



2016
WOMEN
IN COMMERCIAL
CONSTRUCTION
& FACILITIES



Making a difference

Attendees discuss importance of being a woman in today's commercial construction industry

They came from different backgrounds and different generations. They work in different parts of the industry. But as women in the commercial construction industry, each has a fire that drives them to not only raise themselves and their companies to new levels, but the industry as well.

Representing all sides of the industry, some of the leading female executives across the vendor and end user spaces took part in our annual Women in Commercial Construction & Facilities Retreat, held Aug. 4-7 at the Mills House Wyndham Grand Hotel in Charleston, S.C.

The three-day conference, sponsored by *Commercial Construction & Renovation* magazine, featured a roundtable discussion on industry trends and challenges. It also included a series of networking opportunities – from an intimate bus tour of historic downtown Charleston, to several lunch and dinner parties, and the always anticipated one-on-one meetings.

Included in the roundtable was a discussion on what it is like to be a woman in today's ever-changing commercial construction market. In the following final installment of the forum, you will get a look at how they are excelling in what still is a male dominated industry.

For more information, visit us at www.ccr-mag.com.



Jennifer Abilez
Steak n Shake



Melisa Baune
Core State Group



Gabriella Bolm
Cedar Lake Cellars



Rita Briggs
Fairmont Sign



Kelli Buhay
Retail Maintenance Specialists



Magen Bybee
Genesis Lighting Solutions



Rebekah Cianfrocco
Level Office



Bre Coe
Level Office



Penny Czarra
AC-Tech



Patricia Davis
Innovative Dehumidifier Systems



Haylee Giere
P&C Construction



Laura Gross
American Signature Furniture



Jessica Hamilton
Porcelanosa USA



Patty Kelly
Broad Street



Sharron Koch
JHM Hotels



Karen MacCannell
The McIntosh Group



Emily McCready
Selser Schaefer Architects



Lisa McShane
Los Angeles Dodgers



Angela Peterson
The Public Library of Cincinnati



Angie Roach
Cedar Lake Cellars



Janel Scarborough
Broad Street



Rebecca Suen
Hilliker Corporation



Nicole Thompson-Floyd
TD Bank



Grace Daly
Shop Talk 360



CCR: What does it mean to be a woman in today's commercial construction industry; one that is primarily male dominated?

Kelli Buhay, Retail Maintenance Specialists: Prior to being with Retail Maintenance Specialists, I was in the signage industry for almost seven years, which is also predominantly male. Prior to that, I was with Minolta for 14 years, yet another predominantly male industry, a definite pattern. Now, I find it very empowering. I enjoy having the ability to have my feminine side; having the sensitivity as a woman, but yet still have the dominance of a strong woman in the industry, and feel that I'm competitive with my male counterpart, and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Jennifer Abilez, Steak and Shake: Because I'm a registered interior designer, it's a primarily female industry, so being around other designers or contractors, I don't feel out of place. As a director at Steak 'n Shake, I'm constantly looking for female leadership, right now I do have to fight for a chair at the table with the boys. I think they have really have good respect for me. I listen a lot, and then I speak my opinion. And it seems like when I speak, they really listen and value my opinion.

I feel very fortunate to be in the place that I am now. It's taken a while for them to respect me, but I think it's because I haven't let them down. When they see me, they see a strong leader – a future leader.

Karen MacCannell, McIntosh Group: The architecture industry is very male-dominated, and our firm is no different. When I started there 11 years ago, I believe there were six women, and they were all in administrative roles. We're a small firm, so I also do HR. I've worked hard to bring women with architecture degrees to our firm. Not long ago, we were very excited to have the first woman in our firm become licensed, and several others are close behind her.

To keep up the momentum of our increasingly diverse workforce, our CEO encouraged us to start a women's group within our firm that we have actually extended into our local chapter of the American Institute of Architects. That group is new but already very popular and growing in participation. We address questions like: How do we compete in this environment today? What are some hurdles we face in our industry and how can we overcome them? When I attend a meeting like this, I try to take what I've learned to the owners of our firm to make sure we are hearing and serving our female employees.

