Breaking new ground: Special women in construction issue

At John Deere, we believe that when we improve the diversity of our workforce, we all benefit. Diverse perspectives bring fresh ideas and inform better decisions while strengthening connections to local communities and the world around us. And it’s a competitive advantage. Opening the doors to a broader mix of talent through diversity and an inclusive culture is vital to our growth and innovation.

In this special double issue of Worksite Journal and The Dirt, we celebrate the growing and extremely important role women are playing in the construction industry. Today more women than ever before are joining the industry, although it remains a male-dominated field. Women represent 10 percent of the construction industry in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. By comparison, women make up 47 percent of the total U.S. workforce. But job opportunities for women in the construction field are on the rise, reports the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC).

The gender pay gap in construction is significantly smaller than in other industries. In the U.S., women earn an average of 88.1 percent of what men make, but in the construction industry, women earn an average of 99.1 percent of what men make, according to the NAWIC. And many women are breaking the glass ceiling. One in three companies has promoted women to senior roles, and in recent years the number of women-owned construction firms has grown 64 percent. Today 13 percent of construction firms are owned by women.*

As you’ll learn in the stories in this issue, women are thriving in many roles including owner, CEO, CFO, office manager, estimating manager, maintenance supervisor, and machine operator. These women love their jobs and are passionate about the industry. They believe women have an important role in construction and that more are needed. According to a woman CFO we interviewed, there is a place for everyone to make an impact by sharing their unique talents and perspectives. Or as one of the woman operators we spoke with succinctly put it: “We are strong. And we belong.”

*Sources: BigRentz.com.

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A female CFO and office manager has perfected the mixture of good chemistry and family ties to build a business with lots of potential energy.

10 | AMERICAN DREAMERS
A pair of sisters-in-law seizes a golden opportunity — and enables the next generation of female voices to be heard — in the Golden State.
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Elements of Success

Nitrogen

Sulfur

Cerium
Successful companies can often pinpoint specific milestones where they were able to take the next step forward and grow. For Tim Messer Construction, Auberry, California, that moment came in the spring of 2010. The company had been completing smaller projects for the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Southern California Edison® (SCE), when SCE approached them to take on a massive campground project. “I told my dad Tim Messer that this is what we had been preparing for,” recalls Hayley Ferguson, office manager and CFO. “I’ve always believed we were going to be really successful, so I said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

The company quickly proved itself and became an approved vendor for SCE. “It was a turning point for us,” says Ferguson. “It allowed us to invest in more iron and make a lot of connections. It took our company in a new direction. We were a very small construction company doing house pads, septic systems, and roads, but since then we morphed into something much larger.”

Hayley Ferguson has the construction business down to a science

– continued
GOOD CHEMISTRY

Ferguson met her husband Stephen while attending Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo. “We met in chemistry class,” she says. “People always find that funny. We must have had good chemistry (laughs).”

Ferguson enjoys working with her husband, father, and staff, and attributes the company’s success to, well, positive chemistry. “Some of our employees have been here over 20 years. We all really get along and support each other with our diverse talents. We owe that to my father. He always tells us how much he values and appreciates us. He’s a good person with a big heart, and that has really set the tone for this company.”

CAMP FERGUSON

The company worked nonstop that first summer rebuilding Rancheria Campground. It created a new amphitheater, paved roads, fire pits, benches, signage, bathrooms, over 1,000 bollards, and new pads for approximately 150 campsites.

Ferguson and her husband camped at the campground that summer with their two small children. “We were trying to make it an adventure for the kids,” she recalls. Growing up, Ferguson remembers camping with her own mother and father during the summer while her father logged in the woods. “We never knew that Dad was working. We were just hiking and camping — spending time in the mountains and having fun.”

— HAYLEY FERGUSON, CFO and office manager, on meeting her husband, Stephen Ferguson, field operations manager, Tim Messer Construction
Ferguson admits that the Rancheria Campground project was daunting. “It was a long, hard summer. There were moments where I wondered if we could really do it. But at the end of the project, I thought, ‘Wow, we really accomplished that? It’s amazing!’ It looks gorgeous and it’s exactly what the customer asked for. Since then, we’ve completed many more projects that were big and complex, and I’m really proud of how our team has stepped up.”

