SS):** Thank you, it's an honour and privilege to be joining such a well-respected and impactful organization. It has been a phenomenal first month, and everyone has been very welcoming and supportive. My first impression is how dedicated

and engaged our membership is, and how committed they are in advancing GCCA. We also have a great staff who bring a vast array of skillsets and knowledge that allows us to deliver so much to our members.

Our boards at GCCA, the Global Cold Chain Foundation (GCCF) and the Controlled Environment Building Association (CEBA) are committed and ready to lead as we ensure the stability and growth of the organization. The cold chain is a vitally important

industry that has shown its importance and resiliency over the past few years. We face many new opportunities and challenges, GCCA is well positioned to lead on these matters, and I am optimistic for our future.

**CF:** You have led other associations, most recently WTS International that works to promote equity and access in the transportation industry. What has that taught you about the role and relevance of trade associations to the industries they serve?

**SS:** I have spent the last 15 years falling in love with association work, whether at WTS International or before that at the Household and Commercial Products Association, building their Educational and Research work and managing their Foundation. Now with GCCA included, I have had the privilege of getting to know three very different industries.



Each industry has had its own unique set of opportunities, but what I love about associations is the power of a unified voice and a joining together of competitors for the larger good of the industry. Associations help to drive innovation, adaptation, growth, and education within and of an industry.

The ability to deliver for our members and advocate for our industry are my guiding motivations every day. As I think about the priorities here at GCCA, the first is to continue to drive member value and return on investment. I'm already hearing from members about their hopes for GCCA, GCCF and CEBA, and I look forward to meeting and talking with many more people in the coming months to gain a deeper understanding.

**CF:** Earlier in your career you were a teacher and sports coach, and you have said you see your leadership role as “the coach” – can you explain?

**SS:** I am proud to be a former educator and coach, and that mentality and philosophy is still at the heart of everything I do. I see myself as “the coach,” and working with the Boards, members, and staff, we will collaboratively define our long-term goals – the “championship” we are working towards. As the coach, I have four main philosophies that drive me. Firstly, always be making continual progress. We're better today than yesterday and better tomorrow than today. It's not one big workout at the gym that will get results, but rather the consistency of showing up each day with an aspiration of being better than yesterday.

Second, leave things better than you found them. This will be vital to us in GCCA, GCCF and CEBA. There is so much potential to improve on our strengths. This mentality will shape how we collaborate with our colleagues, members, and stakeholders and build our

reputation as a team that others want to be on.

Third, if you do something, take the time to do it right the first time. To ensure a high standard of excellence in all that we do, we commit to transparent and open communications to ensure shared expectations.

And finally, as the coach, it's my job to build a great team and let that team play. This is your association. Whether the team is the GCCA staff, experts like our GCCF Council of Scientific Advisors or a cohort of members organized to educate members on Capitol Hill or in the European Parliament, it is building and supporting a team of professionals and utilizing and complementing the skills of each individual. And then getting out of the way to let their expertise shine.

**CF:** You talked to members at the GCCA Convention about the importance of GCCA as a global voice for the cold chain. Why is that important?

**SS:** I am very aware that I have not worked in the cold chain before, so I have a lot to learn about this industry. But I did recognize, alongside everyone else in the pandemic years, just how vital the cold chain is. The rapid deployment of the COVID-19 vaccine was an amazing feat of cold chain delivery as was how our industry delivered continuity of food supply chains during that period of unprecedented upheaval. The industry's success at that time created a new awareness of supply chains, in general, and cold chains, in particular.

The pandemic was a moment in time, but it has also proved to be an episode in a more extended period of disruption and uncertainty in our global economy and geopolitics. At the convention, we heard from world experts like Jason Schenker (the Futurist Institute) and Rachel Wilson (Morgan Stanley) about the future of our

economy and the cybersecurity threat. Their perspectives reinforced for all of us that while we are grateful that the global pandemic is behind us, people, governments and our customers face other upheavals and challenges.

Cold chain resilience is vital, and we must ensure that decision-makers across the world recognize that and support us in getting the job done. That allows us to build, expand and replace cold storage infrastructure and transportation hubs; keep trade routes open; and ensure we have access to the skilled workforce, technology and energy supplies we need to be effective and make investments.

We will do this by proudly telling our story in relevant media and government forums, bringing together our members' expertise, building broad coalitions and holding the key regulators to account. There is so much to do, and I am excited to get started.

**CF:** With so much on your plate, it may be hard to think about right now, but can you share some insights on what life is like for you outside of work and what your hobbies or interests are?

**SS:** While excited and ready to learn more about the cold chain and visit with members, my role as wife and mother are the two most important titles I will ever have. My family joined me at the GCCA Convention this year, and it was such a joy to see how we were all so welcomed into the GCCA family.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending as much time as possible with my family and most of that time is outside, which includes swimming, hiking, kayaking and even yard work. I pretend to be a runner, and I have completed four marathons. I think it's the teacher in me, but I love continuing to learn new things. I love non-fiction, and typically I'm reading two or three books at the same time. 📖