

BUILDING WOMEN

Strategies and solutions for women in the building industry

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READY FOR WHAT'S NEXT

For real estate veteran Betsy Sheppard, becoming the NAHB PWB 2020 Chair is the next open door in her career. She's eager to walk in and plans to bring all of us along with her.

When Betsy Sheppard walks into a room, you can expect a smile, a handshake, or a hug within seconds. Sheppard has leveraged a sunny disposition with a passion for communication and a fascination with housing to build a stellar career and reputation.

In recent years, Sheppard has given and gained a great deal as she made her way through the ranks of PWB. As she prepares to take over as chair of NAHB Professional Women in Building, Sheppard is grateful for the opportunity to serve and grow in her new role.



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Walking the Dirt

Born in Rome, Georgia, Sheppard was a busy, curious child. She recalls accompanying her father on visits to the construction site of homes the family built over the years.

“We moved several times, and with each move we built a new house. After the crew would leave for the day, Dad and I would head out to check the progress,” she recalls. “I loved the smell of the dirt and sawdust and watched in awe as sticks took on the shape of a house.”

Sheppard attended Georgia Southern University where she majored in public relations and learned the value of strong, focused messaging. During an internship with a PR firm on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, Sheppard worked on the account of a real estate developer, who hired her after graduation.

“I learned how a development starts from ground zero and what it takes to create a concept that will work today, and for decades to come,” she says. “That fascination with the process continues. When we get a call from a developer looking for help with a new project, it’s just as exciting as the first time.”

After moving to Atlanta in 1984, Sheppard worked for a real

estate marketing agency before joining Northside Realty as vice president of marketing. The firm was owned by then-State Senator, now former U.S. Senator, Johnny Isakson, who became a close colleague, friend, and mentor.

“Johnny and I worked well together,” Sheppard says. “I don’t like to be micromanaged, and that’s not his style either. He’s a great man who became like a second father to me.”

After eight productive years at Northside, Sheppard was ready for a new challenge. She had always been aware of an entrepreneurial instinct, and she went for it in 1999, opening a real estate marketing firm under the name B. Sheppard Consulting.

It was an exciting time as Sheppard supported many of the area’s leading builders and developers. She joined forces with creative director Kerrie Gilbert, whom she had met on Hilton Head. Gilbert handled the creative side of the business, while Sheppard concentrated on strategic business

development. Their business flourished and was later rebranded as Gilbert & Sheppard, eventually moving out of Atlanta to a new location in Ellijay, about an hour north of Atlanta.

The award-winning firm continues to offer strategic consult-

Whether she’s assembling a team for a client project or volunteers for a charity event, Sheppard has always been a connector of people, ideas, and resources.

Bottom: Current and former Atlanta PWB Chairs Tangela Martin, Sheppard, Donna Mathis, Irene Hall, Meg Thompson. Right: Sheppard receives the 2018 PWB Woman of the Year Award.



ing, site planning, branding, traditional and digital advertising, and lead conversion for creators of active adult communities. Last year, Gilbert & Sheppard became a division of Immersion Active, which uses digital marketing to reach mature consumers. Gilbert & Sheppard maintains offices in Georgia and in Frederick, Maryland, where Immersion Active is headquartered.

PWB: The Magic of Connection

Whether she’s assembling a team for a client project or volunteers for a charity event, Sheppard has always been a connector of people, ideas, and resources. Getting involved in PWB was an ideal outlet for her energy and leadership skills.

Asked by an industry colleague to join the inaugural board of directors for the Atlanta PWB council, Sheppard went on to serve as vice-chair and chair of the group. Her involvement soon extended beyond Georgia as a National PWB Area Trustee, Regional Trustee, and Vice Chair. Sheppard

was also the 2018 NAHB PWB Woman of the Year.

She has served in numerous NAHB leadership posts, including the NAHB 55+ Industry Housing Board of Trustees and as 55+ Council Membership Chair. Currently, Sheppard is a member of the Board of Directors of the Atlanta 55+ Housing Council and was invited this year to join the Urban Land Institute’s Lifestyle Residential Development Council.

“The learning and growth that have come from my involvement in PWB and NAHB are a true blessing,” says Sheppard. “And they are equaled by the friendship and personal connection with amazing women and men in our industry. I’m pretty much a walking billboard for PWB and encourage everyone, especially our emerging professionals, to get involved.”

This year, as NAHB PWB Chair, Sheppard envisions a continued focus on growth and connectivity. She also plans to use technology (online meetings, social media, etc.) to advance mentorship. PWB’s



Betsy Sheppard shares a close moment with three of her "PWB peeps," Lisa Campfield, Karen Schroeder, and Terri Everhart.

2020 initiatives will emphasize professional development and establishing pathways for members who wish to deepen their involvement as leaders.

Sheppard also looks forward to growing the local PWB Council model, using the national committee structure. National committee calls, which are open to all members, are an excellent way to learn and be inspired by achievements in membership, charitable fundraising, member recognition, mentoring, and legislative outreach. Sheppard encourages members to reach out professionally to PWB and NAHB colleagues, and to get involved with efforts such as BUILD-PAC, NAHB's nonpartisan political action arm.

"Building, in all its facets, is the ultimate team sport and we are stronger and more effective when we collaborate," Sheppard adds. "That's our strength and our value proposition."

Reaching Out

Sheppard's passion for giving back extends to her adopted community of Gilmer County. She is a volunteer and leader in organizations that support business, arts and culture, children at risk, and other charitable causes.

Asked for advice she would offer colleagues, Sheppard urges women and men in building to "be honest and authentic about your abilities. Identify those with whom you can share your talents and, in areas where you need help, find a mentor."

She also stresses the importance of delivering on your promise. "That means delivering on your brand promise in a professional context. But it also means delivering on your promise as a person of integrity. Prepare more for a meeting. Arrive earlier to the job site. Work harder and give more than you promised."

As the incoming chair of NAHB PWB, that's exactly what Sheppard plans to do. **BW**



Kerrie Gilbert and Sheppard review a site plan for a development with a client.



Sheppard at one of her many volunteer activities in Gilmer County, Georgia.



The NAHB PWB leadership team paused for a group photo at the 2019 fall board meeting.