

Membership Matters

Women, Work, and APPA: It's Not Just Programs—It's People!

by Randel Edwards



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Seven women agreed to an interview on APPA and their work in facilities management. Their facilities management experience ranges from four to 22 years, with an average of 12 years. Their experience with APPA is comparable to their work experience. These members represent all six regions of the association.

Randel Edwards: What influenced you to find employment in facilities management?

Guillen-Aguilar: While growing up I always had a great appreciation for blue-collar work. My father had a job as a cement contractor. Seeing him work hard to complete jobs while keeping customers happy always seemed to amaze me.

Bailey: The job I applied for itself—architectural drafting and design—was appealing.

Randel Edwards is APPA's director of member services and can be reached at randel@appa.org.

Vosevich: Previously, I was working in agricultural research and was dissatisfied with that work. I was looking for a position where I would utilize my education and skills. I thought a position in higher education would enable me to not only use my skills and education but also continue to develop them.

Lee-Price: Truthfully, I sought an employment opportunity with Rose-Hulman based on their sterling reputation as an educational institution and as a positive employer in our community. I had previously left a position that required vast travel and at that time in my personal and professional life, travel was not conducive to my priorities.

Quinn: A daily sense of accomplishment and a life-long love of construction.

Graham: I was unhappy with my employment and started looking at higher education and the opportunity to get a master's degree. With 25 years in procurement, I naturally fell into a spot that opened in the procurement department.

Baldwin: The director and assistant director of Physical Plant encouraged me to apply for the job as housekeeping administrator. I didn't think I had a chance, but they believed in my qualifications and in me. Here I am four years later.

RE: What are or what have been your challenges working in facilities management?

Baldwin: One of the challenges that I face is doing more with less like everyone else. Preparing budgets and filling positions are always challenging. Another challenge that is unique in the housekeeping industry is motivating a staff that is underpaid and where 80 percent of the employees work two jobs in order to survive.

Technology is also challenging. While equipment and products become available to do more with less, the mindset of some employees and upper management doesn't always change. The perception of housekeeping is "mop and bucket, broom and vacuum." However, with SARS,

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indoor air quality, mold, environmentally friendly products, pest control, and other topics, more than just a mop and bucket, broom and vacuum are involved.

Graham: I work in a facilities department where the vice president and all six directors are male. We have 25 supervisors in the department. I am only one of three female supervisors. Men are being groomed for management positions, but women aren't.

Bailey: The very real gender differences, and the "good old boy network" that sometimes prevails.

Quinn: Other than the ubiquitous politics, I find that fostering the individualism common in maintenance workers and yet maintaining control over their work can be tricky.

Lee-Price: I walked into a situation where the staff had not had direct supervision for several years. Can you

A frustrating fact of my job in facilities management is receiving equitable pay as opposed to my male peers. National figures just recently released indicate that on a whole, females are earning \$.77 on the dollar as opposed to males.

imagine? I walk in and implement policies and procedures and accountability. Needless-to-say, I wasn't the most popular person on campus. Slowly, we have formed trust and a real team made up of mutual respect and admiration.

A frustrating fact of my job in facilities management is receiving

equitable pay as opposed to my male peers. National figures just recently released indicate that on a whole, females are earning \$.77 on the dollar as opposed to males. What we must realize is that not only are our base salaries affected yearly, but also our long-term earning through retirement and benefits take a hit as well.

Vosevich: I have had two challenges. The first one was more noticeable when I first started working in facilities, but it still lingers somewhat. That is the challenge that other folks in the facilities arena have with the opposite gender. I once worked for a vice president who said, "You're not like one of the guys." I said, "That's pretty obvious. But it doesn't mean I bring anything less to the table." Men and women do relate to one another differently, but it's about people—not about men and women. It's about treating people with respect because they're human beings. Once you learn that, it's not a problem.

The second challenge is resource-oriented. We have accountability for how we use our resources—human and financial. The financial resources challenge is dealing with deferred maintenance and modernization. The human challenge is, "Where will we find the workforce of tomorrow?" We are not raising our children to become custodians and maintenance workers. We are going to have to look seriously at growing our own.

RE: Of what accomplishments are you most proud?

Quinn: Improving the organization, relationships, and productivity of the employees I manage.

Graham: I am most proud that I reintroduced a true customer service attitude in the facilities department. Prior to my arrival, the department was internally focused rather than externally focused. They didn't realize that they were here solely to fill the needs of their customers. I adopted an attitude that no matter what it takes

Sometimes our best work is over people's heads



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to fill the customer's needs we are going to do it. If it means dropping everything you are doing to drive across campus to make a delivery, that's what you need to do.

