

# BUSINESS

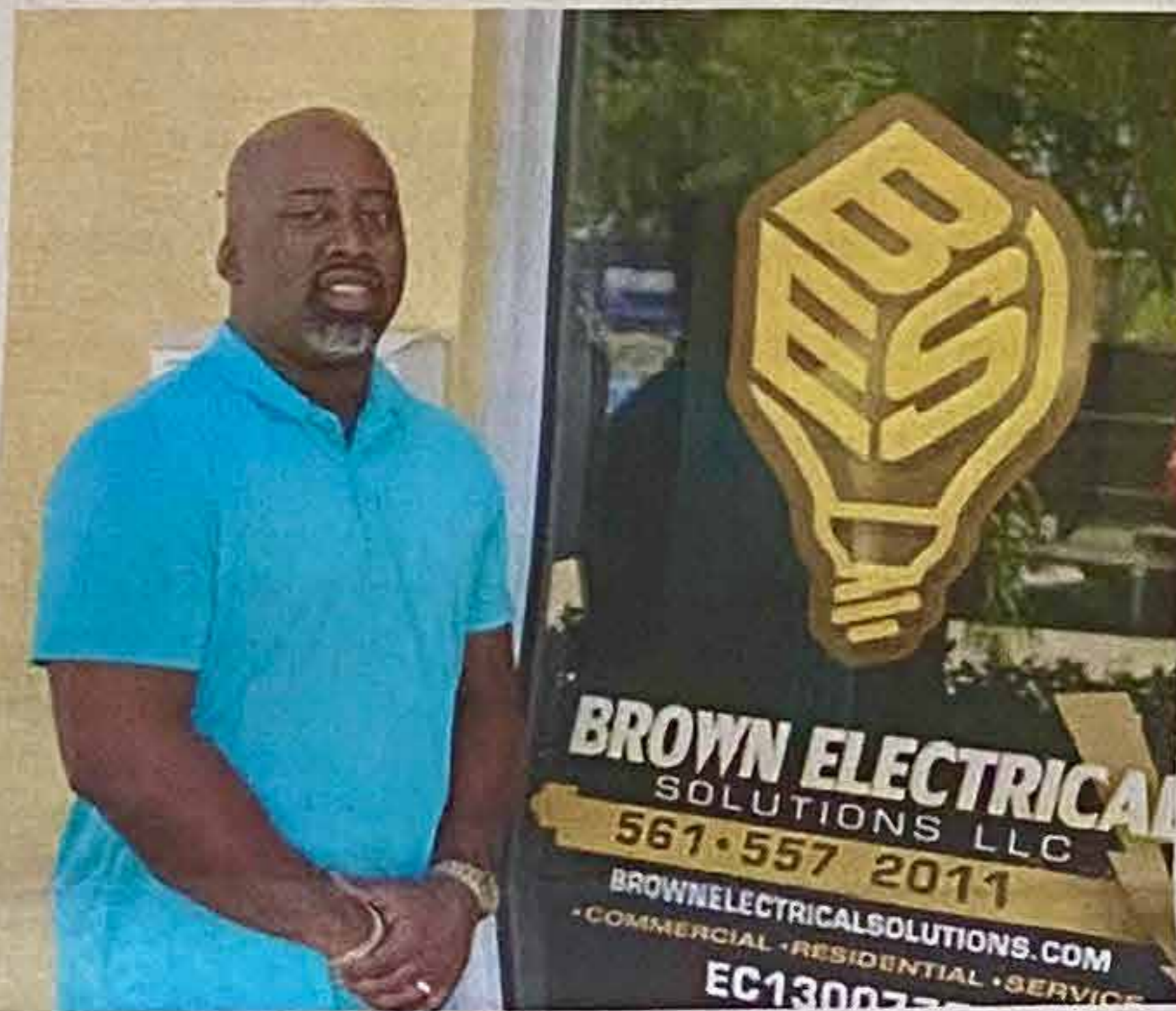
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SECTION **B**

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Margaret Anglin (L) working on a project installing a computer lab in West Palm Beach. COURTESY OF MARGARET ANGLIN



Vincent Brown is the president and CEO of Brown Electrical Solutions. VIA FACEBOOK



Ann McNeill is the owner of M.C.O. Construction and Services, and president of the National Association of Black Women in Construction. BUSY BIZ BRANDING LLC

## Cracking into the construction business

### Making inroads in a white male-dominated field

**BIANCA MARCOF**  
Miami Times Staff Writer

The construction industry is overwhelmingly white and male across the country, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Of those working in the sector, Black workers represent only 6.3%, compared to white workers at 87.9%. And women lag behind men, comprising only 11% of workers in the industry, even though they account for half of the overall national workforce. This shortage of women and minorities has led some in the industry to look for ways to specifically recruit, hire and ensure their advancement in the field.

