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## OREGON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AWARDS

### ▼ WOMEN IN BUSINESS

# ANDREA BAINBRIDGE

*Bainbridge Design: Company builds on foundation of listening to customers*

BY LINDA MCDONNELL

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penchant for "chatting" is one way to talk yourself up the ladder of success.

At least, that has worked for Andrea Bainbridge, who said being personal helps in getting to know clients, understanding their needs and growing a business.

"[We have] a reputation for being good listeners and savvy to the customer," said Bainbridge, whose design firm played a key role in the new Port of Portland building in Old Town. "That's why we have these long-term relationships."

Thanks to an ongoing relationship with the Port, Bainbridge Design was selected



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ANDREA BAINBRIDGE



as prime design contractor on the new headquarters, a lead position that typically goes to an architectural firm. Past jobs with Port officials positioned the firm to



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Andrea Bainbridge and her design team are building an impressive list of long-term clients.

take the lead in development of the new headquarters. The \$19.5 million Port building now stands as one of Bainbridge's largest projects.

In 1983, with five years of professional experience behind her, Bainbridge opened her own tiny office, plugged in a phone and was in business. Nike was one of her first customers.

"I was in the right place at the right time," she said. That first job led to repeat work with the ever-expanding Nike and helped establish what has become something of a company philosophy.

"It's easier to keep a client than to get a new one," Bainbridge said, adding with a

laugh, "although I probably didn't know that when I started."

Most of her clients have been with her for 10 years or more.

Bainbridge Design focuses entirely on commercial work. Long-term clients include a number of governmental bodies, such as the city of Portland, Multnomah County and the Bonneville Power Administration. Wells Fargo Bank, another of Bainbridge's earliest clients, has called on her firm to design 50 branch remodels over the years.

If women are finally claiming their place in the world of design and construction, then work on the Port of Portland head-

quarters may be emblematic of their progress. In addition to Bainbridge—the interior designer and lead contractor—the project engineer for builder Baugh Construction was a woman, as was the lead electrician. Development managers on the Port's end also were female.

Bainbridge remembers initially having trouble getting other contractors to take her seriously. "They'd pat you on the head and call you an 'interior decorator,' she said. Today, she finds the professional field fairly level for herself, but acknowledged there may still be challenges in some segments.

"I'm in my mid-40s, and my generation is finally getting to places of power in their own structures," she said. But she firmly believes that women bring a valuable dimension to design in the construction industry.

All of Bainbridge Design's 15 employees are women. Even the company's size is unusual for the field. Most interior-design firms are small, seldom growing to more than 10 people.

The quality of a job for Bainbridge is contingent on meeting the client's goals. And that doesn't necessarily mean spending a lot of money. "We work the client's budget for what is important for them—not what we think is important," she said.

The job of interior design is far from the "decorating" Bainbridge's early colleagues seemed to expect. The specialty,



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**Bainbridge Design was the prime design contractor for the new Port of Portland headquarters.**

which includes space planning, begins with analyzing how the client's offices need to work within the company's organizational structure. At the Port, for example, the layout is designed to break down communication barriers and encourage teamwork. Dividers with open entry ways largely replace traditional walls and doors.

Another consideration in designing public buildings comes with public perception. At the Port, for example, the goal was a building that added aesthetically to the neighborhood, while not appearing extravagant.

"It's important for a public agency that the image is not 'glitzy.' If it is, everybody gets in trouble," Bainbridge said.

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