

# WOMEN'S WORK . . . IN WOOD PRODUCTS

BY

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# Women's Work... in Wood Products

*by Janice K. Wiedenbeck*

**Women have opportunities galore in the 1990s in wood products research, education, extension, consulting, manufacturing, marketing, and associations in North America. In the 1980s, the same statement could not have been made. Fewer women were pursuing wood products careers. Those women who were in wood products jobs were experiencing the growth pains that accompany change. This article will discuss how women can be encouraged to participate in skilled wood manufacturing jobs and will share the results of a survey of women in professional forest products positions. It appears that we have made more advances in the professional arena than in the area of skilled jobs in industry.**

## **Opportunities for Women in Wood Manufacturing**

My work takes me into a fair number of small- to medium-sized sawmills and secondary products manufacturers; my observation has been that the male-only workforce still exists today in too many locations in the eastern United States. This is disturbing. It is disturbing because it means females in these (frequently rural) locales have limited job opportunities (both in number and variety). How many other manufacturing industries retain remnants of gender inequity in their hiring practices affecting these same women, or similarly affecting other women in other communities? How many young women are doing work that doesn't suit their interests or abilities who would be competent and enthusiastic sawyers, ripsaw operators, sawfilers, dry kiln operators, paper machine operators, home builders, ...?

When these wood manufacturing plants maintain all-male production workforces or all-male *skilled* production workforces, it means these companies are selecting their employees from a smaller labor pool and surely losing out on competency in some of their selections. It also means that any employees of these mills/plants who do harbor the opinion that "women can't do my job" or "women aren't cut out for the wood industry" will be a long time in shedding this opinion (if ever) since they do not have the opportunity to learn otherwise. If these men interact with women who work at other companies, with wood products associations, with suppliers or buyers, or with state or federal agencies, they may encounter evidence to make them shift their opinions. Alternatively, they may lose out on information, business deals, etc. if they are unable to perceive these external female contacts as wood products equals. Also, any men (or office-bound women) in these companies who do not

understand that women are contributing across the board in the forest products community in North America may engender in their own daughters limitations on their future opportunities.

## **A Possible Solution to Many of Our Workforce Challenges**

"Building a Workforce for the Next Millennium," the April 1998 meeting sponsored by the Ohio Valley Section of the Forest Products Society, spotlighted the current level of anxiety attached to employment issues in the wood products manufacturing industry. Recruiting and retaining high quality employees in many wood products manufacturing sectors has been a challenge for many years, due, in part, to the raw material-finished product pricing structure that yields limited profit margins for many manufacturers. Limited price margins, in turn, limit wages in the more labor-intensive segments of the wood industry. Only higher-margin, higher-productivity segments of the forest products industry have historically competed for employees on a wage basis (e.g., various sectors of the paper industry).

Many members of the North American forest products industry are beginning to realize that wage-rate increases and other employee-development programs that may seem cost prohibitive are in fact cost-saving programs that warrant careful consideration. Wood manufacturers must make sure they consider how much investments in employee programs will reduce other costs of production such as quality losses, yield losses, productivity losses, and administrative overhead, which are all associated with high turnover rates (estimated replacement cost of \$10,000 per employee (2)).

Many wood industry associations are leading the charge on the employee-development front. Much of their current focus is on increasing the pool of trained woodworkers (5). This is an important and valuable investment. Pre-trained employees can step into higher-paying jobs with shorter learning curves and an understanding of what working in wood products manufacturing is all about. Employee-job mismatches are reduced. BINGO! Reduced turnover rates!

The high that the U.S. economy is currently riding has pushed manufacturing output levels across the country to all-time record levels. With manufacturing up, competition for good employees has become intense in many localities. Louisville, Ky. is one such example. Louisville is a major hub for United Parcel Service (UPS). In March 1998, UPS announced it was going to begin hiring new employees from several counties in southern Indiana and then busing them each day to their expanded operations facility. This move was necessary because of the low unemployment in Louisville, which is hovering around 3 percent. Many hardwood lumber and product manufacturers in southern Indiana will now have to compete with UPS for good employees.

