

# Outstanding Women of the Canadian Sprinkler Industry

By Jo-Ann Gauthier CASA Ontario Regional Manager

The opportunities for women in trades has increased over the past years and more and more women are choosing a skilled trade for their career path. Skilled trade is defined as an occupation that requires specialized skills and knowledge, apprenticeship training and certification of qualification. We are living in a time where specialized trades are in more demand than ever and much has been written about the need to increase the number of women. Women choosing a trade have the potential to change their lives for the better given the benefits and the programs offered such as Federal Bill C-243 and the National Maternity Assistance Program.

As for the Fire Protection Trade, women are still underrepresented compared to other service sector trades, such as Hairstylist or Educational Assistant. The gender mix in skilled trades continues to be unbalanced and Canada's labour market already suffers from a shortage of skilled workers.

Working in the Trades is often hard, physically demanding and women are held to the same standards as men. As you read below, we will be highlighting some of the most confident, determined and brilliant women in the Fire Sprinkler Trade who work as Journey Persons, Business Owners, Inspectors, Sales Executives, and Apprentices. I hope you are as enthusiastic as I am to be working amongst these great women! The women we will speak about are in every province and territory within Canada and we would like to congratulate them on being part of our important and inclusive industry!

There are some great organizations and programs available to help introduce women to the various trades, providing or directing them to training, and some even work with employers to get the experience they need. Careers in Construction is a good website for those seeking more information. <http://www.careersinconstruction.ca/en/why-construction/opportunities-women/organizations-help-women-get-started-construction-trades>

According to a report by BuildForce Canada, several studies have reported that girls are systematically steered away from science, technology and trades careers by the very educational pathways intended to expose them to opportunities in these sectors.

A number of programs are responding to this stereotyping by helping girls to expand their thinking and explore careers in the areas of skilled trades.

**In Ontario - Skills Work! Day Camp** – a week-long day program for kids entering grades 7 and 8 – allows students to explore careers in skilled trades through interactive games, industry tours and entrepreneurship programs. There are 20+ camp locations across Ontario, including specialized camps for girls only.

**In Saskatchewan and Manitoba - Girls Exploring Trades and Technology** - introduces girls in grades 6, 7 and 8 to possible future careers while attending a fun and engaging week-long summer camp that demystifies tools and technology and builds self-awareness and confidence. The girls learn they have options to select occupations according to their own talents, skills and abilities, and are encouraged to think about career options that go beyond the societal norm so they see themselves as a person first, and not a gender.

**In Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador – The Techsploration** – for girls in grades 9 through 12 to explore careers in science, trades and technology. Through more than 20

participating schools, students have the opportunity to meet role models and partake in interactive presentations and workshops.

We collectively, as a Compulsory Trade (in most provinces), in Life Safety need to encourage women to join us in saving lives. If you're a woman interested in the trades, there's nothing stopping you from empowering yourself to put on a hard hat and a pair of steel-toe boots and shatter the stereotypes around careers in the trades.

To read full biographies of our highlighted women, please go to the **CASA website, Ontario section** [www.casa-firesprinkler.org/memberresources/regions/ontario/](http://www.casa-firesprinkler.org/memberresources/regions/ontario/)

## **Ellen Gosney**

### ***Journey Person***



### **Troy Fire & Life Safety Inc.**

#### ***British Columbia***

I chose pipe fitting because of the Women in Trades program/piping opportunities for women (POW). They paid for my tuition to the Foundations Course which included a bit of information about Plumbing, Steamfitting, Welding and Sprinkler Fitting. They also paid my child care, gas and \$12.00 a day for a meal in the cafeteria. Great opportunity and so I took it. At the end of the course we chose which trade we wanted. I chose Sprinkler Fitting because I liked that nobody else chose it and that I would be saving lives :). I have been Sprinkler Fitting for almost 5 years and I am a journey-woman now.

It is not easy work. You must be physically very strong if you install steel. Plastic is definitely easier and lighter. I am sure my coworkers would do the heavy lifting for me, but if I cannot do my job, then I should find a new job. I think that most men are okay with me being there, but they are sometimes skeptical about whether I am strong enough, which I understand and feel lucky to be as physically strong as I am.

My daughter would prefer me to be in an office job where I dress up and fit the typical Mom role. I would not be happy in an office and I could not support my family on that wage. It pays well and the kids are covered 100% for most dental procedures and I get a pension. I enjoy the challenge of this job and I feel like staying active and working hard is a job perk. Although I am only five years in, ask me how this job is physically on my body in a few more years. I believe in the motto, "If you aren't happy then change what you are doing." My ultimate goal is to run a job. After that who knows what I will do. I am just riding the wave and loving the ride.

## **Maria Osetsky** ***Sprinkler Systems Sales Representative***



### **Johnson Controls Inc.** ***Alberta***

I started in the sprinkler trade back in 2000. I was tired of being at home alone while my partner worked out of town so I asked him to get me hired on as his apprentice. I sent my resume to a Fire Protection Company and they hired me. I'm pretty sure it helped that I had previous experience in the trades as a 1<sup>st</sup> year carpenter and a 2<sup>nd</sup> year instrument mechanic.

