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5 questions with Shannon Holman of Orion Engineers & Associates




Image: Orion Engineers & Associates

Shannon Holman, co-founder of Orion Engineers & Associates and the 2024-2025 president of the American Council of Engineering Companies of Hawaii.

ORION ENGINEERS & ASSOCIATES



By [Stephanie Salmons](#) – Reporter, Pacific Business News
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Shannon Holman, a licensed civil engineer with more than 20 years of experience, said she has worked with "some of the largest global firms in the industry."

But when she made Hawaii her home, she co-founded Orion Engineers & Associates, "aiming to build a company that prioritized quality work and meaningful relationships with our clients and team," she told Pacific Business News in an emailed response to questions.

Headquartered in Honolulu, Orion – which now has additional offices in Seattle and Boston – specializes in runway and airfield engineering, Holman said.

Holman also currently serves as the 2024-2025 president of the American Council of Engineering Companies of Hawaii. In this role, Holman, who has been involved with the Hawaii chapter since 2016, oversees all chapter activities. According to Holman, ACEC is a national organization that represents nearly 6,000 firms and more than 600,000 professionals, including engineers, architects, surveyors and other highly skilled specialists.

"The organization is committed to advocating for the industry, providing continuing education and advancing research," she said.

In Hawaii, ACEC represents 71 member firms and more than 2,000 professionals, said Holman.

"These firms are behind the planning, design and construction of many vital infrastructure projects that impact our daily lives," she said. "Whether it's legislative advocacy, political engagement or business education, our chapter is dedicated to elevating the engineering profession while ensuring public safety, health and welfare through innovation and high standards."

PBN recently caught up with Holman to talk about her goals as president, changes in the work of engineering companies, current trends in the industry and more.

What is your goal as president?

This year, the ACECH Board has outlined several key priorities, and I'm excited to lead the charge on them:

- Inspire the next generation - We want to reach middle and high school students and spark their interest in engineering by showing them how vital this field is in shaping the future.
- Support Neighbor Island membership - It's important to us that we grow and engage our members across all islands, ensuring that ACECH supports and serves the entire state.
- Expand our capacity - By increasing organizational capacity, we can do even more for our member firms and the community as a whole.

How has the work of engineering companies changed over the past five years, especially during the pandemic?

Engineering, whether civil, structural or electrical, is fundamental to every part of our built environment. From the roads we drive on to the water and power systems we rely on, our work is essential. During the pandemic, while the way we worked had to shift – remote collaboration became the norm – the work itself remained constant. In fact, many projects continued full speed ahead because infrastructure doesn't take a break.

What are some of the biggest challenges currently facing Hawaii's engineering industry, and what's being done to address them?

One of our biggest challenges is the local job market, which can't fully meet the demand. Hawaii's high cost of living plays a significant role here. Many of our talented professionals are choosing to move to places where the cost of living is lower, and even when we recruit from the Mainland, it can be difficult to overcome the sticker-shock of things like housing and groceries.

To tackle this, we're focusing on both recruiting and retaining talent by offering competitive packages and working to improve the overall attractiveness of living and working in Hawaii. We also believe in the power of mentorship and education to build the next generation of engineers right here in the Islands.

How is Hawaii's engineering industry working to grow its workforce?

This is something we're passionate about! We want to share our love for engineering with the next generation and show them that this field is everywhere – it's in everything we do! ACECH is launching an education campaign called "Everything We Do Is All Around You" to help spread this message. We're also building strong partnerships with schools, nonprofits and organizations like the University of Hawaii College of Engineering, the Chamber of Commerce, and the [state] Department of Education to create clear pathways for students interested in pursuing engineering careers.

What are some current trends you're seeing in engineering?

There are a few exciting trends shaping the field:

- **Growth in computer and electrical engineering:** These areas are booming, with more demand than ever.
- **AI is making waves:** Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly integrated into both back-office operations and fieldwork, helping to enhance quality and efficiency rather than replace jobs.
- **Sustainability is key:** There's a continued focus on using sustainable products and practices across all disciplines.
- **Climate resiliency:** With climate change affecting the entire world, we're seeing a strong emphasis on designing with resiliency in mind.
- **Digital transformation:** The move toward digital processes is gaining momentum, with more businesses and government agencies embracing technology to streamline operations.