

# working woman

## Building a strong life

### Single mom keeps on top by hammering out the kinks

SHARI WISHENGRAD CONTRIBUTOR

In the '80s, I went to Trenton State College (now The College of New Jersey) to study advertising and design. Although I am a builder now, I still use those skills.

I can see things on a construction job before they happen, meaning I have the insight to know if something is going to work well or not. I can visualize the house on the lot. I can tell how much fill dirt is needed or needs to be taken away. I know exactly where to position the house to give it the most curb appeal.

I didn't set out to do this job. My dad was a builder, and after graduation, I went to his job site. I went in to do office work but was drawn to the creativity of the actual building process. In order to learn the different trades, I bought my first pair of work boots. I went out in the field and got on my hands

and knees and got dirty learning the trades.

I said to one employee, "Show me how to work the bulldozer."

I asked a mason how to lay blocks. The next part of my education came by learning the codes and acquiring the skill of talking to the inspectors to figure out exactly what they were looking for in order to pass the inspections. I was determined to learn so that I would be successful in this business.

I started Diamond Builders, Inc. in the mid-1990s, and business was great, but I had even more to learn.

This time it was real estate trends. I had to understand what buyers wanted and what Realtors look for when they show a house. I needed to know color theory and how to make a home appeal to as many people as possible.

I'm very excited about the new 5,679

square foot spec house I am about to begin at Lakeview Estates, my seven-lot subdivision of distinctive homes in Manalapan. The new model will be a unique home with the finest amenities, a composite of all that has been asked for by many buyers. I take the time to listen to what people want, then I deliver.

Most of my subcontractors have been with me for close to 25 years. They know I am a stickler for detail and I pride myself on exceeding people's expectations, and their craftsmanship reflects just that. From the beginning till the end, I keep my homeowners involved with the entire building process so they are part of watching their dream come true. That's priceless!

Today, I'm a single mom of very active 12-year-old twins, a daughter and a son, and it's important that they understand the value of hard work. I hope they see that in what I do. My mother passed away nine years ago, and a few times a week, we visit with my father, who is now in an assisted living community.

Residing in Jackson, I work full time, and my children are very active at their middle school and in sports. I'm a team mom for my son's football team and a big supporter of my daughter's cheer squad. Trying to cover the bases can be hard. Really hard. But because of what I do, I can schedule appointments with flexibility, even if it means that there are nights when I'm reading blueprints and reviewing contracts until 2 a.m.

I tell my kids, "Whatever has to be done, we do it."

When other moms ask me how I get it all done, I tell them my secret: my think tank is a five-mile walk around the Manasquan Reservoir. Sometimes the answers to construction issues come to me while I am in motion.

My time at the reservoir helps me tackle any problem, even if it means



Business owner Shari Wishengrad lives in Jackson with her 12-year-old twins.

being on the phone for the entire walk. Is it tiring? Yes it is, but the process is exhilarating. There is a lot of joy in what I do. Since superstorm Sandy, there is a level of distrust in our field. I believe you have to make people comfortable. When people move into their homes and say it's better than anything they could have dreamed of, that's great.

It is so tragic how these people have lost their homes. Given the opportunity to help them get back to a new home that is better than anything they could have ever imagined is truly a gift.

The truth is people need help. They really do. If I can help just one person who really needs me, it's worth it. When you know you have done something good for someone else, you sleep better on your pillow at night.

I didn't see myself doing this, but when I found my niche, I knew I was meant for this line of work. Occasionally, people who don't know me ask if I'm the Realtor or the secretary on a job site. Yes, I tell them, sometimes I'm both — but I am actually the builder.

I'm the guy on top.

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