Patty Kelly, Broad Street: As a woman in the industry, I personally feel like times have changed and women overall are well respected in their positions just the same as a male. I fell into property management 18 years ago by chance. I started off at the bottom, as a young woman in a very large well known company. I knew nothing about commercial property management and construction. I worked very hard to learn the business and was always appreciative for having patient leaders who were willing to take the time to show me the ropes. I am now working for a company where the leadership is top notch, encourages all

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– Haylee Giere, P&C Construction



employees to set their own goals and is willing to be there as a resource with an open door policy.

Haylee Giere, P&C Construction: I started out in an entry level position in my company, and have been working my way up ever since. I work directly with the vice president now. It goes without saying that in this industry there are definitely challenges presented to females that males do not have to deal with. I don't expect to always be treated like one of the guys.

However, I think that being a female in a male dominant industry offers a unique opportunity to provide a different perspective. I try not to focus on the fact that I work in a male dominated industry, but instead to take ownership of the position that I am in and do my best to utilize the skills and talents that I have to offer to my company and to the industry. There are definitely challenges and individuals in the industry who make it difficult for females, but I have to look past those individuals and keep the big picture in mind.

Nicole Thompson-Floyd, TD Bank: I've been blessed to have really strong women around me throughout my career – women who've helped champion my career and me as an employee. They've

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– Janel Scarborough, Broad Street

given me great advice and helped direct my career. So my responsibility is being a woman at the table who needs to do the same for them. And I take that very seriously. I'm a mentor to another woman in the real estate department. I keep in touch with other women I've worked with. We talk. We laugh. We seek advice and give updates on our careers and lives. That's my thing. That's my responsibility, because it was given to me as a gift.

Emily McCready, Selser Schaefer Architects: entered the architecture industry through an ideal scenario. My firm was co-founded by a woman, Janet Selser. Janet is a strong, intelligent, and bold woman. She is also my mentor. Janet works throughout the company to make sure we are not creating gender divides. At Selser Schaefer Architects, women serve in a variety of roles; architects, interior designers, marketing, business development, human resources, accounting and administration.

I do experience some stereotyping when I represent my firm and the architecture industry outside our office walls. People often expect an architecture firm to be represented by a male. Exhibiting knowledge is the best way to overcome these scenarios. I demonstrate my fluency



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– Gabriella Bolm, Cedar Lake Cellars

with the design process and bring them a design team with the ability to meet their goals.

I am fortunate to know many amazing women in the industry that are passionate about the built environment, creating visible impact, and building long-lasting communities. Being taken seriously may mean clearing additional hurdles along the way, but it’s well worth it.

Janel Scarborough, Broad Street: I started in property management 20 years ago. When I started, I felt like it was more of a good old boys club. There were a lot of men in charge. And as I went along, I had a lot of women I looked up to. My vice president at my old job was a breast cancer survivor – a very strong woman. She was somebody I really respected. Today, I feel like the people in property management – vendors, engineers, everyone – have a lot more respect for women. They listen and

take us more seriously. We don’t have to go out of our way to prove ourselves anymore.

As long as you know what you’re talking about, people are going to respect you. So I feel like women need strong women behind them to push them along. I’m a mother of two girls, so I try to set the best example for them. I stress the importance of working your butt off to get where you want to go. The property management sector has come a long way, and I feel like women are really taking charge and leading that workforce.

Sharron Koch, JHM Hotels: I’m really jealous of the women who had female leadership to look up to. I’ve never had that. I started out as an assistant to the owner. The first thing he ever asked me to do was to get him out of a speeding ticket. I felt like I was taking care of him ever since. So I never had that kind of role model where I could ask, “How do you navigate these waters?”



