

SPECIAL SECTION

OUTSTANDING WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

THIS INDUSTRY IS CHANGING.

For some, that truth is hard to stomach. But others are leaning in, no holds barred. The construction leaders of tomorrow are welcoming tech adoption, alternative methods for project delivery, and other changes with open arms. They're also looking to a labor force that has historically been underrepresented as a way to alleviate the ongoing skills shortage.

Currently, women represent only 9% of the construction workforce. In the field, that statistic has an even starker contrast: For every 100 men on the jobsite, there is only one woman. However, many of the women who go to work in construction every day do so with the drive and a vision for a more diverse and more inclusive workforce.

In the following pages, we've highlighted 20 of those women. CBO's Outstanding Women in Construction drew nearly 200 nominations from industry leaders for women working in the office, in the field and everywhere in between, all over the United States and in myriad sectors of the industry.

Finalists were chosen based on their skills, leadership and management techniques, as well as their exceptional contributions to their companies, industry and communities. The women in this section represent some of the very best in the industry—each and every one is working to build a better environment for all who work in construction, regardless of gender, race or background.



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Amanda (Mandi) Richalle Kime

Director of Safety

Associated General Contractors of Washington

Job Must-Have: "I should say personal protective equipment (PPE), but I have to say your smile. It's your brand, and it's how you connect with people. You never know who you are going to encounter on the jobsite, but a simple smile will open so many doors. And it's better than the alternative."

For the past 12 years, Amanda (Mandi) Richalle Kime has served in a director-level position at the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) and was the youngest person to ever fill one. Her role includes the tasks of administering the safety team program and conducting jobsite audits for contractors to help develop their safety programs. "We're like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) without a ticket book. If we see something missing from a program, we offer advice and resources for improvement," Kime said. "We often see people on their darkest days professionally. I'm not there to lead an investigation, but to act as support. When bad stuff happens, you want someone in your corner representing you."

Kime provides support for the disadvantaged. For years, she's played a large role in developing AGC's diversity and inclusion program. "It's about creating the kind of environment where people want to go work. We spend more time with coworkers than we do with our family. That parlays into mental health, into diversity, into inclusion ... There are so many ways in which having the right culture makes it one where people want to be," she said.

For women in particular, Kime believes that having this level of support in the same way AGC has provided it to her can be the driving factor in personal success. "I wish that someone had come to me earlier in my career and said, 'You can do it all.' Unapologetically. You can be married and have kids (if that's your journey), or you can do none of that. Other people don't get to dictate to you what your potential is," Kime said. "If you're a working mom, let's face it, everyone wants you to act like you don't have a job, but then you are supposed to turn around and work like you don't have kids. You have to set appropriate boundaries and have a good balance. You can still kick ass at a lot of things."

Kime says it's not just about making the workplace better, but also improving the way we talk about construction to the next generation to ensure there's an incoming workforce. "The way we encourage folks to consider a career in construction is huge. If we all start working a little harder to see what we all might have in common, we find out that those things are connected. That connection helps us welcome people of different backgrounds and experiences, and when we do that, we get better solutions to our problems."



Tiffany LaBruno

Director of Professional Services

Gafcon

Job Must-Have: "Tech, of course! Specifically, Microsoft Teams and OneNote, because the tools allow me to work on multiple devices and collaborate with my team in real time."

A woman working in construction is rare enough, but a woman working in construction technology—that's a unicorn, according to Tiffany LaBruno. She's proud to say she's not the only one out there, though. She manages a team of 10 in her role with Gafcon, and eight of them are women. After getting her start as a project administrator for a multifamily contractor in California, LaBruno went to work as a consultant with the Navy Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC). She helped manage the construction battalion's projects and facilities finance system for 20 years. She made the move to Gafcon 6 years ago.

Although Gafcon is software agnostic, her role is focused on helping guide the company's team managers and project owners through program implementation, life-cycle reporting, etc. She is also charged with setting standards on Gafcon projects for process optimization, requests for information (RFIs), submittals, safety reporting, building information modeling (BIM) and more. Put simply, her team goes into a fairly low-tech environment and works to generate a passion for tech usage on the jobsite.

"When you're facing the adoption of technology—especially when you are working with people who have never used tech [on that level]—being empathetic and listening to team members' fears is the only way to work toward a collaborative environment," LaBruno said. "We're still using paper and clamshell phones in this industry—it's got to change."

One big step forward? LaBruno says it's important for newcomers to the industry, as well as those not even considering it as a career path, to know that construction is not just heavy lifting. "The lack of resources in construction is really hurting us," LaBruno said. But, she says, the only way to change that is to change the perception of what the industry has to offer someone looking for a lucrative, challenging career.

On a company level, LaBruno credits Gafcon as an excellent example of what organizations should be doing. "Gafcon is a company that recognizes excellence in employees and has a clear-cut plan for promotion," she said. She advises looking to the current workforce to see underlying values and company culture. "If you're working for a company where everyone looks the same, you pretty much know that may not be a place you want to go." Last but not least, find a mentor. "Find a group to network with. The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) is a great place to start."