



PWC presents "Women in Construction" panel at the Competitive Edge Conference in NYC

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On Tuesday, September 18, Professional Women in Construction (PWC), a national association, presented a workshop and panel discussion moderated by PWC President Lenore Janis on "Women in Construction" at the Competitive Edge Conference in New York City. The panelists were: Lina Gottesman, president of Altus Metal & Marble Maintenance, a woman-owned business enterprise (WBE) based in Stony Brook, N.Y.; Barbara Armand, president and CEO of Armand Corporation of Cherry Hill, N.J., a woman and minority-owned company (W/MBE); Joan Chao, president of Oriental Lumberland, Inc.(W/MBE), of Brooklyn, N.Y. and Amy Peterson, P.E., president of Nontraditional Employment for Women. The workshop was arranged by Zenaida Chape, assistant director, MTA Office of Civil Rights.

Janis told the audience that when PWC was formed in 1980 "discrimination against women was rampant. The support of an organization like PWC was essential to all of us." By 1985 PWC opened its door to the men in the industry and has been growing ever since." The nonprofit organization, which presents monthly seminars and promotes Business-to-Business interaction, now has over a 1,000 members with chapters in Conn., N.Y., N.J., Capital Region and northeast Penn. and its website www.pwcusa.org attracts 25,000 visits monthly.

She noted that PWC's influence has been profound. She also points out that since "educational barriers have tumbled," more women are entering the field at the professional level and major companies are actively seeking women as engineers, architects, and construction managers.

Janis, formerly owner of the only certified WBE steel erection company in the area, was appointed the first woman to head the Bureau of Building Management for the NYC Dept. of Sanitation in 1986. Since the mid-1990s, Janis has devoted herself full-time to PWC and its expansion.

Armand described her own uphill climb to transform a small, home-based business into a successful construction management and engineering consulting company. Founded in 1991, Armand Corp. has performed numerous projects for clients such as South Jersey Light Rail System; the Brigantine Connector, in Atlantic City; the General Services Administration, as well as numerous housing projects. Armed with a "non-traditional" degree - in math - and a minor in physics, she weathered several extremely difficult years until at last she was able to buy an office building to house the company and her staff of 21.

"I believe in perseverance and meeting challenges as they arise," said Armand. She credited government programs that set goals for participation of certified M/WBEs as "critical to the success" of her company, yet stressed that the programs only provided a first step and after that the quality of the work has allowed her firm to grow and prosper.

Gottesman said that though her father owned a masonry and stone business, she hailed from a time when women became "nurses, secretaries or teachers." With a degree in nursing, she advanced in

her profession and enjoyed it, yet the lure of construction eventually emboldened her to launch her own company in 1989. Regarding government goals programs, she noted that "the outreach effort to WBEs helped me get my foot in the door, but I wouldn't have gotten repeat business if I hadn't been qualified and able to do the job well. You need a solid business to succeed."

Altus, the only certified WBE in the tri-state area specializing in ornamental metal, glass and stone, has completed major projects at Grand Central, the LIRR, the Time Warner building, Cartier's, World Financial Center and the N.Y. Public Library. Still, Gottesman reported that she continues to encounter skepticism and outright discrimination. "I always speak up," she said. "I won't remain silent if someone crosses the line."

Chao, representing the retail and supply arm of the industry, began her business as a partnership in 1986, then continued on her own in 1991. She finds that "The real challenge for a woman with a successful business is to break into the major projects such as Yankee Stadium."

Chao said that she sells to several major public agencies and hopes to work with the giants of private industry in the future as her company continues to grow. Oriental Lumberland is the only woman/minority owned lumberyard in the tri-state area. It counts among its clients: CBS; KAFKA Construction; NYC Department of Sanitation; NYCPD; and the NYCDEP.

Founded in 1978, Nontraditional Employment for Women is a nonprofit organization that trains women for skilled jobs in construction and other blue-collar industries. Most of the female hardhats at work today in New York City are NEW graduates. NEW trains 400 women a year at its own facility and has placed 280 women in the building and construction trades since October 2005.

Peterson said that the pre-apprenticeship training programs lead graduates to careers that pay considerably more than jobs traditionally held by women. With the rise in construction, NEW finds itself fulfilling a need for more construction workers. Although the percentage of women in the labor force remains small, "we're starting to see women laborers and tradeswomen in the field," said Peterson. Several graduates have gone on to start their own labor intensive companies.

"With the support of government and the unions, we're growing," she said.

Gottesman said, "Networking is the most effective way of gaining business. Through interaction and exchanging ideas all parties prosper."