

# Engineering gets the feminine touch



**Erica Jonker, Anna-Marie Jay and Kathleen Spandiel have their future in their hands**

It is encouraging to see a company such as Atlantis Foundries leading the way in affording women the opportunity to work in what is commonly referred to as a “man’s world”.

The ever-growing interest by women in industrial science, engineering and technology also needs to be applauded.

This is a step in the right direction to address the challenge of achieving gender parity in the workplace and to help address the critical shortage of skills in the engineering sector. Three young women exemplify this new trajectory.

Kathleen Spandiel, Anna-Marie Jay and Erica Jonker are taking this so-called “man’s world” by storm.

Atlantis Foundries produces automotive castings for both the passenger and commercial vehicles industries. The company also produces machine cylinders and crankshafts for automotive applications.

The company is located in Atlantis, about 50km north of Cape Town, and plays an active role in promoting



Erica Jonker ... "Women pay more attention to detail"

gender parity. Since 1996, the company has trained several female apprentices, many of whom have qualified as turner machinists.

In a male-dominated field, proving oneself is often a prerequisite for success and the women had to do exactly that.

"This was definitely the right choice for me. I am proof that women are capable of doing this job just as well as men can," explains Kathleen.

The same sentiment was shared by Tony de Vos, then Training Manager at Atlantis Foundries.

"We decided to give women a chance as far back as 1996 and I was pleasantly surprised to find that they fitted in so well and that their male counterparts accepted them and really went out of their way to help them with the various modules of the training," says Tony.

Kathleen was brought up in a family of four boys. Being the only girl, her siblings taught her the technical fundamentals of how to fix different mechanical devices. This entrenched an appetite for all things technical and a lasting fascination for the field, which has resulted in her launching a career as an artisan.

Kathleen says that, in the past, it was not possible for anyone to become an artisan. But now, with the right qualifications and right attitude, anybody – man or woman – can realise their dreams.

Kathleen says gender or race should

*“No matter how difficult it may be, go out and search for opportunities – a good job will not just fall onto your lap”*

not prevent one from pursuing one's dreams.

"We need more training in these trades and more jobs should be made available for people - especially women - who want to pursue a career in these fields," she says.

Kathleen is a turner and univ grinder and has been with the company for many years. She says skills development is fundamental in the South African context, as, in the past, women were not given an opportunity to venture into the engineering field.

Her advice to young people who aspire to follow in her footsteps is that they should achieve an educational qualification, set goals and strive to achieve success in their chosen field. "No matter how difficult it may be, go out and search for opportunities – a good job will not just fall into your lap," she says.

Erica says although men are endowed with greater physical strength, which can help get the job done, women pay more attention to detail and have the patience that many males do not have.

"Women were oppressed in the past,

but these days they have a lot of opportunities and the government is encouraging them to become involved in all sectors of our economy."

Erica says her male counterparts have been supportive of her and other women.

Daunting challenges can sometimes derail and demotivate an employee from performing to the best of his or her ability, but Erica has the confidence to do things that might normally be perceived as too challenging.

Erica is a turner machinist apprentice and she relishes every moment of her work. Working alongside people like Kathleen and Anna-Marie is a real motivation and she learns something new from them every day.

Anna-Marie, who was born in Robertson but grew up in George, moved to Cape Town in 1998, when she started an apprenticeship at Atlantis Foundries.

She attended PW Botha Technical College, where she studied a variety of technical subjects, including electrical studies, woodwork, motor

mechanics and fitting and turning. She is now a qualified turner machinist.

"I absolutely fell in love with fitting and turning, because I finally got to make and learn how to manufacture various parts," says Anna-Marie.

Anna-Marie works in a tool room, which is directly linked to production. "We have support maintenance and production engineering. Based on an engineering drawing/sample, we have to plan the safest, quickest and best machining process to manufacture the end-product using a lathe drilling or milling machine," adds Anna-Marie.

She is responsible for manufacturing new parts and performing modifications on old ones.

"I am also directly involved in training apprentices and preparing them for trade tests."

Atlantis Foundries has urged other companies to give women an equal opportunity, especially in the light engineering field.

merSETA salutes Atlantis Foundries for its pivotal role in driving skills development among women.



Kathleen Spandiel ... "Skills development is fundamental"

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