

KCA Top Young Leader thrives on working with others in a man's world

By: *Cris Collingwood*

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Sarah Knehr wanted to be an architect, or so she thought.

She went to work for Quandel Construction Group while in high school to learn about building and how the architect's plans are carried out. After graduating with a degree in architecture from the University of Cincinnati, she quickly realized the field was not for her.

"I started working for Quandel again as a project engineer which gave me the opportunity to be on site," she said. Sitting behind a desk just wasn't for her. "I'm a people person."

Today, at 34, Knehr is a senior project manager, overseeing health care construction projects. The largest to date was the 300,000 square-foot UPMC Memorial Hospital in York.



Left to right: Jon O'Brien, Executive Director of KCA, Sarah Knehr, Senior Project Manager of Quandel, Mike Karcutskie, President of Quandel Construction Group. PHOTO/PROVIDED

This week, she was named the 2021 KCA Top Young Leader by Keystone Contractors Association.

"Sarah has served in the construction industry since 2010 and has been a valuable member of the Quandel team," said Jon O'Brien, executive director of the KCA.

"Starting as a project engineer, it became evident that she belonged in a more challenging role and was quickly promoted to assistant project manager. Growing professionally over the past decade, she now leads her own projects and is the key point of contact for clients on projects," he said during the award ceremony.

"She is responsible, not only for administration of our construction services, but also serves as the corporate lead for health care planning and design matters," said Greg Quandel, CEO of Quandel Enterprises. "Her skills in running efficient and timely projects have made her one of our top project managers. Sarah's leadership abilities have gained respect from many who she has interacted with over the years."

Knehr, who likes working out, being with her two dogs and loves being on the go and on the construction site, said being a woman in the construction world has not been a problem. "The bigger challenge I faced was my age," she said.

"I grew up with two brothers, so I was used to being around the guys. You have to show up and know what you are talking about. Sometimes you have to put your foot down," she said of being on site with all men.

Being a woman, she said, has helped because women tend to be more organized and can stay calmer when things get heated. "You just have to take a step back."

Sometimes, she said, "people are afraid of me when they walk in the trailer. Like who is this and what is she doing here. Then they find out I'm the boss and things are fine."

Knehr credits good allies in the industry for part of her success. Mostly men, they give her advice and guidance when she needs it.

"Her work ethic and leadership skills have served her well in achieving the prestigious recognition from the KCA. The fact that KCA chose Sarah is not surprising for those of us that work with her on a daily basis," said Mike Karcutskie, president of Quandel Construction Group. "Sarah consistently manages projects with enthusiasm and problem-solving at the forefront. Her consistent results continue to serve both Quandel and our clients well."

As a senior project manager, Knehr manages the overall construction site. She does so when bids are put out to subcontractors, they know exactly what mate

"I oversee the entire production. I make sure the contractors are doing what the architectural design says and that they are using the right materials." As the coordinator, she also needs to make sure no one is going over budget.

When it happens, which she said does on occasion, she works to find the best solutions to keep costs down.

When not on site, Knehr works with site owners to plan projects and helps train other project managers.

She is also involved with the Dauphin County ACE program teaching high school students about careers in architecture, construction and engineering.

"This gives them a chance to see the industry upfront. I'm very passionate about it because they will know what to expect in the field they pursue," she said.

Knehr said the award means a great deal to her because she hopes it will encourage young people to come into the field. "As we all know, the trades are short of people with a lot of retirements. This can be viewed as a harsher, harder industry, but people can succeed very well."



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