“I think it’s all about embracing that inner strength and by seeing things in a positive light. I’ve encountered a lot of women who sit there and complain about their boss and all these disadvantages of being in a male industry. While that’s true, there are a lot of disadvantages there can be some positives, too.”

– Janel Scarborough, Broad Street

On top of that, I felt like we were in a construction, male dominated world and I work for a family-owned, Indian-based company. They are very male dominated culturally. So I had to get to the point for the first time in my career where I was like, “How do I make myself heard? How do you hear my voice? How do I make you respect me?”

For them, it was an education. My boss told me, “If you don’t have a degree, we’ll never promote you. It’s just that important to the family.” I was like 30 years old with three small children. Alright then. I went back to school and earned my degree.

And I think I earned their respect. They could see I was going to do whatever it took to earn their respect. I was going to work the hours, even though I had small children. I was going to go back to school and get my degree. I was going to do everything they asked. Nothing was ever going to be beneath me, even if it meant getting their coffee. I felt like I finally got heard. I feel like I can walk onto a job site as an expert and not just a female expert.

Melisa Baune, Core State Group: I began my career in the industry about ten years ago as a receptionist for a commercial construction company. I was incredibly thankful for the opportunity and worked extremely hard working up the ladder until I reached Project Management level. I found it challenging to find my place in this roll, as a young twenty-something female in a very male dominated industry; my mentors up to this point were men and I struggled to find my confidence. After a few years I took the valuable knowledge I had gained and moved into a business development role which is still what I do to this day.

I have since found a lot of support through both men and women in the industry and have started a women in the industry



networking group where we are able to share our own struggles and successes which are found in any industry. I am certainly thankful for all of the women in past generations who have paved the way for women like myself.

Laura Gross, American Signature

Furniture: I kind of have a strong personality, and I might not listen as well because I do like to be heard. But by doing that, I’m learning to push. I’m able to let the industry know that I’m here and that I have the education and the knowledge. They might need to sit back and listen to what I have to say and what I can do. My boss said from Day 1, “I know you’re one of the people who are doing this. This is yours. Just take it and do what you need to do.”

So I grabbed the horse by the reins and ran with it. The different changes that I have made have been really good for the company. I gained the respect from a lot of

different male role models in the industry.

What I will talk about though is what I’m finding in the this industry, and only in the last few years is that there are more women to talk to with all of the people you’re in business with.

NEED TO FIND PERSON: I’m a woman product manufacturer working with men in Germany and India. I have one colleague who’s a woman. When dealing with the subcontractors, they may not be the person putting the material down, but it’s the wife, sister or daughter who’s running the business. You now have someone to talk to who is a property manager. Then it’s the architect. They have somebody to talk to who’s involved in all aspects of the construction of their project.

That has become quite empowering, because I think I’m seeing a trend here. We’re not giving business to each other because we’re



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– Magen Bybee, Genesis Lighting Solutions

girls or sisters, but it’s the way we communicate. We tend to think outside the box a little bit more.

Janel Scarborough, Broad Street: I think it’s all about embracing that inner strength and by seeing things in a positive light. I’ve encountered a lot of women who sit there and complain about their boss and all these disadvantages of being in a male industry. While that’s true, there are a lot of disadvantages there can be some positives, too.

If I’m going to any commercial real estate event in St. Louis, I’m most likely either the only female or one of the five in the room of 200 men. So when I’m networking, they remember who I am. They’re not going to remember the 20 other guys they talked to. When they need somebody in real estate, I’m going to be the first person they think of

versus the ten 40- year-old white guys. You have to think like that to survive. You have to believe in yourself. You have to be a resource for your company.

Once you have that, I think the confidence you build will naturally exude. I think that’s where you’ll get the respect you want. It’s not sitting here demanding respect or that things should be different. If you want something to be done differently, do something about it.

