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2022 Women in Construction: Lee Sullivan, President at Lion's Head Cost Consulting, Inc.

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Lee Sullivan

What was your greatest professional achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months? Last year, even in the midst of the pandemic, I was proud to expand my company's client base, which led to a successful and profitable year for Lion's Head Cost Consultants, Inc. It is a great feeling when performance and success with current clients results in referrals to new clients.

Starting out in the construction business, who or what empowered you? My first job empowered me with the strength of experience. A civil engineer in my hometown hired me as the rodman on a surveying crew, which was unusual in 1978. Rob Cameron knew a woman could work just as well as a man, though, since his daughter was on a crew the year before. It was a hot, sunburned summer and a great experience for me. When it came time for a junior year internship, Ford Motor Company Steel Division gave me the opportunity because they wanted an experienced surveyor for their engineering department. We set rolling mill equipment to the nearest 1,000th of an inch and laid out track for the trains to shuttle iron ore from the Rouge River docks to the blast furnaces. Those two summers led me to full-time employment with Turner Construction Company, where I started as a field engineer at the Fairfax County Water Authority project in Virginia. I'm so thankful for that first opportunity!

When you're not busy, what is your go-to book or podcast to help you unwind? My eclectic reading list spans from science/nature nonfiction to sci-fi and fantasy novels. I just finished two novels by Naomi Novak, who is a vivid writer.

Within your firm, who has helped you succeed within the industry? How have they helped you? I formed Lion's Head Cost Consultants, Inc. in 2015 with the support of my colleague, friend, and corporate secretary, Susan Wyler. Our career paths had taken similar routes: as employees of Turner Construction Company in the 1980s, to self-employment when our kids were young, then back to Turner in the 2010s. Susan established an S-corp when her daughter was born to provide estimating services to CMs and architects. Running her own business allowed her to keep a schedule that meshed with parenthood. When it came time for me to start LHCC, Susan shared templates, contracts, business plans, and the emotional support that means so much when it comes from a successful woman.

What tips or advice would you offer to other women who are considering entering the construction industry? Researchers show that the number of women who graduate from engineering and construction studies has drawn closer to the number of men graduating, but women drop out of their career paths at much higher rates. Part of the reason is the stress of construction deadlines on relationships—parents, kids, partners. My advice: be kind to yourself. You can have it all—an interesting career in construction and a strong family life. But no one says you have to have it all at once. Carve out part-time opportunities for work-life balance during part of your career if it allows more time with your family. Or maybe you are happiest running full tilt with your career. Follow your heart. Do what is right for you.