



## CHANGING THE FACE OF CONSTRUCTION:

Heather Ferrier Laminack Advocates for Women in Construction

By Victoria Luing, Contributing Editor

**R**ECENTLY WELCOMED as the first female president of the Greater Fort Worth BA in 75 years, Heather Ferrier Laminack wakes up every morning with a mission to encourage women to approach the stand and find their place. Within the Texas Association of Builders, Heather has helped facilitate the discussion of creating a women's council much like NAHB's Professional Women in Building. To explore this idea further, the women had their first meeting in the summer of 2019 and voted to move forward in making it an official standing council at the fall meeting. Heather is eager for this council to get started because it will ultimately support women in the construction industry and beyond. Since more women are joining homebuilders associations, this will be a great opportunity for them to come together and share their ideas.

Heather's father has long been a member of GFWBA and she used to join him at their meetings. Eventually, she was invited to the local and state level association's meetings, where she found a home within the groups and committees. "I'm really proud of both associations and the people working within them," she says. GFWBA finally has their first female president and they welcomed Heather with open arms, saying they'd always give her a seat at their table. Heather will use this opportunity as a platform to show that women in business deserve more recognition in leadership roles. Even within her own company, Ferrier Custom Homes, Heather is hoping to break the social construct that only men can work in construction. She

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believes, if you see more women doing it, more women will feel comfortable expressing interest in it, too. Heather's hoping to be that example for other people, women and men alike.

Heather, general manager of Ferrier, represents the fourth generation in her family to be working in construction and homebuilding. Inspired by the work of her great-grandfather, Heather says Ferrier was built with energy efficiency in mind. "My great grandfather immigrated to Texas from Scotland and was a stonemason for the Capitol Building in exchange for free land," she says. Her father grew up working in structural concrete with her grandfather and in the late '70s, early '80s, north Texas clients approached them about possibly building an earth-sheltered home. These homes' walls and roof are made from structural concrete, which is then waterproofed, insulated and covered with dirt; they are naturally more energy-efficient because they're surrounded by earth. Building the homes this way helps keep them cool during summer – the ultimate goal in Texas – and warmer during winter. The homes became a trend and her father continued to build and gain confidence with the efficiency they provided. In the wake of the oil crisis of the '70s, resulting in gas prices spiking, pursuing energy-efficient construction only made sense. "Why not build better? Why not build these homes so they consume less?" her father said.

"My father has always been committed to educating himself; if someone

comes to Ferrier with a new technology, approach or product, and we're not familiar with it, we're always willing to learn. Especially these days where technologies are so rapidly changing," she explains. Ferrier has been an evolution – it's changed from year-to-year as technology becomes more advanced and well-known. "We started building with the idea of being energy-efficient, and now it's evolved into building more sustainable environments." Like most children of self-employed parents, Heather grew up working in, and around, the company from an early age. Her father had her filing at nine years old, so construction has always been woven into her life.

Heather never felt like she was "super handy" and, therefore, never foresaw

herself being in the construction business long-term. "I don't wear a toolbelt. I wanted to travel. I grew up in a church that was very missions-oriented and I had the benefit of doing a lot of international travel in my teens and early twenties," she says. Heather was exposed to non-profits that did micro-enterprise work where they invested in third-world countries to help get them out of poverty. Instead of pursuing that dream to its fullest, she continued to build her career within the family-business and went to college at the University of Texas at Arlington. She has a degree in international business, but as Ferrier shifted in the early 2000s to a more sustainable approach, construction more fully resonated with her. In 2005, Heather built her own home and loved every step it took, saying the work hooked her. "I grew up surrounded by super handy people in my life. So, I saw this stereotype where if you're in construction then maybe you're 'x.' Or if you're handy, then maybe you're male. And now, even though I'm still not extremely handy, I am very much a



L-R: Kimberly Eaton-Pregler, Heather Laminack, Lynn Motharal

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process-person. I'm involved in sales, coordinating the design process and in-house project management."

Having her company take specific measures to build more sustainable homes, Heather mentioned that the energy-efficiency of a home is grounded in the design. The biggest step is orienting the property so it's working with the environment, not against it. Ferrier observes where the sun is rising and setting and how the light it provides affects the inside of the home. Nestling the home among trees, utilizing overhangs or relocating windows in relation to the sun, all help decrease energy consumption. Materials Ferrier uses to build vary from project to project, but it all starts with the design. "To us, when it comes to sustainability, the most important aspect is the energy-efficiency because if we're using less energy, it has a domino effect where it'll lessen the impact of the footprint from the home," Heather explains. Even though she hasn't spent her life traveling, there are similarities between what Heather wanted to do and what she currently does: she still gets to change people's lives, meet their needs and make a wise investment.

