

CONTRACTOR

Women-owned Fraser Engineering Co. celebrates 60th anniversary

NEWTON, MASS. — It is no surprise to anyone who knows the Fraser family that Cecelia (C.J.) and Shawna Fraser are running Fraser Engineering, an industrial/commercial contracting firm providing mechanical, plumbing, industrial processing, electrical and general contracting, and 24 hour service and support to companies throughout the Northeast United States.

C.J. and Shawna were quite literally born into the family's mechanical business, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, with their mother Nancy writing out the company's payroll checks from her hospital bed moments after both girls were born.

C.J. and Shawna started to learn the ropes of the family business at young ages. Both helped out in different departments. They were never pigeonholed into traditional female roles and were urged by their parents to follow their interests while learning the business.

When asked by CONTRACTOR why their parents encouraged them to pursue whatever they wanted, C.J., now president of Fraser Engineering, said, "My father learned the family business starting at age 16 and although he was happy he never wanted us to feel pressured. My parents wanted us to be happy, no matter what we did."

"They always told us we could be whatever we wanted, but that we had to work hard to get it," said Shawna.

Both C.J. and Shawna have fond memories of growing up in the family business.

"We have always been part of the business since we were very little," said C.J. "My mother would bring me to work as a newborn. Even being a new mother she could not afford time

off; she could not afford to miss work.

"My first real job was entering invoices into the DOS computer system, and trying to get it to reconcile at the end of the batch, which I remember was challenging because I didn't have a computer skill set yet," recalled C.J. "It always amazed me how my mother could type on the calculator with such speed and accuracy. When I was 17-years-old, I worked at the tank farms as a laborer, painting catwalks, fire watched men welding, and helping the foreman set up. I enjoyed being on site and part of the action in the field. Soon after, I went to college and started my career in architecture studies."

Shawna, now vice president of safety and clerk, recalls going plowing with her dad on snow days to open the shop and hanging Christmas cards in the office. She also answered phones and sorted checks in accounting.

"It's as if we were being trained to lead a company in a very male dominated industry, but didn't realize it at the time," said C.J., referring to the executive positions she and her sister now hold as the third generation running the family-owned business.

Both women attended college after graduating from high school. C.J. has degrees in architectural studies and interior architecture. She also gained experience in the field by drawing construction documents in AutoCAD for a local architectural and interior design firm.

"This knowledge gave me a jump start into project management and estimat-



ing," said C.J. "Having the conceptual means and the understanding of how building systems come together was important background."

Shawna has a degree in economics with a minor in environmental studies.

"Having a background in environmental studies has helped me as director of health, safety and environment," said Shawna. "It allows me to fully understand the complexities dealing with the environment in our industry and the importance to uphold safe and resourceful systems and procedures."

Shawna also earned a welding certificate from Wentworth Institute of Technology, a Boston-based college that focuses on studies in architecture, design, engineering, technology and management of technology.

"It was exciting and rewarding and I gained valuable knowledge of what our employees do," said Shawna.

The business

Fraser Engineering was incorporated on July 20, 1950, when, upon returning from World War II where he served as a Navy lieutenant commander, Lester Sr. started a business installing and servicing boilers. The business focused on HVAC, providing service and support to the Archdiocese of Boston, the City of Newton and other government-run agencies and independent companies.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the company expanded into a full service organization. In 1978, Lester Sr. passed away and the business transitioned to Lester Jr. and his wife, Nancy, who transformed Fraser Engineering into a firm specializing in mechanical, plumbing, industrial processing and electrical. In 2003, the Frasers believed employee ownership was an essential component for the future of the company.

The company became a close to 40% owned employee firm in 2003 through an Employee Stock Option Purchase (ESOP) program. C.J., Shawna and their mother, Nancy, treasurer, are majority shareholders in the company and are directors and members of the company board.

"It was important for my parents and us to give back to the employees," said C.J. "There are many who have been with the company for 20 and 30 years. The longevity and retention is incredible and says a lot about Fraser

Engineering. Through the ESOP employees can reap the benefits of the success of the company — not just the family. We use the saying 'Think like an owner' because all of us are owners, not just the Fraser family. Everyone has a direct impact on the business in each of our daily decisions and choices we make."

Early this year Fraser Petroleum Services Inc. was formed as a sister company, servicing the petroleum and chemical industries.

"Fraser Engineering is very diverse and we do a lot of different types of work, from mechanical, electrical, plumbing, HVAC service to petroleum tank farm work," said C.J. "It made sense to differentiate MEP trades from petroleum/chemical work. Now it is easier to market Fraser Petroleum Services Inc. to its distinct clientele nationally."

The company is also involved in federal work this year due to the economy.

"We have picked up a lot more federal work which we would not have usually done," said C.J. "We will continue to service our existing markets and clients to the best of our ability and keep the



doors open for new opportunities that may arise. Our reputation is so important — 60 years of quality installations and attention to detail has propelled Fraser to where it is today."

Also this May, the Massachusetts State Office of Minority and Women's Business Assistance (SOMWBA) certified Fraser Engineering as a Women Owned Business Enterprise (WBE) general contractor specializing in project management.

Fraser Engineering has 70 employees and a client list that includes Astra Zeneca, Gensyme, JFK Museum, National Grid, the City of Newton, Harvard, MIT and others. Projects include retrofitting steam pipes for World War II era government installations to creating environmentally controlled labs for biotech and pharmaceutical researchers.