

# OUR PEOPLE TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR WORK

## IN A MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY, MY BIGGEST CHALLENGE WAS HAVING A VOICE - BY TANIKA MILLER, SHAPIRO & DUNCAN SPECIAL PROJECT FOREMAN

Growing up with brothers and a host of male cousins has allowed me to easily adapt to an industry that is predominately male. The construction industry is no place to be gender biased. It's a fruitful industry that can be a career for those who are mechanically inclined and who can think on their feet when solving problems. I began my journey into construction 25 years ago. As a single parent of two small children, the industry offered me a chance to work a steady schedule and provided a healthy earning potential. After high school graduation, I enrolled into a sheet metal apprenticeship under the support of Hess Mechanical Corporation. I earned the District of Columbia's Apprentice of the Year in 1995 and had the opportunity to speak at the Women in Construction Conference that same year. Later I studied four semesters at Prince George County Community College in Construction Management.

In a male-dominated industry, my biggest challenge was having a voice. People heard me, but they did not listen. There were several ways in which I overcame this challenge through the years. I practiced speaking more clearly, made strong eye contact and exuded confidence through my words and actions. I had the help of my first sheet metal foreman and mentor, James Tew from Hess Mechanical Corporation to guide me along the way. Tew was someone who I looked up to and who inspired me to become a better communicator, leader and worker. His dedication to train me to navigate different personalities and multi-task projects are qualities and skills I carry with me to this day. The first project I ran as Foreman, The Department of Energy, located in Gaithersburg, Maryland was a huge success for the company and for me, as it built my confidence as a leader.

Overall a construction career can be a physically demanding job, especially for a person who is not active. However, I found that like any activity your body gets acclimated to your daily routine. My advice to women is to not be afraid, don't let fear override you. In order to succeed in this industry and become a strong competent and productive woman enroll in an apprenticeship; team up with a mentor; choose a company whose values match your own; and become familiar with the tools, equipment and safety standards.



*Tanika Miller is currently a foreman for Shapiro & Duncan's special project department. She manages complex fast-paced mechanical projects, leading a crew up to 10.*