Imagine how difficult this situation is for those wood manufacturers whose pool of potential employees is reduced by one-half because they don't attract female employees. Most of these companies are quick to assert they "would hire a girl but none ever apply." What they should be asking themselves is why women are not applying. Companies that would truly welcome female employment applications can examine their individual recruitment practices and work environment to discover what can be done to attract female applicants. There is potential to double or even triple their employee candidate pool because women make up such a large portion of the unemployment rolls in many rural locations.

If it isn't a matter of hiring practices, then female disinterest in applying for jobs in wood products manufacturing probably relates to one of three other factors: 1) the work environment in the plants is unappealing (and this may be the physi-

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**"Recruiting and retaining high quality employees in many wood products manufacturing sectors has been a challenge for many years"**

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cal environment or the social environment); 2) the opportunities for advancement are perceived to be limited (many companies have women sorting and stacking wood but no women in the higher-paid positions); or 3) the women have internalized a gender distinction as to what kind of work is acceptable for women.

For wood products manufacturers to thrive, they must seek to attract the best possible employees. They should learn what the existing perceptions of the industry and their company are. They can conduct focus groups with their employees and with the pool of potential employees in their

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community to discover their priority issues in considering a job, their goals, apprehensions, and pre-conceived notions.

The focus group approach has proven effective in other instances where it has been used to detect attitudes that influence career choices. This is precisely what Virginia Tech did 8 years ago when they decided to aggressively pursue expansion of their undergraduate program in forest products. Several focus groups were conducted to learn about the prevailing interests, goals, and perceptions of various groups of undergraduate students. This information was then used to make changes to the wood products degree programs and course offerings and to tailor the marketing message differently for different groups of potential students (e.g., male versus female, agriculture versus engineering). Results have been outstanding. Virginia Tech's Department of Wood Science and Forest Products undergraduate student enrollment expanded to meet and exceed its ambitious enrollment targets over a span of only a few years (8).

Another component of the Virginia Tech success story that can be transferred to industrial recruitment and retention efforts is the creation of a “recruitment coordinator” position. This position is held by a graduate student, who usually has more in common with undergraduates than a faculty member would. This person is dedicated to making contacts, understanding student concerns and perceptions, answering questions, offering ideas to the department on recruitment issues and opportunities, and promoting the program to build the student application pool.

In similar fashion, the largest companies in the forest products industry have had personnel directors, employee-development directors, and training directors for decades. However, for intermediate-sized companies, only the most progressive, people-oriented companies are beginning to hire specialists to focus on these issues. And many of these specialists are women!

Historically, men have tended to make up a larger portion of the students and employee pool in forestry, wood products, and other agricultural fields, but women make up a larger portion of the trained professionals in human resource development. If a company is looking to improve the diversity of its applicant pool as well as the proportion of women in its workforce, then having a female Director of Human Resources can enhance the recruitment program (much as having a student serve as recruitment coordinator at Virginia Tech enhanced that program).

### **Labor Statistics Confirm the Lack of Female Participation in the Forest Products Industry**

Workforce numbers from Canada and West Virginia support the contention that the current level of participation of women in the wood products industry remains low despite the current low unemployment rate and concomitant loss of potential wood industry employees to other employment sectors across much of North America. These numbers were the first I encoun-

tered on my web search but I feel certain that many others would tell the same story. In West Virginia, women comprise 25 percent of the workforce in "Paper and Allied Products" but only 13 percent of the workforce in "Lumber, Wood Products & Furniture" (3). The majority of the women in this group are in secondary processing or "Furniture." These levels of participation are in line with my observations throughout the Appalachian hardwood production region.

Canadian labor statistics indicate that the percentage of supervisors in logging and forestry who are women is 14 percent (4). The percentage of "Machine Operators and Related Workers in Pulp and Paper Production and Wood Processing" who are female in Canada is reported to be 12 percent. Overall, women constitute 45 percent of the Canadian workforce.

## **Women Have Made Gains in the Forest Products Profession**

The forest products profession has traditionally been a male-dominated group, but thanks to many pioneering women in this area, the landscape is changing. In North America in 1998, there are few "firsts" left for women in wood products to obtain. Following are some of the most significant "firsts" that have been tallied:

- \* Jean Mater was the first active female member of the Forest Products [Research] Society. (Pat Holliday should be recognized as a distinguished second.)
- \* Sue LeVan was the first woman to rise to the level of Assistant Director at the Forest Products Laboratory.
- \* Elisabeth Wheeler was the first female wood products faculty member at a North American university (North Carolina State).
- \* Sarah Smith was the first woman to serve as a wood products extension specialist in the United States (at the University of New Hampshire).
- \* Sue Regan was the first Executive Vice President of a major wood industry

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association (Hardwood Manufacturers Association).