Bailey: Sticking with facilities all these years [19 years] and making it through some tough times.

Lee-Price: My children. The relationship I have with my husband; my faith. My community involvement (community rent is all so important). Forming a team with the people I work with daily. And my involvement with advocacy for human rights.

Baldwin: Receiving a scholarship from SRAPPA to attend the Institute for Facilities Management! I am a two-time recipient of the SRAPPA scholarship! Also being elected as the district director of the Middle Atlantic District and Board Member of the International Executive Housekeepers Association, Inc.

Guillen-Aguilar: Facilities Management Services was awarded the APPA Award for Excellence in 2000. The California Council for Excellence (CCE) awarded the California Challenge Award to the Customer Resource Center, under my leadership in 1999. The awards competition emulates the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award criteria and honors those private and public sector organizations in California that achieve excellence in the workplace.

Vosevich: We have been able to elevate the importance of facilities to our university community. Our folks now understand that facilities play a key role in the work that they are doing. Recently, we had someone say we can't apply for this grant because we don't have the facilities for it. It gave us a new appreciation of what facilities had done [in educating others].

RE: What advice would you give to women that are contemplating a career in facilities management?

Lee-Price: Have your ducks in order. This is still a predominately male pro-

fession and you really need to do your homework and know your stuff. Don't have a female agenda; have a professional agenda that benefits you and your school. Agendas aren't always negative so be sincere and earnest. Women are breaking through the glass ceiling and I'm thrilled, but we had better be qualified to do the job.

Graham: Definitely get the education first if you are serious. Get an engineering degree or the appropriate technical training so that you know the difference between an L and a P trap.

Guillen-Aguilar: Learn the profession, stay focused, and pull together a support system of women in similar type positions.

Bailey: Be strong and persevere; be yourself; maintain confidence in your abilities and value within the organi-

zation; find solutions to problems together and move on; and maintain a sense of humor.

Vosevich: I would say to all women, "To thine own self be true." They can't work in a more interesting and dynamic environment in higher education. They have to reach for the stars or they are never going to get there.

RE: How did you become acquainted with APPA?

Vosevich: When I started working in higher education, one of my colleagues was serving on an APPA committee.

Lee-Price: My vice president introduced me to APPA and the Institute for Facilities Management program. Yes, I'm a graduate.

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Graham: When I came on board in facilities and inquired about getting ahead, I was told go complete the APPA Institute for Facilities Management. I have been to two tracks of the Institute.

Guillen-Aguilar: In 1993, I was invited by Maurice Hollman to attend my first APPA seminar in Quarteline, Idaho. Maurice has encouraged and mentored me to become a part of this great organization. I would like to

The most important thing about APPA is that it strives to stay on the leading edge of technology, planning, and construction within the facilities profession.

give special thanks to Chris Christofferson, Brian Worley, and Hildo Hernandez for encouraging me to get involved.

Bailey: By working for and with someone who was and is a strong supporter of APPA at all levels. He has always encouraged his staff to get involved.

Baldwin: At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, each manager is encouraged to become an active member of APPA and to attend the Institute for Facilities Management. We are also encouraged to continue our leadership development by attending the Leadership Academy.

RE: For you, what is the most important thing about APPA?

Baldwin: NETWORKING! NETWORKING AND MORE NETWORKING!

Guillen-Aguilar: The most important thing about APPA is that it strives to stay on the leading edge of technology, planning, and construction within the facilities profession. I am most impressed with the newly established Center for Facilities Research (CFaR).

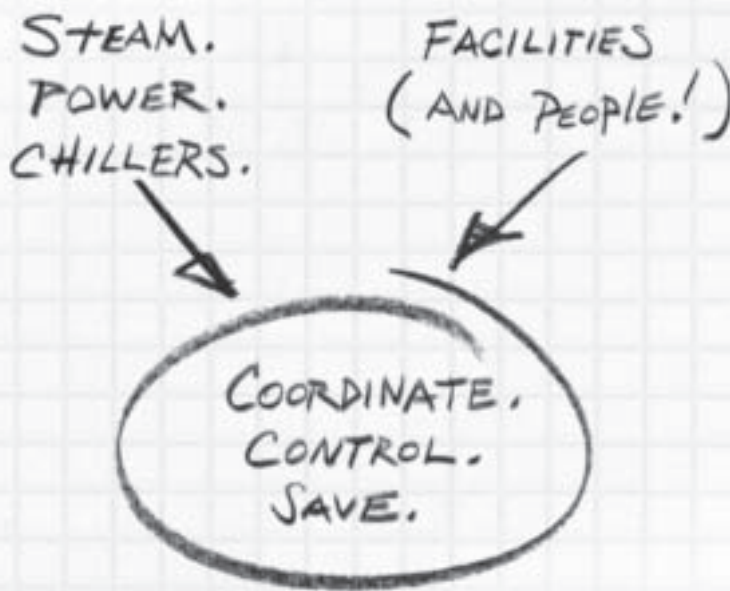
Quinn: Gaining broader perspective of the work and networking with other professionals.

