

WOMEN in ROOFING

Investment bank Goldman Sachs recently released a report entitled 'Closing the Gender Gap: Plenty of Potential Economic Upside'. The report looks at how women are utilised in the economy. It was welcomed by the government which has signalled that it will be encouraging more females into the trades in particular, given that women could help alleviate a looming skilled labour shortage, especially when the Christchurch rebuild programme rolls out.

Although a very small percentage of tradespeople in New Zealand are women, we are likely to see a more determined approach to acquire more "girl power" in male dominated trades including roofing.

In its plans for 2011-2013, the Plumbing

Gasfitting Drainlaying and Roofing ITO announced its aim to increase the number of females participating in the industry. With the projected boom in building and construction over the coming years, an inevitable increase in demand for a skilled workforce will follow.

The ITO, by working with industry associations such as RANZ, is encouraging employers to look beyond their traditional work force supply and to raise awareness amongst employers of the skill sets and diversity women can bring to the job.

While roofing is viewed as a traditionally male occupation, *Rooflink* has identified several women already happily engaged on the tools. So if any high school leavers are contemplating careers in roofing, these women would be keen to encourage

female students to give roofing some serious consideration.

Roofing is a skill that needs people to perform tasks that require manual dexterity and good coordination of the mind and hands: the female installers interviewed by *Rooflink* have stressed the importance to them of carrying out those tasks in a satisfactory manner.

Is it time for a noteworthy shift in the male-dominated roofing sector?



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Jeanine Clark (left) with brother and partner in the business Shaun.

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Jeanine Clark, T W Clark Roofing 2002 Ltd, Lower Hutt

Terry Clark has been a roofer in Wellington for over 30 years and son and daughter, Shaun and Jeanine Clark often accompanied him on jobs while they were growing up. So Jeanine was not entirely new to roofing when owing to a serious eye condition Terry needed her to become his driver. Jeanine was an apprentice fitter and turner at the time, working for Lever Rexona but the conditions in the factory were playing havoc with her breathing. So it was easy to make the decision to also join her father on the tools 15 years ago.

Given that he has taught them everything they need to know – plus all the difficult tasks of roofing as well – Terry is now semi-retired and has handed the day-to-day responsibilities of the company to Shaun and Jeanine.

T W Clark Roofing is mainly involved in the residential sector, so it was important for Shaun and Jeanine to become licensed and Jeanine says they're pleased to have the formal acknowledgement and LBP status as verification of their knowledge and skill sets.

"I wouldn't say women must have brute strength to become roofers but obviously we don't have the same ability to lift extremely heavy loads", says Jeanine. "But over the years I have learned to work around those issues and I am far more interested in overcoming difficult tasks and seeing them through to a satisfactory conclusion.

"We often work on older villa properties which have bullnosing on rounded metal verandahs that can be really tricky to achieve to a high standard. Bullnosing of

metal is difficult but it is these jobs that I particularly enjoy and it's good to do the job and see it finished – besides which I love working outdoors".

Shaun and Jeanine share the tasks of running things back in the office too from accounts to estimating, quoting and GST. A job Jeanine found really satisfying was at Akatarawa in Upper Hutt. They installed Dimondek 400 roof and wall cladding on a home designed by Davor Mikulcic, the appearance of which has been described as a "butterfly in flight" when approaching it from above at a fifth elevation.

Projects like the home at Akatarawa give Jeanine a real sense of satisfaction at what can be achieved and she genuinely believes roofing to be a good career choice for the right female contenders.

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Tanya Mather – Wellington Lightweight Roofing Ltd

On leaving school Tanya trained as a chef but became tired of working weekends and holidays and earning very little money for the long hours. The last straw came when someone was hired that Tanya could not get along with.

Dad Kerry Mather became tired of Tanya's complaining so offered the 22 year old at the time, a job with his company installing spouting. Tanya soon discovered how much she enjoyed working outside, going to new places all the time and meeting different people on the way. A bonus was working on two different jobs over in Rarotonga.

Seven years into her employment in the roofing industry, Tanya emphasises that her main role is installing spouting but she has performed a few other roofing tasks and

has helped Kerry with repairs and installing parapet flashings.

