

GROUNDBREAKING *Women*

by Marilyn Murray Willison

Although it is difficult for women in the 90's to accept such an outlandish idea, only a decade or so ago newspaper classified ads were segregated into "jobs wanted - female" and "jobs wanted - male." Fortunately, today women are working in a wide variety of fields that would once have been considered strictly off limits. For example, according to government figures, the lowest percentage of female employees (in non traditional fields) hover around areas like airplane pilots and navigators (1.4%), firefighters (2.5%), pest control occupations (2.6%), and work their way up to areas in which females constitute roughly 20% of the work force—areas like drafting, correctional institution officers, and butchers.

Statistics now show that women seem to be making the greatest advances in fields that have shrinking employment and low-wage jobs. It's significant that the share of women workers in gasoline service stations is twelve percentage points higher than it was ten years ago, but service stations today employ 37% fewer workers overall. The hidden aspect that affects all working women is that women are in the work force today in larger numbers than ever before, but more and more of them are setting their sights on non-traditional careers. Here are a few statistics that make for thought-provoking data: In Florida, from 1987 to 1996, the greatest increase in the number of women-owned firms has been in wholesale trade, construction, and transportation. And employment growth among women-owned firms from 1987 to 1996 has been highest in agriculture/mining and lowest in retail trade. Sales growth among women-owned firms in Florida from 1987 to 1996 has been highest in wholesale trade, and lowest in transportation/communication.

According to the National Foundation for Women Business Owners (NFBO) between 1987 and 1996, construction not PR, Marketing, or Retail, was the fastest growth area for women business owners. The number of women starting construction businesses has increased 170% over the past nine years. Last year over 320,000 female contractors employed more than a million people and took in \$130.4 billion in revenue. This incredible growth can look deceiving—women make up only 7% of the industry as a whole, but back in 1987 that number was practically zero. While the improvement may seem monumental, what makes the shift fascinating is the reason why non-traditional doors are suddenly being opened. And the reason is professionalism. Fewer of the people who run these companies today came up "through the shop" because today's woman earned her stripes through improved

people skills and education.

For example, once upon a time business owners were able to get their start with a dump truck, experience, and strong muscles. But today, bidding on and completing a project requires a whole different realm of professional skills, from law and accounting to computer technology and high-tech engineering.

EDUCATION

John Mouton head of the Department of Building Science at Auburn University in Alabama says that he has seen a steady increase in the number of women receiving construction-related engineering degrees. And, fortunately, he reports a tremendous demand for these graduates in the work force. Today women make up ten percent of the class, and Auburn estimates that the number will double every five years until it hits 40%. Mouton believes the majority of these women will start their own firms because of the resistance they face when it comes to working at traditional companies. As one (female) observer of the rapid growth in non-traditional working gender wars relates, these days, "construction is less about who can sweat the most and more about developing good relationships—something women know all about."

In 1945, the U.S. Army hired six women to help program the giant ENIAC computer at the University of Pennsylvania. In those days, programming was considered "clerical work" and was assigned to women. Few people today realize that women—as this century's first computer programmers—helped launch America's computer era.

Unfortunately, women make up only 35% of the high-tech work force, and mostly occupy staff positions in human resources and marketing (rather than technical jobs in the field of information resources.) According to the experts, this gender gap begins in childhood. The American Association of University Women contends that girls are not encouraged to pursue math and science in school, and the result is that fewer women are qualified for positions that require this background. In 1995 women earned 17.5% of the bachelors degrees in engineering, 16.7% of masters and only 12.1% of doctoral degrees.

Two remarkable programs are trying to reverse this imbalance. Microsoft has sponsored a program for young women called "Expanding Your Horizons." And a New England technical college has also started a program called "Multiply Your Options." Both of these programs are aimed at middle-school

girls because most engineers and technical professionals surveyed revealed that by the ninth grade they had decided whether or not to pursue math and/or science. These girl-friendly workshops allow students to meet and work alongside professional women from such fields as veterinary medicine, forensic science, biology, civil engineering, aviation, zoology and computer science.

FLORIDA WOMEN

These changes have affected Florida residents as much as they have the rest of the nation. Here's a brief introduction to a few local, Florida women who have cheerfully and successfully broken the mold.



