



## ON THE LEVEL: Despite enduring biases, Osheim sees woman advancing in construction

By: Jimmy Nesbitt ⌚ June 27, 2019 1:40 pm

The notion that construction is a man's job is still widespread, but that's changing — albeit slowly.

That's the perception at least of Barbara Osheim, president of the Milwaukee chapter of the National Association of Women in Construction, also known as NAWIC. Osheim, who has been in the field for around 13 years, said progress is evident when she attends NAWIC forums.

"You see all these women who are in the industry," she said. "Many of them are what I like to call boots on the ground. They are in the trenches. They are engineers. They are project managers. They're safety managers. We have a master plumber who is a member of our chapter.

"So, I do see it changing. It's just a slow evolution."

In her day job, Osheim is an operations analyst in the Milwaukee offices of Johnson Controls, a global technology company that produces electronics and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment for buildings.

A native of Baltimore, Osheim went to high school in Maryland and attended college at Cardinal Stritch University, where she received an associate of science degree in business. She later earned a bachelor of arts in business and accounting from Lakeland University and received a master of business administration from Ashford University.

Osheim was at another company in Milwaukee when a friend who worked at JCI told her about some open positions at Johnson Controls. "And JCI was the 'it' company back in the '90s to work for," she said. "It was very hard to get in. Basically, you really did have to know someone. And that's how I started."

Now as president of NAWIC, Osheim finds herself looking for ways to bring more women into construction. That can be as simple as "letting girls know it's not just a boys' world anymore. If this is what you want to do, you can do it," she said. "You can get your hands dirty, or maybe you want to run your own company. You can do that as well."

The Daily Reporter recently spoke to Osheim about her job and role at NAWIC. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**The Daily Reporter:** What do you enjoy about your job?

**Osheim:** I love the operational side. Because this is really the true construction side of it. It makes you think. It's challenging. You're faced with different issues all the time. And you definitely have to be on your game to respond quickly.

**TDR:** Why do you think there aren't more women working in construction?

**Osheim:** Women, a lot of times, are still not welcomed or accepted. So, I think that puts off a lot of people. A lot of young girls might say, 'I don't want to deal with that.' ... It's still kind the 1950s, stay at home and have babies type of (attitude). But that's changing. That is definitely changing.

**TDR:** What are some of enduring biases the industry has against women workers?



Barbara Osheim

**Osheim:** I think it’s just the general bias of construction is man’s work. Kitchen is woman’s work. I still just kind of think it’s that general bias. I work with a female project manager, and she kind of comes across a lot of issues or challenges all the time because she’s being challenged. It’s almost like they’re harder on women because we have to prove ourselves, whereas men really generally don’t have to prove themselves. So I think that’s one thing the construction industry can do to overcome this bias is keep more of an open mind. Women can do what men do, 99 percent of the time ... It should just be about the work and not who is performing it.”

**TDR:** Where do you see yourself going in your career?

**Osheim:** I would actually like to become a construction manager. I have thought of that.

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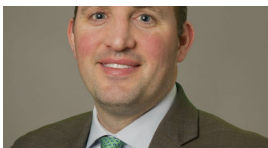
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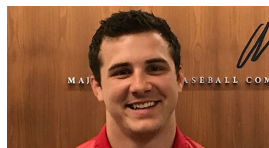
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