In response to claims that roofing is a blokey dominated industry Tanya sees no reason why more women should find work in roofing. "Roofing is hard for anyone at the outset because the body is doing a lot of new things like standing on a slope all day – but like anything in life you get used to it".

She's never had a problem with sexism – most people she comes across are all good. "There was one inappropriate hugger but at least he was nice!"

A big reader, Tanya loves movies and TV (maybe too much) she says. She loves riding her bike with the dog running alongside and snowboarding "which I can do during the week since I usually go



with my boss". She would eventually like to progress to another role in Wellington Lightweight Roofing Ltd and one which is more sales-related.

Shirlene (Shirl) Rasmussen – Roofcare Ltd, Auckland

It was an ex partner with a roofing business that encouraged Shirl on to the tools when she was 18. He didn't have to apply much pressure to teach Shirl most of the basics and for this she will always be grateful. Shirl says he was a hard boss but that he equipped her well so all these years later "getting the job right" is her absolute priority. She obtained her National Certificate in Metal Roof and Wall Cladding in 2006.

She accepts roofing is a man thing but says: "I always loved working outdoors and the physical nature of the work but I won't deny there's been a certain amount of distrust from the guys.

"I think women apply a certain feminine trait of wanting to do the job well adding what I call the finishing touches. This is not to say men don't perform like this but I think being a female means you approach things slightly differently.

"It was a big challenge for me to learn how to install metal roofing and flashings properly but I stuck at it and in time won the sceptics over".

When Shirl Turner (as she was then) and her partner went separate ways ten years later she began labour-only contracting for Metalcraft in Auckland and Hamilton. Seven years ago she became a contracts manager for Metalcraft based in East Tamaki, later moving into a similar role with them on the North Shore. While contracting

for Metalcraft 10-12 years ago, Shirl installed a new roof for Habitat for Humanity on one of their project houses that was later transported to a new location. This was a "ladies only" build on which Shirl was the



only roofer with experience but she had several other women helping out.

The role with Metalcraft on the North Shore involved running jobs and ordering in the product. Things were going well – or at least Shirl thought so – until along with other staff she was made redundant. So gutted from the shock of losing her roofing job in this way she left the industry to become a corrections officer at Manukau Women's Prison and at this time

also married Kerry Rasmussen, a skills broker with the BCITO. The prison role was a great job but the hours were bad and after six months Shirl was back on the tools helping a roofer friend involved on the fit out on Auckland's new Wynyard Quarter.

Six months ago Shirl became a supervisor at Roofcare Ltd, Penrose mostly involved with re-roofing projects. "Running these jobs is quite a challenge" she says "but the days are long gone of needing to gain acceptance for girl-power in the supervisor's role.

"Roofing is a male orientated domain and to begin with you really have to prove yourself but I would say to any girls leaving school to consider roofing because it's a job women can perform very well. I make sure I am familiar with the building code and all the new legislation and because we are largely involved in re-roofing, a lot of my dealings are with homeowners, architects and councils. Sometimes these re-roofing jobs look great on paper but there's a lot that has to be knuckled out to make it work but I love that part of the job".

Shirlene holds a National Certificate in Roofing in Metal Roof and Wall Cladding and is currently working towards becoming an ITO assessor. She and Kerry live at Whangaparaoa and leisure time includes triathlons, jet skiing, wake boarding and Shirl is currently training for a half ironman event this month.

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Paula Meredith, Roofing & Spouting Contractors (1986) Ltd, Wellington

Paula grew up on a farm in the Bay of Plenty so it was no surprise that she eventually opted for a job outdoors, joining husband Rob in his roofing business. Initially Paula only fixed spouting but on days off from her career as a social worker, she began to enjoy learning how to install roofs under Rob's watchful eye. Rob and Paula have three adult children of their own but over the years have also been foster parents to many others. As the young ones grew up and left home Paula became more inclined to work as a roofer and went full time from 1992.

