

Small Business Spotlight:

Mary-Anne Bowcott | Owner & Founder Westcom Plumbing and Gas, Est. 2015

Life Story

Mary-Anne Bowcott grew up on a hobby farm in Sooke, B.C., where hard, physical work came naturally. Tough times early on meant that Mary-Anne needed an opportunity to make a higher wage and gain financial independence. Securing a job in the trades gave Mary-Anne the means to survive on her own while completing her schooling. However, finding that first job was difficult for a woman with no experience in a male-dominated industry. Now, as the owner of Victoria-based Westcom Plumbing and Gas, Mary-Anne empowers other women to pursue their dreams in the trades.



What motivated you to start your own business?

I had a comfortable, full-time plumbing job, but then I got injured. My partner suggested that I start my own plumbing business so I could pick and choose the jobs that I did. I was also inspired by local businesswomen to start my own company. The injury turned out to be a blessing in disguise!

How did you get your start as a woman in trades?

Fifteen years ago, you didn't see women on job sites, so I didn't think it would be possible to get a job in the trades. I probably handed out a hundred resumes and didn't get a single call back. In the end, it was a friend's uncle who hired me as a roofer, and that's how I got my start.

How has mentorship and networking played a role in the growth of your business?

I've been mentoring aspiring female plumbers and I'm heavily involved in the networking of women in trades as the former vice-president of the BC Tradeswomen Society. It's played a big role in getting my name out and spreading the word that Westcom Plumbing and Gas is a female-owned company.

What do you wish you had known when you started your business?

When I first started in the trades, nobody took me seriously. When I decided to open my own company, I worried about how people would react or if they would hire a woman plumber. I didn't even have my name on the business cards at first because I didn't want people to know the company was woman-owned. It turned out that I didn't need to worry because the reaction I've received has been amazing – people are excited to see someone unconventional making it in my industry.

What has been your greatest reward as a small business in your industry?

Some women don't feel comfortable in their home alone with a male tradesperson. Knowing that I or one of my female plumbers can help them feel comfortable is a very rewarding feeling.

Why is it important for you to support women in trades?

It was extremely hard for me to find a job in the trades – getting your foot in the door is the toughest part. Someone gave me an opportunity, and it changed my life forever. By supporting women in trades, I'm giving opportunities to women who might otherwise not get that chance.

What advice would you give to aspiring female entrepreneurs in the trades sector?

Don't be afraid to advertise that you are a woman, because it's nothing to be ashamed of. The majority of people are going to be supportive. And don't take 'no' for an answer!

Based on your experience, what are the key qualities needed to be a successful entrepreneur?

You can't be afraid of hard work, but you also need to know your limitations so you can focus your energy on where it belongs. Otherwise, you get stretched too thin and it's no longer sustainable.

What words do you live by?

Persistence and perseverance. I've never been one to let someone tell me I can't do something, and I love proving them wrong!

Where is your favourite B.C. destination?

I don't have a favourite, but Boat Basin on the west coast of Vancouver Island is absolutely stunning.

Bottom Line

- Westcom Plumbing and Gas employs five staff.
- Mary-Anne Bowcott was awarded the Canadian Construction Association's 2018 Person of the Year.
- Mary-Anne hopes to double the size of her business in the future.