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Mandy Rennehan, CEO, Freshco



## THE ODD COUPLE

Why a blue collar CEO teamed up with Mattel to make the trades a cool career choice for young girls

At first glance, the Barbie brand and Yarmouth-raised construction magnate Mandy Rennehan appear to be an odd match. After all, the founder and CEO of Freshco—a retail maintenance business—has a personality that is the opposite of the image the blonde-haired, blue-eyed doll has represented for decades.

“I didn’t play with Barbies,” Rennehan says. “But young women still have a fascination with them and it’s still an influential brand.”

And that’s why Rennehan agreed to partner with Mattel, the toy company that makes the doll, on a ‘Barbie you can be anything’ mentorship event that was held in her Nova Scotia hometown in November. The event was a way for Mattel to promote its latest Barbie doll—Construction Barbie. But it was also a way to promote the trades as a career path for young girls.

By 2020 the Conference Board of Canada expects that Canada will face a

shortage of one million skilled workers. In the trades, the impending worker shortage could be partly alleviated by more women taking up trades as a career. The Yarmouth event saw one girl, eight-year-old Xoe Nickerson (left), win a contest to spend the day with Rennehan learning about the construction trade. The event also included a pop-up party at the Yarmouth Mall where 300 Construction Barbies were handed out for free and other activities were held.

Could the partnership of Construction Barbie and Rennehan entice more young girls to enter the trades? Rennehan thinks it can, and along the way possibly inspire them to become entrepreneurs with a focus on trades like construction. “The numbers are still not impressive for women wanting to be part of our industry,” Rennehan says. “But there could be 20 to 25 per cent of women I can touch with this brand and change the thought process—even with Barbie.”

## EYE ON THE PRIZE

Airo Landscape looks to grab a bigger slice of the landscaping sector pie



St. John’s-based Airo Landscape Design Inc. is very a small part of Canada’s landscaping industry. But it has its eyes on becoming bigger.

The Canadian Nursery Landscape Association says the ‘green’ industry—one it says is comprised of thousands of locally-owned companies that grow, design, install and maintain plants and other landscape features—is worth \$14.8 billion annually. That is a big number for a sector that doesn’t attract as much attention as the fishery, the oil and gas and manufacturing industries. It also illustrates the opportunity that’s out there for companies like Airo Landscape.

Andrea Rowe, owner and principal landscape designer for Airo, is going after that opportunity in what she describes as a “pretty competitive industry.” It’s focused on attracting business in Newfoundland and Labrador’s residential market, but she is looking to expand Airo’s horizons. It will certainly help that the company won an award for excellence in landscape design in the fall of 2017 at the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association’s 14th annual National Awards of Landscape Excellence gala. Airo placed first for its Bristol Place Garden project in Gander. It beat out 45 other entries in the category, and is the first Newfoundland and Labrador company to be recognized for its work by the Association.

Rowe is also part owner of Atmosphere Landscape Construction—the firm that builds the landscaping projects Rowe and fellow Airo designer Jennifer Olah (left) dream up. With a national award to show off and plans to grow, Rowe is hoping the momentum allows the company to expand into the commercial landscaping market. Doing so would diversify its client base and allow it to stretch its legs on larger, more complex projects. “The residential market is a big part of what we do,” Rowe says. “But commercial projects tend to be larger scale, with more people involved and lots of regulations to follow. We want to see the business grow and keep getting bigger projects.”