"In the early days my role would best be described as a labourer – fetching and carrying – but Rob taught me quite a lot and I can perform all sorts of skills. He has always encouraged me and had nice things to say when I've completed a job

well", says Paula.

"What I like about being a roofer is that it's outdoors and there's plenty of variety in the different jobs and types of roofs we repair or replace – working under eaves and at all sorts of angles. In the early days I was nailing down all the time but once power drills were available it made a big difference to fixing roofs.

Paula says the success of her working relationship with Rob involves her thinking ahead of him all the time as to what he will need next on a particular job. He is very patient, she says.

Paula thinks women make good roofers provided they are working with the right person to learn from because the skills are acquired as you move from job to job tackling different aspects. She puts her ease of learning to be on the tools

down to her earlier life on a farm where she grew up with her grandparents and helped with fencing and operating farm machinery.

"Sometimes the work is hard on the knees and my back but when that happens I get off the roof and have a 30 minute break which seems to do the trick", says Paula. "The only thing that holds us back is the weather and in Wellington it's frustrating to have to work around the wind factor – finding the best place to put the ladder up so it will still be there when you get off the roof".

Lawn bowls has been Paula's focus in her leisure time for the past 22 years and she is a New Zealand and Wellington representative as a member of the Johnsonville Bowling Club.

Kim Houston, Contracts Manager, Kiwi Roofing Ltd, Auckland

Dunedin is where Kim Houston began as a roofer. While studying for her Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Computer Science at Otago University Kim was also learning to be a roofer and the trades is where she decided to remain. Having become engaged to Nathan, who had worked as a roofer in Sydney, she went out on the tools to help him out when they co-founded Right Now Roofing Ltd. On the steep, old roofs of Dunedin's villas, Kim formed a passion for roofing. Ironically enough, it turns out that she is a third generation roofer having followed in her father's and grandfather's footsteps.

"I love the outdoors and the physicality of being a roofer and the environment that workers in the industry create – you work really hard and go home exhausted at the end of the day but it's also very satisfying to see a job well done", says Kim.

In 2004, following the birth of their first daughter, Kim and Nathan moved to Warkworth to be closer to Kim's family. With the housing boom in Auckland the business grew – at one time employing up to 20 roofers including some labour-only contractors.

As time went by two more daughters joined them and now they have Portia (7), Lizzie (5) and Sienna (3). As well as putting on the roofs during the day Kim took on the estimating role in the company in the evenings once the girls were in bed.

Nathan has always pinpointed Kim's success as a roofer to her attention to detail. She thinks her female side comes into how she performs as a roofer and admits to being "a bit of a perfectionist". She remembers being taught very early on in her roofing career, when 95% of the work was re-roofs, that the best way to learn is to look what was done by the original roofers. Being a very practical and logical thinker Kim has always been open to learning which she feels is on-going when you're a roofer.

In March this year Kim moved to join Kiwi Roofing Ltd, following the separation between her and Nathan the year before. She took up a role as Contract Manager and then moved into their residential division. She has just recently accepted an estimating and contract managing position in Kiwi's light commercial side. So now, although off the tools, she admits her pleasure when it's busy and she gets to put her tool belt on again!

The negative side of being a roofer for Kim came in the concessions she had to make in regards to her daughters. With Nathan never being able to find enough staff it became impossible for Kim to be able to stay at home full time. "Sadly I did have to make sacrifices with my girls. They are the reason I'm no longer permanently on the tools. Because most roofs are installed early in the morning when I



want to be at home with the girls it was time to take a different direction".

Thirty three year old Kim feels she would have no difficulty selling roofing as a career suitable for women – with some provisos. "You definitely need the right attitude and it's not easy. Whether real or imagined, us girls in the construction sector feel a lot of pressure to perform due to our rarity! You need to be thick skinned and if you get some hassles for being a girl in a tool belt. I always found the best way to handle it was to laugh it off and if that didn't work play up to it. Sometimes a girl likes it when someone treats her like a lady and offers to carry the ladder for her!

"Roofing is good fun and I've always felt that as a female roofer I have a good eye for detail. I'm fussy about getting things right. It's hard work but there's always something new to learn and I find great reward in that".

