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2022 Women in Construction: Giuliana Zelada, Associate Principal at Simpson Gumpertz & Heger

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Giuliana Zelada

What was your greatest professional achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months? My team and I completed an 80-foot-deep support of excavation system in Portland, ME, last summer. I was the project manager and design lead. It was especially complex because we needed to demolish a parking garage on the side of a hill supporting a hospital building on top to make room for the excavation. This required us to install anchors to support the portion of the structure that had to remain to support the hill, to ensure the hospital remained fully operational the entire time. It was both challenging and rewarding to be part of the process.

Starting out in the construction business, who or what empowered you? Overall, I have been lucky in my career. My colleagues and employers have always been supportive. I've worked at four places during my career, including internships. At each job, I've been surrounded by people that were always willing to share their time, expertise, and advice. Each of my bosses has been willing to give professional guidance and commit time to me. I feel lucky that I've maintained most of those relationships throughout my career.

When you're not busy, what is your go to book or podcast to help you unwind? There are three ways I love to unwind—music, watching a show or movie, and being active. I love all sorts of music. Depending on my mood, I vary between classic rock, hip-hop, and even some country. Music is a great outlet for me, even in shows like The Voice and X-Factor—anything where people are singing. I also love high fantasy shows that allow me to escape the “real world” for a bit. For working out, boxing is my favorite, it's such a great way to alleviate stress in a very focused way.

Within your firm, who has helped you succeed within the industry? How have they helped you? I've worked at Simpson Gumpertz & Heger (SGH) for nearly 20 years and have many great mentors throughout that time. William (Bill) Konicki has been my supervisor since I started. I remember being so nervous to tell him I was pregnant with my first child and how it might affect my career. He wasn't worried, and instead focused on making sure I was set up to balance work with being a mother. In addition to Bill, Paul Kelley has been a great coach and someone I can go to for advice or to talk through project details with and he constantly challenges me to be a better engineer.

What tips or advice would you offer to other women who are considering entering the construction industry? Take a deep breath and be true to yourself. There are always going to be personalities and opinions to contend with, but the only thing you can control is yourself. Having female representation in the construction business is very important and I've been impressed the increasing number of opportunities for women in the field, and amazed at the talent I see every day. Moving forward, it will be important to focus on encouraging women to join the field and giving them the support to succeed. I always try to gravitate toward people who share my personality traits and interests—those are the people I've developed lasting relationships with.