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## Leadership's fresh face

Increasing numbers of women are working for mining companies – in the field, and in the corner office

Krisendra Bisetty

Grizzly prospectors still abound, but from camp sites all the way up to executive suites, the face of one of the most masculine of industries in B.C. is changing.

At some mine sites these days, it's not uncommon to find women in the field doing the technical work, or heading up operations or even entire resource companies.

That's not something that surprises Susan Craig, though.

At Vancouver-based Northern Freegold Resources Ltd., it's the norm, not the exception, for women to hold the reins of power, whether it's on technical/geological projects or overall responsibility, which Craig, 44, has had since being appointed president in February.

Northern Freegold, a TSX Venture Exchange-listed junior mineral exploration company with properties in Yukon and Arizona, was co-founded by Craig and partner Bill Harris, a second-generation prospector, who is its CEO.

Craig, a trained geologist who also has a teaching degree, joins a small but growing list of women heading up B.C. mining companies.

Others include:

- Catherine McLeod-Seltzer, the chairman of Pacific Rim Mining Corp. who co-founded and led Arequipa Resources as president before it was taken over by Barrick Gold Corp. in 1996 for \$1.1 billion;
- Eira Thomas, chief executive and director of Stornoway Diamond Corp.; and
- Joanne Freeze, president, CEO and co-founder of Candente Resource Corp., which is exploring for copper, gold and silver in Mexico and Peru.

Women have melded so seamlessly into the industry that Craig had not even realized, until asked, that they accounted for more than 64% (nine of 14) of Northern Freegold's technical staff. "We didn't go to look to hire females," she said. "But the fact that they ended up being females was great."

Recent Statistics Canada data shows that in an average month in 2006, approximately 157,600 people reported employment in the mining and mining services industry. When combined across Canada, women account for 14%, or 22,000 of that employment, an increase from 16,500 in 2005 and 10,300 in 2002.

In B.C., 2,400 women, or 16% out of a total of 15,100 respondents, indicated that they worked in the mining and mining services industry.

As she looked across the exhibitors' floor of the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada's global industry conference in Toronto earlier in March, Craig said she was struck by the number of female managers or company bosses.



"I just think it's a sort of an evolution," said Craig, who was once part of a Women in Leadership Foundation study that examined barriers women faced in the industry. "A lot of females have the technical skills, a lot of females are good organizers, and so, to have the wherewithal to step up and run a junior company or being involved in the management of a larger company, I think people are starting to recognize that's a benefit."

And as streams of university mining students flowed through exhibitor stands, Craig was also surprised at the gender ratio of classes. Most, she said, were 50:50.

So what's the attraction?

For one, earnings in B.C. are the highest in the industry, at 16% above the national average, according to a recent report by the Mining Industry Human Resources Council.

The report also pointed out that the industry would need to recruit about 10,000 people per year overall, or 100,000 in the next 10 years, due to retirement.

Moreover, some mining companies are being innovative in how they attract and retain staff, providing not only competitive salary and benefits packages but flexible shift options, fly-in camps and even top-notch food and accommodation at sites. The council report even suggested providing child-care facilities to lure women into the industry.

"There're companies willing to look at solutions for having [women] being able to be in field and also have time with children," said Craig.

As well, a lot of geology these days is not done in the field, but with computers and modelling.

That was not the case for Danae Voormeij, however. The Simon Fraser University geology graduate worked around the world at mine camps and sites, enduring stifling heat and even a five-metre long boa constrictor in the Amazonian jungle, before starting her own company, Mynah Exploration Inc., to help B.C. mining companies explore their own potential.

"Be prepared to travel anywhere, anytime," Voormeij told SFU students at a recent mining event. "It's fun. It's a big adventure."

kbisetty@telus.net