- \* Jean Mater (along with her husband Milton H. Mater) was the first woman to be honored with the Forest Products [Research] Society's Gottschalk Award (in 1973).
- \* Pat Holliday was the first woman to serve on the Executive Board of the Forest Products Society.
- \* Following Elisabeth Wheeler, Audrey Zink and Barbara Gartner were the first female faculty members in the forest products departments at Virginia Tech and Oregon State, respectively, two (of the five) largest forest products departments in North America (there still may be a few firsts to be grabbed at the other major forest products programs).
- \* Barbara Weber, formerly a wood quality scientist with the USDA Forest Service at Carbondale, Ill., was the first woman to serve as Associate Deputy Chief for Research in the Forest Service in Washington, D.C.
- \* Dr. Ann Datko was the first woman to head the USDA CSREES Competitive Grants Wood and Wood Fiber Program.
- \* Bonnie Neff was the first woman selected to receive the "Man (Woman) of the Year in Forestry Award" from the Virginia Forestry Association.
- \* Jan Wiedenbeck will be the first President of the Forest Products Society at the turn of the century.

Obviously this list is not exhaustive, but it does highlight some of the areas where women are making their presence felt.

## Prominent Women in Forest Products Offer Insights on Employment

In the past decade, more women have been entering university forest products programs, and they are emerging with the credentials necessary to gain

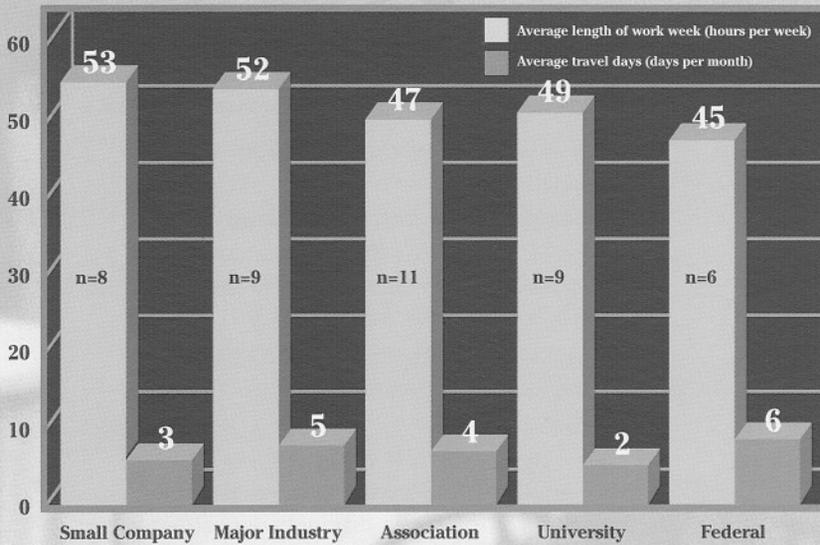
employment in professional jobs in the forest products community. In order to understand the experiences of women in this area, a non-statistical survey was sent to 102 female leaders in wood science and forest products in the fall of 1997. How do women feel about their work in forest products? What job characteristics and environment are

associated with work in different parts of the forest products community? What strategies have led these women to find success in their careers? Are there any gender-specific challenges or benefits that the next generation of new employees should be aware of and prepared for? These questions, and many others, were part of the survey.

