

## **Women in the Building Materials Industry**

In our previous blog ([https://www.nrla.org/NRLA/State\\_and\\_Locals/RILBMDA/Blog.aspx](https://www.nrla.org/NRLA/State_and_Locals/RILBMDA/Blog.aspx)), we discussed what makes today's building materials dealer different than its predecessors. One of the major changes not previously discussed in this space but equally important to the success of the business is the emergence of females in prominent roles within our industry. Long considered a male dominated industry, Rhode Island's independent lumber and building materials dealers now feature women in prominent sales, marketing, human resources, management, and ownership roles. Females now account for a larger percentage of employees in the lumber industry than ever before as our workplace demographics continue to evolve and become more diverse. We spoke with several prominent females in the industry to get their thoughts on the unique challenges they face in a traditionally male dominated business and what they have done to not only overcome those challenges but to thrive in their roles.

### ***What attracted you to the building materials industry?***

*Maria Fratiello, Director of Human Resources, National Lumber*

*"I studied drafting in high school and college so there was some underlying interest there. Sherwin Williams offered me a job right out of college so I can't necessarily say it was a "chosen" field – maybe more like an offer a recent college grad better take! I had the good fortune to then work for the Cohen family who were the class act owners of Somerville Lumber. When they closed, I chose to stick with the "family" business motto and found myself with the Kaitz family who owned National Lumber. I noticed the independents can offer more flexibility and be creative with company positions and services for customers. They don't have to say "no" and can make things happen."*

*Kelli Butler, Marketing Coordinator, Arnold Lumber Company*

*"I fell into the building industry many years ago when I was offered a job at a commercial construction management firm. It was a rewarding career where I learned a great deal about the industry and also gained an exceptional amount of experience in Marketing for an International firm. A year ago I saw an opening in Marketing at Arnold Lumber to which I applied and was brought on to the team. I was attracted to the history of the company as well as their "family" atmosphere."*

*Peggy Kleber, Sales Assistant, Douglas Lumber*

*"My husband's uncle owned a lumber yard and asked if I wanted to help him out. My husband's grandfather originally started it as a roadside stand selling grain and animal feed and I liked the history behind it. I started working there part time and eventually went full time."*

*Kate Carret, Co-Owner, Arnold Lumber*

*"The obvious answer would be that Allison (Allison Arnold, co-owner) and I are the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of a successful family owned business that has been supporting contractors, vendors, employees and our community for over 100 years. It is in our blood. That being said, I strongly believe whether it is in your family or not, you have to have a passion for the industry and business. I did not jump right in after college, it took me leaving the "nest" to learn about other industries and businesses, before I embraced and appreciated the opportunities and the amazing talent within our industry."*

**What challenges have you faced as a female in a traditionally male dominated industry and how have you overcome them?**

Maria Fratiello

*"Years ago before my HR days, while in sales, I remember customers not wanting to deal with females. Things have gotten better. We do see more females in the industry now. This is not an industry for the faint of heart. Staying educated and credible, doing the right thing, not losing your cool and avoiding negativity help one deal with the challenges. I remain happy and grateful for what I have accomplished and received. Stick with it and your efforts will be rewarded."*

Kelli Butler

*"Early in my career I joined an industry that was predominantly male dominated, which was a little intimidating, but I overcame that. I've always believed that respect has to be earned; so as with any position, in any industry, you have to work hard and be confident in your knowledge and the experience you bring to the table. Over time I became well respected because of the effort I put forth. It also helps to always be prepared and get involved in as much as possible to make yourself a well-rounded part of the team."*

Peggy Kleber

*"The biggest challenge for any female in a male dominated industry is gaining the trust of your customers. They don't think you would have as much knowledge as a man so I try to learn as much as I can about the products we sell. Once you show them you are just as capable as the other salesmen they won't hesitate to come to you again."*

Kate Carret

*"I have rarely found it challenging. We grew up in this business and I think the customers and employees knew and accepted a long time ago that we were going to be carrying the torch in the future. There are the rare few that pass judgment or make assumptions, but I believe if you keep your chin up, continue to work hard and take care of those in your circle, those same people learn to respect and appreciate what you bring to the table. Good communication, sincerity and a sense of humor helps too."*

**What do you enjoy about working in the lumber and building materials industry?**

Maria Fratiello

*"You never know what's gonna happen next! There really are no two days that are the same. There are a lot of smart people in this industry so you can always find expert advice when a solution is being sought. When working for an independent there is direct access to the company owners so concerns and ideas are heard."*

Kelli Butler

*"I enjoy the variety that this industry brings. My position offers me the ability to interact with many different people which I really enjoy. I also like seeing all the quality recycled material and sustainable products that are now available. In this industry, there is something new and exciting every day."*

Peggy Kleber

*"I like the relationships you build with customers. You see the same people year after year and you get to know them. They tell you about the good things happening in their lives as well as the lows. It's not all about building houses. I'm not sure you get the same sort of relationships in other industries."*

Kate Carret

*"I have a real appreciation of working with people who are driven and successful, but are inclusive of all and want to share their knowledge and passion with those around them. It is imperative to our success that we have a collaborative team approach. Not just the success of our company, but of the industry as a whole. It is increasingly more difficult to capture and retain talent, and we need to provide the right tools and empower the next generation for a secure future. I know this industry has the talent to accomplish this. I see examples of it every day."*

**What do you feel is the most rewarding thing about working in this industry?**

Maria Fratiello

*"Driving by a job site knowing we made that happen. Being part of our company growth. Living through the dramatic changes in the industry such as the undertaking of design work, engineering, and large commercial projects. The career avenues that have become available are remarkable. This is no longer just a sticks and sheets business. Lifelong friends have been made in this industry and it's amazing to see what a bunch of lumber yard "kids" have grown into over the decades."*

Kelli Butler

*"All of the wonderful people. From our owners, coworkers, customers and vendors, everyone has been terrific to work with. It really is a family environment."*

Peggy Kleber

*"Helping people. I don't think its industry specific but that's my favorite part. Whether it is helping the management team, our sales staff, customers, or vendors I just like helping people."*

Kate Carret

*"Every day it seems we are bobbing and weaving and proactively looking for the next potential fire. The rewarding part is when you prevent or quickly extinguish that flame, or more so, when you see your team accomplish that before it gets within our customer's sights! I like witnessing the professional and personal growth of the people around me. To hire a person and watch them develop both personally and professionally while working for your company is exciting. Most enter our industry accidentally, and seeing them embrace the opportunities in the industry and build a life and family around that is great. To take a new employee around and introduce them to many employees who have been working for us for 15+ years is a proud feeling, and I hope 15 years from now, I will be introducing that same employee to a new hire. The same applies to our customers. To see them grow and develop and find new ways to help them be successful is rewarding. I have really just started to get my feet wet in the lumber industry, but know that there are customers, employees and vendors that I can learn from, and I truly enjoy every opportunity I have to get to know them and learn from them."*

