



2017
WOMEN
IN COMMERCIAL
CONSTRUCTION
& FACILITIES

Turning the corner



Attendees discuss the continued advancement of women in the workplace

“If there is no struggle there is no progress.” The words of Frederick Douglass continue to ring true wherever there are still hills to climb and roads to travel. While many of today’s leading commercial construction companies across all sectors have women in leadership positions, there is still work to be done.

That was the overlying theme of the second half of the roundtable discussion during the 2017 Commercial Construction & Renovation Women’s Retreat. The women in attendance, leaders in their own right, discussed their journeys and how the road to gain a seat at the leadership table continues to be a work in progress.

The discussion was one of the many snapshots of the Retreat, held at The Andaz Hotel in Savannah, Ga., Aug. 3-6. Along with several key networking events, dinners, cocktail parties and haunted tours, attendees spent a morning participating in the always anticipated one-on-one meetings.

Following is the conclusion of our roundtable discussion coverage, which you can also see online at www.ccr-mag.com.



Sarah Appleton
Wallace Engineering
wallace



Lori Armstrong
Beam Team
BEAM TEAM



Michol Brandon
Crestpoint Companies
CRESTPOINT
OUR EXPERTISE. YOUR SUCCESS



Marilyn Brennan
Egan Sign
EGAN SIGN



Kelli Buhay
Retail Maint Spec
Retail Maintenance Specialists



Kelly Burnette
F&D Commercial
F&D COMMERCIAL



Isyol Cabrera
IHG
IHG



Caroline Carithers
Woodforest National Bank
WOODFOREST NATIONAL BANK



TJ Cartier
Lee Health
LEE HEALTH



Grace Daly
Shop Talk 360
SHOPTALK 360



Julie Fox
ShopCore Properties
SHOPCORE PROPERTIES



Melissa Gallant
Spence Diamonds
SPENCE DIAMONDS



Jennifer Grieser
Tuesday Morning
Tuesday Morning



Laura Gross
Value City/American Signature Furniture
VCF VALUE CITY FURNITURE
AMERICAN SIGNATURE FURNITURE



Annada Hinson
Rogers Electrical
ROGERS ELECTRIC



Cynthia Hirsch
Sargenti Architects
SA SARGENTI ARCHITECTS



Faith Hoople
Fulcrum Construction
FULCRUM CONSTRUCTION



Debbie Kozar
Ulta
ULTA BEAUTY



Karen MacCannell
The McIntosh Group
McIntosh



Susan Marsh
Continental Realty
CONTINENTAL REALTY



Adrienne Natale
Topco
Topco



Gina Noda
Connect Source
CSG CONNECT SOURCE CONSULTING GROUP



Demetria Peterson
Bridgestone Retail Operations
BRIDGESTONE



Malinda Redman
Genesis Lighting Solutions
GENESIS LIGHTING SOLUTIONS



Roz Strapko
Automated Cutting Technologies
ACT Inc
Cutting Your Fixture Costs



Jackie Tomlinson
Woodforest National Bank
WOODFOREST NATIONAL BANK

CCR: Talk about what it is like being a woman in a male-dominated industry.

Grace Daly, ShopTalk 360: I've been in the industry for a very long time, probably combined, well over 25 years, and it has been really interesting. I used to build for brands back in the day. Today, it's great because there are so many more women in leadership roles.

Michol Brandon, Crestpoint Companies:

I have a different outlook on it because I am looking at it from the hospitality industry. We develop hotels, so I don't see as many women-owned and operated hotel developers. I recently attended the National Association for Black Hotel Owners, Operators and Developers conference and it was very empowering and inspiring to see so many women in the room, especially women of color.

So, for me, I'd like to say that it is promising enough that they have opened the playing field for us to come in and begin to cut our teeth in the industry. There are some of the brands that are actually going after

“An ongoing focus for Fulcrum is to develop relationships with industry partners and clients. Specifically in 2018, we want to be the go-to partner who tackles challenges creatively and brings ideas and solutions to the table.”

– Faith Hoople, Fulcrum Construction

more diversity inclusion. It was encouraging to see African-American women who are hotel owners now, whether it's new developments or acquisitions.

We are finally getting into leadership positions within hotels. And that's so important. We are helping impact the bottom lines in revenue management, GMs, hoteliers, investors. My takeaway is that I can do this. It was such a big confirmation and a legacy I can leave for my son.

So, yes, we are making a breakthrough and it's empowering.

Kelli Buhay, Retail Maintenance

Specialists: I believe that we have turned a corner, but I think it depends on who you're dealing with. You still have the good old boy clubs that don't always respect what women in this industry do. It's a mentality. There are more women in the workforce today, especially women in leadership positions. So, I think the corner has been turned, and we will continue to do that. But we need to get past the old-world thinking, too.





