

in BUSINESS

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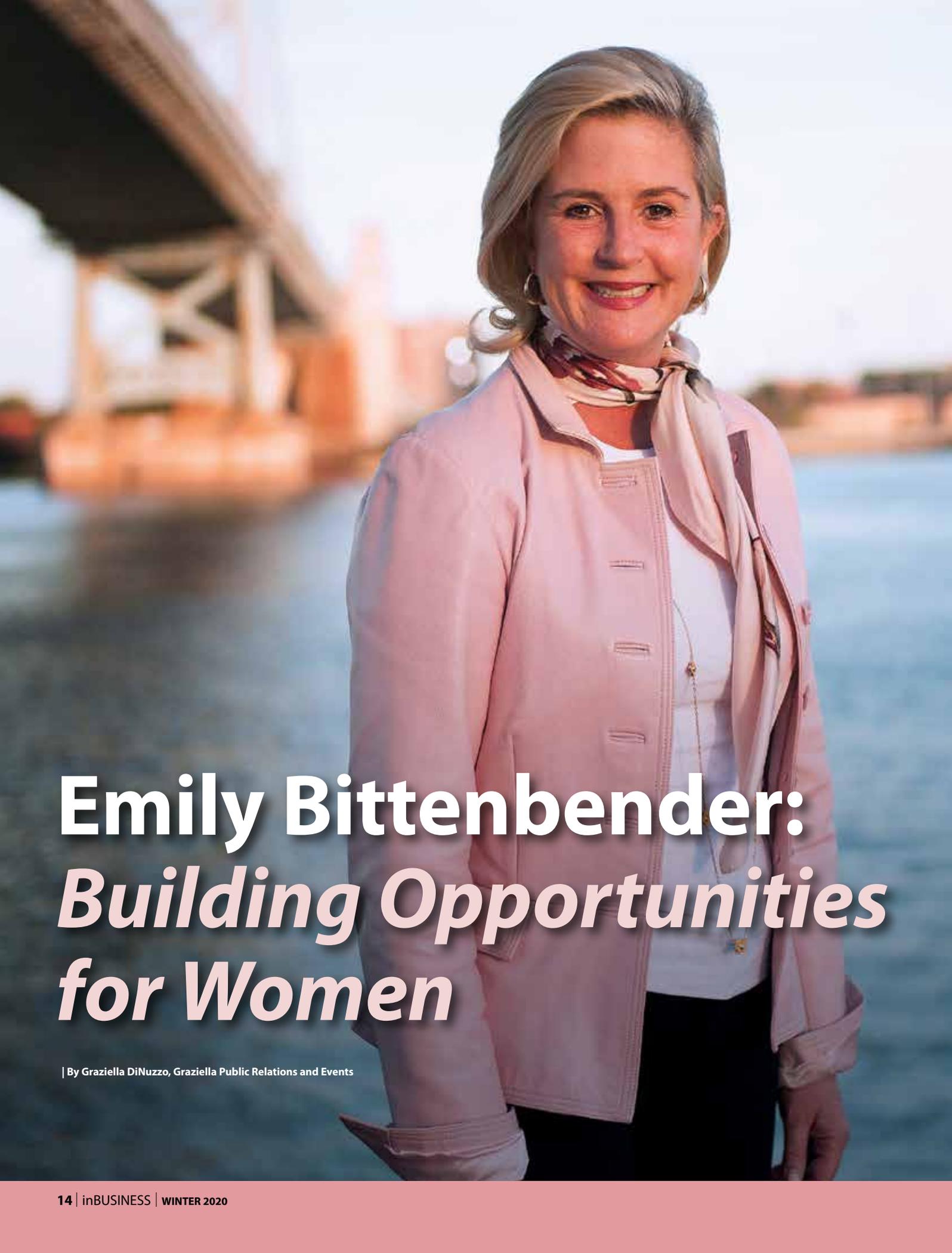
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Emily Bittenbender: *Building Opportunities for Women*

| By Graziella DiNuzzo, Graziella Public Relations and Events

The Virginia Slims cigarette slogan, "You've come a long way baby," appeared across magazines and billboards in the 1970's, at the same time when members of the National Organization for Women (NOW) were standing up for the Equal Rights Amendment in the US senate.