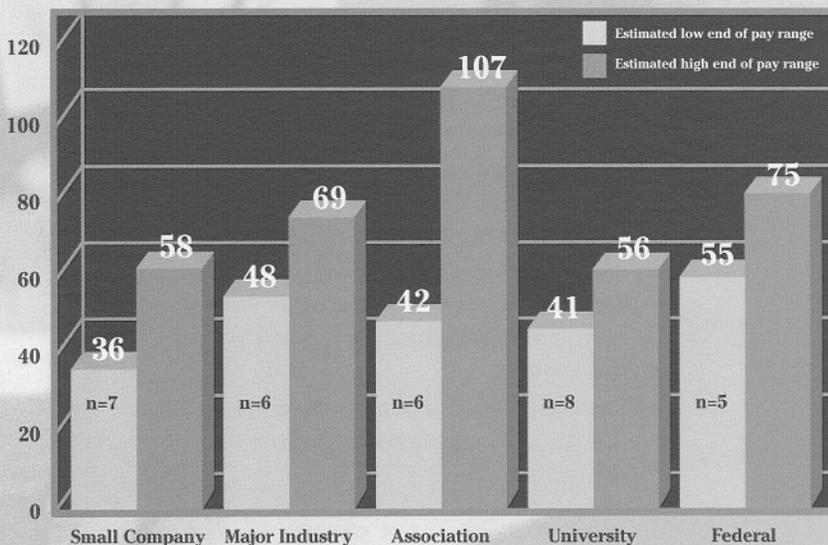
Fifty completed surveys were returned. This response rate (the survey was not short and many respondents wrote extended answers to some of the questions) signifies the high level of interest and commitment that female leaders have in fostering growth in female membership and influence in wood products.

There were six or more responses from female leaders in each of five employment sectors: 1) small companies; 2) major industries; 3) associations; 4) universities; and 5) federal government. A smaller number of responses were obtained from state and local government-employed forest products agents and consultants. Forty-four of the 50 respondents were from North America; the others were from Europe (3 responses), Australia (1 response), and New Zealand (2 responses).

For young women (or men) considering their career options, these responses could be thought-provoking. Perhaps recruiters (university and industry) will find some of these results helpful in promoting their interests. Thoughtful remarks that tell the story more than the numbers



**Figure 1.** Survey results regarding the average hours worked per week and the amount of overnight travel.



**Figure 2.** Respondents' estimates of the pay range of annual salaries of their peer group (male and female).

do were offered by many of the respondents. Quotes (anonymous) excerpted from some of the more insightful remarks give an indication of how different women interpret and handle the challenges and opportunities of being the minority gender in forest products.

Although this survey polled successful females in wood products, it is certain that many of the results could also apply to their male colleagues. We are almost all overworked, but not necessarily underpaid. For example, the results show that the respondents are almost all working long hours (Fig. 1). Comparisons between employment sectors seem to indicate that all the respondents are working considerably longer than the "standard" 40-hour work week, with the average work week for the female managers of small manufacturing companies being the most extreme (53 hours per week on average for eight respondents). However, the salary picture is somewhat brighter (Fig. 2). Since the survey question relating to pay only asked for estimates of the pay range for the respondent's peer group (male and female) no distinction between the pay rates of men and women can be drawn.

Overnight travel is more substantial for the respondents who work for the federal government, major industry, and associations than it is for smaller company managers and university faculty (Fig. 1). Figure 2 shows the pay range estimates for all the sectors. The low end of the small company pay scale is several thousand dollars lower than for the other sectors and the high end of the association pay range is many thousand dollars higher than the average estimates for the other sectors.

Figure 3 shows the most frequent responses, by job sector, when respondents were asked to *Put an*

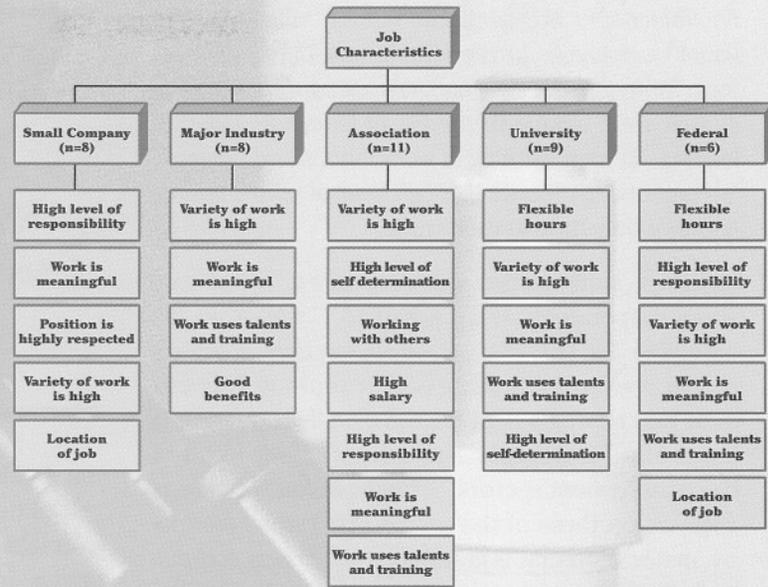


Figure 3. Survey results regarding the most applicable job attributes.

