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Greencastle woman trades white collar for hard hat

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By Liz Vargo The Record Herald

GREENCASTLE - From hospital to hard hat, Pam Anderson of Greencastle knows what it takes to make a successful career change.

Originally the director of the speech therapy department in Chambersburg Hospital, Anderson made a non-traditional career change to construction.



Next Wednesday, she will share her experiences at the

Pam Anderson of Greencastle, who works on construction projects throughout Franklin County, examines blueprints in her office.

Greencastle-Antrim Chamber of Commerce's third annual administrative professionals day luncheon.

The transition was not as daunting as it may seem, Anderson said.

"When starting something new, you really don't know how much you don't know, and that's a good thing," she said. "Otherwise, you wouldn't take the chance to change."

Luncheon

The chamber will host the luncheon from noon to 1:30 next Wednesday in the First United Methodist Church, 45 N. Washington St.

According to Director Bill Gour, Anderson was the obvious choice for a guest speaker. She will focus on the skills necessary to make any job successful.

The luncheon is open to chamber members and non-members. The cost is \$18 per person.

To register, call the chamber at 597-4610 or e-mail info@greencastlepachamber.org

The name game

Anderson said she gets teased from time to time about the "other" Pamela Anderson, especially since her husband's name is Tom - prompting additional references to the famous

Pamela Anderson's ex-husband, drummer Tommy Lee.

"I tell my specialty contractors if you work on my job, you get to tell people you work for Pamela Anderson," she said.

Once time, a contractor's wife was concerned about him working with her - just because of the name.

That was the only time the similarity caused a problem, she noted.

New interests

Anderson said she is not particularly crafty, never loved heavy lifting and doesn't necessarily enjoy design.

In fact, she honestly enjoyed her position as director of speech therapy at Chambersburg Hospital.

"I was really happy with what I was doing and I especially enjoyed moving to the hospital, which was technically my first career change," Anderson said.

In 1979, Anderson graduated from Illinois State with her master's degree in speech pathology. Women in her generation were some of the first to explore new careers, Anderson said.

"It was just becoming OK for women not to be nurses or teachers," she said.

Anderson's interest in speech pathology developed at a special education day camp in her home state of Illinois. She started in deaf education and moved to speech pathology working with in kindergarten through 12th grade.

When Anderson and her husband, Tom, moved to Chambersburg, both took positions at the hospital. Tom is now vice president of medical affairs.

Anderson realized the reason she enjoyed her position was because she enjoyed developing the speech therapy department.

"One of the reasons I left was because we weren't doing anything new," she said. "I was trying to do something more."

A contractor named Terry Stinson was working on a project in the hospital and gave Anderson the "something more" she was looking for. Soon, she was turning her head from speech pathology to construction.

Renovating

When Tom and Pam Anderson moved to Greencastle in 1986, they purchased a house that needed "cosmetic work," Anderson said.

They hired A.C. Dukehart of Waynesboro to do the work.

A.C. Dukehart did most of the difficult work, while the Andersons helped with wallpaper, painting and carpeting.

"When the Dukeharts did work for our house, we'd rush home to see what they'd done. We called it the miracles of carpentry," Anderson remembered.

"I wanted to learn more," Anderson said. "I think (my husband) knew I wanted to do

something different. We worked on this house a lot and I learned a lot. He basically said, 'Do what you need to do.'

Career change

When Anderson decided to make the career change, she knew she had to make it work.

It wasn't easy, but it wasn't impossible.

She had the stigma of being a woman in a male-oriented career and the stigma of being a doctor's wife. Many co-workers said if her new venture didn't work out, she could fall back on her husband.

"People thought it was a phase ... They said if it didn't work out I could go back to speech therapy," Anderson said. "I let my license run out and I made this work."

Anderson took on any work Stinson, her new partner, thought she could accomplish. She learned on the job with Stinson and their partnership lasted for six years.

To change careers, one must focus on transitional skills, not book skills, she said.

"Name any career and it's something I can relate to construction," she said.

What really makes a job successful are organizational, management and supervisory skills, scheduling capabilities, communication and the "basics," Anderson said.

It also is important to have a strong support team. Her husband, Stinson and several friends in the business were always available if necessary, Anderson said. She now does the same for new people in the business.

Anderson knows she won't be quite as good a craftsman as those who have done construction all their lives. Her specialty is organizing and overseeing each job, and those business skill are things she learned at Chambersburg Hospital.

Success

Anderson didn't start her new career until she turned 35. But she has been so successful, she's booked through the summer of 2007.

After splitting with Stinson, she admits that continuing on her own was a scary thought. But during down time between jobs, she focused on improving her business and marketability.

Construction wasn't something Anderson could have done straight out of college, she said.

"I don't think the time was right ... I definitely learned a lot from the hospital," she said.

Her biggest success is the positive feedback she gets from customers, she said. Customer service is No. 1 in the construction business.

Anderson said even if it's not time to change careers, there are ways to make a job better. It just takes a moment to step back and evaluate one's skills, she said.

"Work smarter, not harder," Anderson said.