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The Construction Institute is proud to support women in the AEC Industry

March 26, 2021 - Spotlights

The Construction Institute is proud to support women in the AEC Industry - Below are Q&A responses from members of the Construction Institute:

Andrea Baker, Vice President, Client Services, CannonDesign

Post-pandemic observations: If anyone had told me in 2019 that in 2020 I couldn't visit with clients, I wouldn't have believed them. And yet...when our clients were faced with the pandemic, they found ways to rise. Humans are social, and we are resilient. I remain amazed at how resourceful my clients and colleagues have proven to be. Across healthcare, education, and commercial businesses, we have rallied and found ways to connect, to sustain, and to support each other. International teams, sparked by American ingenuity, lead the way forward with vaccines, and our industry is rallying with new ways to visualize, new approaches to building design, and creative engineering solutions that will endure. I am proud to be part of an industry that is poised to roar forward and do great things in 2021.

Tracy Brower, Principal, Applied Research + Consulting, Steelcase

What was your greatest achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months? I love to write, and it's been my weekend therapy through the pandemic. Most notable for me: I wrote a book called "The Secrets to Happiness at Work." I began writing at the beginning of the pandemic when we had no idea it would last so long—and it's being published now, as we come out of it—so that feels like interesting timing. I am passionate that we can create and choose joy for ourselves and that we're empowered to cultivate the conditions for happiness—at work and everywhere. That's what the book is about!

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? I'm looking forward to the new fuel we will have for acceleration and innovation. I think after our year-long pause, it will be an opportunity to accomplish some new and exciting things. I really believe the greatest innovations arise from the most limiting barriers—and that we can rethink, renew and reinvent for ourselves, our teams and our companies. I'm also looking forward to the bonds we'll have—coming back together with our friends

and colleagues and feeling a new level of connectedness to go forward together.

Luciana Burdi, Director of Capital Programs and Enviro., Massachusetts Port Authority

Why should women consider a career in the A/E/C industry? In order for the A/E/C industry to continue to become more representative of society as a whole, it is crucial that more women consider the A/E/C industry. This industry is still lagging behind in its representation of women and needs to encourage more young women to follow in our footsteps. Women bring a different perspective to this industry and need to have it activated more. We're half of the population and need to be better represented in design and construction. Women working in construction numbered 1.5% of the entire U.S. workforce in 2018 according to US Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2019. Our industry shapes the world and so much that is in it. A/E/C and its works influences all that is around it and women need to be a part of this. We need to encourage our daughters and young women in our lives of the importance of our chosen professions and how they can contribute to building a better and more sustainable world and how critically important this is. Women should want to be a driving force in something this important and we should be there with an outstretched hand to welcome them into the sorority and the future.

What steps have you taken to ensure the continued success of your firm? In order to be successful, it's important to be flexible, adaptable and visionary. It's necessary to have the ability to read the terrain and have a feel for what is possibly over the next hill or around the next bend. It's also important to have the right tools in the toolkit. Understanding the technology that's available and having the foresight to stay informed of the ever-changing, technology-based environment is tantamount to one's success. Additionally, lean methodology and its continuous improvement ideology is a key tool in the kit. Those organizations that apply Lean practices have proven why it was originally developed- to promote business with value and respect. By cross streaming these two principles, success has followed. Lean has been a key component to my approach to my career and my professional journey as well as employee engagement. Lean and its focus on value and respect led to the creation of a program we called EASE which was an engagement platform developed by team members for team members. A core group, which changed from time to time, worked on the agendas and the various exercises and present them to the department throughout the year. At times, surveys were given to allow all the opportunity to weigh in and determine where the program would go. This program gives the team a sense of interconnectedness and involvement beyond the work-a-day experience. More human. These approaches have been quite successful in our Department thus allowing us maintain our overall success. Without these, our products would be unchanging and in stasis and not reflective of the world-class organization we have become.

Petina Killiany, Senior Vice President, Arcadis

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? Reconnecting with my project teams in

person. They have been in the field every day since the start of the pandemic and making a difference for our clients and Arcadis. They are the heart and soul of what we do and I want them to show off the efforts of their hard work in between the land mines they have had to maneuver around these last 12 months in both their professional and personal/family lives.

Why should women consider a career in the A/E/C industry? Why shouldn't they? Women are just as capable as men in this industry. Gender, race, or skin color should not be a factor in determining your career. Doing what you love and what excites you should. With passion you will learn and grow as you would with any other career.

Alicia Washington, Director of Marketing and JEDI, HRP Associates, Inc.

Why should women consider a career in the A/E/C industry? There are tremendous career and growth opportunities in the AEC industry. Women are needed in every space and when it comes to AEC, having a diverse perspective on building, design, marketing, and business allows for the industry to build better.

Starting out in the A/E/C business, who or what empowered you? I met Lindsey Mathieu, owner/principal of Golden Egg Concepts, about 3 years into my career and she showed me the value in learning and understanding the projects we bid on. It is not just about putting the RFP response together, it is also about understanding the scope, knowing who the players should be and leading the technical team, as the marketing professional. She inspired me to learn more and recognize that I bring value to the team.