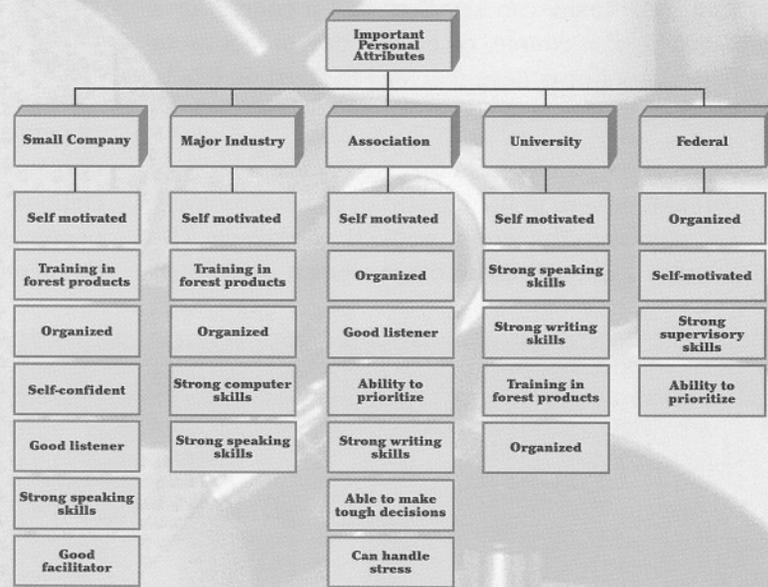


Figure 4. Survey results regarding the personal attributes necessary for job success.

*X* next to the three attributes (from a list of 23) that are most applicable to your job. The order, top to bottom, on these lists reflects the relative frequency of the given response (there were many ties, however). *Variety of work* and *work is meaningful* were popular responses across the sectors, and potential selling points in the recruitment process.

*Flexible hours* are available to and valued by the female employees in the federal and university sectors. *Working with others* and *high salary* were responses that were unique to the list of female association leaders. Women working in associations and university positions appreciate the *high level of self-determination* that they have in their work.

Figure 4 summarizes the responses, by sector, when respondents were asked to *Circle, from the following list (of 22), all attributes that a person should possess to be successful in your job.* It is evident that having a high degree of self-motivation is important for success and advancement in all of the employment sectors. *Training in forest products* appears on three of the sector lists (small company, major industry, and university). *Strong computer skills* only appears on the major industry list, which is surprising and certainly subject to change. Note that organizational skills are considered to be extremely important in all of the sectors. How many can say they had a course, or a segment of a course, or even a day of lecture in high school or college that was focused on teaching organizational skills?

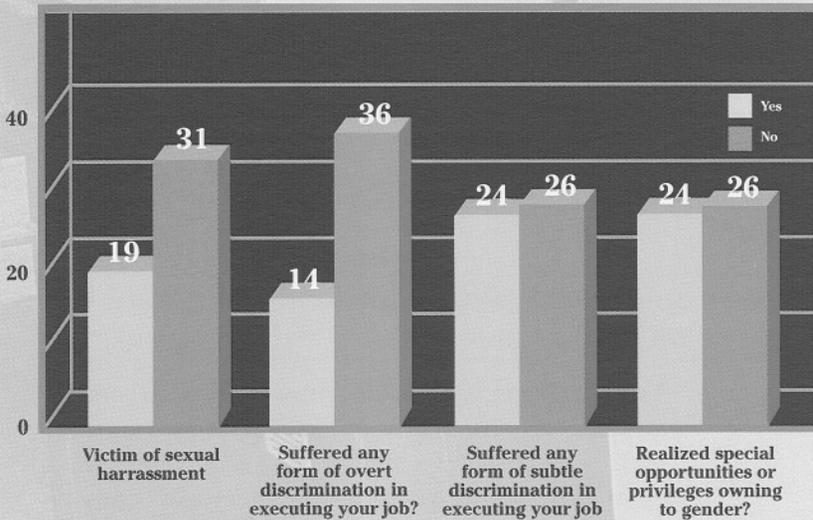
A few other results from this survey are worthy of discussion here in the context of the environment for women in the wood products workplace. The number (proportion) of other women working at

