



2022 Women in Construction: Margaret Coppa, Shawmut Design and Construction

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Name: Margaret Coppa

Title: Project Manager

Company Name: Shawmut Design and Construction

What was your greatest professional achievement or most notable project in the last 12 months?

I am on a project for non-profit City Harvest—where we're completing a major interior renovation for their new food rescue and delivery hub, the Cohen Community Food Rescue Center, in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Though we're still actively in construction, the amount I have learned has been incredible. As Shawmut's first design-build project in New York, it has been rewarding to see the design process of this building while implementing it into the structure. On a personal level, there aren't many times you get to work with a client that, by providing your services, you're actively helping your community. It gives me great joy to know what we are doing now will help the non-profit feed more throughout the community and grow over the next 30 years.

What advice would you offer to other women getting into the construction industry?

Get to the projects! Find ways to be on-site and see the work that is getting put into place. Not only is it the best learning tool, but it helps get you comfortable going up to a stranger and asking questions. Our teams, subcontractors, and consultants have so much knowledge—and giving them the opportunity to share that with us only helps us grow. In the end, don't be afraid to put yourself out there—you'll be surprised how receptive most people are!

Why should women consider a career in construction?

I always think about how there are so few jobs that allow you to physically see the fruits of your labor. It's incredibly rewarding to walk into or pass a building and know that your time and effort equated to it. Being able to say I was part of the team that built this makes me appreciate my own efforts so much more.

Starting out in the construction business, who or what empowered you?

My coworkers are who empowered me. I never had a manager, teammate, or project executive that wasn't always telling me to ask questions and not be afraid to share my ideas. It allowed me to feel ready to push back in tougher situations and understand how to communicate with others who may not be as generous. Overall, it gave me the confidence to feel comfortable with my voice and has taught me I do not need outside reassurance to know that I am supposed to be where I am—and nobody can make me feel differently.

Who within your own firm has helped you succeed within the construction industry?

During my time at Shawmut, I have had several mentors—and thanks to the Construction Management Skills Training (CMST) rotational program I have had mentors in several different roles and experiences. All of my mentors have taught me that we are always learning, there is always time to ask questions, and that working hard is the one thing we cannot teach.

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