

Not Afraid to Sweat

From rural south Georgia, to the military, to industrial construction, Monda Mathis is used to performing well in a male-dominated environment. But now, the men work for her.

This 42-year-old electrician spent 20 years doing manufacturing and heavy industrial work before one of her employers encouraged her to strike out on her own, and start her own UL508 control panel manufacturing company. Now, after a year in business for herself, she is working hard to build long-term relationships with her customers.

"When I was in high school, I wanted to be a writer. I came from a rural town, and in the summer we worked in the fields to make money," she said. "Early on, I learned that there was a difference between what men and women got paid. The jobs that men were doing just paid better than the jobs that women typically were doing."

And with little opportunity in her small town – writing or otherwise – Monda left the area and joined the military. "I had the want-to-see-the-world twinkle in my eyes," she said. She was assigned to work on ground support equipment, and soon realized that she had a skill she enjoyed. "At that time, it was historically male dominated," she said of the work detail, "and I did well with that." But the military environment enabled her to work in an area that was also male-dominated outside the service...where it was more difficult to break in.

"When I got out of the service, I couldn't get a job doing what I had been doing," she said. "When I would go for an interview, I seemed to make them feel uncomfortable. Sometimes I felt like I must have had three eyes or something...if you know what I mean. But when I came up against a wall, I'd go to another door." Along the way, she would find a number of doors to go through. Some of those doors, her ingenuity would help open.

After having difficulty getting hired in the industrial field for maintenance, she applied for a job through the mail – using only her initials on her resume, so her gender was not so obvious. She was hired, and when she showed up on the job, the company that hired her was very surprised. But they were impressed by her resume and gave her a shot. It paid off.

She worked for some time, and then decided she needed to get more training...so she went back to school at night. She studied drafting and computer design, becoming proficient with AutoCAD.

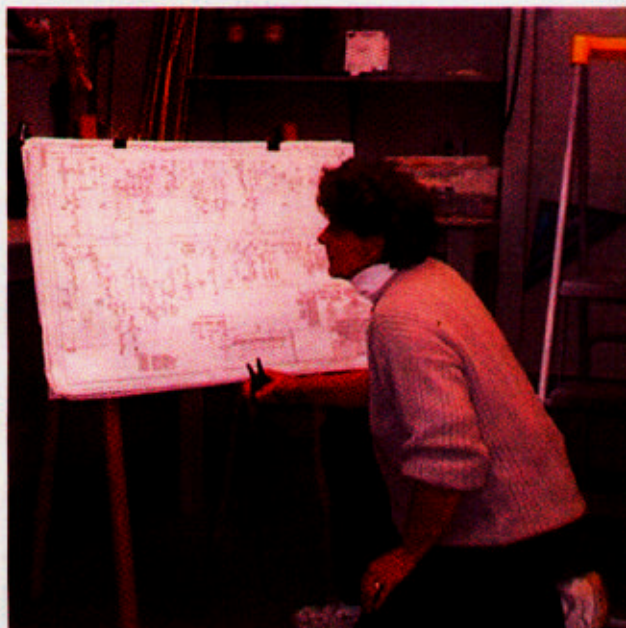
And then she put those new skills to use, and began working on trouble-shooting and then control panels.

Although she was not an engineer, she found herself working with them a great deal, and her eye for detail did not go unnoticed. "Little by little you build their confidence in you. If there were any problems, I tried to catch them before they got to the

field," she said. "It's been a little bit of a rough row to hoe."

Over time, though, her reputation grew. And it was actually one of the companies she was working for – Metric Constructors – that encouraged her to strike out on her own. "They had a huge project," she said. So beginning in January 2000 with more encouragement from her husband, she started dividing her time between construction work and her new business – DMS Services, Inc. But that ability to spread herself out would be short-lived, as the demand for her time and services began to grow.

"The last seven or eight months I've had to go into it full force," she said, adding that the workload kept her too busy to be done on a



"I don't want to be known as a small woman-owned business, I want to be known for my ability, skills, business ethics and hard work," she said. "I have worked in the field, and I'm not afraid to sweat."