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the business site is important to many of the respondents and should be considered in efforts to retain valued women employees. At small companies, the average estimated female workforce on-site was 20 percent of the total workforce, higher than expected. In large companies (major industry), the female proportion at the respondents' place of work averaged 26 percent. For the association, university, and federal sectors, the percentage of the local office's workforce comprised of female employees was 55 percent, 15 percent, and 29 percent, respectively. In this regard, the association environment is distinct; but many of the associations' offices consist of no more than 2 to 4 people. Respondents were also asked to estimate the percentage of women in their sector who hold positions comparable to their positions. These estimates ranged from a low of 5 percent for small companies and universities to a high of 13 percent for associations.

There were four questions on the survey that related to workplace relations. The sector-based analysis does not point to any between-sector distinctions on these questions. Figure 5 shows the overall results based on all 50 responses.

Almost all of the respondents who disclosed that they had suffered through an incident of sexual harassment on the job indicated that it had happened earlier in their careers rather than recently. Since 35 of the



**Figure 5.** Survey results regarding workplace relations.

50 respondents were between the ages of 35 and 49, it would seem many of these incidents occurred when the woman was not that long out of college. Perhaps we can do more along the lines of discussing these matters with young men and women at the college level so they are sensitive to the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace, aware of the many forms it can take, and prepared to handle the situation if it does arise.

### **Selected Quotes Regarding Working in the Forest Products Community**

The survey was designed to encourage the respondents to provide opinions, in addition to supplying quantitative estimates. These responses are valuable as they provide insight into the experiences of women in the forest products community. Following are some quotes from survey respondents.

#### **Concerning current and future job prospects:**

*"The best opportunities for women are in forest products – especially if they have writing and organizational skills."*

*"Currently, all of our female graduates at the masters and undergraduate level are rapidly employed by the major forest products industries. Ph.D. level students, in general, have a more difficult time finding a job."*

*"The future is good - women are receiving respect for their abilities. Slowly, industry is realizing women have distinct advantages in creating a team environment as the hierarchy concept of organization continues to crumble."*

*"I think most of the opportunities for women will be in the public, academic, or large corporate sectors."*

*"Women in the forest products industry may be increasing in this country, but on a global scale we are even more of an enigma."*

*"Things are changing - future prospects are great!"*

#### **Concerning strategies/tips for success:**

*"I think women need to have the right attitude and be careful not to take on too much in order to prove themselves."*

*"As in any job, for a woman to succeed she must be self-motivated, self-confident, a good listener, and able to handle stress. If she has these, I think she could be a strong supervisor."*

*"Women in the field are gradually becoming more frequent and therefore accepted. Women must have self-confidence, enjoy working with men, and be patient with men's initial reaction until they have the opportunity to prove their competency. Most men are very accepting of women in the field as long as they are competent."*

*"At most industry meetings I attend I am the only woman - it does get lonely sometimes. The industry is still very traditional and white male dominated. Besides being competent and professional, somewhere along the line a woman needs to be sponsored by a white male to be promoted."*

*"It is an extremely hard job that involves weekends and physical jobs. I won't ask anyone to do a job I don't do. I usually work with my employees. I hug them and listen to their problems. I consider myself far more than a boss."*

*"Avoid having a chip on your shoulder about entering a male-dominated field. When you say something, know what you are talking about but don't be overly pushy."*

*"Women in the university seem to be slightly insulated from some of the problems in the workplace. I believe we need to work toward preparation of young individuals for issues not addressed in the science and technology curricula."*

*"I think I have done well in my profession because I do not see myself as a woman in natural resources - I see myself as a person (in natural resources). You succeed on your effort and abilities. The best way to treat people in the workplace is to expect that you will like them and enjoy working with them and they will do the same."*

*"Just do your job with excellence and don't focus on being a woman."*

### **General observations and benefits of being a woman in wood products:**

*"There are increasing numbers of individuals becoming more sensitive to discrimination issues in the workplace."*