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– Grace Daly, ShopTalk 360

CCR: Is that good or bad?

Malinda Redman, Genesis Lighting: I’ve been in many forums in my Lighting career where I was the only women. Setting on the executive boards of many companies, trade meetings, sales meetings. I do bidding, proposals and meet with foundations representing the company. Most attendees, already know me, my capabilities and knowledge which empowers me and earns me their respect. They know I can do the job. Not all women have this opportunity. I have been in the industry many years, networking and developing a long standing respected corporate relationships.

But there are regions of the country where although women are turning that corner, that corner still has a long way to go. There’s that good old boy’s club. I see it a lot. I know a lot of them. But once they get to know me and find that I am the real deal, it opens up the doors. But until you can have that conversation or open a dialogue with them, you’re just a face. And that face can be ignored. It is rewarding to see that after having a conversation that they think, “She might actually know what she’s talking about.”

“As women, we’re very empathetic. We multitask well. We have some skill sets that men don’t have. So it’s about showing your knowledge base without overstepping your boundaries.”

– Gina Noda, Connect Source Consulting Group

CCR: And that makes all the difference.

Genesis Lighting’s Redman: I’m so fortunate to have the industry respect for me to sit before most male dominated organizations. More times than not being the only women at the table. I am always able to hold my end of the conversation, just like any of us here can. I have a long standing relationship with a big box retailer, who’s women buyers are always so happy to see me for meetings. They tell me they welcome meeting with another women, since most of the vendors are men.

It’s really important that we get out there and work with them, show them that we are just as capable as they are, maybe even more so in some cases.

Genesis Lighting’s Redman: I’m so fortunate to have the industry respect for me to sit before most male dominated organizations. Most times as the only woman at the table. And hold my own end of the conversation, just like any of us here can. That’s why we have to keep moving forward. We cannot take any steps back,



just keep moving forward. It's important to have women running our businesses, being on the forefront for our companies.

Debbie Kozar, Ulta: I agree that we have turned the corner, but think that we have a long way to go. There are still male managers where we have opportunities to make connections with. But I think slowly but surely things are changing. They begin to see that we know what we are talking about.

Demetria Peterson, Bridgestone: I think we're beginning to turn the corner. When I first entered this industry, working for a general contractor, I was just one of the guys. I think this is because I was at a very junior level with no authority over anything. Once I reached the manager level, I immediately noticed a change in how I was treated. Some of it due to intimidation. So there's a fine line we have to walk to achieve results without alienating our teammates and managers.

“We have all these big universities that are offering construction manager and architectural design programs. Right now, if you go into a classroom, it's filled with minorities and females. So that's progress.”

— Isyol Cabrera, IHG

Gina Noda, Connect Source Consulting Group: I've encountered that a couple times in the past. I was working with a company where I felt a little lack of respect. And when I stepped up to show my knowledge, their egos kicked in. There has to be a balance. As women, we're very empathetic. We multitask well. We have some skill sets that men don't have. But it's still hard in a construction world dominated by men. So it's about showing your knowledge base without overstepping your boundaries.

CCR: You don't want to seem threatening, right?

Connect Source's Noda: No. They can get intimidated by that. So I still want to try to be a woman — I still want to have that balance.

Roz Strapko, ACT: On the fixture side of things, women have turned the corner to some extent, but we still have those pockets of good old boys. This is especially true in certain parts of the South. It's not as bad as it was 30 years ago, where there were so few women.



When I look at the women in this group, I see a strength of character. I hear stories and know that we have experienced the same things. I also see change. And I know that more change is coming. That's part of the evolution that must continue to happen.

Jennifer Grieser, Tuesday Morning: We have not yet turned the corner but we are able to say there is a big spotlight on the subject.

From the time I was hired by Tuesday morning, I was treated like management in charge of my department, not like an administrative position. What it boils down to is that change is not really going to happen until leadership – male or female – is stronger.

CCR: And that starts at the top.

Tuesday Morning's Grieser: Yes. The next level up needs to be more robust. There has to be mentoring and coaching in the field, regardless of gender. I think women are 50 percent culpable of this problem, because we need to participate more

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– Susan Marsh, Continental Realty



in our own outcome. We need to show up and be active in our own growth. We can't sit down and be that mousy administrative person waiting for our place in line. We have to ask for it.

Men get it offered to them; we have to ask for it. And I am okay with that. There's nothing wrong with standing up and saying, "It's my turn. I want my shot at the big project. We tend to wait for it and hope that they'll notice us one day. They'll see how awesome we are. That's not their job. It's our job to speak up for ourselves. We must help bring the leadership team forward in their thinking and actions.

Grace Daly, Shop Talk 360: I think that's so important. We can pick and choose who we work with. So you know what, if the good old boys club is not welcoming, we don't have to work with them. That's the way we can make our voices heard.

