Ms. Carolyn Doerle became the president of Doerle Food Services in 1988 and built the company into a multi-million dollar independent distributor. She spoke about her experience as the company’s new leader.

- One of the first things she did as CEO was hire the top 7 food salesmen in the area.
- She began looking for a larger facility and located one in Broussard, Louisiana.
- Doerle Food moved from a 100,000 sq. ft. facility into a 400,000 sq. ft. facility.
- This larger facility allowed Doerle Food to go after larger accounts.
- Within 6 months, the company took on an $80 million contract with Sonic.
- During this same period Doerle Food acquired a contract with Subway worth $50 million.

Within a 6 week period they acquired contracts worth over $120 million. Ms. Doerle saw this as an opportunity to utilize the new facility. The biggest challenge was hiring 120 new employees, training them, and preparing them to handle these new business contracts.

- Since 2003, Doerle has increased its contracts to $380 million, increased to 500 employees, and operates 4 facilities in Shreveport, LA; Pasadena, TX; Broussard, LA; and Port Fourchon, LA.
- Its Port Fourchon facility handles its energy marine contracts, a service they have provided to the Gulf’s oil industry for over 40 years, servicing the industry from Mobile, AL to Corpus Christie, TX.
- Doerle Food’s distribution area covers all of Louisiana, east Texas, and southern Mississippi making it a regional company.
- The biggest challenge has been managing and controlling the company’s growth, which takes an enormous amount of capital to sustain.

Doerle Food Services is an independent distribution company. In order to compete with public companies on a national level they joined a purchasing co-op comprised of over 300 hundred other independent companies. The co-op of distribution companies pool their volume which provides them leverage against the marketplace to negotiate the best possible price. This process leaves little margin for error and reduces a company’s profitability to a game of fractions. Fuel costs are the greatest expense item in this business.

Ms. Doerle also discussed future projects for Doerle Food.

- In response to the shale oil areas booming in central LA, all the way to San Antonio, TX, logistical catering companies are increasing in these areas, which will provide new contracts to Doerle Food.
- Catering companies are setting up feeding camps for all the drilling industry and are expected to remain for the next 7-12 years.
- Doerle is prepared to meet this growing demand with its strategically located distribution centers. The newest distribution facility in Shreveport will be of vital importance.

During her tenure as CEO/Managing Director with Doerle Food Services she has gained new knowledge in what it is to be a leader.

- Leaders are the keepers of the corporate culture. This is the role Ms. Doerle feels she now must fill.
- It is important to maintain the company for the sake of the 500 employees and their families.
- She has been able to redefine the role of CEO from the traditional male action-oriented, quasi-military, and focused performance with an approach that is intuitive, integrative, participatory, and a consensus building style. Ms. Doerle believes she has taken a blend of the two and created an approach that fits today’s workforce and made it her own.
- Ms. Doerle pointed to the following book as a source of inspiration - *Leading from the Front: No Excuse Leadership Tactics for Women* by Courtney Lynch & Annie Morgan.