*"I work for a great company where I have never heard of any type of discrimination or sexual harassment. Personally, I think in some circumstances it is easier for a woman to gather information when asking a man because men always try to be gentlemen."*

*"It helps if you can drink beer and crack jokes! I work with some great men and women (on my team) - there is a lot of mutual affection and respect. The only rough spot is using a feminine leadership style based on consensus and communication. They're not used to it yet."*

*"There are many good people in this industry, most are very supportive - the few who are not are simply insecure. There are many different directions (a young person) could take - from forest management to manufacturing to distribution to retail to legislative, etc."*

*"Men are more gentlemanly in my presence!"*

*"Working in the international arena (I) find that some countries/cultures are reluctant to accept female authority."*

*"In a sea of males the audience generally remembers the name and message delivered by the other gender."*

*"I am frequently selected for opinion polls!"*

*"One benefit of being a woman in a male-dominated field is you can go to meetings and make it through the women's restroom in short order! No lines to contend with!"*

### **Two International Reports on Women in Forest Products**

#### **Hungary**

The following is excerpted from an article that recently appeared in the journal *Women in Natural Resources*. It was written by Dr. Ilona Peszlen at my

request and is part of a much more substantial article on forestry in the Carpathian region of Europe (7).

"The forestry professions are viewed as difficult for women. They often involve field work and living in rural environments ... Furthermore, the forestry and forest products community is a very closed society; there are certain expectations if someone wants to join the "club," such as hunting, field trips, and social gatherings, which are impossible for a woman with a family.

"Women work instead in administration, management, and production design, but rarely in the production line. More are employed in education, research, and government offices. Regarding the role they play in decision-making and leadership, it can be estimated that only 1 to 2 percent of women graduates will become a senior manager.

"Before the privatization in Hungary, there were a few hundred forest products companies, but these days there are about 10 times that many, so opportunities for women in leadership roles can be expected to increase.

"The representation of female students enrolled in forestry, wood engineering, and wood technology (at the University of Sopron) is around 10 percent.

"The change of regime has decreased the salary gap between men and women, contributing also to the difficulty of women entering the labor market. The gap between incomes of men and women

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decreased from 35 to 20 percent during the last 10 years, and in government offices women fare relatively better - their salaries average only 6 percent lower than their male counterparts."

Many of Dr. Peszlen's comments on the involvement of females in wood products education and manufacturing in Hungary are relatively similar to the current situation in the United States. In the United States, we have only a slightly higher rate of female enrollment in wood science and technology programs than is cited by Peszlen (13% versus Hungary's 10% (1)). A more extended discussion of efforts and results in recruiting women into undergraduate wood science programs is provided by Zink (8).

## Chile

Observations from Carolyn Henri on the apparent lack of involvement of women in forest products in Chile also appeared in the same issue (a Forest Products Focus Issue) of the journal *Women in Natural Resources* (6). Henri, a Ph.D. candidate in Forest Management at North Carolina State University, was employed by Pan-American Forest Products of Valdivia, Chile, as general manager from 1990 to 1994. During this time she traveled throughout Chile interacting with people in the wood products industry.

"One of my major complaints about working in Chile was the lack of female colleagues. In 4 years I met fewer than a handful of professional women in the forest products sector and private forestry sector. I did meet one woman sawmill owner in a small southern town, whose weathered face and rough hands spoke of a lifetime career. Another woman was a furniture buyer in Santiago. The sectors I observed where women did manage to reach more than low-level positions were health care and banking. Fortunately, this situation is slowly changing for the better as more women attend professional institutions and universities and make career-oriented choices."

There are signs that many developing countries are turning to women as contributors in wood products science, education, and manufacturing.

Zink (9), in an overview that accompanied a series of research abstracts written by female graduate students at Virginia Tech University, noted that, on average, women comprise 30 percent of Virginia Tech's Wood Science graduate student population and 50 percent of these students are international students. Currently, Virginia Tech has graduate students from Malaysia, Germany, Switzerland, India, China, Russia, France, Brazil, Canada, and Hungary (9). If the other major graduate programs in North America and Europe are similarly attracting female students from around the world, the coming decade will be the decade of "firsts" for women in many countries.

