

# CCAI CORNER

## Women in Finishing FORUM Exceeds Expectations

After a successful debut in 2019, CCAI's Women in Finishing (WiF) FORUM returned to the Embassy Suites South Bend at Notre Dame, October 4-6. Registrations for this year's FORUM increased by nearly 40% over the inaugural event. Many of the companies that sent employees in 2019 participated again this year but gave different women within their respective organizations the opportunity to experience the benefits of the FORUM.

In addition to the increased overall numbers, the mix of industry veterans and newcomers was surprisingly different. While those with longstanding finishing careers made up the bulk of the 2019 registrants, they were far outnumbered this year by women in the early stages of their careers. "Having lost some momentum from the success of the 2019 FORUM combined with the lingering impacts of COVID, I did not know what to expect for turnout this year," stated Sheila LaMothe, WiF program director. "I am absolutely thrilled, not only with the increase in attendee numbers, but to see so many young women joining our group. How wonderful that they have chosen to pursue a career in finishing!"

With threatening skies during much of the FORUM, the rain held off just long enough for attendees to meet and socialize at the welcome reception held on the hotel rooftop, overlooking the campus of the University of Notre Dame. Bright and early the next morning, participants began what would be a very busy day, boarding a bus to Lippert's Plant 72. Before heading out on the shop floor, President and CEO Jason Lippert addressed the group, sharing information on Lippert's history as well as insights on their employee-focused culture and resulting benefits. Then, dividing into small groups, several energetic guides led attendees through the plant with specific focus on the finishing operations, especially Lippert's impressive electrocoat system. For many of the women in attendance it was their first facility tour. Grateful for the opportunity, they were completely engaged and asked lots of questions.

Upon return to the hotel, attendees gathered in the ballroom where Lippert's Kim Lisiak and Michelle Shattuck led the group through an interactive presentation on managing conflict. The program continued after lunch with the popular "My Journey to Leadership" panel. Panelists representing companies from a small custom coater to major corporations shared their experiences and advice, and fielded questions from the audience. Attendees appreciated the diversity in panelist job function – executive, sales, general manager, and quality director – and expressed they were able to identify with at least one of the panelists.

Closing the day 1 general session, Dr. Amber Selking engaged the audience addressing gender differences and how they can be used to drive organizational performance. Drawing on her experience from her roles as vice president of leadership and



culture at Lippert and the mental performance coach for the Notre Dame football team and Coach Brian Kelly, she shared examples of steps attendees can take to ensure they positively impact their team and company.

Injected with a boost of energy from Amber's presentation, seven teams descended on the Notre Dame campus for a scavenger hunt. Task completion required strategy, attention to detail, planning, and teamwork with the goal of accumulating the most points within the designated timeframe. The winning team received Starbucks gift cards and CCAI scarves – and of course, bragging rights.

Hungry and thirsty after a day packed with learning and a good amount of walking on campus, attendees enjoyed a networking reception and dinner during which they recapped the day's events and continued to forge new relationships. "It was great to see everyone mingling and talking. While many only knew a couple of participants at the start of the event, the atmosphere at dinner was that of a group of longtime friends," observed Anne Goyer, CCAI executive director. Musical entertainment provided by John Fister added a special touch and was enjoyed by all.

The final day of the WiF FORUM started with a wellness walk to Notre Dame Stadium and the library. CCAI's Amanda Moore, a Notre Dame alum, was a valuable walk participant as she shared points of interest, stories, and answered questions along the way. Reconvening in the ballroom, the group settled in to learn about market and technology trends from Shelley Bausch, Sr. VP, global industrial coatings, for Axalta Coating Systems followed by a session led by Lee Ann Schwoppe Cochran of Amphora Consulting, focused on creating the structure for accountability within your team, department, and/or company. The morning wrapped up with roundtable discussions on topics of interest submitted by attendees.

The FORUM closed with lunch featuring a discussion with Leslee Robinson, sales representative with Cardinal Paint & Powder. Feedback from previous WiF events indicated a particular interest in sales strategies as a discussion topic. A seasoned sales professional, Leslee shared anecdotes and advice in a casual manner. As the 2021 WiF FORUM attendees packed up and headed out for the airport or their drive home, comments about their experience were overwhelmingly positive.

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## Hear what attendees had to say about the 2021 WiF FORUM:

- "I feel like I am walking away with a lot of useful information and enjoyed learning about the shared experiences of women in this industry."
- "My expectations were beyond exceeded. I was floored and returned singing high praises in hopes of recruiting more women next year."
- "All together the women were very knowledgeable about the process and talked about real things I could relate to. I also had a great time seeing a new plant and the way they process their parts."
- "All of the presenters were so knowledgeable. The method of presentations was relatable to all regardless of the varying level of leadership."

Planning is underway for the 2022 Women in Finishing FORUM. Watch for details at [www.womeninfinishing.org](http://www.womeninfinishing.org).