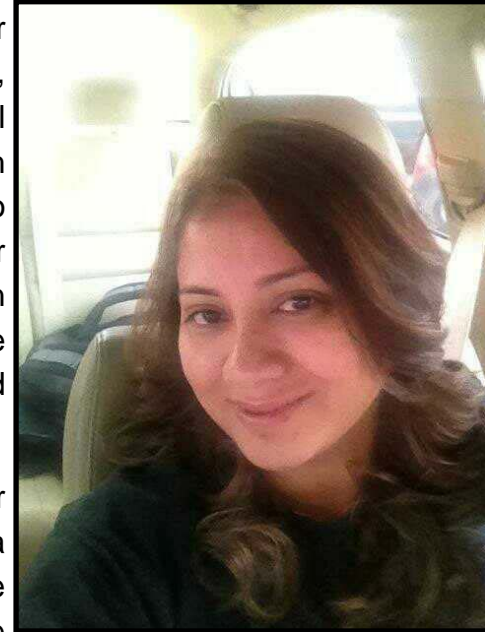


S&D's First Plumber Journeywoman

Meet Zuleima Perez, Shapiro & Duncan's first plumber journeywoman. Her journey into construction was not the easiest, however with a little persuasion, interest, and support she was able to break down barriers. Originally from El Salvador, she came to the United States with little knowledge of the English language. Even though she was the only woman at Shapiro & Duncan to pursue a career in plumbing, learning the English language was by far her greatest challenge. Zuleima first started working as a helper at our Fabrication Shop in Landover, MD in 2006. She enjoyed building from scratch; using the machinery; and learning new processes on how to build things quicker and easier.



What was initially her biggest barrier, became her biggest strength. After several years spent at the Fab Shop, she decided to pursue a career as a plumber in the field. Being bilingual now allowed for easy communication in the field. With financial support from Shapiro & Duncan, she enrolled in the plumbing apprenticeship Program at the Associated Builders & Contractors Metro Washington and graduated in 2011. "I choose to start my career with Shapiro & Duncan because of the great working environment, great income and excellent reviews."

Her biggest inspirations in life came from stories she heard or read about people who have struggled in their lives, yet were able to bounce back and accomplish great things in the world. In an industry mostly made up of men, she has come to the realization that she is just as capable of performing well at her job. She encourages women to focus on improving themselves instead of worrying about possible gender issue. "Whatever struggles you may face, be smart, strong, positive and conquer your weaknesses."

In 2012, Zulemia joined our Special Projects Department where she met her mentor, James Mayo. As Foreman, James started mentoring Zulemia on a series of small commercial kitchen renovation projects that would span for over two years. The abatement of fats, oils and grease, collectively known as FOG, has become increasingly problematic for public schools. In 2006, FOG regulations were enacted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and food service establishments (FSEs) all over the country, but specific to our territory the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) jurisdictions of Montgomery County, MD and Prince Georges County, MD found themselves creating new processes and procedures to manage compliance. Zulemia worked on thousands of drains in kitchens, trash rooms and concession stands that needed to be brought into compliance. The job itself wasn't pretty, but the result was successful. The project came in on time and under budget.

After noticing her consistent talent and desire to become successful in this trade, James Mayo pushed Zulemia to pursue her Journeyman's License. In September, she passed her WSSC Plumber Journeyman's test and obtained her license.

Zulemia hopes more women will consider this industry as a valuable career. She believes this industry still needs to find creative ways to attract more women into this field. "A series of options for working schedules should be available to women, so it does not affect their family time at home. I would also suggest that owners try recruiting women in jobs where they are exploited, such as cleaning."