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From the smallest hands to helping millions - by Marie Maia

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Marie Maia, Montagno
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On February 22, over 200 women will convene in East Hartford for the Women Who Build Summit. The all-day program, featuring local, regional, and national speakers, will help attendees power their way to success. Whether seasoned or just starting out, male or female, all will be inspired to reach our goals and dreams in the AEC industry. Riding on the wave of a sold-out crowd in 2017, the program has moved to a bigger venue.

This year's summit, Power Grid to Success, is structured like a ladder we can ascend to define, and achieve, career highs and personal fulfillment.

"Everyone has a strength that he or she can apply for the greater good," said Cathy DeFrances, director of business development at Fuss & O'Neill.

Our day will consist of an address by commissioner Melody Currey followed by a panel Harnessing the Wisdom of Business Owners. Whether or not we own a business, we will hear strategies, tactics, and inspiration that we can apply to our careers. A second panel will share stories of their cutting-edge roles with companies who are leading and innovating the way we design, understand, fund, and build projects. Our midday keynote speaker, joining us from Colorado, is licensed engineer Dr. Annamaria Popescu, who provides professional testimony and teaches scheduling, effective project controls, and dispute avoidance, both nationally and internationally. Her address will be rich with relevance. And be ready to participate in some interactive sessions this year.

"Even the smallest hand can make a difference," said Julia Jack of Parsons Brinkerhoff.

To end the day, the Giving Back panel will suggest ways women can use their power for good; how we all can take the skills and knowledge we have, and combine it with our passion to lift others in need, helping them to succeed. Be prepared to be moved by their work. Here's a taste of what the panel will offer.

Dr. Medria Blue-Ellis, principal of the Engineering and Science University Magnet School in West Haven, guides young people who are becoming the science, technology, engineering, and math

professionals of tomorrow. Although girls have historically been in the minority at her school (this year her student body enjoys a ratio of 60/40), the majority of valedictorians and salutatorians have been girls. Her students are learning, early on, to be tenacious, assertive, and to plow through challenges to become the best.

DeFrances has served the Connecticut Chapter of ACE Mentoring for decades. While she doesn't have the technical expertise to instruct, she has found a way to use her unique skills to orchestrate students and mentors coming together, bringing hands-on knowledge of the AEC industry to high schoolers who may not have had the chance to be exposed to our industry and its opportunities.

Jack has found her calling with Youth Build Habitat for Humanity. Her original involvement was a single project, joining homeowners building sweat equity into their first home. When she learned that Habitat also coaches prospective homeowners, teaches them money management skills, and ensures that they will be successful as first time homeowners, her interest deepened. Her current involvement is with at-risk young youth, who are given the opportunity, structure, and guidance to learn marketable skills in the AEC industry.

Housing for the homeless – on a global scale – is the focus of Jessica Chambers of Microdesk, who works with the United Nations High Command for Refugees, helping millions of displaced refugees all over the world. After emergency relief caters to the immediate needs of refugees in the aftermath of an exodus from war or oppression, the people living in camps that are established need 1st-world assistance with improved and efficient shelters and sustainable technologies to begin piecing their lives back together. You shouldn't miss her compelling stories.

"What skills can you use to help the global community?" said Chambers.

There's still time to register online, or call the office to secure your spot now.

Marie Maia is a long-time member of Construction Institute, chair of the Fairfield County Council, and on the task force for the Women Who Build Summit. She is director of business development and marketing for Montagno Construction, Inc., Waterbury, Conn.

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