

Women In Tech 2007: Cable More Than Just A Job For Carolyn Terry

2195 words

15 June 2007

Communications Technology

Vol. 24; Issue 6

English

© 2007 Access Intelligence, LLC. All Rights Reserved.

By Mike Robuck, Associate Editor

There's no "I" in team or in Carolyn Terry.

Terry's résumé looks like a highlight reel for the cable industry over the past two decades: She has worked at deploying most of the cutting-age technologies as they became available. While the list of her accomplishments is long, she is quick to point out that it was the teams - usually teams that she built and trained - that are responsible for her successes in the industry.

Terry, who is regional director of engineering for Time Warner Cable's Los Angeles division, joins a distinguished list as this year's **Women** in Technology Award winner, but given her druthers, the spotlight would shine on her co-workers.

"I wanted to crawl under my desk and not tell anybody," Terry says of the moment when she found out she was this year's winner. "I truly believe that this (award) belongs to the teams and organizations that I've been privileged and honored to work with and lead. I want to hold them up and say, 'I didn't get here without these people and all of these opportunities.' I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all of them for their dedication throughout the years. I am honored to be able to represent them in receiving this award."

And to think coming out of college, Terry wasn't interested in a career in cable, or for that matter, even after she first started working in the industry.

Film's loss is cable's gain

When Terry graduated from college "the first time" in 1986, she hoped to parlay her telecommunications degree into a career in television, radio or film production in California.

"I really thought I was going to be a great director like Steven Spielberg or Sydney Pollack," she says. "I worked on a few productions and things, but there was a pretty big recession here around 1986 for the film industry, so there wasn't a lot of work, and I needed a job to pay off my student loans."

Terry, the daughter of Dean and Jeanne Terry, was living in her hometown of Simi Valley after graduating from Moorpark Community College when some cable guys came by to work on the box in her apartment.

"I asked them if the cable company was doing any hiring because at the time Group W was part of TriStar/HBO," she says. "I thought I would break in as a cable installer and then somehow that would get me to TriStar/HBO. It didn't quite work out that way."

Instead of working for Group W, Terry found herself working for Comcast Cablevision, which had purchased the Group W cable assets. Two traits stand out from Terry's days as an installer and service technician: her desire to learn and her belief in functioning as a member of a team.

When a slot opened up to take an NCTI course, Terry jumped on it even though she didn't have the on-the-job hours that were normally required. She went on to complete four more NCTI courses in addition to completing other seminars and certificates from various organizations.

As a service technician, she and five other techs had 300 miles of plant and 14 to 20 service calls a day when she first started, but in the end, the team prevailed.

"The system was in bad shape," she says. "At first you just wanted to hide every day after work, or you took your work shirt off before leaving the location. By the time I left, the six techs were just doing maintenance and only one or two service calls outages a day. It really felt good to be a part of a team that turned things around."

With four brothers and two sisters growing up around her, Terry said being a woman in a male-dominated field never bothered her because it was never about being a female - it was about getting the job done, just like she did at home. She climbed poles when she was training rookie technicians and took the most difficult amp locations.

"I always took the hardest locations if we were running a change management at 4 in the morning," she says. "I just wanted to let them know I was there for a reason and that I could do the job."

A career path, finally

Six years into her job at Comcast Cablevision, Terry realized she was hooked when she was giving a review to one of her employees. It seemed foreign to her that the employee had worked as a technician for 10 years and hadn't taken one course to advance himself. By contrast, Terry had been spending her evenings pursuing a degree in AS **Electronics** Engineering Technology at the ITT Technical Institute, which she completed with highest honors in 1998. Terry picked up her Bachelor of Science of **Electronics** Engineering from ITT Technical Institute in 1999.

Terry had moved up through the ranks in those six years, and after putting in 14-hour days, she said it finally sunk in that she wasn't going to be the next Steven Spielberg and that she had found her true calling.

"I consciously accepted it at that point," she says. "I really loved what I did. I loved working with the guys in the field, and I loved the organizations I had the opportunity to be a part of. Even though I worked really hard, it didn't seem like it because I enjoyed it."

Comcast's Wayne Hall worked with Terry for four years at Comcast Cablevision and personally picked her as his California area staff engineer. In that position, Terry was the principal engineer for all of Comcast's engineering projects in Comcast's California area, and Hall said her work was "critical in the launch of Comcast's first digital video services in the Orange County systems."

Terry nailed down her two degrees from the ITT Technical Institute while serving as Comcast's area staff engineer, a job that included not only the launch of digital video, but also 750 MHz upgrades and multiple buildings with optical interconnects, according to Hall.

"Carolyn is an outstanding engineer who has worked at and understands our industry's technology from the ground up," says Hall, who is vice president of engineering in Comcast's Central Pennsylvania region. "She is very deserving of this award and the recognition that goes with it. It'll make her a bit uncomfortable to be in the spotlight, but I hope she understands."

After a 13-year stint at Comcast, Terry went to KMPG Consulting as a senior consultant in 1999 before joining Digeo in Seattle in 2000. A year later, Terry returned to her California roots when she took a job with Altrio Communications as director, broadband communications center.

