



Celebrating WiC WEEK!

Only **9.9%** of the
Construction Workforce
Is **Female.**

What Makes Our WiCs Tick?

Jessie Cunningham, PE Geotechnical Engineer



Geotechnical Engineering has historically been a male-dominated field. But when meeting a capable and technically proficient engineer like F&R Jessup's Jessie Cunningham, you have to wonder why. Jessie makes it look easy and totally natural for a female to excel in this space while balancing kids, home life and multiple projects and clients.

Was this career an accident or a plan?

JC: *I aimed for civil engineering so that part, along with the Geotechnical Engineering, was planned. In high school, I was drawn to engineering and to service and civil engineering seemed the correct combination. In college, I was immersed in design and solving challenges with numbers, but I wasn't as good with theoretical numbers as I was with applied numbers. After graduation, and starting my family, it became apparent that my talents were in the field and with smaller less theoretical designs. This last piece was accidental and to be sure my day is less glamorous/polite than my peers who stuck with design.*

What are some roadblocks you have met along the way in your career/education?

JC: *Maybe not necessarily roadblocks but "personal choices", such as my choice to control my schedule, stick to a defined geographical area and have a large family. With each choice, I have had to pivot, check my network, and see who is doing work similar to what I want to do then reach out and ask them how they are doing it. Their solutions don't necessarily fit my situation but they give me more ideas of how I could structure life.*



What part of your work is most challenging?

JC: *The most challenging part of work is building the professional network. I do not have the technical recall to come off as brilliant in social settings AND I am the primary parent so getting out and about requires a lot of organizing.*

Why do you feel there is such a shortage of females in this industry?

JC: *It seems to take a certain amount of either thick skin (not me) or earnestness in pursuit of your goals (me for a long time) to get into and stick with construction. Believing that you belong even when the evidence may appear to the contrary and making your own path are critical to keeping on. Sometimes it might seem like there are dry spells of what I would call 'emotional support' which is probably different than more typically diverse professions.*

What is your dream project – the type of project that just thrills you every time you get to work on one?

JC: *The projects I enjoy most are those I can take from boring inspection through construction inspection; that said I like caissons and retaining wall design.*

What project are you most proud of?

JC: *When they broke ground on the Purple Line at long last I cheered. Even the structures I worked on aren't only mine by any stretch of one's imagination but I am proud of being able to advance mass transit. I also like to go check on the wall below the Catholic Church in Old Ellicott City, when the latest flooding happened I was very proud to see it standing strong. Lately my projects are important to their owners and I am proud to provide them quality design services.*

If you'd like to rock the construction world like Jessie F&R has a place for you! Visit our careers page at: [FandR.com/careers](https://www.fandR.com/careers) and see how you fit into our family.



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