My partner and I worked all over Northern Alberta on many different types of jobs. I met a lot of interesting people and always found the guys on the job sites to be quite helpful. Oh, occasionally you would get a grumpy guy who would convey his opinion about a female working in a "man's" job but, as soon as he became aware that I was good at my job he would begrudgingly concede that I belonged there. It definitely took time for me to build up the muscle to be able to keep up with the guys but by the time I was a second year I could carry my end of a length of 6" pipe. One of the great things about the physical work was that a day on the job was my workout. I was in the best shape of my life! Now that I've been in the office for almost 12 years I couldn't go back. My body isn't strong enough anymore.

One of the more interesting places I worked was the Ekati diamond mine in the North West Territories. It was later on in my career in the field, and I was a supervisor. I had 6 sprinkler fitters and 2 electricians working for me. To get there we had to fly into Yellowknife, charter a plane, land on an ice runway to get to the mine. My shift was 3 weeks in and 1 week out, 12-hour night shifts. I didn't see the sun at all for those three weeks because we were there during winter. The camp reminded me of the hotel in the movie *The Shining*. We were in the middle of nowhere with nothing but snow around us, not even any trees. Because we were on night shift, the halls of the camp were deserted when we were up. Some of the guys would try and scare us saying the Inuit Ghosts were haunting the mine shafts because they were mad we were stealing their diamonds. The best thing about working up north for 8 months was that I was able to save up for the down payment for my house.

I worked for Gisborne until 2006 and then I was approached by Brent Campbell of Troy Life and Fire Safety to work in their office as an estimator. This was one of my long-term goals but I wanted more experience in the field! I figured I better take the opportunity while it was there so that's when I started estimating. I worked for Troy for 5 years and then applied for a job at Tyco as a Service Sales Estimator. They hired me and I've been there ever since.

I've never been married and I don't have any children so my job has never affected my family. As an Estimator, I can put in some long hours but I have the flexibility of working at home if I want to. All in all, the fire sprinkler trade has been very good to me. Thank you for reading my story!

## **Samantha Lucko**

### ***Sprinkler Sales & Service Representative***



#### **Troy Life & Fire Safety Ltd**

##### ***Manitoba***

I have worked in my current role for six years but have been in the industry for almost ten. I started as an Administrative Assistant for our sprinkler division in January 2009, completing payroll, entering purchase orders, and typing inspection reports. I quickly moved into a Service Coordinator role. I didn't know it at the time, but these first few years at Troy were very important because I learned a lot about NFPA 25 requirements while typing inspection reports. I deciphered handwritten notes from the inspectors and determined whether or not each item was a sufficient deficiency to leave written upon a report and which code to reference. This was at a time when the industry was moving away from inspecting according to NFPA 13, and following NFPA 25 instead. It involved a lot of reading and research with the codebook, which resulted in my becoming quite knowledgeable with common codes.

Fast forward a couple years. I had the opportunity to cover a maternity leave position as PMA Sales Rep for one year. I was glad to have this opportunity to learn more and move up the ranks. At the end of the 1-year term, I had learned so much that my manager, Robert Ash, moved me into a new position: Sprinkler Sales. He taught me how to quote public tenders for sprinkler renovations. This was a new ball game for me. I was really comfortable with NFPA 25, but now I had to learn how to use and understand NFPA 13. I took a couple of basic courses through Seneca online to brush up on my sprinkler knowledge but most of what I learned came from the fitters themselves. Each contract that I was awarded helped build my confidence.

I am not a sprinkler fitter and sometimes this is difficult for me when quoting deficiencies and renovation work because I don't have a vast hands-on technical background to reference. But here's the thing; I know what I know, and I know what I don't know. I know exactly who to ask and where to find the information. I have no issues in admitting defeat on a certain subject. Over the years I have built great relationships with the fitters that work for us and this is key for me. I spend a lot of time on the phone with them asking questions about how they think this valve should be installed? How long does it take to drain this system? Sometimes I bring them to a site visit with me to make sure that no information is missed. This helps me to be successful at my job. I hope they know how much they've helped build my knowledge and success over the years.

I still remember very specifically a meeting I attended around 7 years ago. I was bidding on a large PMA sprinkler contract. All the contractors were invited to attend a Q&A type session with the customer. I came prepared because this was my first meeting in a setting like this. I asked a lot of questions about the scope of work in comparison to the NFPA 25 code. With every question that I asked, I could see the bewildered looks on the faces of the male contractors in the room. Some of them were sprinkler fitters who had been in the industry for many years. They hadn't even thought of the questions I asked and seemed surprised that I knew enough to ask. One of them even came up to me at the end of the meeting and told me he was impressed with my knowledge and how I carried myself. I was so proud of myself for handling the meeting so well.

This memory has always stuck with me as a reminder that I'm completely capable of talking shop with the men at the table who have been in the industry for a lot longer than I have.

There are multiple times where I've shown up to a job site visit to review the building for a public tender and as I'm standing with all the contractors decked out in my steel toes, hard hat, vest, holding my clip board, waiting for the project manager to show up, some of the other contractors on site assume that I'm the safety or contract coordinator. Their first thought is not that I'm one of the trades contractors gathering information to bid the job.

