

Young women winners show future of industry



WORDS BY MERYN MORRISON, WIRT CHAIRPERSON

If you looked around the room at this year's RTF Conference in Taupo, you could be forgiven in thinking: "here we go again, the same old faces."

Yes, the vast majority of delegates at the Conference and the associated NZ Road Transport Industry Awards Dinner were men, and I don't wish to demean the achievements of the many great blokes in our industry, but for the first time, it was fantastic to see a bunch of young women being the centre of attention.

Three of the five New Zealand Road Transport Industry Awards went to young women and each one of those women were thoroughly deserving winners. The runners-up for each award were also of a very high calibre.

The EROAD Outstanding Contribution to Health and Safety Award, which, as a long-time HR manager, is an award close to my heart, went to Carla Seymour

Mansell from Seymours Transport Services in Gisborne with Pana Sharma as runner-up.

Carla, who is the company's operations manager, is someone who has road transport running through her veins. She also makes health and safety training and compliance a priority for Seymours. In accepting the award, Carla reinforced the message that we must all keep striving to make sure that everybody who goes to work for the day can return home safely to their families.

For the first time, the EROAD Young Driver of the Year Award was judged on a driver's overall body of work across the year and Summer Ratima Thompson, from G J Sheldrake Ltd in Tokoroa, just pipped runner-up Toni Tawhara to take it out.

At 27 years old, Summer is an outstanding log truck driver with an impeccable safety record. She

approached company owner Graham Sheldrake looking for a job after working as a barista. Graham liked what he saw in Summer and now she is one of his best drivers.

For anyone that hasn't seen it, TVNZ's *Seven Sharp* did a fantastic profile on Summer after she won the award.

As chairperson of WIRT, I was absolutely thrilled to be involved in judging the first award specifically aimed at women—the Teletrac Navman Outstanding Contribution by a Woman in the Road Transport Industry Award. This year's inaugural winner was Angel Transport owner Ayna Shamim with Casey Glover taking the runner-up spot.

It's pleasing to see someone like Ayna win the award. As a young owner of a transport company, she's a real inspiration for other young people wanting to get into the industry and with aspirations of getting into the management side of things.

I also want to acknowledge Teletrac Navman for their sponsorship of the award; it's great to have your support.

The RTF Conference itself also featured a fascinating presentation from the Founder of Women Step Forward, Melanie Boyle.

Melanie is an expert on what young people, particularly young women,



Ayna Shamim



Carla Seymour Mansell



Summer Ratima Thompson

expect from today's job market. I have no doubt that for some delegates the message was a bit confronting.

In 10 years, millennials will be 75% of New Zealand's workforce yet it's no secret that our industry is struggling to recruit them.

Melanie's advice included making sure that job seekers can see that your business model promotes equality and diversity and allows for a reasonable personal life. She emphasised the importance of a good culture and how young people are more likely to chop and change jobs as their careers progress so if you aren't providing them professional development opportunities, they will almost certainly look for that somewhere else.

Melanie also urged transport companies to consider a more cooperative and collaborative management approach as the old 'command and control' way of doing things no longer appeals to younger job-seekers.

I guess each transport owner can decide whether or not to heed this advice but for those who don't, the reality is that staff recruitment is only going to get tougher in the years ahead. ■

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