What was your greatest achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months? I have been deeply involved in DEI initiatives in several areas of my life (professional and personal) and feel that my greatest achievement with regards to DEI, is the awareness I have built in the industry and in my community, including leading the efforts to diversify SMPS CT, establishing the first CT Chapter of the Nat'l Organization of Minority Architects and my new role as JEDI Director at HRP Associates, Inc.

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? I have developed a lot of relationships (via zoom) in the last 12 months and I am looking forward to connecting with these amazing people, in-person for the first time.

How have you adapted and changed in the last 12 months? AEC Marketing didn't slow down during the pandemic, in fact, the pandemic forced us to pivot and focus, which included a lot of long days and nights. Due to this demand, plus my responsibilities as a wife and mother, I had to learn how to give myself grace, and know that no matter how much I couldn't do, it was enough.

What steps have you taken to ensure the continued success of your firm? We developed new markets and service lines and did some internal restructuring to put us in a better position to service

our clients and have stronger team cohesion.

Sonia Richards, Director of Capital Projects, MIT Department of Facilities

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? I am looking forward to getting back to campus and seeing my team and all of our partners in person. Though we have been able to accomplish great work in the virtual world, I have missed the face-to-face daily communications with my colleagues. What used to be a stop-by-the desk for a quick question/answer has become a much more time consuming process and I feel I have lost touch with some of the important non-work discussions that are so important in our relationships.

Why should women consider a career in the A/E/C industry? The satisfaction of touching and feeling the results of your hard work never gets old. I know you can get this in many other fields but I believe that as a maker of space we enable all of those other fields to happen, whether it is a laboratory where scientists rush to find a vaccine for a new virus, a manufacturing facility that makes that vaccine, a stadium where this vaccine is administered or a high school where dreams of becoming the scientist begins. The project journey is always worth the end result.

Joy Clark, Vice President, Partner, Leggat McCall Properties

What was your greatest achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months? Renovating an urgent care clinic and a major imaging space for two new CT scanners in an occupied healthcare facility, during the pandemic. It was a successful project and was the result of a lot of close coordination, communication, and dedication by a great team.

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? Networking in person and on a personal note, hugging loved ones that I haven't seen in three dimensions for over a year.

How have you adapted and changed in the last 12 months? Working remotely for the good part of the last 12 months has necessitated fine-tuned multi-tasking skills and ultra-clear and succinct communication. So much can get lost in translation in big group virtual meetings, so clearly setting outcomes and action items as a Team is a must.

What steps have you taken to ensure the continued success of your firm? Putting the Client and their best interest first. Also, finding and retaining talented Staff – especially females early in their career.

Why should women consider a career in the A/E/C industry? It is highly rewarding and provides a tangible result, it also has wonderful growth opportunities.

Starting out in the A/E/C business, who or what empowered you? For me, it started earlier, in 10th grade when my (female) chemistry teacher noted she had a chemical engineering degree and encouraged the females in her class to look toward engineering as a profession. Also, along the way, I was fortunate to be supported by a group of wonderful mentors who had my back if I was not treated professionally and with respect.

Kaitlyn Dobberfuhl, Project Engineer III, Gilbane Building Company

Why women should join the industry? Women have a lot to contribute. When I first began in the industry, I thought I needed to be one of the boys to show I could handle my job. I've discovered that when I act like a strong woman, I succeed. We bring different skills. Women bring a more collaborative approach and are often better at organizing collaboration among teams.

What empowered you when first joining the industry? My mentors. What I find empowering in this industry is the strong culture of mentorship. In my company, right away there was someone who immediately took me to job sites and showed me the ropes. I appreciated strong mentors who were excited to bring younger people into the industry. I felt comfortable asking questions. Seeing their example empowered me to be confident.

Olivia Gardner, Virtual Design & Construction Manager, BOND Building, Inc.

What was your greatest achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months? My most notable project in the last year has been coordinating a 50,000 s/f supplemental utility plant at UCONN. The plant consists of a chiller hall, boiler hall, emergency electric generators, electrical switchgear and distribution, a loading dock and an administrative core. The pandemic forced the use of the model to effectively resolve issues remotely. Many folks that were "non-believers" are now integrated into the process and it has been a rewarding experience to see the adaptation of technology and what it holds for the future of the A/E/C industry.

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? It is proven that we can use tools to work smarter and communicate effectively with our experience from the pandemic. However, there is nothing that can replace the value of face-to-face meetings and engaging with teams in person. I am looking forward to regaining that level of collaboration that (in my opinion) is what makes the construction industry so rewarding.

Laura Cooley, Consultant

What are you most looking forward to post-pandemic? The pandemic has knocked everyone out of

their comfort zones and has forced the entire world to re-think what is possible. I am looking forward to the innovations which are inevitably going to come.

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