

In an industry dominated by men, Renee Fiorelli stands out.

The president of the Mechanical Contractors Association of New Jersey (MCANJ) stood out during a recent gathering of its members in Jersey City.

In a catering hall on the Hudson River waterfront, Renee Fiorelli was one of only a handful of women working the room filled with leaders of New Jersey's mechanical contracting industry.

Fiorelli is the first female president of the MCANJ in the over 100-year history of the association.

Being a woman in a male-dominated industry is nothing new for Fiorelli, who took over as president of Peterson Service Co. in Medford, N.J., from her father in 2011.

She grew up in her family's business, tagging along with her father as a young girl. After graduating with a degree in mechanical engineering from University of Delaware, where she was also one of the few women studying for that degree, Fiorelli joined the family business.

Even though she had an engineering degree, Fiorelli needed to learn the specifics of the mechanical contracting business, including estimating and project management. She enrolled in a night education program in Philadelphia offered by the American Society of Heating Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers.

"That's how I really learned the application side of the business – the pumps, rooftop units, boilers, chillers. It really gave me a foundation in all of the equipment."

At Peterson Service, she was the only woman on a jobsite.

"There are women that were in our office, but they were more administrative," she said. "I was the only one doing this type of work – the more technical side of the business. No women were on the estimating or project side of the business."

Now that she has a leadership role in the industry, Fiorelli hopes to encourage more women to enter the field and eventually become leaders. In April, she led the first networking meeting of the New Jersey Women in Mechanical Industry (NJWiMI) with plans for more meetings in the coming months.

Fiorelli is also the treasurer for the Mechanical Service Contractors of America (MSCA) and serves as a Trustee for the UA International Training Fund. She also serves on the National WiMI Committee.

For the first time in 2019, the national organization hosted a conference just for women that attracted 150 women. It's planning another conference in June with the goal of attracting 250 women.

Fiorelli said it was important for her to hold a national conference just for women in the industry.

“At MSCA national conferences, men outnumber women by at least 8 to 1,” she said.

Fiorelli said she is often asked how businesses in the industry can not only attract women, but retain them.

“At the national level, we’re focused on creating opportunities for women in the industry to connect and meet each other as well come up with ideas to recruit more women into our field,” she said. “We need to provide mentorship and career support so that women can flourish in this industry.”