Gabriella Bolm, Cedar Lake Cellars: I came to the United States 20 years ago and was hired as an account executive. It was an eye opener to see all that happens within other countries and within America. I realized that, unlike in other countries, America is

very driven by women. They have job titles, they have relevant positions, and they are leaders. I knew this was a place I had to be! I didn’t have a father, so we had a pretty female-driven family with my sister and my mom. It was important for me to see there are women who can be extremely successful and wear so many hats. It’s all about being knowledgeable. Once you have that insight in the region and the company you work for, I think you will get respect.

As a woman, I read a lot of books because men think and act differently than women. So in order to understand that, I read to try and understand their process. I really think we are all going in the same direction. If I can understand where they’re coming from, I believe I can better relate to them. From my perspective, women fail less and can multitask more. I think men realize our strengths.

It's a different era now than it was 10, 15 or 30 years ago. It is much better to be a woman today than it was decades ago.

Magen Bybee, Genesis Lighting Solutions: I'm the only female sales person in my company. We have other females who work there, but none of them are in the management level. I feel blessed because I started in project management. And then I got promoted because I was putting in 14 hours a day doing everything I needed to do to build our division, which is a part of a larger company that has been open for 50 years.

I helped us double in size. I was the only project manager, so I had to make sure everything was good. I'm proud of what I do. I'm proud of this industry. I keep learning more and more, as much as I can.

I work with men twice my age as their equals. I can't tell you how many times that an account I moved to another person comes back to me for advice. They know I will get it done. "Megan will take care of it," they say. I love that. I'm proud of it. I hope that eventually we'll grow and be able to have another female

“I want to be able to continue to improve the maintenance software we use for our stores and evaluate ours vendor to be able to understand more of what their needs are through our software system.”

— Laura Gross, American Signature Furniture

salesperson. But right now I'm just glad that the other project managers who work there see what happens when a woman steps up to the plate.

Angela Peterson, The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County: To be a woman in the construction industry today is encouraging. We are being challenged by our colleagues to bring our personality and expertise into this trade that has been male dominated forever. I still have my trials where I walk onto a job site and have to prove to the men that I know what I am doing and I have to prove I am capable of the position I hold. That can be very frustrating. But that said, at the end of a project, when your project manager and or superintendent shakes your hand and tells you it was great to work with you; that is rewarding.

That said, when you walk into the field and you're the woman in the room, it's frustrating. You have to prove yourself, prove your knowledge and prove you're capable. But at the same point, at the end of a project, when your project manager shakes your hand and says thank you, it's rewarding. That's an awesome feeling.

Patricia Davis, Innovative Dehumidifier Systems: I'm the only female in our company, too, but I love it. I feel very empowered. There have been several jobs I've had in my past where it has been very male dominated and I've never seemed to have had a problem. I think it's because I go in with the fact that I don't feel entitled. I don't feel that because I'm a female I deserve certain things or certain ways. I have no problem going into that warehouse in my suit and heels, and digging a unit out or answering technical questions.

I don't have a problem with asking my counterparts questions. I'm aware that when I'm new to a business, I don't know everything. So it's not a problem whether I'm a male or a female. I need to learn the business. I think that knowledge always overpowers gender. Being a female brings a different way of thinking. When we have meetings, people listen to me. If it's because I'm female and I'm a little more memorable, I'm fine with that.



It's never "I'm-running-the-show-kind-of-scenario." It's very respectful. Everybody likes the ideas that are presented because it's always been in a professional manner. I always treat them with respect, and vice versa. I never want to be treated a certain way. I always want to learn about new products and technologies.

Lisa McShane, Los Angeles Dodgers:

In baseball, it's definitely still a boy's club, but slowly but surely it is changing. I was born and raised in Ireland, women there are very strong. For me this has worked to my advantage in all job positions I have held within the USA. I'm am very good at what I do. I do meet lots of resistance internally as folks have done the same thing year in and year out so management is lucky that I don't scare easy! I was very lucky to have a lady mentor who has worked in baseball operations for 34 years, I would always run things by her. I didn't always know the language of what they were referring to as well as all off baseball's superstitions. Men definitely think differently than women, when I would respond I would always go in to lots of detail

“Sometimes you have to prove yourself. Sometimes you have to work harder than the other person, and sometimes you just have to be the person who stands out. I’ve had some very strong women in my life. And I have a great dad. You have to keep going, keep moving forward.”

