

Women in the Water Quality Industry II: More Voices Heard

By Denise M. Roberts

In December 2006, *WC&P* featured five women who are prominent in the water quality industry. This year, in response to your requests, we've interviewed five more! Herewith, our 2007 dialogue about what it takes to break through the glass ceiling, gain recognition and achieve success in the industry.

About the participants

More than half of our 2007 participants have earned certifications through the Water Quality Association. Their duties are as diverse and important as any in the industry; their contributions have made them standout performers.

Andrea Swiney, Marketing Manager for Aqua Finance, Inc. is primarily responsible for the promotion of Aqua's programs, managing internal and external communications, advertising, trade shows, dealer communications, dealer setup and training and creation of sales, marketing and training materials. Promoted from a sales position, Swiney still engages in many new dealer sales and is also involved in business development, although those activities are no longer her primary responsibilities.



Swiney



Hamilton

Ryanne Hamilton, Graphic Designer/Marketing Coordinator at R-Can Environmental, Inc., is responsible for the creation of artwork/graphics from concept to final production. This includes advertisements, brochures, literature, manuals,

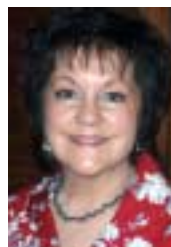
price catalogues, etc. Day-to-day marketing tasks (quote solicitation, research for new marketing material, website maintenance, production scheduling, writing and coordinating project briefs, etc.) are also prominent aspects of her position.

Ana-Maria Bogatan, CWS-IV, Mechanical Designer, also with R-Can Environmental, Inc., is responsible for the design and management of current and in-development products.



Bogatan

Kathleen Srygley, CWS-V1, Regional Accounts Manager, GE Water & Process Technologies, manages mid-atlantic accounts in addition to some mid-western and west coast clients. Her strategic duties include enhancing OEM (original equipment manufacturers) capabilities by partnering with GE's Water & Process Technologies, allowing them to expand their base with quality products and training along with follow-through support for solutions. Srygley is Secretary/Treasurer of Eastern Water Quality Association (www.ewqa.org) and a volunteer for the Water Systems Council (www.watersystemscouncil.org/) for Children's Waterfest Program in Delaware and Maryland.



Srygley

Dawn Rineer, CWS-V, an Engineering Technician with Lancaster Water Treatment for 10 years, earned her Associates Degree in Mechanical Engineering Technology from Pennsylvania State University (York, Pa.). Her varied responsi-

bilities include producing and maintaining engineering drawings for the water treatment department; making equipment recommendations based on a water analysis; technical support and equipment troubleshooting; recommendation and design of commercial systems; compiling and conducting educational seminars and supervising/conducting equipment testing.



Rineer

Successful choices

Myths about women in the industry are numerous and common but our respondents have dealt with them in a positive way. They noted that the most obvious myths (women aren't capable of handling the technical roles and many are sitting behind a desk answering the phone, serving coffee and typing) are being overcome with the entry of more women as knowledgeable and competent professionals. Though still outnumbered, these women have made positive strides in shattering the preconceptions that might otherwise have kept them from becoming successful dealers, technicians and managers. Swiney reiterates the positive aspect: "I think a lot of women are realizing that they can have success in the water business and that the guys they'll work with will help them achieve it."

Most find themselves in the industry by chance. Srygley became aware of water quality issues in the 80s when she had her first home RO system installed. She switched her focus from computer science to water treatment and became a sales associate for a local company. Ex-

perience convinced her that she made a very sound decision. Hamilton, who holds a degree in fashion marketing, said her entry opportunity was purely by chance. Swiney worked for another finance company; she joined Aqua after a few conversations with management members. She had no clue about water treatment or any concept of how big it actually was. "I knew financing and was able to transition easily." Bogatan noted her entry into the technical field was by choice, though to water was by chance, while Rineer believes it was fate. "The job was posted on the bulletin board at the university that I was attending and the location was less than five miles from my home," she recalls.

Gender roles

How do they feel about being part of a male-dominated industry? According to Swiney, it's a lot of fun. "There is a different way that you have to approach males and females when it comes to sales of any type. Joking around with the guys can help break the ice, but you have to know where to draw the line and make it clear when that line has been crossed. Most of the men I've worked with have been very professional and supportive. But you do have to be able to show that

you can handle yourself." Hamilton doesn't see a gender issue, nor does she think it has an effect on who she is. "Most of my experience prior to this position was working in the fashion industry, which oddly enough is male dominated as well!" Bogatan notes that working in any gender-dominated industry can be intimidating until you find out the best way to converse with your peers. For her, it was learning a few golfing terms. "Overall, I would say that it's easier for women in this industry because there is less gossip, competition and emotion involved," Bogatan offered. Syrgley quickly became aware of the gender issue but life experiences taught her to resolve these types of obstacles. "I've had great mentors. One was Stan Zairkowski from Sybron Chemicals who always said 'Follow your gut and keep doing the right thing' in order to be successful," she said. "I've been very privileged to know male mentors. They patiently guided me along in my career growth and I will always be grateful for their assistance. Now, I consider my male peers and customers more as friendly partners. This allows me to continue to grow in this industry and have a positive and proactive impact on all I serve." Rineer, hired by a company with a progressive leadership,

acknowledges there are situations that perpetuate the myth of male-domination. "Internally, gender did not play any part in the hiring decision but externally, there are still many old-school thinkers out there. Often, there is a pause on the other end of the line when I answer calls to the technical department," she said. "Sometimes people are honest and blunt. 'Oh, I was expecting a man to answer.' Sometimes they are just confused and wondering if the department secretary was about to transfer their call again."