"We just have to shift how we think and how we see this industry, so we have to do the work," said Ann McNeill, owner of the first African American female-owned construction company in Florida - M.C.O. Construction and Services. "There's no barrier to entry in construction. None. It's an honorable profession."

It all started for McNeill as an accountant working for the Urban League of Greater Miami in the 1970s. She says she came to the city after she was rejected from a job in her home of West Palm Beach, because Black people and women weren't being hired. She later began working at the budget office of Miami-Dade Transit, and that's when she realized there was a future in construction in the county.

"The journey really began to take off for me as I realized I knew nothing about con-

struction," she said. "While working on a master's degree at Barry (University), I went to a trade school called North Technical Institute in Riviera Beach and all my friends laughed (at me)."

Shortly after, the 1980 McDuffie riots broke out and a county ordinance mandating that 30% of every public dollar spent would go to minority contractors allowed McNeill to take advantage of the reconstruction opportunities.

"It gave me an opportunity to come back and participate in the rebuilding of Miami with a company by the name of Thacker Construction. That's how I ended up in construction," she said.

McNeill would go on to start her own company and dedicate her career to bringing the next generation of Black women into the industry. Thus, she founded the National Association of Black Women in Construction (NABWIC).

She currently coaches nationally and participates in panel discussions to share her message. She also teaches a construction trades certificate program course at her alma mater, Florida Memorial University.

Having assisted clients and contractors in Miami to secure major projects like the \$200 million American Airlines Arena (now FTX Arena) and the \$700 million Miami International Airport South Terminal, if there's one thing McNeill emphasizes to others about the business, it's to network and maintain relationships.

"I find that people go out

of their way to do business with people they know, like and trust," she said. "I invest lots of time, lots of energy and lots of money investing in building and maintaining relationships. And I do that by volunteering, I do that by attending conferences, I do that by being a strategic partner and helping my clients get business."

McNeill now finds herself back in Riviera Beach, where she's assisting in the building of Fire Station 88, a new state-of-the-art facility. It will be her first time working on a project in her hometown. Reflecting on her past, she's glad she never gave up on construction.

"I have two general contracting licenses and it took me six tries to pass the first time. Six tries. But I didn't quit," she said. "I have a larger

vision of what's possible for myself and my community."

#### STILL, SHE PERSISTED

Persevering is a struggle Margaret Anglin, president and co-owner of Mr. Wireman Electric, has had to face on the job. When forced to step into her husband's leadership role after he unexpectedly suffered a brain stroke in 2012, more challenges followed.

Her inexperience caused her to be taken advantage of, she says, but being the only woman of color was a large factor. With projects that she and her husband had taken on prior to his illness, people felt as if she didn't know what she was doing. She even had several contractors not pay her.

"I had men, as a whole, challenge me on every corner," Anglin said. "I would get in a room and they would talk as though, if we do all this technical stuff she'll just wither

away and things like that. I did not like how they talked down to me."

At the time, she was only knowledgeable about administrative matters in the family-owned business that had been operating since 1992. Although Mr. Wireman Electric handles residential repairs, the bulk of its business is new construction and putting in new service for entire buildings. One of its signature projects was the \$60 million Miami Dade College renovation of the David W. Dyer Federal Building in downtown Miami, which the company worked on with Turner Construction.

"I took the time to learn ... getting mentors, just seeking out individuals that didn't mind helping me," Anglin said. "It was rough because a woman walking up to a man in the construction industry and saying, 'help me' is not always favorable. But I was

persistent. Today, I sit here and I have an office and I look around and individuals no longer talk to me like that. They no longer play with my money."

With this underrepresentation in the industry, how does one attract more women and minorities to the trade?

Like McNeill, Anglin works to show young women that there is a path to success in this industry through NABWIC, which allows her to mentor those interested in the trade. On the organization's "Industry Day," she visits students in high schools to give seminars and says that part of her presentations tackle misinformation. People mistakenly believe construction is only about getting dirty or having to wear a hard hat, she adds, but with education and support, she hopes others achieve the success she's found.

SEE FIELD 10B



Ann McNeill (center) at the groundbreaking for Fire Station 88 in her home city of Riviera Beach, Fla. BUSY BIZ BRANDING LLC