BUILDING A FUTURE

When she started college at California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo, Ferguson dreamed of becoming a news broadcaster. But after entering the ag business program, she discovered a love for marketing. After completing an internship with a produce company and graduating in 2003, she started to apply for marketing jobs in the ag field. “I told Dad I might be taking a job in the Salinas Valley where there is a lot of farmland and agriculture.”

Her father nonchalantly asked how much people coming out of college made. “Looking back, I should have told him $100,000 (laughs). But I gave him a much lower figure, and he told me he’d pay me that. He’d let me create my own job with flexible hours. I took the job a week later and have been working for him ever since.”

Today Ferguson wears many hats, including taking care of employees and payroll, managing the fleet, and ordering new equipment. She also supports 12 employees, assumes payroll duties, manages the fleet, orders new equipment, handles accounts payable and accounts receivable, oversees all other financial aspects of the business, problem-solves in the shop and on the jobsite, and handles accounts payable and accounts receivable.

I’m passionate about what we do and about building a quality business.”

Hayley Ferguson, CFO and office manager, Tim Messer Construction
Women have always been welcomed and well received in this industry.”

GINGER CARDOZA,
construction manager, Tim Messer Construction

handles accounts payable, accounts receivable, and any other financial aspect of the business. “When I’m not at the shop or in the field helping solve problems, I’m pretty much behind my desk crunching numbers to make sure things are going to work out. I’m passionate about what we do and about building a quality business.”

Her husband is field operations manager for the company, which runs John Deere equipment almost exclusively, including 50D, 60D, and 60G Compact Excavators and numerous compact track loaders (CTLs) including two 333Gs. “The mini excavators, skid steers, and CTLs are the most utilized pieces of equipment we run,” he says. “On campground projects with narrow trails, they can go where we need them to go. And with a variety of attachments, they are so versatile and give us a lot of flexibility.”

“If I were only able to buy one piece of equipment, it would be a John Deere compact machine,” adds Ferguson.

“There’s not a day that goes by that we don’t use them. John Deere is just top-of-the-line quality. The machines are almost never down.”

Outstanding service and support from their local dealer help make sure the machines are always up and running. “I can’t say enough about our people at Papé Machinery. We feel valued as a customer and that they understand our needs. They answer our calls no matter what time of day. They’re always available, they’re friendly, and they make it happen.”

Ferguson claims the company would not be able do the volume they do without John Deere Financial. “It’s the best financing in the industry. We’ve bought many of our machines with zero-interest payment plans, which has allowed us to purchase more equipment.”

RIGHT-HAND WOMAN

Recently Ferguson hired a new construction manager, Ginger Cardoza, whom she calls her “right-hand woman.” “Steve and I kept throwing names around and they were all men,” says Ferguson. “I’ve known Ginger’s family for decades. She saw the qualities of our family and company, and she jumped on board. She does a wonderful job and goes above and beyond educating herself on things she doesn’t know. I believe in every case women in the industry are fully capable of doing exactly what their male counterparts do.”

Cardoza maintains RFI (request for information) submittals, processes paperwork, updates plans, and helps Ferguson with accounting work and any other office support needed. “The Messers are an amazing family and it’s an honor to be a part of this team,” she says.

Prior to joining Tim Messer Construction, Cardoza worked...
for an architect for 20 years. She is familiar with many construction companies in the area, including several that are owned by or employ women. “Women have always been welcomed and well received in this industry,” says Cardoza.

“It’s awesome that women are making an impact,” adds Ferguson. “I think there’s a place for everyone. We all have our own unique talents and perspectives. You just have to have the determination to work hard, persevere, and not take no for an answer.”

Tim Messer Construction, Inc. is serviced by Papé® Machinery, Fowler, California.

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/worksitejournal

The mini excavators, skid steers, and CTLs are the most utilized pieces of equipment we run.”

STEPHEN FERGUSON, field operations manager, Tim Messer Construction
Lilia Jubrail, co-owner of The Equipment Connection in Lancaster, California, echoes these words as she reflects on her own experience as an immigrant: “The United States is the ‘golden country.’ It is the place where dreams come true. I have been to many countries in the world, and there is no other country like the United States.”