As a woman in the construction industry I have experienced my fair share of ignorant comments, being stared at on a jobsite, not being taken seriously by general contractors, being laughed at by competitors, asking to speak with a male counterpart instead. Yes, I've experienced these things, but they helped shape me into what I've become today. It helped me build a backbone. It drove me to want to learn more about the industry so that I could hold my own at that next project meeting and prove them wrong. I've met some amazing people over the years who believe in me and my abilities. I love nothing more than when a contractor calls me and says, "so-and-so recommended I give you a call because they had a really wonderful experience with you and your company on that last project". It means I built a good relationship and left a lasting impression. Of all the things Robert has taught me over the years, it's that relationship building is the most important of all.

On the personal side. My husband, Nick and I are high school sweethearts. We've been together for 13 years, married for 7. He is a sprinkler fitter who also works for Troy. He is the Superintendent for our Contracts Division. It's inevitable that we talk about work a lot. Sometimes I will bring drawings home and he will help me figure out the sprinkler spacing. Sometimes he will ask me to review an email before he sends it out to a customer. He has played a huge part in my knowledge growth, as he's usually the first person I call when I have a technical question I need answered.

We have a four-year-old daughter named Avery. I was planning to work until the very end of my pregnancy but plans never usually work out the way you want them to –something I've grown to learn working in this industry. Due to preeclampsia, she was born 13 weeks early weighing 1.9 pounds. It was terrifying and amazingly wonderful all at the same time. She spent three months in the NICU before we were able to take her home. Fast forward, now she's four years old and you would never know that she was a preemie.

Working in this industry specifically has not affected my family life but being a mom and working full time while your husband is often away working out of town is a hard gig. Any working parent can tell you that it's difficult to juggle all of life's demands when you have little ones at home to worry about. There are times I've had to bring Avery to work with me because she was sick, I couldn't send her to daycare, Nick was out of town, I had no one else to watch her, and I had a huge tender closing that day. Sometimes you just do what you have to do to keep the wheel spinning. I'm very lucky that I have a village of family and friends to help me out, and they probably have no idea how much I appreciate them.

Future goals for me are to move up the ranks into management. I worked really hard to get to where I am today, from the bottom up to my sales position. I know a lot about the business and how everything functions. I love working for Troy and appreciate all the opportunities that they have given me along my career path.

Thank you to CASA for giving me this opportunity to share my story and shed some light on women in the sprinkler industry.

**Renee Saltiss (nee Fenez)**  
***Test & Inspect Sales Representative***



**Vipond Inc.**  
***Manitoba***

Six years ago, I took a leap and decided to do something completely different and new. My family has been extremely supportive right from the beginning and they have been very proud of the knowledge I have gained and the love I have for what I do.

Working and meeting with customers is part of my job and the job I love the most. My main goal is to be the person that they trust to put their safety first. I strive to make sure that my customers know that I am here to help them and will do all the leg work required to make their life easier. Inspections are so important and will always be constant; therefore, there is always something to do. I love the diversity, fast pace and challenges that come with maintaining all the various sprinkler systems in buildings. Between fire codes and new innovated systems, I am continuously learning and gaining knowledge, which is very important to me.

At the end of the day, a satisfied customer is my ultimate reward. There are many people who are very unfamiliar with sprinkler systems, how they work and what is required to make sure that they function properly. So, gaining their trust with the safety of people's lives is extremely important to me. Some customers may not be expecting a woman to walk through the door so I sometimes have to prove my ability and work a little harder at letting them know that I can handle their requests over and above their expectations. Luckily, I am always up for the challenge!

My amazing colleagues make it easy and I have their support. They are extremely helpful and always willing to offer explanations, advice and have discussions whenever I need guidance. My wonderful managers continuously give me encouragement and motivation to become better.

I am a recent mother of a beautiful baby girl born in July of 2017. Now that my husband and I have brought our baby girl into this world, I will be continuing to work hard towards success to be a role model for her, to be living proof that you can do and be good at whatever you set your mind to.



## **Katherine Tipping**

### ***Inspection Coordinator***



### **Viking Fire Protection**

#### ***Ontario***

I have been working in the Fire Protection Industry for just over 15 years now. When I meet new people, they ask what it is that I do for a living. When I say that I am an Inspection Coordinator at a fire protection company, they always ask why I chose this field as a Career. I tell them a little bit about what it was that got me into this Field.

When I was younger, I used to watch my dad on the computer in the basement of our house while he made up tests and was correcting tests for an AutoCAD class he taught at Seneca College in the Fire Protection Course. I thought it was very interesting and found myself testing myself to see if I could answer them correctly. At that moment I told myself I was going to go to school for that. As I grew up and I entered grade 12, I decided to change my career path and apply to College for Massage Therapy. I received a letter back from Fleming College and I was #5 on their waiting list. As I waited for another letter to say I have been accepted into the course, my parents and I were talking and my mom asked me, "Why don't you apply to Seneca? You were always interested in what your dad was doing".

I thought about it and asked my dad to see if I could get an Application for the January Semester. From there I chose my Career Path in Fire Protection and have no regrets.