Apart from juggling work demands, Heather is a dedicated volunteer and mother of young children. She is often volunteering with the local YMCA and is a Pilates instructor for them in her spare time. Habitat for Humanity is big in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, so Ferrier, alongside other members of the GFWBA, partner with them in fund-

raising (a part of the proceeds from GFWBA's annual Clay Shoot is donated). To Heather, the biggest challenge is having children and raising them while trying to build a career. "Finding that balance and feeling like you're giving your children enough and also giving enough to your job ... I wonder, 'Am I doing it right; am I giving my kids the right experiences; could I be doing more at work?'" Learning how to find equilibrium and being okay with it has been a process of self-discovery for her. "I'm always tired!" she laughs.

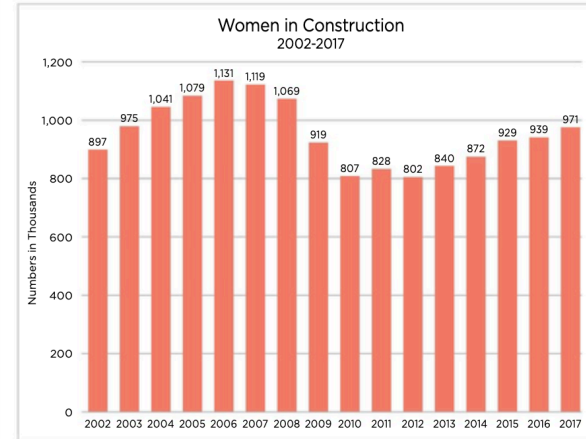
Being a leader-figure for so many people carries some heavy weight and responsibilities. Getting time to do something that helps a person recharge is a helpful relief when they can get it. "I have a tendency to do-do-do. Something as simple as a hike is good for the soul," says Heather. On the days that she can

relax, Heather, her husband, and their two sons (Wyatt and Knox) like to spend time in nature by hiking and unplugging to get away from a chaotic life. They have a camper they like to take out where they'll string up a hammock, call it a weekend and decompress. "We've got a canoe and bikes and we try to spend as much time in nature together as we can. We like to cook; we do a lot of cooking at home. My boys like to help with the process but 'help' is a loose term!" she laughs. "The harder it gets to sneak those moments in, the more important they become."

As someone who is always looking for people to learn from, Heather had a lot of women and men through the years that were more than willing to share their experiences in construction with her. Heather strongly believes in the benefits of mentorship and encourages others to reach out to professionals with demonstrated success in their chosen field. She describes, "It doesn't have to be a formal mentorship. It can be something simple where you take that person out for lunch or coffee, and



Ft. Worth Mayor Betsy Price installs Heather Laminack as GFWBA President.



ask them questions about their struggles or how they approached certain situations. It's important to find those champions to guide you along the way and to help you find your own voice."

Heather believes the rewards for doing research and giving effort towards your passions can have a lot of value. "When I built a home in 2005, Oprah's *O at Home* magazine got a hold of the project we were working on. They came down to do a photoshoot with makeup and home-styling crews. For about two days, we took pictures and discussed the home. That was a perk that was really fun," she recalls. "People ask me, 'Did you meet Oprah?' And I didn't! But nevertheless, it was still a really fun process."

Heather got involved with TAB when they established their Young Professionals Council and invited her to be one of the founding council members to get it off the ground. GFWBA had established their own Young Professionals Committee in 2013, so it was something that was near and dear to her heart. She says, "It's such

a great leadership incubator and stepping stone to finding where you belong in either or both associations." She recently returned from a trip to the Bahamas where she attended a NAHB Strategic Leadership meeting. As the incoming Young Professionals chair for NAHB, they had all the incoming chairs join for the meeting to lay out their goals for the committees. Heather feels she is the president of GFWBA because the Young Professionals Committee was established, as it shows the importance of ushering in women and the younger generation.

Alongside the Young Professionals Committee, she's helping form a new women's council with the GFWBA. Prior to this last Thanksgiving, Heather and the new women's council held a drive for Safe Haven, a local women's shelter. They gathered donated items for baskets that were delivered to 30 or more families. The baskets included gift cards and everything needed to cook a family's Thanksgiving meal to help the displaced families feel a sense of normalcy around the holiday. One pillar of the women's council is to help support women in the community. "I like to know that at the end of the day, I gave it my all. That's why I'm here, why I'm serving. I want to do my part and give back where I can," Heather says.

Heather wants to participate in more events to get her committees off the ground supporting women, since diversity and inclusion are incredibly important in this day. She thinks being exhausted is a positive part of being conscientious and involved in your community, career and family. Excited to see what being the first female president of GFWBA brings, Heather will continue to be an inspiration and advocate for women, like herself, who are working to have their voice heard. If she can do it, others can do it. "It took a while, but we're here and I'm happy to be a part of that change." ★

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