



As senior project manager at Suffolk, Carla Giarrusso celebrates the building trades and encourages women to take a seat at the table

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New York, NY The New York Real Estate Journal (NYREJ) sat down with Carla Giarrusso, this month's Executive of the Month, for a question and answer session. Giarrusso is senior project manager at Suffolk Construction.

NYREJ: How did you end up in construction?

Giarrusso: I received a Bachelor of Architecture from Roger Williams University. Upon graduation, I practiced architecture in Boston. While there, I worked on multiple commercial office buildings in the Metro area along with many tenant fit-outs for various tech companies during what became known as the "dot-com" boom. It was during my time in Boston as an aspiring architect that I discovered my enthusiasm for not only designing buildings but understanding how to build them. As my career

progressed, I always felt the most inspired by being able to solve the more technical issues that arise during construction, I always took every opportunity to go out “into the field.”

NYREJ: What are some of your favorite projects that you've worked on in your career?

Giarrusso: In the early 2000s, I moved back (home) to New York City. For several years, I worked in the Design and Construction Department of Prospect Park Alliance (PPA) in partnership with New York City Parks and Recreation both as a project designer and resident engineer. This position was my first exposure to public work and one of the most gratifying positions of my career. In addition to designing and overseeing construction projects like the Prospect Park Tennis Center, I worked on the design team selection for The Lakeside Center, on the restoration of historic structures such as the Prospect Park Boathouse, and the renovation of Grand Army Plaza. At the Prospect Park Alliance, I was also involved in community engagement, local politics, and fundraising. I would present future projects to the local Community Boards and lobby the various government agencies for project funding; I was fortunate enough to see projects from their inception all the way through to ribbon cutting.

Several years later, I joined a colleague to start our own design/build firm, BLDG, which focused primarily on the high-end residential market in New York City. A few years later we joined with another firm, Aerial Design + Build, which also focused on high-end residential renovation work in NYC. Many of our projects were in iconic NYC landmarks as well as some of the newer high-rise residential buildings that began to shoot up on the New York City skyline in the 2010s.

After spending time in the residential market, I decided to return to larger-scale projects and in 2014 joined Allied CMS, an NYC-based construction management firm where I worked with international developers on hospitality projects throughout New York City. During my tenure at Allied, I completed four high-rise hotels and mixed-use projects throughout New York City.

NYREJ: What was your experience been like since joining Suffolk?

Giarrusso: Since joining Suffolk in 2020, I am thrilled to be part of such a forward-looking, construction company; Suffolk puts their employees first, they celebrate inclusion and diversity and they give their employees the tools to never stop learning. I have been especially impressed by Suffolk's willingness to leverage data and innovative technology to be on the cutting-edge. It's also a privilege to work alongside some of the best leaders in the construction industry.

NYREJ: Are there any projects that you are particularly excited about right now?

Giarrusso: Currently, as a senior project manager at Suffolk, I am managing a 1 million s/f distribution facility in Maspeth, Queens. I am proud to say that our project is ahead of schedule and on budget.

NYREJ: What is your experience like as a woman in the construction industry?

Giarrusso: I would say one of the most remarkable things about my career to date is the extent to which I feel at home as a woman in the construction industry. My experience with all my male colleagues and mentors, past and present, has been nothing short of positive. I am excited to share my experiences and encourage other women to join the industry. This year, I was nominated to be a

2022 REBNY Fellow and we are working with Coro New York Leadership Center to build civic welfare and a more diverse and inclusive real estate industry, I am fortunate to have the opportunity to continue to connect with other construction professionals, including strong female industry experts.

NYREJ: What are some misconceptions about your industry and your role?

Giarrusso: Construction can sometimes be looked down upon which is unfair, it is truly a science, one that requires a wealth of knowledge that should be respected as a skilled profession. I believe there needs to be more of a balance in the professional world. College degrees and trade degrees are both valuable and needed.

Another misconception is that the industry is not as welcoming of women. In 25 years of being in this male-dominated industry, I have had little experience with discrimination. Overall, I have had such a positive experience working with a wide range of professionals at various levels, I would like to encourage all women to take their seats at the table.

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