## A Decade of Growth for Women in the Forest Products Society

It wasn't even 10 years ago that you could go to a Forest Products Society Annual Meeting and quickly spot and name all of the women in attendance (except that year's new face who you quickly made efforts to get to know). This is no longer the case. There were (best estimate based on names in registration list) 14 women in attendance at the 1988 Annual Meeting in Quebec City (I wasn't even a new face yet!). This was only 3 percent of the attendees. At last year's Annual Meeting in Vancouver there were 51 women registered, which represented 9 percent of the meeting's attendees (this is a conservative count based on names; gender-neutral names and unfamiliar international names were counted as males). The growth of female involvement in the Society has been good. In fact, it has likely been more substantial than these numbers indicate because there were many more names on the 1997 meeting registration list for which I could not discern the gender (therefore counted as males).

Another measure of the growth in importance of women to the Forest Products Society and vice-versa is the change in the number of women serving as session chairs, moderators, or speakers at technical sessions (formerly plenary sessions) at the Society's Annual Meeting. In 1988, 3 of 103 (3%) program presenters were women (only 1st and 2nd

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authors were included in the count; female speakers in 1988 were Marcia Patton-Mallory, Sue LeVan, and Mary Jane Wheatley). In 1997, 21 of 254 (8%) Annual Meeting program presenters were women. Again, the accuracy of my count for 1997 is less certain because there were more names for which I could not be certain of the gender. Since the meeting attendance and technical program participation rates match each other so closely, it seems women are finding opportunities to step into visible roles at the Annual Meeting. Certainly, the new format of the Annual Meeting with multiple concurrent sessions gives greater opportunity to our younger members to actively participate. This, in turn, builds the science and technology transfer collaboration/communication network for the younger Society members, and everyone, at a faster rate.

The participation of women as speakers, moderators, and chairs is important not only for the science/information they contribute, but also for the motivation they instill in the newest female members of the Society. I clearly remember this happening for me when I heard Sue Willits speak at one of my first two Annual Meetings. I was impressed that she could speak comfortably in front of such a large audience (and in the old plenary format, the audiences were large ... except on Wednesday afternoon!). And, I was motivated to work toward that level of scientific accomplishment and respect so that I would earn the same opportunity. In this way, we have more quickly fostered the growth in

participation of women in the Forest Products Society and in the scientific community at-large. With our Annual Meeting participation rate for women hovering at 8 to 9 percent, we can continue to help our newest female members of the Society gain comfort and motivation by making a focused effort to invite women to be speakers and moderators whenever there is a good candidate. In this way, we all contribute to the mentoring process for our newest female colleagues.

The final measure of the growth in involvement of women in the Forest Products Society from the last decade until today is the number of women serving the Society as Executive Board members, ad-hoc committee members, section officers, or technical interest group officers. Technical interest group officers, in particular, are in a position to influence the visibility and contributions of their junior colleagues by searching for opportunities to extend to female colleagues invitations to participate as speakers or moderators in the Technical Sessions of the Annual Meeting and at other meetings sponsored by the Forest Products Society. In 1987-1988, 2.6 percent of the Forest Products Society's officers and committee members were female. In 1997-1998, this number has risen, but not as substantially as one might expect. Only slightly over 6 percent of the Society's officers are women in 1998.

There are many possible explanations for why growth in participation of women as officers lags behind growth in participation of women at the Annual Meeting. The first that comes to mind is that our sections try hard to reach out to industry and they do this rather successfully. Section officer rosters and meetings tend to have a higher industry participation rate than do Annual Meeting rosters, and women less frequently hold industry positions that interface with the Forest Products Society (e.g., vice president for operations or vice president for research and development). A second explanation for the lower female participation rates in officer positions is that because there are still relatively few women on forest products faculties and in higher level industry positions, they are asked to participate in so many committees, meetings, programs, and polls that they have to learn to say no. Perhaps some of my colleagues have learned this better than I!

## Women Working in Wood Products Careers: So What's the Big Deal?

Women have many opportunities in the 1990s in forest products research, education, extension, consulting, manufacturing, marketing, and associations in North America but ... women are still not working in the wood sector of North America at rates anywhere near comparable to rates in other employment sectors. We need to learn why this is

the case. Then we can make the changes to our recruitment and work environment that invite female participation. With improvements in the work environment for all employees, and increased female interest, the forest products community's labor pool will expand in size and competency. Women do indeed offer a solution to many of our workforce challenges.

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