

FinishMaster's Michelle Sullivan Honored as WIN's 2016 Most Influential Woman

by Chasidy Rae Sisk

As part of its goal to “enhance the role of women in the collision repair industry,” the Women’s Industry Network (WIN®) honors at least one woman each year for enriching the industry through their leadership, vision and commitment to excellence through their Most Influential Women (MIW) program. This year, WIN chose to honor **Michelle Sullivan**, Regional Vice President of *FinishMaster*, as the 2016 MIW.

When asked how it feels to be honored as WIN’s 2016 MIW, Sullivan responded, “I am excited, grateful and humbled. I have held leadership positions throughout my career that have allowed me to identify, advance and retain talent in the collision repair industry. Great mentors inspired me, and I have a strong desire to do that for others. Winning the MIW award means that I have a responsibility to continue that advocacy and ‘leave it better than I found it.’”

Sullivan began her career in the collision repair industry in 1994 as a Human Resources Manager for a Baltimore distributor.

She explained, “I was working for a large corporation and was attracted to a smaller company where I could make a great impact.”

The next eight years of Sullivan’s career were spent working in marketing, operations, sales and management in order to learn every aspect of the business, before she became President of that company in 2002. She continued there for another ten years. The company went on to win the 2007 Distributor of the Year award under her leadership. Sullivan then worked for paint manufacturer for several years, winning their Leadership Award in 2015. Sullivan joined *FinishMaster* as Regional Vice President in January 2016.



Michelle Sullivan

Sullivan stated, “Most of my career has been spent championing change, developing talent, and driving results. I have been elected to various councils which have provided many opportunities, particularly to be part of shaping the direction of the organization.”

Denise Caspersen, WIN’s Chair, said, “Being selected as an MIW not only reflects on Michelle’s past actions but also sets the future stage for her as a mentor to others in the collision repair industry and as a continued

industry leader. WIN is honored to recognize Michelle and looks forward to a future where every woman in the collision industry finds and fulfills her place of influence.”



Sullivan attended the first WIN conference in 2007 and has been involved ever since.

“I was attracted to WIN because this is an organization that is dedicated to encouraging, developing and cultivating opportunities to attract women to collision repair,” she said. “They also recognize excellence, promote leadership, and foster a network of women who are shaping the industry. I wanted to be part of that!”

In 2013, Sullivan was elected to WIN’s Board of Directors. She also participates as the co-chair for the Membership and Industry Outreach committees. Sullivan is involved in other organizations, representing the collision repair industry at national events. She enjoys speaking to various segments of the industry and raising awareness of the opportunities within collision repair.

When asked about why it’s important for women to be involved in the collision repair industry, Sullivan responded, “The collision repair industry

continues to face a shortage of people to fill critical positions, such as technicians, managers and executives. Recruiting and retaining talent becomes essential for the long-term sustainability of our industry. We are seeing more of that talent in women that are entering our industry or who are embracing leadership roles. It is important for women to be involved to bring additional talent and diversity to work environments.”

Sullivan offers some advice for young women interested in pursuing a career in the automotive industry: “Don’t let preconceived notions limit your thinking. Most people don’t realize the various career paths within the automotive field. If you are a student, join an industry organization and

connect to the industry. Explore, question, engage! The more that you can get involved early on, the more opportunities will appear. Stay positive and adaptable, and find a mentor. Women who are part of industry organizations make great mentors; they typically had someone who promoted their development and were important to their journey, and most are looking to pay it forward.”

The MIW program was established in 1999 by AkzoNobel and has recognized nearly 85 women whose leadership, vision and commitment to excellence has enriched the industry. Since acquiring stewardship of the MIW program in 2013, WIN continues to evolve the program to align with the organization’s mission to “enhance the role of women in the collision repair industry.”

The leadership of women who received the MIW Award focuses on four areas: industry influence, professional accomplishments, mentoring and supporting others in the collision repair industry, and going beyond the requirements of their professional lives to give back to their communities.

Amidst resounding applause, Sul-

livan said, “It is with great excitement, gratitude and humility that I accept this award. I want to thank WIN and its founders. Ten years ago, they had a vision, and they and many others along the way have worked tirelessly to engage women in the collision repair industry. They have provided a platform for me and many others to do what we love in an industry that we are so passionate about and to ensure that women have a seat at the table.”

Sullivan continued, “I want to thank *FinishMaster* and the many other organizations that sponsor and support WIN. I want to thank my parents for giving me a solid foundation, and to the many friends, colleagues and mentors who have helped me along in my journey. Most of those mentors are in this room tonight, and I want to thank you; they have inspired me and coached me along the way.”

Denise Caspersen, Outgoing Chair for WIN and 2008 MIW Honoree, led a toast to Sullivan, the scholarship recipients and all WINners, noting, “We are all MIWs. Maybe we haven’t been given the title, but by being a leader in the industry, we are all most influential!”

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