

DONNA ANDERSON — TRISURA GUARANTEE INSURANCE CO.

Daily deadlines, quick-decision-making attract Donna Anderson to surety underwriting

*Canadian Design and Construction
Report special feature*

Donna Anderson, vice-president surety with Trisura Guarantee Insurance Co., came to the industry unintentionally, as many seem to do. The daily deadlines and the need for quick decision-making quickly drew her in. She has remained in the business for almost four decades.

Anderson grew up in a small town in Saskatchewan. She moved to Regina and began her career with a grade 12 education and some general business courses. She says she “fell into the surety business on the administrative side, typing contracts and issuing various documents common to the industry and honing her shorthand skills. I was hooked, even at the entry level position.”

She later moved to Vancouver. At the time any knowledge of bonding opened doors in the surety business and she landed a job as a junior underwriter. She spent more



Donna Anderson

than 20 years with that company helping them grow and working her way up through the ranks to managerial positions in both Winnipeg and Calgary before Trisura approached her in 2006.

“I was easily hooked on Mike’s story (Mike George is president, CEO and co-founder of Trisura) and what he wanted to achieve. After 30 years in the industry it has been an exciting opportunity to help build a new company.”

Chris Sekine, Trisura’s senior-vice president, surety, said when we he first met Donna and heard her story, it was an easy decision to have her lead and grow Trisura’s business in the prairies.

While the industry has changed in many ways over the past four decades and women are becoming more common in it, Anderson says she never experienced discrimination in her career. She says she has always been fortunate to have supportive managers and never felt push-back from the brokers she worked with or contractors she had the privilege to visit.

“It’s important to go into a meeting with a contractor knowing something about their core business,” she said. “First impressions are extremely important and a good general knowledge of the construction industry is critical.”

Continued on page 46



Donna Anderson

continued from page 45

Anderson says it's important to do background research and show a genuine interest in the contractor's business. Brokers, she says, are understandably sensitive when it comes to individuals they are willing to introduce to their clients so professionalism and preparation are key.

She says this is one lesson any new underwriter should learn quickly and one she works to impart on new staff. "Donna has been a tremendous mentor for many of Trisura's staff," says Sekine.

Anderson says the fast-pace today has created many different changes and challenges. "Thirty years ago we would perform our underwriting exercises on an annual basis – set up the program and issue the required bonds until the next year. Not so today. It is not uncommon for a contractor's financial position to swing in a matter of months."

She says a deeper knowledge of construction law is also required because of increased litigation.

The biggest challenge for anyone in the field, she says, is the ability to make quick decisions based on analysis and gut instinct and then committing to those decisions.

"If you're not confident in your decision-making you can expect a lot of sleepless nights."

That decision-making is what she likes most about the business. "There is no greater feeling than to be involved in a decision to support a contractor on a key project and it's even more rewarding when the contractor appreciates the role we play in helping them grow their businesses," Anderson says.

She says surety underwriting is an invisible industry to the general public, adding this is unfortunate because the business is both fascinating and challenging.

Trisura recruits students with backgrounds in finance and accounting and those in the banking industry for their financial skills. Anderson graduated in 1985 with a Certified General Accountant's designation to ensure she had the skills required for the financial analysis side of the underwriting process.

She says has been hooked on the business since day one. Learning every facet of the construction industry from road building to general building construction, living life and making fast-decisions has kept her completely engaged.

"This job becomes part of who you are," she said. "It has been a pleasure working in the industry and to have had the opportunity later in my career to be part of building Trisura and contributing to its success."

For more information, visit trisura.com.