

Media Release

Inspiring first Women Building Australia winners

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Master Builders Western Australia has presented the first awards for women in the male-dominated construction industry to three impressive leaders.

The inaugural Women Building Australia awards were introduced in three categories, judged on positive contributions to the industry through leadership, inclusion and commitment to excellence.

The consultants and professionals category was won by Structerre engineering manager Jane Arnolda. In the office-based category, Karamfiles Builders director Franzine Karamfiles took the honours and Devrite Constructions boss Jay Mangano won the onsite award.

Devrite Constructions founder Jay Mangano said her proudest achievement was the home she built for a family with a severely disabled child.

The family didn't have the money to build the highly specialised house they needed but Jay called suppliers and arranged discounts until she could wrangle the project into the budget.

The child averaged 13 hospital admissions a year until moving into the open, light-filled home which allowed better family connections and had important equipment such as hoists and a therapy pool. His health improved so much in the first 12 months in the new house, he didn't go to hospital once.

"This proved to be one of the most wonderful building experiences of my life," Jay said.

"Having faced the challenges of being accepted in a male dominated industry, I strive to inspire women to persevere through difficulties to achieve success regardless of their chosen path.

"Women face additional struggles, especially if, like me, they don't fit the mould for physical size and socialite appearance and can't boast a swag of university degrees.

"I am equally comfortable with my work boots on as I am at the negotiating table. With enough desire, motivation and a clear, calm approach, most challenges can be met."

Structerre manager Jane Arnolda, winner of the consultant and professional category, rose from graduate engineer to the company's first national engineering manager within 10 years.

CEO Gervase Purich, who nominated Jane for the award, said key achievements included introducing the Mates in Construction suicide prevention program to the company, creating a diversity committee and instigating COVID calls to team members struggling with lockdowns across Australia.

“Jane is known for her uncompromising yet pragmatic approach to quality, her talent for identifying and articulating where improvements need to be made and her drive to see those improvements through,” Mr Purich said.

“She is fundamentally driven to include and raise up those who may not have their voices heard – a firm believer that a rising tide lifts all boats, especially when it comes to equality and opportunity.”

She was also responsible for innovative creation of 3D Details and Framing World, an indoor construction display featuring trades and components used to build framed structures.

Karamfiles Builders director Franzine Karamfiles joined the construction industry more than 20 years ago when she married into a South West building company.

Husband Sam Karamfiles, who nominated Franzine for the award, said her Bachelor of Business studies were the perfect addition to the third-generation family business and her involvement had grown to developing safety management systems and client, subcontractor and employee liaison.

“As Franzine was not originally employed in the construction industry, she has had to adapt to meet the needs of our business. She now is a formidable partner,” Mr Karamfiles said.

“A commitment to high standards and excellence seems to come naturally to Franzine. Her skills and knowledge have led to the development of our business and the industry awards we have received.

“Franzine is a fantastic role model for women in our industry. She meets challenges head on, she participates in training and development, she is involved in mentoring youth, she engages with clients, staff, peers and community members alike.”

Master Builders WA executive director John Gelavis said women accounted for just 11 per cent of the total building workforce and only one per cent of trades, so he was delighted to see the industry evolve as women took up opportunities and considered construction careers.

“We are seeing an increase of women in the building industry in roles with a mix of working onsite and in the office such as site managers, safety coordinators and contracts administrators,” he said.

“This mix of onsite and office work is a strong trend among women in smaller, family businesses. They make important commercial decisions every day and their contribution is vital the success of the business but can go unrecognised. That’s why we believed it was important to acknowledge them in the office-based category of the Women Building Australia awards.

“Although we’re seeing slow growth of women in trades, we are getting anecdotal evidence that women feel empowered when completing trade qualifications and starting their own businesses. That’s an important attraction.”

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