Overall, being a woman isn't considered a handicap by the group, though Hamilton notes it could be, depending on a person's role. "It's more about mental, rather than physical ability," says Bogatan. "Being a woman in any industry has always been a challenge," Syrgley opines. "However, I firmly believe the industry has helped me to grow in ways I could not imagine. I know as a woman I make a difference when strangers are referred to me for solutions." Rineer believes that she was hired for previous draftsman positions because the companies needed to show diversity in employment to maintain their contracts. "In those situations, being a woman helped me to obtain a job," she notes. "I think it is absolutely a help," Swiney says. "It



would probably be fair to say that most guys like talking with women. I think I have an advantage in catching someone's attention whether it is at a trade show or industry event or even on a phone call."

For all of the advances made in the modern corporate world, women still face certain hurdles based on their gender. Equality of pay hasn't been realized, though entry to the corner office has become a reality for many. In the water industry, the exception seems to be the rule, though. Almost all our respondents agreed that changes in society have led to a more level playing field for women interested in the challenges. Application of skills, positive attitudes, continued training and team spirit have fostered advances to the loftier goals of ownership and management of companies small and large.

If a woman believes she would find satisfaction in the challenges and rewards of the water quality trades, there is a resounding 'Do it!' encouragement from everyone. "It's an extremely interesting field to work in and there are a lot of great women in a variety of positions—from water sales, to media, to trade associations, to legal, to marketing—to look up to," Swiney advises. "Clean water is something people will always need, so

there is good security in the industry as well." Hamilton encourages "If you are a self-confident individual with a drive to succeed you will do just that, regardless of your gender."

What lies ahead

With their fingers firmly on the pulse of the industry, our participants offered their assessment of the future. Swiney says increased consumer awareness and new government regulations may make it more difficult for dealerships to find new customers. With the Internet, consumers have access to more information than ever before on the products, the reputations of dealers, the prices being charged, etc. Dealerships will have to figure out how to make that information work for them. And the government may regulate even further, both the products offered and the ways in which they may be marketed to consumers. It will be a challenge that dealers have to overcome. Getting more women involved in a variety of roles will help bring new, different viewpoints and creative ideas they can use to help keep their sales growing. "Ten years from now, I think there will be a lot more women in prominent roles in the industry" she predicts. "Maybe we'll even outnumber the men by then!"

Hamilton's view is upbeat. "Over the past few decades there have been numerous changes in many industries. Females are being embraced and welcomed in the workplace more often. I believe that there is always room for change, especially when it's going to improve workplace behavior and productivity."

"In future, I see men and women working together in every field," Bogatan surmises. "We use computers, automated assembly lines and machinery. Work will require skill rather than power." According to Srygley, "Change is always happening and for me to speculate on the next five or 10 years is not easy. For example, GE Water Technologies is working on the next generation of water quality solutions worldwide. A company as passionate as GE means a dedication to continue to improve with time. I see more global industries also striving for improved water quality solutions because of the worldwide concerns over water quality and scarcity. I'm excited about the possibilities and eagerly look forward to the future."

Rineer is very positive about the future. "I would love to see more women become involved in the industry, to take part in the educational opportunities that are available in the form of seminars and



panels. Water treatment is ever-evolving. I hope that the dialogues in the industry continue to be as open and informative as they are now and that industry leaders continue to share their knowledge with their colleagues."

The industry welcomes more new women to its ranks every year. Mothers and fathers encourage all their children and other relatives to take a serious look at a career in water. The diversity this offers the industry is a win-win situation for everyone, as a larger pool of qualified technicians and specialists, regardless of gender, bodes well for all markets. The world is, after all, a place for all of us to work, play, grow, succeed and take care of one another. It's everybody's job to make the best use of the planet's resources to ensure our future and our survival.

Editorial note

When WC&P contacted the respondents to request their participation, an unexpected letter about Dawn Rineer arrived. It outlines the important qualities this successful water specialist embodies and how she has made a difference.

Dear Ms. Roberts,

I have strongly encouraged Dawn to participate in your article on women in the

water treatment industry. Dawn is a unique individual with excellent problem-solving ability, great skill in communicating with all types of people and a love and appreciation of the water treatment industry.

As you can see, I am a Dawn Rineer fan. I am a fan of who she is because of what she does. In the water treatment world, as with all industries, people have a tendency to treat the symptom and not the problem. Dawn is a problem solver. She defines the problem and makes the necessary suggestions to solve the problem once and for all.

In order to effectively solve the problem, she has to communicate with all types of people: homeowners, plumbing contractors, plumbing wholesale personnel and engineers.

She communicates with all these people in such a way as to make them part of the process and to feel comfortable with the final decision.

Dawn has many fine attributes, but her concern for taking care of the customer is first and foremost. She is a great asset to Lancaster Pump and Water Treatment; but she is also a great asset to the water treatment industry.

Best Regards,

John D. Wenzel, Jr.

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