

WOMEN in transport

The story of Carol McGeady, executive officer, NZ Trucking Association

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The transport industry in New Zealand is currently going through a major period of change: a new road user charges (RUC) system; the introduction of high productivity motor vehicles (HPMV), including 50MAX, that has seen a massive reinvestment in new equipment and technology; new health and safety legislation that puts more pressure on anyone who has control or influence in the running of a business; increased competition with ever-tightening margins; an ever-aging workforce, with an average age of over 50 years; and a massive shortage of suitably-qualified Class 5 drivers.

The latter issue has been the catalyst in developing a range of new initiatives to attract a more diverse range of people (including women and younger people) into a career in the transport industry. Part of this initiative is to highlight and celebrate the women who are already successfully working in the industry by telling their stories, in the hope they will inspire others to consider a career in the transport industry. This is the story of Carol McGeady, an executive officer for the NZ Trucking Association.

Last year, NZ Trucking Association was going through a number of changes within the office, mainly aimed at providing an enhanced service to the association's members. At the time, we required an additional staff member to fill the role of office manager. One of the many applicants



for the role was Carol McGeady. Carol had an amazing life story to tell. She was more than qualified for the job, with an outgoing personality that fitted our industry perfectly. Carol was hired right away, fitting in with the

team from day one. Within a very short period, she was responsible for streamlining our internal office systems and procedures. It didn't take us long to recognise Carol's many talents and enthusiasm, and soon she

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was promoted to the role of executive officer, where she has continued to challenge the accepted norm within the trucking industry. The association's office manager role has since been taken up by Tania Taylor, who also brings an enthusiastic personality and years of business experience to the role.

Carol tells her story

In my interview I was told the role I was applying for wasn't a job for a 'shrinking violet'. At this point, I had no idea what that meant in relation to my job, so when I got home I googled it. While the dictionary has one meaning, I actually related more to the other one — the fictional super hero, Shrinking Violet.

Leaving school at 15 with no career path and being told for many years I would amount to nothing, I decided to prove them wrong. I lied about my age and experience and secured myself a job in a department store selling sewing supplies. Soon I was promoted to department manager and then to buyer. From there, my career took off.

Over the years, I've worked in various roles from office manager, to running my own insurance brokerage business specialising in rural and business insurance. While working, I also had a hobby I enjoyed — designing baby furniture. Turning 40 years old was a milestone for me, so I got out of the insurance game and decided to turn my hobby into a business. Amazingly, the words still ring in my ear from school and my determination continued to prove them all wrong. I set about building an internationally-recognised brand called Cariboo, and produced a range of cleverly-designed furniture no one else had done before.

Exporting high quality pine furniture that was made in New Zealand was impossible — well, so I was told by many people. It was quite a journey growing the business. It took me to all parts of the world opening up markets in Harrods in the UK, to some of the largest chains of baby stores in Australia and the USA. The brand and furniture was sought after by USA celebrities. One of the highlights was setting up the nursery for John Travolta's new baby Benjamin. This led

me to being invited as a guest to celebrity-only events in the USA.

One day I'll write a book with all my experiences, as people have told me many of my adventures are inspirational. The business was recognised on a local level and was a finalist in the Export NZ awards for four years in a row, and in 2008 we won Global Operator and the Supreme Small Business awards at the Canterbury Champion Awards.

Three years later, due to circumstances beyond my control, the business was liquidated and sold. I continued on for two years working for the new owners and then decided I needed to test my skills in another industry. Luckily for me, the NZ Trucking Association offered me an opportunity.

At first I thought the job was going to be easy, managing the accounts, then after a very short time I was promoted to a new role of executive officer, which is now my 'dream job'. From babies to truckies, not much is different really. While you do get the odd fussy baby, you also get the odd delicate truckie, which is quite entertaining.

I'm making a difference every day by using what I've learnt over the years and applying it to help the industry achieve a better profile, and assisting our members with sound business advice. Building a brand is easy for me, so I'll enjoy using my skills to help transport operators and the transport industry build their brand.

My perception of the transport industry before I began working in it was that it would be hard to be accepted, and I actually expected to be bullied. How wrong could I have been? I've never had so much respect

and support — not only from the team at NZ Trucking Association but the executive board and their partners as well.

I am excited to be supporting projects to encourage more women into the industry on all levels, whether it is driving or other roles. The passion in the industry is understated and unreported. I couldn't be happier.

In Carol's previous work roles she has been responsible for organising a number of trade shows and industry events, both in New Zealand and overseas. The skills and experience learnt along the way have been invaluable as a key part of the team organising the upcoming Tyre General GT Radial Trucking 2014 event being held at the Wigram Airforce Museum on Saturday, 11 October. At the event will be over 80 industry-related trade stands, including many launching new and exciting products; in excess of 250 trucks and machinery polished to within an inch of their life in the Show and Shine; a transport industry careers hub for anyone interested in a career in the transport industry; a cycle safety workshop, focusing on sharing the road, industry-focused speakers in a seminar session, and 650 people to the gala dinner and charity auction which is raising funds for the Child Cancer Foundation and Ronald McDonald House. This event promises to be exciting, and is certainly the largest of its kind ever held in the South Island. The event is open to everyone who wishes to attend. Entry is by gold coin donation. ■

For more information contact NZ Trucking Association on 0800 338 338 or info@nztruckingassn.co.nz

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