



## **PWC mentorship program inspires girls at Bronx Design/Construction Academy**

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Professional Women in Construction (PWC) launched its mentorship program on Wednesday, November 28, at the Bronx Design and Construction Academy, a new, innovative high school, where a group of successful women addressed some 30 freshmen and sophomore girls on the opportunities open to women in a non-traditional, male-dominated arena. The response was enthusiastic.

"I learned that women can do the same things men do," said Veronica Cruz, 15, who plans to go into carpentry.

Cherrelle Barnhill, 15, also a freshman, enjoyed "seeing the women be part of the work" and said that she wants to be an electrician so she can "make a whole building light up."

The young women represent 10% of the BDCA's student body. Future programs with the BDCA will include one-on-one meetings with PWC president Lenore Janis and other women leaders; on-site visits; and presentations on diverse career paths.

Tamara Hughes, integrated algebra teacher at the BDCA, reached out to Janis and PWC early in the fall semester to see if a match could be made. Delighted with Janis' enthusiastic "of course!" response, she said, "We have a small population of girls here and want to increase the number. The PWC program will show them that there is a place for them in this industry."

BDCA coordinator for building trades Osten Pinkney said, "It's important for the girls to see a positive image of how they can emerge in the future."

Each speaker discussed the biases and obstacles they had to overcome, the nature of their work, and the education required. The girls were shown construction drawings; bid documents; billing forms; contracts; roofing and paving materials; and safety equipment such as hard hats and harnesses.

Janis spoke of the prejudices she met and overcame, saying, "I applaud you for making the right choice. We hope that PWC will inspire you to continue in this field."

PWC's event organizer Dorothy Wasiak, VP of PCGNY Corp. (Professional Construction Group of New York - an exterior restoration and waterproofing company), told the girls, "You can be anything you want- a project manager, an architect, an engineer, a property manager."

Wasiak has over 14 years of experience in project management with expertise in budgeting, capital expenditures, contract negotiations, and sustainability. She has managed 52 buildings for the second largest senior living provider.

Architect Anita E. Konfederak, vice president and senior project manager with Merritt Engineering, said that she was one of two girls out of 30 in a mechanical drawing class. She told them that it is tougher for a woman to succeed as some men hesitate to take direction from a woman so "you have to know your field thoroughly." Urging all to continue their studies, she said that "you'll find the right

fit." Konfederak has conducted over 500 NYC Local Law 11-98 façade inspections. Key projects include major hospitals and Manhattan House's nearly \$2M façade restoration.

Kristen Storino, managing agent for Matthew Adam Properties, told the girls of her climb up through the ranks saying that "there are so many routes to go." She noted too that she no longer has a problem "being the only woman in the room." Storino's background includes oversight on rehabs and new construction of low to mid-rise buildings.

Upon BDCA graduation students are prepared for a range of postsecondary options – including college, certification programs, apprenticeships, military service, or formal job training.

Students at Bronx Design & Construction Academy surround faculty and PWC speakers. Shown in back row (from left) are: Osten Pinkney, BDCA; Lenore Janis, PWC; Dorothy Wasiak, PCGNY; Kristen Storino, Matthew Adam Properties; Anita Konfederak, Merritt Engineering; Tamara Hughes, BDCA. Photo Credit: Tomasz Terpilowski, PCGNY

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