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- AUDIO
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- UPCOMING EVENTS
- PAST EVENTS
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- MEDIA CENTER
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LEADERSHIP

Helping Hand for Women-Owned Companies

Written by Elissa Rosen
February 22, 2011

Snapshot: Theresa Schroeder



If, a decade ago, you had asked Theresa Schroeder, director of community affairs for Turner Construction, if she could have seen herself working in this industry, she would have laughed at you. With a career in marketing and public relations for consumer goods, Schroeder didn't even realize that construction firms had marketing teams and advertising. But, after seven years in her current post, she has grown to love her work and has been instrumental in fostering relationships and business among the community as well as educating students through the ACE mentorship program. She also coordinates the Turner School of Construction and has been instrumental in efforts to provide minority- and women-owned companies with opportunities to win business.

But for the mother of four children, Schroeder says the most rewarding part of her job is getting to see a final product that will outlast you. "It's exciting to see a new building going up and knowing you had a small part in the process," she says.

Womenetics: Tell us about your role at Turner Construction.

Schroeder: My duties include managing the company's corporate affairs, minority- and women-owned business enterprise program, equal employment, and educational programs. I also coordinate with business development and assist with strategic marketing programs.

I have been instrumental in Turner's corporate efforts of awarding business to thousands of minority and women business enterprises (M/WBE). Since 1979, Turner's total awards to M/WBEs and involvement with M/WBE joint venture partnerships exceeded \$14.4 billion. I coordinate The Turner School of Construction Management which started in 1969. Each Turner business unit annually coordinates and provides educational opportunities in the construction industry for small businesses.

This is an award-winning and widely recognized program that has received many awards, including the U.S. Department of Labor's EVE Award, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission Award for Best Practices, and the U.S. Department of Commerce's Minority Business Development Agency Minority Advocate Award.

In addition to the minority outreach program, I spearhead our charitable community efforts and manage our ACE Mentoring program.

Womenetics: What is the ACE Mentoring Program?

Schroeder: This national organization mentors high school students in the architectural, construction management, and engineering industries. We bring in professionals to teach students about these fields, and we give them hands-on activities and also provide opportunities for scholarships. We will strategically bring in female professionals, including engineers and landscape architects, to show the girls that women can have a great career in the construction industry.

Womenetics: Have there been any particular students who have specifically benefited from these programs?

Schroeder: Oh yes. One young woman, Kym Mapp, is a great example. After the mentor program, she attended Spelman College and then interned at Turner Construction before becoming a full-time employee.

Womenetics: What is Turner Construction's main initiative in the community?

Schroeder: Turner has many community outreach programs. Through our YouthForce 2020 program we go to elementary schools to:

- Encourage K-12 students to stay in school
- Convince students to consider the construction industry as a viable career path
- Provide guidance, direction, and role models
- Promote diversity (race, gender, and age)

Womenetics: What do you feel is the importance of community leadership? Do you feel it is essential to all companies? Why?

Schroeder: As a Rotarian, I am a firm believer in service above self. A community is what you make of it and you get out of it what you put in. I believe that companies have an obligation to support the surrounding communities. Companies that enrich the community by supporting local charities, schools, and organizations are the ones you want to do business with, and it's the right thing to do.

Womenetics: How can companies create community programs?

Schroeder: By encouraging their employees to be active where they live and allowing them the time an opportunity to be involved.

Womenetics: Do you ever get time for yourself? When you do get a break, what do you like to do to unwind?

Schroeder: My alone time is my commute to work each day. I use this time to make my daily calls to my mom and sister, listen to my favorite CDs, and I try not to have road rage. When I do get a break, I like to spend time with my husband enjoying what we call date night.

Womenetics: What do you like about your job?

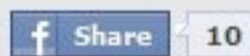
Schroeder: Jennifer Lyles owns FireSign Inc., an Atlanta promotions company. Since becoming a Turner client, FireSign has almost doubled its business. She has told me that she can't believe how much I have increased business for her. That is what is about for me. When we have a project in a small town, we attend trade shows and advertise so that women- and minority-owned companies can come introduce themselves and have a chance to work on a large project that they may never have had the chance to work on before.



Elissa Rosen is a writer and editor who has been on the freelance route after three years at *Atlanta Peach* magazine. She is a regular contributor to *Hauteliving.com* and *944* magazine and is a stringer for *People* magazine. Elissa graduated from Grady College of Journalism at the University of Georgia in 2006 and lives in Atlanta.

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