

GROUNDBREAKING WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION CONFERENCE PREVIEW

GROUNDBREAKING  
WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION  
**GWIC**

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# Inspiration For Everyone

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Construction Professionals Look Forward to  
Gathering in Person at GWIC 2022

By Zena Ryder

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# A World of Diversity, Back in Person

**This year, the 19th annual Groundbreaking Women in Construction (GWIC) conference is back in person.**

It will meet in the fantastic city of San Francisco from May 12 to 13, 2022.

The conference is presented by Engineering News-Record (ENR) and Peckar & Abramson (P&A). For many years, the event has been co-hosted by Melinda Gentile, partner and diversity and inclusion chair with P&A, and Janice Tuchman, ENR executive editor, events.

“I’m truly delighted to be attending Groundbreaking Women in Construction in person this year,” says Tuchman. “With attendance pacing at the same rate as in 2019—our largest gathering ever—I’m looking forward to welcoming new attendees and welcoming back returning professionals.”

Gentile says, “The energy at GWIC conferences—from attendees, speakers and panelists—is palpable. I always leave feeling energized. It’ll be wonderful to be back in person to network, meet new people, see old friends, exchange ideas and just to be together and feel that camaraderie. We’re over the moon with excitement about getting together in person this year.”

The keynote that launches this year’s GWIC conference promises to be stellar. In her presentation, “The Sky is No Longer the Limit,” NASA’s Nancy Bray, an industrial engineer, will talk about opportunities for facility design and construction based on America’s plans for space exploration. These ambitious plans include the Artemis program, which seeks to investigate more of the lunar surface and, in collaboration with international and commercial partners, to establish the first long-term presence on the Moon. This program will land the first person of color and the first woman on the Moon. Bray will share her insights for women’s success in rapidly changing technical careers.

“Through our conference, we empower our attendees, show them new vistas and inspire them to reach

higher than they thought possible,” says Gentile.

The first day’s closing keynote, “A World of Opportunity,” will focus on how infrastructure affects everyone, and how it influences society’s progress. Speaker Lara Poloni is global president of AECOM and a member of the World Economic Forum’s Global Future Council on Infrastructure. She will talk about how the infrastructure industry is prioritizing sustainable social benefits.

In the second day’s closing keynote, Dr. Newsha Ajami will suggest reimagining the built environment as infrastructure is upgraded. An expert on climate, she is chief research strategy and development officer for earth and environmental sciences at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. To

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protect this amazing planet and all the people who live on it—now and in the future—climate-resilient cities must be built, which means prioritizing water management. Doing so will make use of innovative technology and natural infrastructure and will require cross-industry cooperation. Diversity must also be incorporated as an equitable, resilient and water-secure planet is built.

Across two days, attendees will have the opportunity to hear from more than 30 presenters and panelists. In addition to the keynotes, topics covered will include construction on indigenous lands, women’s careers in sustainable energy, agility in construction, implicit

bias, how to make stereotypes work in your favor and practices learned during the pandemic that support work-life balance, especially for women.

Jennifer Papantonio, chief client service officer at P&A, says, “A great thing about GWIC is the broad spectrum of attendees. Whether they’re tradeswomen, architects or senior level executives at major contracting companies, everyone’s talking and connecting and learning from one another.”

Gentile adds, “Each year, we love hearing what people have taken away from prior GWIC conferences—how they’ve implemented things they’ve learned, how they’ve enhanced their career opportunities or have made their organizations better.”

At Zachry Construction, Project Engineer Katrina von Kamrath and some of her colleagues have done just this. She says, “As a direct result of data, ideas and conversations at GWIC, some Zachry attendees formed a group called Zachry Women Breaking Ground. Initially focused on recruiting, retaining and developing our female employees, it’s grown into an employee resource group—our company’s first—for all women in the company.”

At GWIC, there will be opportunities for networking, for making new friends, and meeting up with old ones. “I look forward to the energy at GWIC—especially this one after being so isolated the last couple of years,” says Susan LaBrie, director of surety relations at Zachry Construction. “This conference helps women recognize that in this industry, they’re important, they can be themselves and that they matter. We’re reminded that, together, we can do great things,” LaBrie says.

At this year’s GWIC, everyone who cares about diversity in the construction industry can come together in person, to learn, to share and to be inspired to contribute to a construction industry and a built environment that’s more inclusive, more resilient and does more to protect and conserve the planet. ♦





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## Supporting Women Through Flexibility and Wellness

By Torre Taylor Dos Santos, Director of Talent and Culture at American Global

**American Global is an insurance and surety brokerage firm specializing in construction risk management.** Our values determine how we work together, guide our decision-making and fuel our workplace culture.

During the pandemic, it became apparent that many working mothers grappled with decisions to downshift their careers or leave the workforce entirely. Our organization tackled this issue head-on, as it's central to our company values.

I personally was a beneficiary of this values-driven culture. About seven months ago, my first child was born. I received paid family leave through our organization, and after my leave

concluded, I returned to work gradually. Instead of rushing to find childcare, I worked a flexible schedule. I continued to breastfeed—without having to figure out how to pump milk at the office or while traveling. When I did need to pump at the office, I was given time and privacy to do so comfortably.

Participating in virtual meetings meant I didn't have to jump back into extensive traveling as soon as I returned to work. I worked as much and as hard—but American Global trusted me to do that work on my terms. This made the transition easier, empowering me to work at full capacity and contribute meaningfully to the company.

The pandemic also highlighted

the need for mental health and wellness resources in the workplace.

Issy Bustamante, vice president at American Global, will lead a workshop on “Mindfulness in the Workplace” at the upcoming GWIC conference. Attendees will discover the benefits of mindfulness and learn techniques to increase their success while maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Flexibility and wellness resources help attract and retain talent. Hiring and retaining working mothers is good for those employees—and it's also good for business. American Global prioritizes diversity, which drives innovation and cultivates a workplace that empowers everyone who's part of it. ♦

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