When I graduated College in 2002, it took me a few months to find a job. One day while I was working with a co-worker at Harvey's, she mentioned to me that her mom was friends with a family that had a family business in fire protection. I applied and in October 2002 I started my Career as a Service Coordinator in the fire protection industry. In this position, I scheduled annual inspections, quoted inspection deficiencies and typed up inspection reports so they would be ready to be sent to the customer. I also took service calls and dispatched technicians. In 2007, I found myself to be at a point that I needed more of a challenge and wanted to get more into Sprinkler Design as I had loved the design courses at Seneca. I applied for another job and was hired in February 2007. With this change, I learned a lot about sprinkler systems and the various codes for installs. A lot of the design work that I was working on was very repetitive and I got to the point where I missed the Inspection/Service side of Fire Alarms and Sprinklers. This was my sign that I knew where I wanted to be. I started looking for positions and it took a while before I found a company and a position that I wanted to apply for. Finally, an opening came up and I applied to Viking Fire Protection in 2011 for the Inspection Coordinator's position. In November 2011, I was hired and have been working here since. I absolutely made the correct decision and I could not be happier.

As an Inspection Coordinator at Viking Fire Protection I have many tasks assigned to me. I am the Supervisor for 11 Technicians and 3 Office Personnel. I am their support if they have any questions, concerns or need guidance on what to do if there is an issue at a site. I also quote for new business for inspections or repairs. I review the inspection and repair reports when the technicians hand back their completed paperwork and then create the invoices for the customers.

A couple of years ago I was asked to be a part of the National Inspections Team. My Manager and I worked closely with our other offices to build the Viking Fire Protection Inspections right across Canada. Being in the position I am in, I have been able to increase my confidence level, thanks to my Manager Steve Spearing. He has been a huge support for me since day 1 along with my co-workers. He has allowed me to spread my wings and fly with the Inspections Department.

**Danielle Pearson**  
***Account Manager***



**Vipond Inc.**  
***Ontario***

I have been in the industry for 17 years now and started my career as a Receptionist in the Inspections Department. I am a mother of two grown children.

I believe partnerships form with your customer from the very beginning. When you first quote the inspection and then are chosen to be their life safety provider for all their needs, you gain intimate knowledge of your customers buildings, their business, their people, their problems and most certainly their needs.

I've had the opportunity to meet and work with great customers which has allowed me to go into buildings that I would not normally get a chance to go into.

Service is driven from inspections. It's ground zero!

I've worked with some great people along the way who have taught me so much about Fire Protection and offered tremendous guidance. The technical complexities of the industry have not always been easy but there is always someone willing to sit down to explain the how's and why's and, even better, draw me a picture so I can visually see how something works, which I find to be helpful. I've saved many of those drawings over the years to refer to for future reference.

I absolutely love the people I work with along with the great customers.



## **Joanne Reid** ***Estimator***



### **Forest City Fire Protection** **Ontario**

My dad and I lived in Manchester (UK) until 10 years ago when I moved here. Through school I always knew I wanted to work in the construction industry. My dad was an Engineer, and, as kids, he used to take me and my sister to his job sites on the weekend. We would follow him around attentively or sit in the trailer and colour in old blue prints (We were 7-8yrs old). After High School it took a couple of years to figure out which direction I wanted to go, and I enrolled in several CAD courses which I absolutely loved. That led to 3D CAD, which led to an HNC in Engineering (or Diploma).

I have been in the Sprinkler / Fire Protection Industry for the past 5 years; however, I have worked in the Building Services Industry since 1998 (HVAC, Domestic Water, Electrical and Fire Protection). In Manchester, most of my experience was working as a Services Coordinator which later became known as BIM coordination. In 2013 I applied to APEX Fabrication & Supply. I was employed as a Fabrication Coordinator; compiling bill of materials for Sprinkler installation, listing pipe and fittings for fabrication.

Having over 15 years' experience in Building Services, the move over to Fire Protection wasn't too daunting. Plus, this was a good introduction to the industry. Understanding and translating Architectural, Structural and Service drawings was half the battle. I was offered an Estimating position at FCFP about 3 years ago. The rest has been an interesting and educational transition.

After moving to Canada 10 years ago, I noticed straight away that there were more women in the construction industry than back in the UK. I worked for an Engineering Consultant for a short period where the majority of my colleagues were female which was so nice to see and a far cry from back home.

Back in my college days I was the only female on my diploma. Even though I thoroughly enjoyed it, sometimes I felt a little out of my depth. One of my tutors had a very old-school opinion of 'women in the industry' but this only made me more determined to do well.

As Services Coordinator it was an uphill battle working with the guys on site. BIM wasn't a new concept but it was being enforced more and more on our job sites. Contractors couldn't just install their services wherever they wanted, they had to follow our blue prints, or else the whole BIM process was pointless... To be told all that by a woman went down like a lead balloon!!

From those experiences, I learned I had to be twice as confident when speaking to contractors and clients to make sure I am taken seriously. There are still some tough nuts to crack, but generally I think I am well received.

To work in the industry as a whole is very satisfying and to see projects through from estimating, to the design stage, through to completion and handover, plus all the challenges in-between is awesome to know you had a part in it. Plus, the odd acknowledgement that you've done a good

job goes a long way. There is always something new to learn... every day is a school day. No two jobs are the same, so it's far from repetitive. It helps to work with supportive co-workers.