While the 70's feminist revolution was mounting, and women were increasingly entering the workforce as secretaries, teachers, bookkeepers, waitresses and nurses, many women like Emily Bittenbender's mom and grandmother were maintaining their traditional "work" roles inside the home. Men's traditional work roles included truck drivers, production workers, carpenters and farmers.

"I was raised in a matriarchal house where domestic life ruled," recalls Bittenbender. "I remember mom giving me a step stool so I could help in the kitchen."

Bittenbender likes to drive trucks and her all-terrain vehicle. As a child, she wanted to play outside on her family's 400-acre farm outside of Huntington Mills, Pennsylvania. "Boys were always treated better than girls."

"I am grateful to my grandfather who owned an architect firm and used to take me with him to job sites. I loved it."

Fashion was Bittenbender's first career goal. She attended the Moore College of Art as a fashion design major and was told, "I didn't have the talent or skill to be in fashion, so I moved on and enrolled in the commercial interior design department."

Bittenbender's decision to pursue commercial design payed off when she was hired to lead a team in the design and construction of the National Constitution Center in January 2000.

Three years later in 2003, Bittenbender liquidated all of her assets and started Bittenbender Construction, LLP, the first 100% female owned and operated general contracting construction firm in the region, and today, the largest. She partnered with Angela McCaffery, business partner and Chief Operating Officer.

Bittenbender Construction is certified by (WBENC) the Women's Business Enterprise National Council and the (PAUCP) Pennsylvania Unified Certification Program. Angela McCaffery, joined Emily as Chief Operating Officer.

"I did it on my own, no husband or dad."

Bittenbender Construction provides construction management and general contracting services for corporate, greenspace, institutional, medical, museums and attractions, retail and science and technology.

"I needed to start my own company because I didn't feel comfortable working in other people's cultures. I wanted a more team-managed focus ...an entrepreneurial approach to client's projects with no egos or a lot of rules."

The company's open-air offices with beautiful views of the Delaware River reflect Bittenbender's flexible management style and respect for her team as equals. It wasn't surprising that I couldn't find her bio on her website.



Considered one of the most diverse companies in our region, Bittenbender has made diversity, inclusion and equality her mission – with a workforce consisting of sixty-percent women professionals and 16% minorities.

And Bittenbender loves millennials.

"Millennials are open minded and uninhibited. They don't see color or gender and base people on their actions. They are awesome."

Some noteworthy Bittenbender projects include Franklin Park, Sister Cities Park and the newly renovated Love Park.

"I love working on projects that have purpose and meaning and immediate community impact. I was sitting at a restaurant and a woman approached me to say thank you for building Sister Cities Park because now she has somewhere in center city to take her daughter to play."

In 2005 architect Jewel Johnson found herself on a same project as Emily Bittenbender, they soon developed a friendship.

"If you would have told me that in 2011 I would find myself occupying a space at Bittenbender Construction so I could literally learn first-hand how to incorporate construction management into my architect business, I would have said you were crazy," explain Johnson. "Emily opened her heart, gave me a desk in her office and introduced me to her banker, accountant, attorney, sub-contractors and ultimately her clients."

"It's important for me to be a mentor for women and minorities," says Bittenbender. "It's hard to succeed as a start-up and even more difficult for an African-American woman."

Johnson explains how at a Construction Industry event award ceremony event where Bittenbender was being honored, out of 200 guests, there were only 5 minorities – and all 5 were Emily's guests.

"I can never repay Emily for all the help she has given me," says Johnson who runs Antoine Johnson, LLC

"Women need to help women," Bittenbender says twice.

"We have a lot of cool women in this city- " and that most certainly includes Emily Bittenbender. ●