

Builder

DIVERSITY IN HOME BUILDING

By John McManus
April 24, 2018



Progress may be slow, but brave, bold, and increasingly effective steps are being taken to change construction's cultural paradigm.

You or I would be wrong to say that women are not breaking through barriers in a still-too-heavily male-dominated home building industry.

It's also fake news to fail to recognize that women are not some of the most influential and effective people leading in this

complex business of residential development, investment, design, and construction--up and down the chain of command, from the corner headquarters office, to Wall Street, to the model home center, to the job site.

So when we called out, yesterday, that there were only three women listed among public home building company "named executive officers"--the most highly-paid executive leadership team members--we may well have struck an unintended chord.

Factually, the information is verifiably correct, sourced to these companies' very own publicly filed Securities and Exchange Commission proxy statements. Exactly three women rank among 73 total "NEOs" for 18 public companies. That's 4.1% of the class of 2017 NEOs, and as reported here, the compensation of those three executives added up to a little shy of 3% of the \$300 million those 73 executives had in their compensation packages.

But for those individuals, and those teams who are here and there making a difference in a business, and livelihood, and trade community that has worked the way it did always and forever until a generation or so ago--and almost literally started from square one--yesterday's piece, while factual, missed a truth.

An important one. It is not enough any longer to report that opportunity for women and people of color is too rare in home building. The fact of that matter--even bringing it to light--does little to change anything for the better. Only people can do that; and they are doing it, as professionals, expert crafts workers, technicians, and, in more and more work places, leaders.

Those individuals and teams who are transforming their business cultures and changing building itself--one job at a time and one decision chain at a time--count. They matter.

Yes, among 19 publicly-traded home building enterprises who list key officers on their web sites, 105 out of 120 of those executives are male, an 8 to 1 male to female ratio in the C-suite. One, of course, is Taylor Morrison chairman, ceo, and president Sheryl Palmer. Finance, marketing, investor relations, and human resources figure prominently among the other 14 executives' title and function. But not all; and that's changing.

"Diversity in our industry is ridiculously lacking," Palmer told me for a piece that focused on that lack [of women and people of color] on public company boards of directors a couple of weeks ago. "Not just gender diversity, but in all its forms--in every piece of our business community."

Still, Sheryl Palmer is doing something about it. Other people in other organizations, and other work places, and in other parts of the construction, materials, manufacturing, marketing, finance, data, and management ecosystem are starting to make a difference.

Five of Taylor Morrison's 17 division presidents are female, and the ranks of management and executive-level spots that draw qualified candidates irrespective of gender or ethnicity is slowly giving way to more inclusiveness, says Palmer.

"We did not set out to achieve a quota," she says. "We don't and wouldn't do that. Our approach is that we want the very best person we can get in every job."

Here are the names and titles of the female executive officers public companies list among their corner-office headquarters set:

Green Brick Partners: Summer Loveland, Chief Accounting Officer

Hovnanian Enterprises: Marcia Wines, Vice President

KB Home: Jill Peters, Senior VP, Investor Relations

LGI: Rachel Eaton, Chief Marketing Officer

Lennar: Diane Bessette, VP, Chief Financial Officer

Lennar: Laura Lete, Chief Information Officer

Lennar: Kay Howard, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer

Meritage Homes: Hilla Sferruzza, EVP, Chief Financial Officer

The New Home Company: Joan Marcus Webb, Chief Marketing Officer

PulteGroup: Michelle Hairston, Senior VP, Human Resources

Taylor Morrison: Stephanie McCarty, VP, Communications

Taylor Morrison: Tawn Kelley, President, Taylor Morrison Home Funding and Mortgage Funding Direct Ventures

Toll Brothers: Kira Sterling, Chief Marketing Officer

TRI Pointe Group: Linda Mamet, VP Corporate Marketing

To say that there are "only 14 plus Sheryl Palmer" could be to diminish the importance of the work they're doing, the strategic impact they have, and the paradigm shift they're bringing about in the business cultures and the operations, and all the ways that resources, and creativity, and land, and investment bring people together with new homes and communities.

To say that there are eight public companies with not one female among the executive leadership teams might be to diminish the many privately held companies who've nurtured and elevated people of all makes and sizes and persuasions and descriptions into roles as trusted leaders.

To say that there's a very long way to go to improve opportunity among women and people of color in home building doesn't negate that the workplace has come a ways already, and doesn't negate the brave, tireless work of those who've fought for and who are still fighting for progress.

The week before last, more than 750 registered to attend the Women's Leadership Conference, a 4th annual event dedicated to furthering opportunities for women and addressing the unique challenges they face in home building, organized by New Home Company CMO Marcus Webb.

"Diversity in the workplace is vital to our industry as it continues to evolve," said Marcus Webb. "The conference has become a platform to discuss the unique challenges, opportunities, accomplishments and perspectives from both genders that we all encounter in our professional lives. Creating more leadership positions for the talented women in home building is a topic that needs constant attention, so we are thrilled with the support the conference receives."

Ashton Woods chief financial officer Cory Boydston, Hearthstone senior VP Cindy Gilmore, and Arroyo Capital principal Leigh Austin have launched Women's Housing Leadership Group, a home building business community-wide leadership and mentorship initiative aimed at cultivating and boosting women in the residential construction field.

If you think about the home building universe, where many if not most of the buying decisions that are made by our customers, are made by women," says Boydston. "If you don't have the perspective and leadership of women looking at the liveability, function, design, then your ability to operate strategically in step with home buying decisions every day is at risk."

We'll also hear from three of home building's leaders--Margaret Whelan, ceo and principal at Whelan Advisory, Cathey Lowe, board member of The New Home Company, and Mary Federau, executive VP at Mattamy, in a conversation on "Board Diversity in an Equitable World," at our Housing Leadership Summit, May 14-16, in Southern California. You can still register [here](#).

http://www.builderonline.com/builder-100/diversity-in-home-building_o