



Family, community, work – part of the team; Amy Mestas on becoming Engineer of the Year 2018 by Max Frey

The day was November 30th 2018 and at 8:29am a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck 10 miles north of Anchorage, Alaska. "It was quite dramatic. We lost power almost immediately," Amy Mestas recalled. "My office door swung shut and locked me out, so I had to go look for keys when it was over," she said with a laugh.

As a senior structural engineer at PDC Engineers, Amy is one of the most knowledgeable staff members on the subject of seismic events and on that day it was evident. She took action immediately, telling employees to stay put during the shaking, then alerting everyone to the real danger of aftershocks, which immediately followed.

After getting her children home and safe, Amy spent the remainder of the day, and into the night, in the field with the rest of the PDC structural team evaluating buildings for damage. So followed every day for the next month.

Its clear Amy doesn't do the work for the money or recognition, but for the challenge, and more importantly, to help keep the public safe. That's why it was no surprise when, after being nominated by the Structural Engineers Association of Alaska (SEAAK), she was awarded with the title of Engineer of the Year 2018.

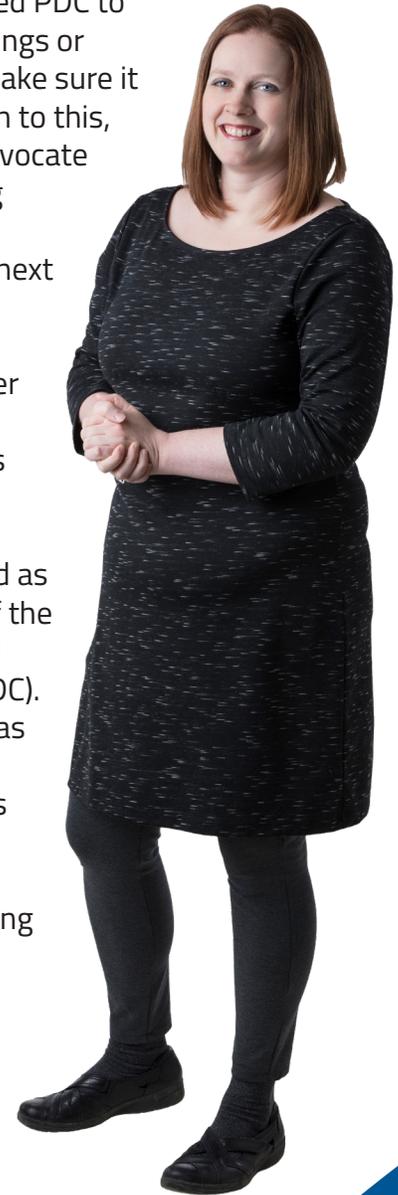
"Amy is a force to be reckoned with," said Danny Rauchenstein, Amy's immediate supervisor. "Many of our clients ask for her by name. She is very talented technically and is a savvy communicator," he said. "She is also great at making sure her team gets the kudos they deserve for a job well done. That's why it was nice to see her get recognized like this."

While professional reputation and a strong project work history weigh heavily on the

decision of selecting an Engineer of the Year, community involvement is just as important. In Amy's case, it's difficult to separate the two. After the earthquake, Amy spent hours on the phone with local officials, architects, and other structural engineers helping to ensure critical facilities were safe to occupy, whether they wanted PDC to evaluate their buildings or not – just to help make sure it got done. In addition to this, she continues to advocate for greater planning and organization of inspections for the next big shaker.

As an active member of SEAAK, serving in several capacities over the past five years, she is also a member of its board as well as the board of the Alaska Professional Design Council (APDC). Furthermore, she has spent time in front of Alaska legislators promoting the importance of the structural engineering licensing process.

When asked if the Engineer of the Year recognition was her first "of the year" award for 2018, Amy modestly responded with



Amy Mestas, PE, SE -
Engineer of the Year, 2018

a smile, “No, I was also selected as Cook Inlet Conference Volleyball Coach of the Year.”

If she isn't at the office or with her family, you'll often find Amy with her girls at South Anchorage High School training or competing for the volleyball championships. This year the team placed second in regions and third place in state overall. Describing the season, she seemed as proud of the fact that her team had won the all-state academic award as she was of their success on the court.

Just as some of her athletes may look up to Amy as a role model, she took special care to mention the positive impact the well-known and recently late Dale Nelson had on her life. As an experienced civil engineer in Anchorage, Dale was instrumental in involving Amy in legislative fly-ins to Juneau and was the first engineer to really impress upon her the importance of getting involved at the state capitol.

Although there have been many outstanding engineers who have had positive impacts on her career, Amy credits the majority of her professional success to PDC's current company president, Matt Emerson.

“There is a lot to be said for working at a company where someone becomes your mentor, both in the technical aspects and on the business side of things,” she explained.

“I am extremely proud of Amy. I've seen her grow in her career and she is an amazing person to work and collaborate with. She is a leader amongst leaders at PDC,” stated Matt. Referring to Amy's response to the November 30th earthquake, Matt recounted, “She felt it was her duty to get out into the community and start investigating structures to ensure public safety and she has not let up since.”

Some have said November 30th in Alaska should become “hug a structural engineer day.” Amy countered this notion with the idea that December should become known as “hug a structural engineer's spouse month,” lamenting how much she's had to be away from her family to do what she believes is her duty.

That is why she felt it was so shocking to receive the title of Engineer of the Year, saying it's not about her but rather, “... it's the engineering societies you belong to, the company you work for, and the families that support you. You don't really feel like you've done it since there is always this substantial network of people that allow you to give your time where you do.”