

Article for City College “EmployerLink” magazine – Women in STEM

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Engineering for all

Karen Friendship of Alderman Tooling explains why she devotes so much time to promoting women in STEM.

It’s an intriguing story: how a civil engineer, with a burgeoning career at Devon Highways, made the switch to running a metal fabrication company. Yet what catches the attention is that this is the story of a woman, who has succeeded in not just one traditional “man’s world”, but two.

While Karen Friendship, Managing Director of Alderman Tooling, is the last to exploit this, she pragmatically seizes every opportunity to communicate two points close to her heart. First, that STEM skills open doors to fascinating careers. And second, that these careers are not just for the boys.

“I excelled in STEM subjects at school, so an engineering degree was perfect for me, although women were very much in the minority,” Karen comments. “As my career progressed, I stepped briefly into the family business to help out with a short project. I was hooked! Eighteen years later, I’m still here.”

As a local STEM ambassador Karen passionately supports initiatives which encourage young people into engineering careers, such as the Go4SET engineering challenge. She has worked with University Technical College in Plymouth in an employer liaison capacity, and inspires students through factory visits and real-life

project work. Most recently she became an employee mentor for the University of Plymouth.

“I do put considerable time into supporting STEM education,” Karen says. “But as an employer we gain a tremendous amount in return. As a city with a strong manufacturing base, it is vital that we demonstrate the career opportunities available to young people on the doorstep – we don’t want to lose that talent. Plymouth is an exciting place to be for manufacturing.”

Aldermans is also a strong supporter of apprenticeships.

“Bill Alderman, our founder, began his career as an apprentice, as did many of our senior staff. We strongly believe that the skills learnt during an apprenticeship stay for life. Working with City College Plymouth we have been able to nurture some exceptional young people, who we are proud are still with us today, contributing to the business, and continuing to develop.”

Karen has every right to feel proud. The company is receiving accolades for its achievements, recently scooping the Apprenticeship and Training Award in the Made In The South West Awards 2016. The company is also shortlisted in the same category for the Western Morning News Awards.

“Building a sustainable business means investing in the next generation,” Karen concludes. “Young men and women in Plymouth have a huge amount to offer – and STEM education for all is the first step to unlocking it.”