

Structural Movers of Gainesville, Georgia

Women throwing cribbing or placing jacks under buildings is not an every day sight on structural moving jobs. Nevertheless, several IASM member companies are owned or managed by women. Additionally, wives of member owners are involved in a vast array of duties critical to their companies.

In fact, it took an act of the United States Congress in 1974 to help women obtain business credit in their own name. If there is any doubt women are shaking off the old constraints consider the following as reported by the Center for Women's Business Research on their website: www.womensbusinessresearch.com.

- ❑ Women own 10.6 million firms - that's nearly half of all privately-held small businesses;
- ❑ Women employ more than 19 million people and are growing their business at twice the national rate;
- ❑ Women generate \$2.5 trillion in annual sales;
- ❑ One in 11 adult women is an entrepreneur;
- ❑ One in 7 employees in the United States works in a woman-owned business; and
- ❑ Women-owned firms are just as likely as men-owned firms to have employees.

While similar strides are certainly not presently evident in the structural moving industry, several member "ladies" have made names for themselves in this "man's" world. One such individual is Charlene Coburn.

For several years after joining IASM in mid-1990, Charlene Coburn attended the association's annual conferences which were geared for MEN ONLY. In fact, most often the only other female present would be a program presenter. But the first woman structural mover proprietor from Georgia in the Association was not deterred.

"I was received wonderfully," she said. "I suspect most attendees looked at me thinking I was with somebody else. Regardless, I have always been accepted as a trusted associate."

Eighty-three-year-old Coburn founded her company,

Coburn about to begin a pull.

Structural Movers, in Gainesville, Ga. in 1987 following retirement and multiple business successes. In one of those businesses—real estate—she had contracted to have buildings moved for domestic use when that company went out of business. So, she bought the necessary equipment to move her own houses and hired an associate, Clarence Smith, Sr. Smith had 50 years experience in moving structure and is still employed by Coburn.

While Coburn is selective in what she moves, she is open to anything with a challenge. "We usually move structures no one else will," she said. And due to insurance coverage, the company limits its area of business to a 200-mile radius of Gainesville and does not move prefab or mobile homes of any kind. On occasions only, she will take special jobs beyond that perimeter, even some out of state.



Charlene Coburn





The first job performed by Coburn in the early 1980's was moving nine structures for Jim Walter Homes.

Operating with only one crew—two permanent employees plus additional help as needed, Coburn said she utilizes a parade of specialists, such as escorts, and uses only experienced subcontractors.

She does not see the plethora of permits, codes, regulations, insurance, etc., as complicated or difficult, rather as simply a part of doing business. "Every state is different," she explained. "So, we do whatever is necessary to get the job done."

Retired from what was AT&T, Coburn said she had never had problems with utilities and finds them cooperative. "I am willing to pay for what I need," she explained.

Coburn sees business for movers improving in 2006 for a couple of reasons. "The new building industry has bottomed out as people can't afford them, thus secondary homes will become a choice," she said. "In addition, the industry has over built." Secondly, a moratorium on tearing down older homes is increasing, she predicts.

Coburn brings to the industry unusual qualities in both education and practical experience. She grew up in Louisiana where her father, a geologist, was in the oil exploration and production business. "We moved around a good bit in the 1920s and 1930s drilling new oil wells, building oil storage refineries and housing facilities," she said.

She finished high school at age 14 and was enrolled at Northwestern University outside Chicago at age 15. But in 1941, pre-WWII maneuvers were being staged in Louisiana. She left college after one quarter to join Southern Bell, as it was known at the time, to work at

Camp Claiborne, La. As a result, she became a full time employee with the giant utility.

For six months, Coburn was transferred to costal locations all around the country to handle overseas telephone calls for the military, which were under heavy security. She became proficient in several languages, including French, Spanish and German. After the war, she was transferred to Atlanta where she remained until retirement in 1974.

During that time, she graduated from Atlanta Law School with the LLB and LLM degrees, plus attended Emory University's continuing education courses in law and securities. In retirement, she took time out to return to Louisiana to build her mother a two-story antebellum home—which took two years—traveling back and forth to take care of Georgia interests, but moved back to Atlanta in 1979 where she has remained since.

In 1954, when Lake Lanier was developed east of Atlanta, Coburn bought into a sub-division and went into the dock and boat house prefabricating building business. Also, she completed Real Estate school in 1961.

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