



Marla Hough

The President of Hough Engineering, Inc., she's a registered Professional Engineer who was named "Engineer of the Year" by the Florida Engineering Society Myakka Chapter in 2012 and also in 1997.

She designs, secures permitting, and follows through infrastructure projects such as drainage, water, sewer, roads, and traffic for public and private sectors in Manatee and Sarasota counties. In short, she lays out a site for a building, development, or road. Some of her work includes the FCCI Corporate Headquarters on University Parkway and current work on the extension of North Cattlemen Rd.

Occasionally a career choice is made in the unlikeliest of places, such as a passing glimpse of a magazine's headline that catches the eye—and imagination. With ability and interest in both math and writing, Marla Hough considered a career in engineering, but attended two years of college before she made a commitment to the field. Now the President of Hough Engineering, Inc., Marla, a registered Professional Engineer, is a civil/traffic engineering consultant who was named "Engineer of the Year" by the Florida Engineering Society Myakka Chapter in 2012 and also in 1997.

Why engineering? "I was good in math and English and knew I wanted to create things. I guess you would say I was 'balanced brain'. I had considered engineering, but also had an interest in business and finance. I earned an A.S. in business and was working at a law office when I saw a magazine about women in engineering," Marla says.

There's less stereotyping now than when she first entered the field; however, from 2000 to 2008, the number of females earning engineering degrees remained flat at about 12,500. Men remain in the field longer than women and one in four female engineers was unemployed or employed in other fields compared to one in ten males.

"After 15 years of work in other engineering firms, clients and some co-workers encouraged me to open my own company. I had to talk my husband into it all the while he was trying to talk me out of it. I'm celebrating 15 years in business this year. Every day is a challenge with something new to learn, fix, or find a better way of doing things. The theory is the same but the tools—especially technology—we use have changed."

Pat Glass, former Manatee County Commissioner and SWFWMD (Southwest Florida Water Management District) governing board member, says, "Life at Marla's level of achievement does not come easily. Marla, the engineer, is that well-rounded individual whose professional skill and expertise blends successfully with her personal sense of dedication to a better world for all of us. 'She knows her stuff' is more than a trite salute to the gal who performs beyond every expectation. She personifies a career where business, art, science, civic duty, and humanity flourish."

As a civil engineer Marla designs, secures permitting, and follows through infrastructure projects such as drainage, water, sewer, roads, and traffic for public and private sectors in Manatee and Sarasota counties. In short, she lays out a site for a building, development, or road. Working on commercial, residential and industrial projects, her most visible past work is the FCCI Corporate Headquarters on University Parkway and current work on the extension of North Cattlemen Rd.

Past projects include Manatee River Harley-Davidson, Dream RV, River Club, Longwood Run, and corporate parks. Much of the work involves MOT (Maintenance of Traffic) plans such as the advanced traffic system with 148 signalized intersections in Sarasota County. Qualified as a Woman Owned Small Business and Small Disadvantaged Business by the U.S. Small Business Administration, as Minority Business Enterprise by the State of Florida, and as Disadvantaged Business Enterprise by the Florida Department of Transportation, she has opportunities to work as a subcontractor for large engineering firms.

Marla's friend, Linda Cinque, says, "Marla entered a profession that was male dominated and is respected and very well liked. I think there's so much to her that others may not see until they get to know her. Marla's sense of humor and candor is disarming as well as endearing."

Mid-2006 saw the beginning of the decline in all sectors: public, private, residential, commercial, and industrial. Prior to that time, Marla was turning away two projects a week. She recalls that, "The fall of 2008 started a whole new level of 'slow' when everyone was afraid to do anything. Residential shut down first, so I see signs that's the first to come back. Local homebuilders are bravely buying property for future residential and retail development. National homebuilders are starting to get back into the mix. Some banks are making loans for commercial and industrial construction, but it's a slow comeback. During the downturn many architects, surveyors, and engineers lost their buildings and/or were forced to significantly reduce staff. I was fortunate that I could ride out the recession since I paid cash for my 88 percent ownership of the building I occupy."

As for the rest of 2012, she shrugs and replies that she doesn't know. FCCI has a planned 100,000 square-foot phase that has not been built. A large hotel chain is awaiting financing for construction on Cortez Rd. in Bradenton. But she's somewhat encouraged by the recent sale of large tracts of land for future development and new potential clients requesting meetings with her.

Marla feels the qualities that are keys to her success are persistence, leadership, and attention to detail—all of which are important when dealing with the permitting process, regulatory agencies, and the necessary follow up. She spends about two-thirds of the time on a project on paperwork and one-third on the design piece. In addition she does her own marketing, networking, project management, and billing as well as being an active member of several local community and engineering organizations and serving on the C1 Bank Advisory Board.

Marla's second interest—writing—plays a significant part in her professional life as her articles appear in the Florida Engineering Society Journal. During 2012 her articles were featured on two covers of the magazine: one on advanced traffic management systems and one on electronic permitting submittals.

Marla graduated from Michigan State University in civil engineering in 1982, married her husband Jim just one week after her final exam, and a short time later they moved to Sarasota. They enjoy travel especially Italy, Switzerland, and for her photography hobby, they enjoy New Orleans, Arizona, and Boston. Her other interests are butterfly gardens—one at home and one at the office—and boating as they live on a canal near Siesta Key.

Marla Hough has paved the way for women in the industry for 30 years one project at a time. These women and the profession are fortunate that she is loyally committed and dedicated to her chosen career.

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