## **Jennifer Gourley** ***President***



### **Harding Fire Protection Systems** ***Ontario***

I officially joined Harding Fire in 2005, 13 years ago.

The industry is in my blood. I was literally raised in the sprinkler industry. I never expected though, to follow in the footsteps of my father. My dad loves the sprinkler industry and has always shared his passion with us. I learned at a young age, to always “look up” when I walk in a building. I grew up watching videos of him in burn trailers, which I found fascinating and frightening all at the same time. I explained to all my young friends that I wasn't talking about watering the lawn when I spoke about my dad's job, and eventually, the company he started.

But despite all the passion my dad shared with us, I, like most children of entrepreneurs, had my own wings to stretch, and I didn't start my career in fire protection. I began in marketing/communications and spent 10 years working in both the private and public sector, managing my own projects and teams.

After my son was born, I knew I was ready for a change. My dad and I decided I would come to work in the family business. I was looking to balance my career and family, and my Dad's company was growing and needed some help. I had skills I'd attained in the first decade of my career which ended up being a natural fit for the company. It was like I'd planned this path all along – I only wish I could have had that foresight and could take credit for the natural progression that lead me back to the family business.

My Dad has now retired, and I've purchased the business from him. I find myself back at conferences I'd attended as a child, with my own kids in tow. I'm always pleasantly surprised to find there are several of us in this industry who come from multi-generational fire protection families. There's just something about this industry!

First, when it comes to my parents, and my Dad in particular, I think and hope that he is proud that I'm continuing on with the work he's done for the last 55 years. As much as I'm continuing the legacy of the company he created, and the reasons he created it are still in my DNA, I'm also involved and passionate about the industry as a whole. He loved this industry, and was involved in lobbying, teaching, and promoting it at every turn of his career. I am also very passionate about the industry, and I'm getting involved where I can as well, in various CASA committees.

This is an incredible industry. Like I mentioned, there are so many multi-generational families. There is something special in this industry. The people are all incredible people, and I think that is because there is a shared passion for making the world a safer place. I think the importance of

the work we do, and the gravity of how important it is to do it right, leads to the passion people have for the fire protection industry. There is certainly a comradery I haven't experienced in the industries I previously worked in.

I have been married to my husband for 18 years and he works in this industry with me as well. He is involved more in the consulting and emergency management side of the business. I have two children – a son who is 12 and a daughter who is 11.

For my kids, I think that it's had a big effect on them. First, they have a very interesting view of 'work'. They only know what a family business looks like – where the whole family works together. I think that has taught them some interesting lessons. They also know that this is important work that we do – that we all have a responsibility to try to make a difference, and that Mommy and Daddy are doing that in our work. I've shared burn trailer videos with them, and I know they've talked about it with their friends, etc.

Maybe most importantly though, my kids are seeing that anyone can do any kind of work. They are aware that I'm working in an industry where there are few women, and when we go to conferences, that I'm the only 'Mom' that's going to the meetings. I think that it's teaching them a great lesson.

I've had a lot of good support working in a male-dominated work environment. I think the reaction that I most often get is still surprise – people aren't expecting a woman president in the fire protection industry.

I think that we can do a better job of promoting the industry to young people. I think that not enough young people consider working in the trades, and especially on the inspection side of the business, there is a lot of work that may appeal to those who wouldn't normally consider a trade.

As an organization, we have goals for continued growth and I would like to continue to get involved in initiatives to help further and promote the industry and plan to continue to be an active member of CASA.

I hope that we can encourage more young people to join us in the trade, especially young women.

## **Cindy Scott** ***Service Manager***



### **Tyco Integrated Fire & Security** ***Ontario***

I am a proud Nova Scotian, who relocated to Ottawa about 20 years ago. I still have strong roots in Nova Scotia but call Ottawa my home now. My husband Michel and I have been married for 17 years and I have three amazing stepchildren, and two beautiful granddaughters who are the absolute loves of my life. Fire protection is a big part of our family. My husband, stepson and brother-in-law all work in the industry. I always manage to keep busy when I am not working. I have many hobbies and love to spend time at our family cottage in Quebec.

I have worked in the fire protection industry for 35 years, all but two of those years with the same company. I did not intentionally look for a career in fire protection. After finishing a post-secondary business program, I was interviewed for a secretarial position with a company called Scotia Sprinklers. I was hired as their secretary and I was the first woman to work in the office which I think was as much a culture shock for me as it was for them since the company was made up of only men. They welcomed me on their team and I soon moved into a service coordinator role and started to learn more about sprinkler systems and the fire protection trade. I quickly realized that I wanted to learn more. I approached the Union about attending the sprinkler apprentice training classes. The training was a mix of classroom and hands on, and I was able to participate in all aspects of the training including: trimming valves, threading and grooving pipe, and welding. It was never my intent to become a sprinkler fitter, I just wanted to learn more about the sprinkler business that I was working in.

When I moved to Ottawa, I started in a sprinkler sales role. I was apprehensive about sales at first, but soon loved getting out to meet people and see clients. The sprinkler fitters I worked with helped me a great deal in my sales career. They always found time for me when I had questions.