Caroline Carithers, Woodforest: That's exactly right. I travel to forums a lot with our facilities department manager and people always look to him for the answer. And he has to say I am his boss.

Isyol Cabrera, IHG: We have all these big universities that are offering construction manager and architectural design programs. I remember taking classes at Poly Southern just to get familiar with the architectural laws. I was the only female in the construction manager classes. I was ignored. Right now, if you go into a classroom, it's filled with minorities and females. So that's progress.

TJ Cartier, Lee Health: I think it is terrific that we are teaching young girls going into post-high school education that they can be engineers and architects and CEOs or that they can work in the construction field or facilities management. They have that option. We need to promote that women can get the education they need to be successful in those fields. This is critical to build that bench strength and build future women leaders in those industries.

Marilyn Brennan, Egan: I've been in project management for most of my career. I have a manufacturing background and have been on construction sites. I've also been told by men that I can be too aggressive when standing my ground. This is something that is acceptable and usually applauded if you are a male.

It really is amazing that this behavior and thinking still exists. Hopefully the next generation will get rid of some of those stereotypes and assumptions. We're not here



“I am looking to develop more creative ways of partnering with suppliers, but still add value for our membership. We're rolling out better messaging programs.”

— Adrienne Natale, Topco Indirect

“The rest of this year is really getting ready for next year when the expansion starts.”

— Melissa Gallant, Spence Diamonds:

just to be another pretty face. I think we've turned a corner. I think we are getting women in key positions. I think some of those old sentiments are going away.

CCR: Do you think these issues are still more generational and that Millennials may be able to make more progress?

Egan's Marilyn Brennan: I think these issues are more generational. There is a lot of good happening in the younger generation with a focus on equality. There are still some old behaviors and thoughts that are being passed down.

Kelly Burnette, F&D Commercial: I see more of a collaborative effort and camaraderie among women in business and particularly,



women in construction. It's important for us to work together in this capacity and to continually learn from one another and lift each other up. I think that is incumbent upon us, for women to support each other and to impress this upon millennials and younger generations.

ACT's Strapko: I agree. But to get to Marilyn's point, a lot of these are generational jobs. There are families who are passing their companies down to their children. In some ways, that's the biggest good old boy's club.

Tuesday Morning's Grieser: Yes the younger generation of leaders will help close the gap with and for women in this industry.

Connect Source's Noda: You are right. There are some brands that do not waiver

I believe that we have turned a corner, but I think it depends on who you're dealing with. It's a mentality. There are more women in the workforce today, especially women in leadership positions.

— Kelli Buhay, Retail Maintenance Specialists

from their beliefs. Their culture is their culture, through and through. And their vendors know this. Their employees know this. Their customers know this.

Michol Brandon, Crestpoint: Interestingly enough, the president and CEO of my company is an Indian American, so for me to be sitting at the table was very interesting. I love the comments that Jennifer and Julie made. I read the most phenomenal book, "Lean In," by Sheryl Sandberg. Every one of us need to get up every morning and empower ourselves. Regardless of if we turned the corner, it will always be a conversation that will be debated. You have to start the conversation. You have to be self-empowered. If no one else does, it starts with you.

At the beginning of the day, sometimes we don't feel like we want to get up and do this. But on my worst day, I get up and come to the table. It's a great book.

If you've not read it, it will empower you to want to sit at the table. It's all in our minds. Corners are just that – they're corners. You go around it or you go to the next one.

Sarah Appleton, Wallace Engineering: I think all of us in this room are pretty strong females and have probably turned the corners we needed to turn. The fact that we hold leadership positions today means our firms have turned that corner as well.

I think that as an industry, though, we still have a long way to go before we can say the corner has been turned. I've had multiple conversations with other engineers who can't figure out how to move up in their companies. They're the only woman at that level and they think they get pushed

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– Marilyn Brennan, Egan

down. I am very fortunate that I don't have that at my company. All in all, we've made progress, but I believe our industry still has a long way to go before we can say we have completely turned that corner.

Susan Marsh, Continental Realty: I agree with that. In property management I feel like most of the managers are female. So I'm still in that female dominated world. But most of the executives and directors are male.

Wallace Engineering's Appleton: As we continue to move up in our careers, I believe our next challenge is to help others advance in their careers. It's all about empowering the next generation by example.



Cynthia Hirsch, Sargenti Architects: I think it's important that we have women in leadership roles. We need to take a stand and become more active in the industry. Attend conferences and speak about these types of things. That's how we will continue to empower women in the younger generations. We can get there. It's not impossible.

ShopTalk 360's Daly: Having worked in the industry as long as I have, I do see a distinct difference in leadership and what women bring to the table. When I do the interviews for my podcasts with women in leadership roles, I am also always trying to learn from them.