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY IN THE GOLDEN STATE

When she arrived in California as an immigrant from Mexico at the age of 15, Jubrail didn’t know English. “I could say ‘hello,’ and that was about it,” she recalls. “None of my teachers spoke Spanish. Math was okay, but other subjects like history were hard. It was pretty tough. It takes a lot of courage and persistence for immigrants to excel and assimilate.”

Almost three decades later, Jubrail has built successful accounting and rental businesses. “People come here from other countries because you can be whatever you want to be. I am extremely grateful and proud to be an American citizen and proud of this country.”

Prior to opening The Equipment Connection three years ago, Jubrail ran a bookkeeping practice for 20 years. Many of her customers were construction contractors. With her experience in providing top-notch customer service, she believed opening a small rental business represented a big opportunity.

“There aren’t too many smaller rental companies in our area that can provide the kind of attention small contractors are looking for,” she says. “My bookkeeping customers kept telling me that the big-box rental stores often ignored them and that they’d rather go somewhere else. So we thought, ‘Let’s go for it.’”

“THE UNITED STATES IS THE ‘GOLDEN COUNTRY.’ IT IS THE PLACE WHERE DREAMS COME TRUE.”

Lilia Jubrail, co-owner, The Equipment Connection
“HEAR OUR VOICE”
Jubrail co-owns The Equipment Connection with her sister-in-law, Ernestina Rincon. “Ernestina and I are not only women, we are immigrant women. That the two of us are able to build a successful business together is the American dream come true.”

The two have known each other 27 years. “She’s more than a sister-in-law. I consider her my actual sister. Working together makes our relationship even stronger. We know each other’s strengths, which helps us succeed.”

Jubrail’s two daughters, Valerie and Natalie, often help out at the rental counter. “I love that my daughters are able to do this,” she says. “We need more women in the construction and rental industries. We need to empower women and make sure our voices are heard because we are very capable.”

Both daughters are college students. Jubrail hopes Valerie, who is studying marketing, will stay with the company after graduation. Her older daughter Natalie is studying political science. “She is passionate about women’s empowerment and human rights in general. She wants to be sure everyone’s voice is heard and that there is equality everywhere.”

EVERY MINUTE COUNTS
In addition to scissor lifts, booms, cranes, generators, and tools, The Equipment Connection offers a full range of John Deere compact excavators. “Everyone loves the 26G because you can take it just about anywhere, slip into tight spaces, and do an amazing job,” says Jubrail.
“WE NEED MORE WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND RENTAL INDUSTRIES. WE NEED TO EMPOWER WOMEN AND MAKE SURE OUR VOICES ARE HEARD BECAUSE WE ARE VERY CAPABLE.”

Lilia Jubrail, co-owner, The Equipment Connection

“For smaller jobs, we offer the 17G. And there’s also a lot of new construction around here, so many of our larger customers ask for the 35G for those bigger jobs.”

The company also offers a 325G Compact Track Loader. “Our customers like the 325G because it is so versatile and can get so many jobs done quickly while reducing hand labor,” she explains.

Customers recognize the Deere brand for its quality. “The machines are extremely well made and durable,” says Jubrail. “We know that every minute counts and that it is important for our customers to have dependable machines. We can’t leave them hanging. That’s why we count on John Deere.”

Brand recognition and reliability aren’t the only reasons Jubrail chose Deere. “John Deere values us as a women-owned company and gave us a great opportunity,” she says. “They offered us a great line of credit, which makes a huge difference for a startup business. Thanks to them, we are able to grow, and we are going to stay loyal to them.”

She also appreciates the service and support she receives from the local John Deere dealer, Coastline Equipment. “They have been a great resource for us, providing a bridge between us and John Deere. Our representative, Chris Chadwick, is amazing. He’s done so much for us, for example, having an attachment or machine ready on short notice when a customer needs it the next day.”

Jubrail is optimistic about the company’s future. “The president just signed an infrastructure bill, which I think will be great for our country and for us. Our cities need fixing and the contractors who are doing the fixing need our machines. And we are definitely here for them.”

The Equipment Connection is serviced by Coastline Equipment, Oxnard, California.

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/worksitejournal