– Rita Briggs, Fairmont Sign

whereas men just want the bottom line. It is always challenging that way.

At the end of the day, the executives come to me directly because they know I'm going to do the best job. We have a large diverse group here from 22-year-old kids all the way through to folks who have been within the organization for 35+ years. The MLB are making a huge push on diverse initiatives within all its teams but I am sure the older clubs will have a slower learning process to change its culture.

Sometimes, I'll get frustrated, but at the end of the day you have to do what you have to do. You cannot take it home with you. You're only as good as the staff that works for you. I've seen people come in and move up the ladder faster, it's just the nature of the beast and how times are changing.

Rebekah Cianfrocco, Level Office:

Level Office as a whole has more female than male employees, and we still are very small. Within the development team, we are 50/50. I feel like I do have a voice, and I'm always throwing around ideas. Also, when you're the only one in your position, you kind of have to run the show.



I've definitely worked for others who don't listen and have brushed me off. You have to be willing to speak up, and unfortunately, prove that you have the knowledge and ability to do the job. Sometimes it's just not worth the struggle, so you must move on and find where you can be accepted without fighting for it.

Rita Briggs, Fairmont Sign: It means that you have to be on top better than what is expected. It seems like in some ways, being a woman in a male dominated industry can be an advantage. Some men find it refreshing to talk to a woman and get a different perspective on the business we are involved in. However, there are those times when you have to prove that you are more than just the opposite gender and that you have the stuff to make the difference. I've been in business development nearly all of my life.

I have four daughters, two sons and three grandchildren. And I'm a single mother. We have to teach our children to be independent and strong. We have learned to never give up. If you don't try, you'll never know.

CCR: You have to prove yourself.

Fairmont Sign's Briggs: Yes, we've all said it. Sometimes you have to prove yourself.

“My boss told me, “If you don't have a degree, we'll never promote you. It's just that important to the family.” I was like 30 years old with three small children. Alright then. I went back to school and earned my degree. And I think I earned their respect. They could see I was going to do whatever it took to earn their respect.”

— Sharron Koch, JHM Hotels

Sometimes you have to work harder than the other person, and sometimes you just have to be the person who stands out. I've had some very strong women in my life. And I have a great dad. You have to keep going, keep moving forward. Things will happen. They will be in the past tomorrow.

I'm the only female salesperson at my company. There are other women who work there — project managers, graphic designers. But I'm the only female salesperson. I've done really well. I listen. I challenge myself. And I learn. I'm always educating myself.

CCR: Has it been hard as a single, working mom?

Fairmont Sign's Briggs: There were challenging times as a working mom. But I give my kids a lot of credit when things hit the fan. They're there to back me up. So I feel blessed.

CCR: What does 2017 look like from your perspective?

Fairmont Sign's Briggs: In 2017, I've grabbed several new accounts. The goal, of course is to get more. I just want to stay out there, keep plugging away and keep trying to bring more business in.

Level Office's Cianfrocco: Level Office is planning to open 12 more centers across the country in 2017. As a team, we need to develop better processes and procedures, and hopefully make some new hires.

Innovative Dehumidifier Systems

Davis: Next year, we'll continue to increase our growth.

The Public Library of Cincinnati's

Peterson: Next year is going to be busy. The construction industry seems to be on an upswing and there is a lot going on. At the Library we will be working on large maintenance packages and we hope to start an ADA renovation on at least one of our buildings. There is also talk of looking to expand another of our locations. It should be an exciting year.

