

THE LIST

# HELP WANTED: MORE LICENSED FEMALE ENGINEERS IN BAY AREA FIRMS

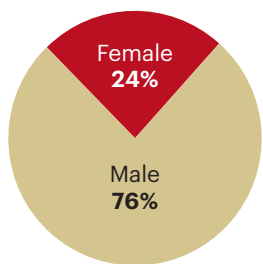


**“Our industry wrestles with child-bearing years,” says Larrabee. Now a CEO, she’s trying to change that.**

HARRIS & ASSOCIATES

## BOYS CLUB

In the San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont metropolitan area from 2006-2010, male professionals heavily dominated the field. The data, compiled by the U.S. Census Bureau, includes both engineers and computer professionals.



SOURCE: SOCIETY OF WOMEN ENGINEERS

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For Lisa Larrabee, she feels fortunate to have work-life balance without sacrificing her career.

As CEO and chair of the board of directors at Harris & Associates, an employee-owned Concord-based engineering firm, she wanted to create a work atmosphere for everyone to thrive in. As a female CEO in a male-dominated industry, Larrabee believes that engineering firms need to be more flexible when it comes to working with women, and that this is key to attracting and retain-

ing qualified female engineers.

“One of the things we’re endeavoring to create at Harris, in general, is an environment where people have thriving careers,” said Larrabee, whose firm ranked No. 21 on our top 50 engineering firms list this week. “This is no rocket science statement, but we take the long-term view as it relates to our employees.”

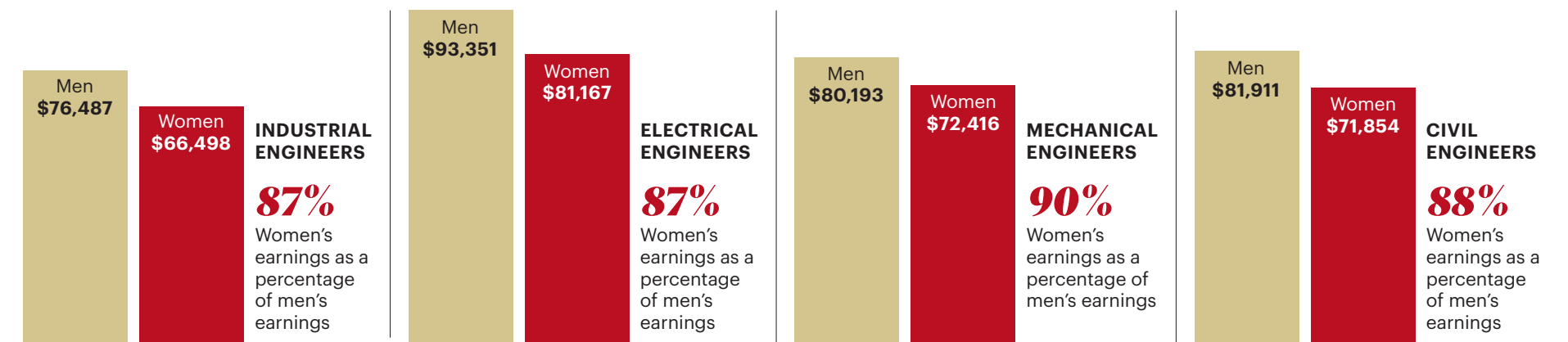
“Our industry wrestles with child-

bearing years, having good maternity and paternity leave, flex time on hours (part time to full time) and leaves of absence beyond the FMLA for people we obviously value,” added Larrabee, who has been at the helm at Harris & Associates since October 2010.

At Redwood City-based BKF Engineers, the firm is actively looking for female engineers to join their company

## ENGINEERING A BRIDGE ACROSS THE GENDER PAY GAP

The good news is that women in engineering see a smaller gender pay gap than in the economy as a whole, where women in most industries earn an estimated 75-80 cents to every \$1 earned by men. The bad news is that a substantial disparity still exists across most engineering disciplines.



NOTES: “INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERS” INCLUDES HEALTH AND SAFETY. “ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS” INCLUDES ELECTRONICS ENGINEERS. SOURCE: L. M. FREHILL ANALYSIS OF U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (2014), AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN.

and offers flex time to their staff, including working mothers. “We feel that diversity in the workforce makes for a better team,” said David LaVelle, president and CEO at BKF Engineers. “Female engineers bring great communication skills to the job and a slightly different perspective to the design business.”

According to LaVelle, his firm has 18 licensed female engineers in the Bay Area, 24 companywide. “Our current trends in hiring indicate that this year about 35 percent of the recent college grads we hire in engineering will be female graduates.

“We expect this trend to continue as more females seek STEM careers,” said

LaVelle, whose firm offers career training and advancement. “We find they are well prepared to enter the workforce and are focused on their careers, as are their male counterparts.”

Larrabee, who said her firm does not have a set hiring goal for women each year, spends a lot on leadership development. The firm currently has four local, licensed female engineers on staff, and nine companywide. “We have a leadership academy of up-and-coming managers in the firm, 12-15 people, classes are

50/50 women and men, and we get into really deep subjects,” said Larrabee, who speaks openly about the need for diversity and the importance of recognizing

bias and discrimination, whether it be gender, age or targeted towards millennials.

So with more Bay Area firms focusing on finding qualified, licensed female engineers, is the field getting better or worse for women? “It’s getting bet-

ter slowly on the private side, but if you look at American Public Works Association, you see more women in high-level

positions on the public side,” said Larrabee. “It may have to do with a higher degree of job security as one hypothesis. That’s a positive trend for women in engineering.”

“The Bay Area leads the state and country around human rights, diversity as kind of a culture subset of the world,” said Larrabee. “There is a lot of influence here, from city of San Francisco to Silicon Valley. There are a lot of women engineers in the Bay Area. As an organization, we need to reflect our constituency, that is an important dimension in the Bay Area. And No. 2, it is a place to practice what we preach to demonstrate that this is a good thing, doesn’t hurt.”

**‘We feel that diversity in the workforce makes for a better team.’**

DAVID LAVELLE, BKF Engineers