My company has changed names many times over the past 35 years, and I have taken on many roles from administration to sales to management. Tyco's most recent merger was with Johnson Controls. I have been fortunate enough in my career to always be fully supported by my managers and my direct reports. I have had many mentors over the years who have challenged me and asked me to work outside my comfort zone. Johnson Controls embraces diversity and promotes women in trades and in management roles.

I would not change my career choice for any other career. Working in the fire protection industry is always challenging, ever changing, and I am always proud of what I do. After all, we save lives!

## **Kathryn Young** *(this issue cover)* ***Sprinkler and Fire Protection Installer***



### **Stumpf Fire Protection Ontario**

I have been working as an SFPI since 2010. I was working landscaping with a close friend when my mom mentioned a course to me through Conestoga College, which was called Women in Skilled Trades. I wasn't sure about it at first but with no direction in life as to what I wanted to do as a career, I figured why not?

Completing that gave me my first year of a carpentry apprenticeship, so straight out of school I started with Jamesway Construction. Eventually that turned into mostly concrete forming (ICF) and I wasn't really enjoying it anymore. I did; however, at that point know that I loved working out in the field and working with my hands so I asked around to the different trades; what do you make (\$)? What are your hours? Benefits? Pension? Also, about each trade in general.

The sprinkler trade stood out immediately and it was when I asked them if they thought I could and the answer "NO" came back, it was then that I knew that this is what I wanted to pursue.

I got the opportunity to start with a local company almost right away and my journey began. The union has always been extremely helpful in my success. They were always available if I had any questions or concerns. You really develop a strong relationship with the people who work at the union hall and, of course, the teachers when you go for schooling. You feel part of a family, a family who wants to see you succeed.

As in any career as "the new guy" you do have to prove yourself to the others. Being the only woman, I definitely felt that extra pressure, but only from myself not from the guys. I knew I was a very hard-working individual so I did that day in and day out just like every guy who worked there. They were all very helpful in terms of offering tips and hints of ways to do things. Eventually, I definitely became part of the "crew".

The physical part of the job was definitely the part that everyone, including me, was unsure I could do. Again, as in any workplace, you adapt and learn ways of doing things that work for you and help you get the job done. The guys taught me good ways of lifting the pipe so I didn't get hurt (as they did with all the guys) so I was able to carry anything I needed to. That being said I'm not going to be put on a job that's all 6" or 8" pipe alone but then again neither would most of the guys.

What I love about the trade is seeing everything come together, the system(s), the valve room...etc. I love the fact that you are always learning, on different jobs from different people. I love the atmosphere of the worksite. Everyone working together. I absolutely love the feeling after a long hard day. You walk off the job site with your crew sweaty and tired knowing you guys all just killed the day. This is so not right to say, but it's like you all just went to war together. Lol! It's the best feeling ever!

Halfway through my apprenticeship I got pregnant. Scariest time of my life; however, I had to "woman up" and raise my little man on my own, and I was still able to get back into the trade and achieve my goal of becoming a sprinkler fitter. I was able to be a single mom raising a baby and finish my schooling because of the support of my family and friends along with the constant support from local 853 and the company who was willing to take me back after my maternity leave and being out of the game for nearly 2 years.

To those people I owe my life and of course, my little boy Owen who gave me the inspiration and drive to continue through every obstacle life threw at me during that time. It was far from easy to balance life and work but he is the reason I am here today. I went through things in my personal life nobody should ever have to experience but my bruises made me stronger and my son made the fight worth it.

Although I have been in the trade for about 7 to 8 years, I feel as though my career has just begun. I still have a lot of learning to do and a lot of experience to gain. I would say a big goal of mine is to make sure that all of the fitters who have taught me and inspired me with their knowledge of the trade will one day say, and be proud to say " I taught her, I worked with her and she is good at what she does."

I love this trade and every aspect of it and I am excited to hopefully make a good name for myself in this industry.

## **Gen Cumpson**

### ***President***



## **Drapeau Automatic Sprinkler Corp.**

### ***Ontario***

I have been in the industry for 27 years and being born a Drapeau, fire sprinklers are in my blood. Since 1991, I have been very fortunate to work with my dad every day along with many other family members employed at Drapeau Automatic Sprinkler Corp. We are a family run business!

Why am I in this trade? This question is easy, my Dad. I am the second oldest of seven siblings; four of us are in the fire protection industry. I grew up in fab shops, job sites, and I remember having a company sticker on my back from age 9. If you were on a site with my Dad, you knew where to return me.

My family members are all proud of me I can honestly say the only effects of what I do are positive ones. There are countless rewards and what I love about our trade is that Sprinklers do in fact save lives, why would you choose any other profession? Our industry is small, they are brothers and now they are sisters too.

That being said, it does not come without its own challenges. Keeping up with codes, standards, new install procedures and system maintenance are a few and at Drapeau we are always striving to be the best at what we do.

I would like to see schools focus more on trades and not only degrees and diplomas, with the baby boomers getting ready to retire and generation X moving into inspections, there is a hole in the installation and service pools.