Genesis Lighting Solutions' Bybee:

Next year is going to be dedicated to landing





another national account – maybe two or three. I already have four under my belt, but you always need to push for more.

Cedar Lake Cellars' Bolm: I would like the new leadership teams to establish their roles and responsibilities. I'm looking forward to seeing how they will successfully implement and execute their ideas.

Female Speaker: In 2017 we hope to speed up, and make effective the way we talk, problems – specific tailor-made problems – with applicators and projects in the field, perhaps using new technology. It's all finding them and going in and helping them that way, but speed that up. 2017, we're going to figure out how to do that.

American Signature Furniture's Gross: I want to be able to continue to improve the maintenance software we use for our stores and evaluate ours vendor to be able to understand more of what their needs are through our software system.

Core State Group's Baune: Two-thousand and seventeen is going to be a very exciting year for our group; with continued growth in the retail, restaurant and hospitality market sectors we will continue to be

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– Melisa Baune, Core State Group

a trusted partner for our clients in these and other sectors. I am personally looking forward to maintaining and building new relationships in the upcoming year.

JHM Hotels' Koch: I'm just to continue to be a part of the team that builds great hotels and puts out a good product. I want to travel more, too.

Female Speaker: In 2017, I'd love to have our systems in place that we've been working on, but expand our team.

Broad Street's Scarborough: I'm succeeding with Broad Street and taking on more square footage. On a personal level, I want to keep a healthy balance between family and work.

Selser Schaefer Architects' McCready: We have not had more meetings to market ourselves to the retail industry. All of our retail clients have come from an existing relationship built off of another referral, where somebody leaves a company, and then hires us. So, it has been awesome. It's a great way to do it. But we haven't learned how to market ourselves to national retail brands. And we need to. So we're figuring out how to get materials to get in front of people.

TD Bank's Thompson-Floyd: My goal is to get a little more streamlined in how we are doing the projects. I want to work smarter, not harder. I want to find a way to figure out how to get all the information we need and not have 20 million conference calls to do something.

P&C Construction's Giere: We'd like to acquire new clients that we can build long-term business relationships with and do repeat projects with. We have found that this is beneficial to both parties.

Broad Street's Kelly: Our goal would be to work more effectively across the board and get a permanent maintenance program implemented for our facilities in engineering.

Level Office's Coe: 2017 will be another exciting year as we will selectively seek to enter new markets while also managing a portfolio of over 850,000 SF of shared office space throughout the country. We are very proud of our past performances but are always looking for new ways and methods to improve our processes. Working at a rapidly expanding company means that I will have plenty of new exposure to challenging projects and a heightened level of responsibility that allows me to grow as a professional. Because we have a small team, everyone has different skill-sets and has a different way of thinking,

I want to improve efficiencies in a lot of aspects of the business. I don't think it's realistic for us to say we're going to hire a bunch of people next year, even though they keep saying we are. We want to find ways to work more effectively, cut down hours at the office late at night, and exceed expectations for the amount of buildings we can grow into this year."

— Rebekah Cianfrocco, Level Office

expansion. I'd like to be able to take those two years to continue our growth and build our own office. That's important for me to be a part of as we move forward, I want to continue to assist with building new business. I'd like to continue the expansion of our facilities management side of things, where we're taking the whole business and managing it from soup to nuts, which has been very exciting. **CCR**

which is why it's so exciting to continue to grow with the company and work with some of the best talent out there.

The McIntosh Group's MacCannell: On a personal level, I want to continue to mentor and be a resource to women — both in our industry and others, locally and outside the local community. And for our firm, I want to continue to build and maintain the relationships we have with our existing clients — and with future clients. I'm always nurturing those relationships and looking for the next big thing.

Steak n Shake's Abilez: We're going to open 50 new restaurants in 2017. We're opening 30 this year. We're not hiring any new people in the design department, so it is about being more efficient.

Retail Maintenance Specialists' Buhay: We're one year into a three-year lease. We moved due to our growth and

