

Chitra Botheju

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Engineer of 'women power'

by LAKMAL
WELABADA

I looked for a woman with a tough countenance. After all, that is what I expected of the first woman Maintenance Engineer in Sri Lanka.

But, was pleasantly surprised with Chitra Boteju's quiet elegance and warm hearted welcome. I wondered how she survived in her male dominated field of work. Especially when handling subordinates of low educational background.

It is hard to believe that this soft spoken woman had even started her career, successfully completing the Junior Technical Officers' Course at the University of Moratuwa in 1968. She offered electrical, mechanical and chemical engineering - which were almost entirely male dominated subjects at the time. And it was the first time that a female student completed the two year course and got through all the three sections together at once.

Though her family preferred her doing medicine, Chitra's brilliant capability in mathematics inspired her to choose engineering as her career.

In 1970, Chitra who was just 24-years-old was offered the job as an Assistant Electrical Superintendent at the State Engineering Corporation.

"At the beginning I was given only office work, but later on I was gradually endowed with more responsibility, and then handling the entire electrical installations in the major projects like

Uswatte Housing Scheme, People's Bank Head Office building, Bank of Ceylon - Hyde Park Corner building and National Lotteries Board building (today where the Inland Revenue is)," she said.

Theory

Among all that the most memorable work Chitra counts as valuable was the chance she got to do electrical

"Actually, my theory is that you should be straightforward and pretend to be tough a bit as otherwise it's difficult to handle your subordinates; but at the same time you should not forget to be humble, kind and understanding when working with them," she said.

Chitra has the born quality of charismatic leadership.

This helped her to



and lunch boxes for Davis Company in Australia. The whole production line was handled by her. And it was another occasion that proved Chitra's proficiency at work.

Milestone

However successful she was, her heart longed for Lankan breeze. No money could give her that satisfaction. In 1991 she along with her family was back in the Lankan soil.

Three years after her return Chitra formed Oceanica International (Pvt) Ltd, an ice making factory at Dambulla. The building was constructed according to the lay out given by her where the electrical network and the installation of the factory is with capacity of 80 tons of ice cubes per day.

Chitra's newest and the winning milestone

Wired for success, she has made many inroads in her field by becoming the first woman maintenance engineer in the country.

gain confidence to resign from the People's Bank and to put up her own family business in Malaysia.

In 1989 the Botheju family formed Tradika Industries, hundred percent export oriented plastic items company with the collaboration of USA and Malaysia. Chitra became the Director cum Executive Engineer at Tradika which catered for the customer designed plastic items like Helium gas balloon valves for McDonalds in USA

in her career cum family business is the newly opened eight storeyed building for Oceanica Recreation (Pvt) Ltd at Galle Road, Kollupitiya which was constructed as a BoI project under 'Jana Mandira' program of the Sports Ministry. The entire electrical network of the building has been designed by her.

"I am a woman who has been worked for the whole life - day and night," she said with a contented smile "I am dedicated to my work

and rarely have the time for myself," she added.

Apart from the hard worker in her, always full of determination to ensure the success in her career and business, Chitra is also a devoted social worker. Last month (March 25) she formed the 'Chitra Botheju Foundation' to give a helping hand for the education of the needy children of her own employees.

Looking after her subordinates has been part of her life from the very beginning. She is not merely the employer of her business but also acts as a mother for her staff and workers. Whether the government says or not her workers get an annual increment and bonuses well on time. "We have to treat and look after our employees well. That is also another ingredient for success," she explained.

Along with the pipeline that runs 3000 feet within 13 acres from the closest 'Weva' (tank) to pump water for their ice factory at Dambulla, Chitra has built three tube wells and two normal wells for the benefit of villagers of the area, constantly troubled by drought.

"I have not drawn a salary from the day I started off with our family business. Now I think it's time for that. But that money will go to our foundation for the needy. I worked hard and gained what I aimed successfully. My only hope in future is to do whatever I can for the nation and bring up my dearest two grandsons Pasindu and Kemindu as good citizens," she concluded.