I married a plumber of all things, 25 years and counting. We have an unusual family to say the least. We have two children together and many others that refer to us as their parents. One of those children has two children of her own they call us their Narnians (Guardian is a tough word for a two-year-old). We are hobby farmers by night with goats, chickens, and kids.

My Dad is the reason I believe that a female in a male-dominated industry means nothing these days as long as you get results. I've never asked anyone in our industry, male or female, for support and didn't get it. There may be dinosaurs out there, they aren't intimidated, and they are not intimidating. That was the past. All you have to do is your job well, and you will get the respect you deserve.

With three new partners in our company, the next five years will be fun. They are not new to the company, they are; however, new to management. I hope to use the next ten years to help our team grow and uphold the legacy our family name represents.

## **Kim Osborne** ***Branch Manager***



### **Classic Fire Protection Inc.** ***Ontario***

My name is Kim Osborne and I have been part of the Fire Protection Industry for over 25 Years. I am not able to say I chose this Industry, it somehow chose me. Finishing High School at the young age of 17, and, joining the Military did not exactly give me a billboard saying "Hire this 21-year-old Girl" for anything!

At 21, I was introduced to the world of Fire Alarms with Edwards GS and hired to type the best inspection reports you would have ever seen. This did not last long; however, as I am not a poster child for minding my own business. I inserted myself within all the other departments and was the first to offer anyone assistance. (Anything not to type more reports).

So only armed with a drive to get out of what I had to do, I did everything. No phone rang twice, no customer called twice. If I didn't understand, I asked. Within, 3 months, I was offered the Position of "Emergency Service Co-ordinator". For the next 3 years, I fell in love with an industry.

After 4 years, my journey with Edwards ended. All this Fire Alarm knowledge and nowhere to go. I was Heartbroken.

I spent the next 4 years being introduced vaguely to the sprinkler Industry with 4 different sprinkler outfits. Anyone around my age would remember the sprinkler takeovers in the mid-to-late-nineties. I had learned nothing but how to shuffle the paperwork and get the customers the information they needed. With my Love for the Industry almost lost, and yet another company takeover, I was out of a job again.

At this point in my career, unbeknownst to me, I walked right into a world of opportunity when I joined Classic Fire Protection. I finally found a company willing to invest in me, as I was willing to invest in them. Fire alarm being my strength, how would I ever fit into the world of sprinklers? Well let me tell you, it wasn't easy. So again, not minding my own business, I jumped right back into the fire so to speak.

The hardest part of this transition was convincing my mostly male colleagues that I could thrive in their industry, not as an administrator or a paper pusher but as an equal in operations. I could, and I would bring something to the table to become part of their success.

The next 5 years of my working life consisted of the adoption of 14 full time working men who were about to open up a whole new world for me, my Sprinkler Fitters. After a year of pushing and shoving between us, we created a bond. I listened and they taught. They would not just tell me what they needed, they told me why they needed it. They would go as far as to show me. I tagged along on their calls and saw firsthand what they were up against. The more I asked and showed interest, the more they shared. For me, they worked so hard to make me part of their industry.



While far from being a fitter, little by little, I was learning, what is a Sprinkler System? Why do we need a Sprinkler System? How do you maintain a Sprinkler System? Best of all, How do I fix this Sprinkler System? I could even assist my fitters without asking what they needed. I was becoming a representative for our Company and the Sprinkler Industry.

This brings me to where I am today. With all the mentoring over the years from our Road Crew, Sales Personnel, Design Team and right up to the Top of the Management Chain, I had been granted the awesome opportunity of operating a West End Branch for our organization and have been for the last 9 years.

As I said, I did not choose The Sprinkler Industry, it chose me and I could not imagine doing anything else. Protecting lives and Saving Lives has become my passion. My advice to women who are interested in our industry...Go For It. You get what you put in to it.

## **Charline Godin**

### ***Estimator/Project Manager***



## **Troy Life & Fire Safety Ltd.**

### ***New Brunswick & Prince Edward Island***

After working 10 years in a call centre, I finally decided to return to college and pursue a career in Civil Engineering Technology. Deciding to return to college 11 years after graduating from high school was not an easy feat; however, with hard work and determination, I graduated with honors. I chose Building Systems as my option which allowed me the opportunity to learn about the buildings integrated systems such as electrical, ventilation, plumbing and fire protection. I was fortunate that during my 2 week work attachment (1 month prior to graduation), I was offered a job with Troy Life & Fire Safety Ltd as a Designer / Project Manager; therefore, fire protection became my new career adventure. I held that position for 2 ½ years and decided to move into sales. I've been the Estimator / Project Manager for Troy Life & Fire Safety Ltd. for the past 7 ½ years.

I've always been career oriented, and truly enjoy working as well as learning new things. The fire protection industry has a lot to offer. There is more to fire suppression than just wet or dry sprinkler systems; it's always evolving. Some days I get to learn something new about a product or a different special hazard system. Other days, it's trying to determine how best to protect a different type of building and/or environment. There is always something to learn which I find very interesting and satisfying. I am also very grateful that I get to work in the office as well as out in the field by performing site visits. It is definitely the best of both worlds.

