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Women in Mechanical Industry (WiMI)



By Debbie Siddall, Caitlin Schimmel, and Alyson Funkhouser

*"When I first heard about WiMI, I wasn't sure what to expect," admitted **Caitlin Schimmel, D.A. Dodd Senior Accounting Specialist**. "But it was so much more than I could have imagined- Instead of focusing on girl-power, they focused on how to be the most authentic version of yourself," **Schimmel** recalled about the three-day event from June 11 – 14, 2023, celebrating the 3rd annual **Women in Mechanical Industry (WiMI) national conference** in Nashville, TN. **Schimmel** and **Alyson Funkhouser, HR & Payroll Manager**, attended the event sponsored by the Mechanical Contractor's Association of America (MCAA). During the WiMI conference, **Schimmel** and **Funkhouser** heard keynote speakers share about innovation and purpose in the workplace, participated in round-table discussions, and met other women working within the mechanical industry from across the US. **Funkhouser** shared, "The WiMI national conference presented new ways to think about the work that I do every day. But the best part for me was connecting with other women in our industry- Our roles may differ, but many of our challenges are the same. We took time to listen and encourage each other."*

The **Indiana WiMI** chapter is just getting started. It is made up of individuals throughout Indiana and is centrally located in Indianapolis, Indiana. After learning about WiMI on a national level this summer, we became eager to learn more about a local WiMI chapter. The Chicago WiMI group invited us to their chapter's summer networking event in August. It allowed us to meet others in a WiMI chapter that was already established and to find out more about what the organization does and the impact it makes. It took talking with **Jason DeMeyer's** contacts at the **MCAI** and speaking with some WiMI of Chicago members to help get D.A. Dodd plugged into the up-and-coming Indiana WiMI chapter. The first Indiana WiMI board was very recently assembled. We look forward to sharing more details about WiMI chapters and events available to women working in our local mechanical communities.

Earlier this month, we had the opportunity to meet virtually with **Stacy Johnson, President of Auburn Mechanical** (Auburn, WA.) and **Chair for the MCAA's Women in Mechanical Industry (WiMI)**. Founded in 1975, Auburn Mechanical is a second-generation mechanical contractor. At sixteen years old, Johnson began working at Auburn as a full-time truck driver during her summer breaks from school. Over the next twenty years, she worked in every position across the company except for the field and became Auburn's Vice President in 2000. After an ownership transition in 2008, Johnson became the President of Auburn Mechanical. We asked Johnson what one of her favorite roles in the industry has been to date, to which she responded, *"Project Manager, because it's never a dull moment. I love this role because you get to work with employees in the field every day and regularly interact with customers."*

Stacy Johnson reminisced about the early days of WiMI, *"John Gentile, the former executive director of the MCAA, had a vision for the MCAA to be a champion for women in the mechanical industry."* In 2018, Gentile's vision came to life. He brought a group of female leaders from across the mechanical industry to meet in Scottsdale, AZ, charging them with *"What should this look like?"* That same task force that met in 2018 created the MCAA's Women in the Mechanical Industry (WiMI) committee and launched their first national conference in Chicago in 2019, with nearly 150 women in attendance. *"We didn't let a pandemic slow us down- Despite national, state, and local health mandates, WiMI kept things moving forward by hosting webinars and virtual events for women when meeting in person wasn't possible,"* shared Johnson, *"In our short five years, we've made some really good strides, but we still have a long way to go... We've made progress with entry and mid-level positions, but we're still underrepresented when it comes to leadership positions, and we also need to focus on pay equity for positions in the office."* The 2023 WiMI national conference reached nearly three hundred attendees.

Since its development, Johnson has fully supported the vision of WiMI, from serving as Vice Chair in 2018 to becoming the WiMI Chair in 2022. During her two-year appointment, Johnson leads the committee as they focus time and energy on creating authentic experiences for national conference attendees and commit resources to developing local WiMI chapters closer to home. *"We believe there is an even greater opportunity for a sphere of support locally than nationally,"* stated Johnson. Today, there are fourteen established WiMI chapters in the U.S., with plans for continued growth in 2024. With the industry having more job openings than can be filled, we asked Johnson why women should consider pursuing a career in the mechanical industry. *"They need us. There are so many ways to be involved,"* she responded. Johnson believes WiMI has a critical role in supporting women's journeys in the mechanical industry by serving as role models, providing education and resources.