Linda Bohlinger
Tri-Rail

Anyone who lives in the Women's Business Journal reading area cannot help but be familiar with Tri-Rail. And the new head of Tri-Rail—for the first time—is a woman. Linda Bohlinger has come to Florida from Los Angeles, where she had a successful career in mass transit. After receiving her teaching credential and masters degree in Spanish, Bohlinger was not afraid to switch gears and break a mold or two. "My interest started with Spanish and teaching. But I realized that the administrative side had more opportunities than the teaching side. After I got my masters, I decided to get out into the so-called real world. My first job was with a regional transportation planning agency. That's where I started learning about transportation and getting interested in the transportation field. I was always strong in the financial end and the administration end, and transportation offered me a

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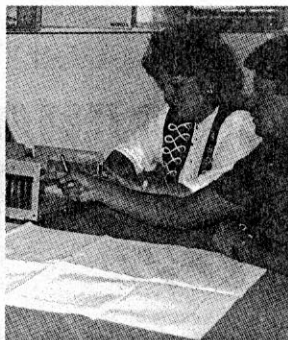
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Pamela Collins
ANRO Metals

whole new career change. I had the opportunity to work with six different counties in California and learn about transportation. With a very good mentor and boss, I was able—over time—to move my way up from analyst to manager to director. Soon I was on the LA County Transportation Commission and then to the State of California Transportation Commission as Deputy Director. My coming to Tri-Rail allows me to use leadership, funding skills, and advocacy, and my ability to work with multiple constituencies and communities. I have been lucky enough to have had experience and success in being a good team leader, building a work culture within an agency, and bringing efficiencies to the administration of an agency."

Pamela Collins is the president of ANRO Metals Manufacturing in Pompano Beach, which specializes in precision metal fabrication, machining and assembly. Pam started ANRO in April of 1983 because "I saw metal fabrication as a great business opportunity, even though I had no background in this field or industry. If anything, it was my awareness of the corporate glass ceiling that catapulted me into a non-traditional work area. Ninety-nine percent of my employees are male and most had never before worked for a woman in this industry. I only know of a couple of other women owners nationally within this sort of industry. But I think that personality and management style supercede gender—and entrepreneurial spirit goes far when it comes to working with our customers. They care about quality, delivery, and price regardless of whether or not you're wearing a skirt."

A woman who has made an enviable name for herself in the South Florida world of transportation is Karina Taillade. "My first job was with the International Department of Shulman Air Freight. I was originally hired because of my fluency in English and Spanish.

But during the four years I worked for Shulman I became knowledgeable in all aspects of the business of transporting cargo in foreign commerce, various methods of payment, and qualification of cargo for export from the U.S. and delivery to foreign countries. Within four years I was offered the opportunity to create a new office in Miami on behalf of CF Air Freight. In 1989, when they merged with Emery Worldwide Freight, I remained terminal manager. Two years later, I realized there were a number of phases in the movement of cargo into and out of the South Florida market that were not being handled in an optimum way. And I also realized that to move up the ladder at Emery, I would have to relocate and leave South Florida—something I did not want to do. That's why I formed the GINE-PRIS group of companies in Miami. The name comes from a combination of the names of my daughters (Ginelle and Priscilla) and the company handles more than half a million shipments involving many millions of packages each year. I am proud of the fact that the GINE-PRIS companies are female oriented and fully ready for the arrival of the 21st century."

Judy Cameron, with Thermoseal Roofing in West Palm Beach, is part of a husband and wife team of entrepreneurs. As Vice President, she supervises collections and accounting and oversees the internal office staff. "I see no disadvantage to being female in this business. One of our female estimators gets up on the roof to give an accurate estimate—just like the guys. We've been in business for 21 years and I think any woman can succeed in a field like this if she comes to work looking and acting professional and is willing to take a strong position in what she can do. Confidence is a big thing, along with being alert and depend-



Karina Taillade
Gene-Pris

able. In this field—with the difficulties of unpredictable weather—being ready to take on any task and being willing to stay with it until the job is finished is what really counts."

One of the more remarkable non-tradition-

al success stories in South Florida is Ann McNeill. Her Miami company—MCO Construction and Services works exclusively for public agencies, but construction was hardly the career McNeill envisioned for herself when she graduated from Miami's Florida Memorial College with a degree in accounting. "I had hoped to have a long career with Pratt and Whitney, but unfortunately I had a supervisor who told me that blacks and women had no place at work and that I should be home, barefoot and pregnant. So I did roofing and construction on the weekends simply to get the



Ann McNeill
MCO Construction Services

experience. I did it while I had my job so I could learn more about construction. I knew the opportunities for a self-employed person would be greater than those that came from just having a job. I was investing in rental property at that time and my husband and I began doing our own repairs. I went to North Tech in Riviera Beach so that I could learn how to build a house from the ground up. My father was a landscaper who owned field buses that took people to the fields to do farm work. I had to operate heavy equipment from an early age, so I never looked at it as man's work or women's work. My father raised me to not look at work as man's work or women's work, but just as work—and as an opportunity. I learned to operate heavy equipment when I was twelve years old. What really made a difference for us was when my husband and I got an estimate to replace a roof on a piece of property we owned. Compared with the estimate, if we replaced the roof ourselves, we would save \$20,000, which was a year's salary. I realized the opportunities in this business to make year's salary in a month were a lot greater than working an entire year for the same amount of money. Probably the smartest thing I ever did was to spend time working for contractors for free—spending every weekend pounding nails, learning carpentry, painting, roofing, estimating and bidding. My last year at Pratt and Whitney I worked weekends for a local black contractor and did everything from bookkeeping to marketing to bidding for con-

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