Graham: I would say the education. It is a very unique education. I don't know if it is available anywhere else. I am not aware of any other programs that can actually provide a facilities manager this type of information and training.

Vosevich: The huge resource that APPA is with its network of people around the world and country to help me perform my job better. We don't have to reinvent the wheel because we can get on the listserv or pick up the phone and call a colleague.

Lee-Price: Oh my gosh, THE NETWORKING with your peers from all over the world. The support APPA's faculty provides us within the classroom and outside the classroom is of high value. Lander Medlin has

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become my inspirational hero. She consistently avails herself when and where needed anytime you send out an S.O.S. APPA has afforded me the opportunity to become educated on a global level with issues in our field.

RE: *What is your perception of APPA with regard to women and opportunities for leadership within the organization?*

Vosevich: I have had opportunities to get involved with APPA at various levels. I think it has been very open and receptive in that regard. It's hard in some ways because there are only so many positions in an international organization, but clearly the opportunity is there. It will not be given to you. It has to be earned, whether serving on the education committee or as a regional representative.

Quinn: I feel that APPA welcomes women to the program, and have noticed an increase in female participants over the past five years.

Bailey: I have had a sense for some time that APPA is striving to involve more women in the organization. I think that first impressions can hurt. Many women still see the organization as a men's network, on initial look. Unfortunately, some of these women do not return as a result. APPA needs to find a way to help women feel comfortable from the start so that they will want to return.

Guillen-Aguilar: I believe that more women need to become involved. I think it begins at the management level in encouraging women to join and attend the seminars. After that it is up to the individual. I believe that APPA promotes diversity and its goal is to have a more diverse organization with minorities and women.

RE: *How do you think we might encourage more women to join APPA or to participate in APPA?*

Graham: Mentoring is the key thing—informal and formal. If there's not an informal mentoring process in your organization and with other peer organizations, then you create a formal one. It's a little bit of a training process. The motto of another organization that I belong to is "Lift as you climb."

Guillen-Aguilar: I would like to see each member of APPA reach out and sign up one or more women into the organization. That would be a start or perhaps simply start a mentor program for women using existing board officers to implement the program.

Baldwin: Communicating the need by e-mails, the website, and regional meetings. Another arena is at the Institute for Facilities Management



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where perhaps a presentation of the opportunities for women in the organization could be held. Directors and assistant directors are vital in recruiting and supporting women interested in participating in APPA.

Vosevich: Well, I think that the leadership in the respective organization is responsible. They have to make the opportunity available to people. They have to provide opportunities for them to attend the Forum, the Institute, or APPA meetings. Initially, I had to go and ask for this opportunity.

Also, we have to look throughout our organizations to see who can benefit from APPA. You can just see people blossom by attending any of APPA's educational programs or meetings. I have heard people say that they don't have the money for APPA pro-

grams. I say they can't afford to do without them.

RE: *What would you say to other female facilities professionals about APPA?*

Graham: That it's a wonderful resource. There's a lot of information available to you to help in your job and help you make better decisions, as well as to improve processes and procedures. It seems to me to be a wealth of knowledge and information.

Bailey: Give it a try, and be ready to provide feedback on how the organization can work for you (and we need to provide that opportunity and make it visible for all women who come).

Baldwin: JOIN APPA! Become active if you can. Attend as many regional

meetings as possible. Contribute ideas where needed and strive to make APPA part of your career. APPA is the organization that is focused on our needs as facility professionals and addresses our issues and concerns. APPA prepares us to become better female leaders for the future maintenance of our facilities and the management of our employees.

Vosevich: If you have chosen this for a career, APPA will provide you with the resources you need not only for your current position but for any position you have in the future. It's not just programs ...it's people. 🛎

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