

JANET MASCITELLI

Trisura surety underwriter builds relationships with brokers and clients

STAFF WRITER

– The Ontario Construction Report Special Feature

A combined passion for business and people led Janet Mascitelli to a career as a surety underwriter. She is now vice-president, surety with Trisura, a leading Canadian specialty insurance and surety provider, with leadership responsibilities for Ontario and Atlantic Canada.

Mascitelli began her career in banking. Deciding she wanted a change, she sought a new path that would include the elements of banking she had enjoyed most. “I started as a financial analyst, learning about the business of construction and how to understand financial statements in relation to contractors,” she says.

In those early days she began interacting with insurance brokers and contractors. She quickly realized that every client had individual needs, a different approach to business and unique personalities.

“Some people were naturally forthcoming and others more reluctant to share the details of their businesses that I needed to know,” she said.

She found an advantage in getting people to open up: she truly wanted to hear their stories and had a genuine interest in the businesses her clients had built. “People are always proud of their companies and

what they have built. Once they knew I was interested many were happy to share and that helped educate me about the industry along the way.”

At work, she learned from people who were knowledgeable and had more experience. Soon she moved into underwriting, a position involving more autonomy and negotiation.

“I truly enjoyed what I was doing and it made me want to dig in and figure things out,” she says. “This isn’t a job for sitting back waiting for someone to hand over the answers. I had to jump in and solve things myself.”

In time she found her way to Trisura, founded in 2006 on the premise that exceptional service, comprehensive products, and hard work would create a company that would appeal to brokers.

Chris Sekine, senior vice-president, surety, says the company’s difference is not in product – a bond is a bond – but rather, in providing superior service to brokers and their clients and the belief that business can be done better.

Mascitelli says she liked Trisura’s founders’ vision of collaboration, and knew they were bright, hard-working and passionate people. “There was integrity in the people at the heart of the company that



Janet Mascitelli

made me want to make the move,” she says.

When she began her career 28 years ago, the world looked different. She says at that time people found ways to make family and life fit the job. “I always made sure I put in the extra time as needed and my employers have been flexible with understanding fam-

ily commitments. If I needed time off for family I would take work home and put in the extra hours to get the work done.”

Now she says, people seem to look for careers that will fit their family and lives outside work. She says part of this is a result of connectivity and people understanding they can work from home and still do their job. While companies are finding ways to meet the home-based work demands, she says in-person contact is still important.

“Juggling family and career is hard but it makes life interesting,” she says. “Networking electronically is great but I always tell people that picking up the phone or having a face-to-face meeting is the best way to build a real relationship. When times are tough those face-to-face connections are real and will stand the test.”

Relationships are a big part of the industry and Mascitelli says she has been able to forge them through the same mechanisms as her male counterparts, but had to understand there were differences.

“I am an avid golfer so I had the ability to build relationships on the course and through industry tournaments the same as

Lianne Armstrong combines dedication, knowledge and client commitment

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Construction lawyer Lianne Armstrong combines dedication, industry knowledge, and a commitment to her clients.

Armstrong, a partner in Lerner's LLP's construction law group, belongs to a team working with building owners, general contractors, project managers, suppliers and subcontractors, providing ongoing advice from the start to completion of projects.

She first began working with Lerner's Toronto office more than 10 years ago. She moved to London and, after a time, joined Lerner's London office.

"This is a firm that is well-respected," she said. "Each of the lawyers has their own specialty. Together we create a team environment offering clients a wide range of services and expertise."

Armstrong specializes in construction disputes, including construction liens. She and her team, with expertise in other construction law areas, keep projects moving forward successfully.

She says when she started in the industry



Lianne Armstrong

15 years ago there were fewer women in construction law. "There have been a growing number of women in law for many years but construction is still a male-dominated industry."

Armstrong says it is important for women to ensure they have the knowledge to be able to demonstrate their expertise. "It can be intimidating entering a male-domi-

nated field. Women need to have the confidence to believe they can do it and the support to pursue their goals."

In law, work has deadlines and not necessarily during regular business hours. She says having a supportive partner at home is crucial to being able to meet the profession's demands including the specific area of construction law. "Balancing work and family is the most challenging part of this job and it's important to have someone at home who understands and supports you."

Armstrong says that another challenge, but one she thrives on, is problem solving. She says the standard solution often isn't enough and finding the answer to meet each situation and each client is satisfying.

No two files are alike and they cannot be dealt with in the same manner.

"I am constantly reading and attending conferences on construction law," she says. "I belong to various construction associations and network on both the law and construction side to ensure I have a broad range of resources at my disposal."

Armstrong is president of the Middlesex Law Association and assists lawyers with other firms who may have less expertise in construction law. One focus of the association this year will be to implement a mentoring program for young lawyers to provide support for practicing law in London.



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any man," she said. "I realized quickly though that I had to be the one to invite that kind of interaction."

She says a bit of a boys' club exists in the industry and she has learned that a good business relationship is different than a friendship. Both are valuable.

This is an area in which Mascitelli excels: "The way men and women relate to each other can be intrinsically different," Sekine said. "Janet excels at making people comfortable and at relating to people with honesty and warmth. She has a strong ability to know and understand different personalities and how to best connect with them."

Mascitelli says the biggest challenge in her current role is finding good people. Trisura recruits through university co-op programs.

Historically, Sekine says the surety industry has been somewhat invisible or un-

known as a career opportunity. It is a business people often fall into from backgrounds in finance, banking or economics, rather than seeking it out directly. He says Trisura searches for the best qualified people and many women are part of the mix. "Women strongly represent Trisura in leadership roles, including Donna Anderson, Janet's counterpart in Western Canada," he said.

Mascitelli also noted that Trisura's newest recruits are women, including a current co-op student and two graduates starting in May.

"This industry has a lot of potential, and especially for women to have some control over their schedules. It is well suited to anyone who is committed to business and passionate about financial matters and people."

She says in any industry it is important to find a job you like, are passionate about and then to give it your all.

For more information about Trisura, visit trisura.com.