



Hough Engineering's Blueprint All Over Manatee, Sarasota

By James A. Jones Jr. Bradenton Herald

In the 20 years that Marla M. Hough has been in business as owner of Hough Engineering Inc., there are few areas of Manatee and Sarasota counties where she has not completed projects. In her first year in business in 1997, she did the infrastructure for the massive FCCI Insurance Group at Lakewood Ranch, as well as a 100-acre project at River Club. "They were good anchor projects to start with," reflected Hough, 59.

At any given time, she has about 15 projects in the works. Projects now under construction include an 89,600-square-foot storage facility at the corner of Caruso Road and State Road 70, and renovations of the Bradenton Professional Center off Cortez Road near DeSoto Square mall. She handled the public hearings and land planning, as well as the civil engineering for a 109-room Homes2 Suites by Hilton at U.S. 41 near Sarasota Bradenton International Airport. The permits are in hand and that project is ready to construct, she said. Among her other projects in the works are two Marriott hotels off Cortez Road and a storage facility in Palmetto.

Her work includes land planning and rezoning, civil engineering, site development design and permitting, advanced maintenance of traffic plans, traffic counts and studies, technical studies and more.

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Notably, she does all this with just a two-person staff: herself and a computer-aided designer. "She has been successful staying lean and mean," said her husband, Jim Hough. "She takes a no-nonsense approach. She gets the project, completes it and moves on. Clients like that." Marla Hough put herself through college at Michigan State University working as a legal secretary and taking odd jobs where she could find them.

She chose to go into civil engineering because it was a diverse field and offered her the opportunity to make more money than in some of the other fields she enjoyed.

"I worked for someone else for 14 years, then I started my own company," Hough said. Her resumé includes working as a design engineer in the Charlotte County Public Works Department, as a project engineer at Smalley & Nalven Inc. in Sarasota, and as a project engineer for Zoller, Najjar & Shroyer. In 1992, she became vice president of Bishop & Associates, an engineering, planning and surveying company.

Five years later, she opened Hough Engineering, now based at 1771 Manatee Ave. W.

Hough became a civil engineer at a time when relatively few women were entering the profession. "In high school, they put me in shop and the boys in home economics," Hough said.

She has been sure-footed in her career choices and ability to analyze the market. Today, apartments, mini-warehouses and hotels are hot in the Bradenton-Sarasota area, she said. In 1999, the Manatee Chamber of Commerce named Hough Engineering a Small Business of the Year recipient. In 1997, the Myakka Chapter of the Florida Engineering Society named Hough Engineer of the Year, and in 2010 she was included in the Top 500 Emerging Businesses in the U.S. for Business Diversity.

BradentonHerald20YrArticle