Karen MacCannell, The McIntosh Group: In the architecture industry, we're graduating 50 percent or more women from architecture school. Three and four years down the road, there's still less than 24 percent women in the field, either because they took another path, or they chose to stay home after having children.

As a firm, we are actively combatting this by creating a more welcoming environment for women and working moms. Some of the ways we do that have to do with flexible hours, a generous maternity policy, and a clear path to leadership within the firm that is accessible to anyone willing to put in the effort. We also worked with our local AIA chapter to create a Women in Design

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subgroup where we tackle issues facing us in this industry.

A big part of it is mentoring. We want to support and bring everybody up along with us.

CCR: This is our lightning round. Give us a quick snapshot on what you're working on through the end of this year and into 2018.

Ulta's Kozar: My plans for the end of 2017 into 2018 is if any new design that we have coming in for our stores. I'm going to look for new opportunities to create an RFP with on additional vendors.

Wallace Engineering's Appleton: My main focus for 2018 is training and growth. I want to continue to train my staff to not only become stronger and more efficient





engineers, but also to teach them the importance of relationships & business development – offering them the encouragement and opportunities to grow in their careers.

Crestpoint Companies' Brandon: It's about training and growth, really connecting with our staff at the guest level so that we don't feel the tremendous impact from some of our competitors out there. We want to continue to deliver exceptional service.

Fulcrum Construction's Hoople: An ongoing focus for Fulcrum is to develop relationships with industry partners and clients. Specifically in 2018, we want to be the go-to partner who tackles challenges creatively and brings ideas and solutions to the table.

ACT's Strapko: The new year is about growth and marketing.

Spence Diamonds' Gallant: The rest of this year is really getting ready for next year when the expansion starts.

Beam Team's Armstrong: We have experienced a lot of growth this year, so we are

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– Sarah Appleton, Wallace Engineering



working on optimizing efficiency through bettering our overall quality in the work we produce as well as the products we use on and off job sites.

Connect Source's Noda: I am putting together my strategic business plan with the goal of becoming a very successful consulting firm.

Bridgestone's Peterson: I am continuing to learn about the automotive industry focusing on Finance and Operations.

F&D Commercial's Burnette: Our key goals for this next year are: to continue to be innovative in our business approach to the hard surface industry and to expand our footprint in the commercial construction world. We are focused on growth, both internally, through expansion of our team and externally, through continued relationship building with both new and existing customers.



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Continental Realty's Marsh: I am continuing to work on the redevelopment of a retail strip center that we just took over – getting my budgets done, etc.

Rogers Electric's Hinson: We are looking to expand our business. That means asking more questions and really listening to our clients, so that we can come up with the solutions that can help.

Sargenti Architects' Hirsch: I want to continue to market and grow our client base.

Tuesday Morning's Grieser: We're looking at bringing faster, better, more cost effective service to our store managers and field team.

Retail Maintenance Specialists' Buhay: We're always looking to continue with our

“I think it is terrific that we are teaching young girls going into post-high school education that they can be engineers and architects and CEOs, or that they can work in the construction field or facilities management. They have that option.”

– TJ Cartier, Lee Health

controlled growth. We want to be able to service that clients who have been with us for 10 years and our new clients without any difference. That's about improving on our internal team.

Lee Health's Cartier: We have several major expansion and new facility projects in flight that will take a great deal of coordination over the next three years. Coming from a retail background I am expanding by design expertise through further education in the area of health care design, optimal healing environments, lean flows of healthcare and the ever-changing healthcare landscape in southwest Florida.

Egan Signs' Brennan: We are always looking for great client partners, ones that bring quality to our brand.



So it's about onboarding new clients and keeping our existing clients. On a personal level, I want to be more involved in advisory boards and different levels within organizations as a whole. I think it's important for women to be involved in key organizations in this industry.

Woodforest National Bank's Carithers:

We continue to make sure we have all the pieces in place. We want to get more efficient at building our branches, build out our offices and support the growth in our people and departments.

Genesis Lighting's Redman: In addition to continuing to work hard with my existing customers, I will proceed to develop new relationships and tap into new markets and avenues of business.

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– Karen MacCannell, The McIntosh Group

Topco's Natale: I am looking to develop more creative ways of partnering with suppliers, but still add value for our membership. We're rolling out better messaging programs.

The McIntosh Group's Karen MacCannell: We are continuing to work hard with our existing clients to maintain

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– Jennifer Grieser, Tuesday Morning



good relationships, and we're looking for the next big clients out there. We continue to develop our staff internally to prepare them for leadership roles within the company.

IHG's Cabrera: My main focus frame is to keep learning about the hospitality business and keep growing.

ShopTalk 360's Daly: I will continue to do by podcasts and expand into video interviews or vlogging. I'm also looking to wrap up my book, which is a fictional piece based on the commercial construction industry. **CCR**