

SPOTLIGHT ON Women IN BUSINESS



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Finding Ways to Fix the World Around Her

Peggy Carpenter knows what it is like to be a woman in a man's world.

She started out with aspirations of becoming a doctor, but after a car accident and ensuing three-week hospital stay, the Greene County native who grew up on a dairy farm realized she hated hospitals. Medicine was not in the cards.

Instead she chose to study geology, computer science and math at Waynesburg University. But by the time she graduated in 1984, the bottom fell out of the oil and gas market, so opportunities were limited.

"I worked at a company that was not that interested in women. The chauvinism was crazy. People actually said to me, 'you don't want to go out on the rigs, it won't be safe,' and tried to scare me out of the field."

They did not succeed. Instead she decided to transition into the then younger field of environmental work. "I enjoyed the thought of having something new every day, a new challenge or twist, being out there fixing things."

Still, it was a struggle. She was the only woman on a 20-member technical staff and even when the company tripled in size over a five-year period, only one more woman was hired. She managed to climb through the male-dominated field and in 1991 went to work with TolTest, where she was the only woman in senior management in a company of more than 400 employees.

"I stuck out like a sore thumb at meetings." She had been passed over for a coveted promotion, but knew she had the advantage of versatility.

"A lot of people are good at science but lack in management and people skills." Carpenter had both covered.

By 2003, as TolTest was growing its federal services division and pursuing large government contracts, the company started selling off other divisions in other states. Carpenter saw an opportunity and asked the majority owner to consider selling the local environmental division to her.

The business was not on the market, but the owners agreed to the sale, and Carpenter started to pursue 8(a) Business Development Program certification through the U.S. Small Business Administration, a

nine-year program providing assistance to business owners who are economically or socially disadvantaged.

Although the process was onerous, Carpenter persevered and purchased the business in 2004. Five years later, the Churchill resident is owner and president of CP Environmental Group (CEG), an environmental consulting firm with annual revenue of nearly \$1.3 million and 10 employees.

Along the way, she has built a reputation for doing things others haven't thought of.

"I look at the intent of regulations and work to our clients' best advantage," she explains, and likens her approach to that of an attorney—investigating, finding data, presenting a case and offering interpretation.

"That leads to the next step, which is what can we do to fix it."

Originally, she rented offices in Monroeville, but was looking to cut overhead costs. Her partner at CEG, Joe Prokopik, encouraged her to consider setting up shop in a renovated law office in downtown New Kensington, a state Enterprise Zone and HUB Zone. They cut their rental costs by two-thirds by buying a building on a block that is targeted for redevelopment.

Carpenter says she is enjoying being part of that community's redevelopment and has played a part in helping with that effort by assisting with asbestos issues. "It is very rewarding."

CEG was named to the Top 100 Diversity Owned Businesses in Pennsylvania by DiversityBusiness.com for the last three years and also maintains WBE and DBE certifications. Her company was named Woman Business of the Year for 2008 at the annual Minority Enterprise Development Week celebration, sponsored by the Pittsburgh Small Business Administration, Diversity Business Resource Center and Minority Business Opportunity Committee.

Carpenter is involved in many professional and charitable organizations, including the Churchill Area Environmental Council, the Academy of Hazardous Materials Managers, American Institute of Professional Geologists, Commercial Real Estate Women of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Geological Society, Pittsburgh Cares, Southwestern Pennsylvania Engineering Outreach and Project Bundle Up. ■



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» The Spotlight on Women in Business was created to shed light on the many successful businesswomen whose work may go unnoticed in our community. A panel of advisers seeks out and selects women to be profiled each quarter. If you know a local woman who should be considered for this section, please e-mail PITTSBURGH MAGAZINE publisher Betsy Benson at bbenson@wqed.org and request a questionnaire. For information about sponsoring Spotlight on Women in Business, e-mail advertising director Ed Kost at ekost@wqed.org.