Dave Large worked with Terry at Altrio, and he says the pace was fast and furious as the company overbuilt Charter and Adelphia in the communities of Arcadia, Monrovia and Pasadena. In his nomination form for Terry, Large says she "built one of the most advanced headends in the industry, while managing all of our headend operations."

"Most cable systems are built for analog video, then you add digital video, and then pay-per-view," Large says. "We simultaneously launched analog video, pay-per-view, digital video, telephone and

high-speed data in a network that was 'four nines' (availability). During all of this, we were building up to a mile of new plant a day, and she had people turning up nodes every single day. It was a very intense environment, and I was just terribly impressed with how she handled it."

Opportunity knocks in LA

Three years ago, Terry was named regional director of advanced video services in Los Angeles for Adelphia Communications. When Time Warner Cable bought out the systems, Terry assumed her current role with TWC.

Terry is tackling one of her toughest challenges to date with the integration of three different systems in TWC's Los Angeles division, but despite some negative press in the mainstream media, she sees the glass as half- full and is almost fiercely proud of her current team's efforts.

"From a technical perspective, you're bringing three different environments together," Terry says. "I think we've already accomplished a tremendous amount here in terms of integrating. We have the biggest integration and the biggest opportunity at Time Warner."

While the public may not notice the difference just yet, Terry and her team have tied the regional video transport across all of the headends by using Gigabit Ethernet (GigE). They've also deployed digital simulcast to all approximately 800,000 customers in the Los Angeles footprint.

"That (digital simulcast) is an amazing accomplishment by an engineering organization in a very short period of time," Terry said. "I'm so proud of my team and the effort they put in to accomplish this."

Mentors, leadership and challenges

As far as her engineering skills go, Terry says Hall paid her one of the best compliments of her career when he said she had a "gut instinct" for engineering. Terry cites Hall, Large, Doug Ike, Gerry Anstine and Marwan Fawaz among the many mentors she's had in her 21-year cable career. She said past **Women** in Technology Award winner Sally Kinsman "has been an inspiration to me my whole career."

"I've been very fortunate to have some grand engineering mentors," she says. "There have been so many people that I have drawn from. Wayne Hall fills the mentor/leadership role very well. I've learned so much from him about leadership."

Terry believes one of the most important aspects of being a leader is finding out what people on her team are good at and then "allowing those skills to bubble up." No matter how small or large a team is, Terry says it needs to have a vision in place; once it does, it can serve as an inspiration for the rest of the organization. And on Terry's team, if a ball goes up, someone needs to catch it - no matter whose ball it is.

"We all own the ball until the ball goes into the basket," she says. "If you pick up the ball and don't know where to throw it, call me or call someone else, and we'll make sure it goes to the right place. I think it's just taking ownership of the performance of the whole organization."

Terry says cable needs a level playing field on the legislative front to be able to fairly compete with other service providers. TWC has 24 "must carries" in its LA division, along with more than 197 PEG (public, educational and government access) channels.

"If you look at the (FCC) 2009 deadline, we're going to be required to receive these HDs, and we're going to be required to carry a certain amount of bandwidth for broadcasters and off-airs here," she says. "Then in state franchises, we have the issue of the PEG access channels that we have to carry. Currently, the regulations work against us."

Balance and inspiration

Terry says she took up golf to force herself out of her home office on weekends. A year later, she is hitting in the low 90s. When she's not golfing, Terry and her partner, Laura, are kept busy with a new Golden Retriever named Riley and two kittens. When she has time, she also enjoys music, water sports, cooking and having guests over for a nice meal and a good bottle of wine.

Like most driven career professionals, she's fine-tuning the balance between a home life and her career.

Carolyn Terry wasn't able to crawl under the desk after winning this year's **Women** in Technology Award, but she was able to find a silver lining in the spotlight's glare.

"If this is an inspiration to some front line installer - I know we have a lot of **women** out there in our installer and technical groups, or even a male installer - then it's all worth it," she says.

Mike Robuck is associate editor of Communications Technology. Reach him at mrobuck@accessintel.com.

Sidebar: Past Winners

Past **Women** in Technology award recipients include:

2006: Vicki Marts, Cox Communications

2005: Charlotte Field, Comcast Cable

2004: Nomi Bergman, Advance/Newhouse Communication

2003: Marci Anderson, Cox Communications

2002: Christy Martin, Canal+ Technologies

2001: Sabrina Calhoun, Cox Communications

2000: Margaret Gaillard, AT&T Broadband

1999: Sally Kinsman, General Instrument

1998: Sheri Stinchcomb, Cox Communications

1997: Yvette Gordon-Kanouff, SeaChange International

1996: Pam Nobles, Jones Intercable

1995: Pam Arment, TCI

Note: Names and companies are as they were at the time of the award. The **Women** in Technology award is a joint effort of **Women** in Cable Telecommunications, the Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers and Communications Technology. The award itself is sponsored by Commscope and presented at Cable-Tec Expo.