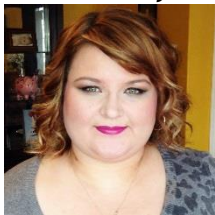
Finding my place in a male dominant world wasn't as difficult as I expected. I've definitely had some challenges but nothing I couldn't easily overcome. My determination allows me to persevere even when faced with difficult situations. All in all, our fitters and inspectors are extremely helpful and ready to provide any guidance when requested. They have definitely made my job easier. Another key component that has assisted me throughout my 10 years with Troy Life & Fire Safety Ltd. is the fact that we have a fully operational fabrication shop. I'm a visual

person and the idea that I can easily walk over to the shop and see firsthand all individual parts and components that make a sprinkler system work has been beneficial.

I enjoy my work tremendously and get excited when I get awarded a job. I take great pride in the fact that my role in the company, more specifically our office, is very important. Without any contract or service work, the design team, shop team and our fitters would not have any work. I know how important my job is and will always do whatever it takes to ensure everyone keeps busy.

Beyond work, I think it's important to find some time to enjoy life to the fullest. I'm a big believer in giving back whenever possible. In 2009, my husband and I, along with a few other people, started a baseball team for children with physical and/or cognitive disabilities called the Field of Dreams Baseball program. Last year, we had 50 children registered and each child got to play the game of baseball once a week during the summer months. Since then, I've become the Coordinator for New Brunswick to promote the program which is near and dear to my heart. Last summer, I also played an integral role in building an accessible baseball field in partnership with the Province of New Brunswick and the City of Moncton; the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada. I'm extremely proud of what we've been able to achieve in the past 9 years and am beyond excited to see the program grow within our community and throughout the Province.

## **Wendy (Noseworthy) White** ***P. Tech, Estimator - Sprinkler Division***



### **Troy Life & Fire Safety Ltd.** ***Newfoundland***

I am an Estimator and have been in my current position since May 2011. Prior to this position, I spent 2 ½ years working with a well-known private consulting engineering company in St. Johns. This was the first position I held following the completion of the Mechanical Manufacturing Engineering Technology Program from College of the North Atlantic.

It is not a common occurrence that a woman with an education in Manufacturing would end up in a career focused on the fire protection industry. Following graduation from the program in August 2008 even with the President's Award, being class valedictorian and an overall 3.9 GPA, jobs in the manufacturing industry within Newfoundland were not easy to find for someone with little to no experience. After a couple of months searching and numerous applications, I managed to land a position with a Mechanical/Electrical Consulting firm. I started this position with little to no knowledge in mechanical system design, but it didn't take long for me to excel in this job, and by late 2010 was designing various HVAC, Plumbing, Fire Protection and Controls Systems for both new buildings and renovation type projects. In February of 2011, the small firm was bought out by a much larger company. Many changes within the organization left me feeling that I was ready for a change in environment. This is when I applied for a few positions and ended up with a couple of different offers, one from another consulting firm and one from Troy Life & Fire Safety

Ltd. At this time, I decided that I would like to take a seat at the other side of the table and see how things work on the construction side.

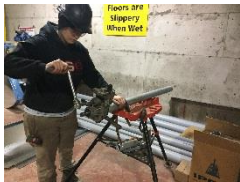
Since this position would transition me from a mechanical design technician into an Estimator for Fire Protection there was another learning curve ahead and I am not one to stray from a challenge and always up to learning new things. It didn't take long to learn that the design portion of fire protection is often left to the contractor themselves and that consultant drawings are a mere guide to the detailed take-offs that need to be completed in order to properly estimate the actual scope of work. With some coaching from my supervisor it didn't take me long to grasp this process and since the start of my career with TLFS the branch has experienced great growth.

Due to the size of the branch, the job description often varies from day to day. In addition to estimation, I have had the pleasure of completing various contract administration roles and assisting in project management all of which come with their own challenges. These challenges help in developing my skills in different areas of the company and increases my ability to grow my career within the industry as time evolves.

2017 was an exciting year in my life as I had the pleasure of marrying my best friend and I am looking forward to starting a family along with continuing my career within the fire sprinkler industry. I feel that an added bonus of being involved in the construction industry is that no matter what happens within the economic situation, there will always be at a minimum the maintenance of the current systems. Job security is a great bonus to an already rewarding career.

## **Autumn Rowe**

### ***Fire Protection and Inspection***



### **Fire Stop Enterprises**

#### ***Nova Scotia***

I am currently a first-year apprentice, but I'm hoping to become a journey person. I test and inspect sprinklers some days and others I'm installing fire sprinkler systems. It takes four years to become a journey person and in those four years there are three 6-week long blocks, that you have to take and pass, along with achieving 8000 hours.

My father worked in the trade for 30+ years and after I had graduated from high school, I was given the opportunity to follow in his footsteps, which I did and have been in the industry for just under a year. My family feels that I am well suited for the job and they always saw me getting into it.

Physically the job can be challenging but it is very rewarding when I complete a task. It has also proven to me that I can do much more than I thought I actually could. My coworkers treat me like everyone else and are willing to give guidance when I need it. The job allows me to travel and see places and things that I wouldn't get to see if I worked at a stationary job. My least favourite thing about the job would be that I am mistaken for a male a lot, because people aren't used to seeing women in the trade.

My goals are to get my journey person ticket and to become an inspector.