



## **National Women's History Month – Carolyn R. Crawford**

As we enter March, we celebrate National Women's History Month, which is a great time to reflect on how female participation in ASHRAE has changed over the decades. For nearly five decades after our chartering in 1935, the Central Oklahoma Chapter was run exclusively by men. It took true pioneers willing to step into what was then very much a man's world to change that trajectory. This month, I wanted to dig into our archives to share the story of Carolyn Rae Crawford, our chapter's very first female member and, eventually, our first female president. Her journey is a vital piece of our chapter's heritage, and her own words provide an incredible window into what it took to break the so called "glass ceiling" in our industry.

Carolyn Rae Crawford holds a uniquely important place in the history of the ASHRAE Central Oklahoma Chapter, serving as a trailblazer for women in the HVAC and refrigeration industry. Her involvement with ASHRAE began during a pivotal time for the society. On August 16, 1972, ASHRAE Society Executive Director Andrew T. Boggs III sent a letter to all chapter presidents encouraging activities to interest women engineers in joining the society. At that time, the Central Oklahoma Chapter, which had been chartered in 1935, had zero female members. Prompted by this call to action, Membership Chairman Bobby Vermillion recruited Crawford, and just two months later (Oct. 1972), she became the chapter's first female member. At the time she joined, she was working as a sales engineer at Besco Sales. Later she would work at R&B Equipment Company.

Crawford continued to be active in the chapter over the next decade. In 1981, during Dr. Faye McQuiston's presidency, she was elected to move through the chairs. By 1984, she made history by becoming the first female president of the Central Oklahoma Chapter (following after Golden Gavel winner Tino Mendez). Since no other chapter in Region VIII had a female president yet, she also held the distinction of being the first female chapter president in the entire region.

On July 27, 1984, The Oklahoman newspaper ran a piece entitled "3 Engineers Say Their Gender May Have Helped Careers" highlighting her groundbreaking role as the incoming president. The following is the full excerpt of her part of the article:

>>>Carolyn Crawford, incoming president of American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers, is a sales engineer with R&B Equipment Company. Originally from McAlester, she has worked in some area of the construction field since before her high school graduation.

"I don't have a degree," she said. "I'm what you'd call, I guess, a self-made woman. I've taken related courses, but I have no engineering degree. And I'm not ashamed of it. I think I appreciate it even more.

"I started out working for a general contractor before I got out of high school as part of the distributive education program. I worked part time and he said, "When you graduate, I'd like you to work full time.' And so that's how I got started.

"Then for about 12 years I worked for mechanical contractors and I learned to do estimating. I wanted to learn as much as I could, so I took courses and paid attention to the people who knew what they were doing and tried to soak up just as much as I possibly could.

"I was living in Tulsa at that time and a firm there approached me with the idea of taking a position like I have right now. They were going to open a branch office in Oklahoma City and I jumped at the chance, not thinking about it, about the obstacles I'd have to overcome. I jumped off in a man's world."

Ms. Crawford said a minimum of 12 years experience has qualified her for membership in ASHRAE.

"You can start out as an affiliate member and upgrade your membership as the years go by," she said. "I started out as an associate member because I'd had quite a few years experience.

"I first went to an ASHRAE meeting in 1972 (in Oklahoma City). It was really awkward because at that time we were drawing about 80 to 100 members at a meeting and I was the only woman. But I told myself, 'Lady, if you're going to work in a man's world, you've got to hang in there.' So I did.

"The men, in the beginning, were kind of skeptical, until they learned I knew what I was doing, and then they respected me. Ever since, they've had nothing but support for me."

Discrimination has never been a problem for her, she said, and believes that, if anything, her sex has been a help.

"In fact," she said, "sometimes I can get in to see a mechanical engineer or a contractor because it's hard for them to turn a woman down."

Ms. Crawford said she enjoys her profession and finds it challenging.

"I'm always learning something new," she said. "I like the people I deal with. It's been good for me and I feel that I've done a good job." <<<

Dusty Stoabs, PE  
ASHRAE Central Oklahoma Chapter Historian

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



I truly hope that the members of our Chapter are as enthusiastic as your new President. The '84-'85 year will certainly be a challenge for all of us. The 1985 CRC will come home to Oklahoma City in April in conjunction with our 50th Anniversary. All of us fully intend to have our Chapter win the 'Golden Gavel', and that will be the first time a chapter has won four consecutive years.

A successful President is only as good as the people supporting him. I believe that we have the "cream of the crop" for Committee Chairpersons. I want our members to become caught up in the tide of excitement for the coming year. I want new members and members who have not become involved with Chapter activities before to take a look at what Committee you would enjoy and like to become involved in, and give me a call.

ASHRAE has certainly become a big part of my life-but you only get out of anything what you put into it. I'm excited, but humble. I have a lot of big footsteps to follow, and I will need all of your help.

See you at the BARBEQUE!

Carolyn Crawford