

EVERYDAY | PEOPLE

Let there be low light

Woman leads landscape lighting firm

By JOHN LEPTICH
TRIBUNE

Michele Swetesich is no dimwit. Even though she spent several years in retail banking and bank trust departments, she thought the landscape lighting business might brighten her life.

It certainly has. And in the process, it projected Swetesich into select company. Swetesich, the president of Night Art in the Scottsdale Airpark, recently earned certification as a low-voltage lighting technician. Heady stuff, as only 36 people in the United States and Canada are designated by the Low Voltage Lighting Institute of America.

Swetesich, 46, is one of two women who actively hold the title — there are three past female members, according to Andy Vande Hey, the group's director and former president.

"This is a male-dominated industry," Swetesich said. "Most women aren't accepted in the landscape industry. If you prove yourself and show people you know what you're doing, you'll be OK."

Swetesich, who lists horseback riding and travel among her top leisure activities, said women shouldn't let how they might be perceived dissuade them from working with landscaping and low-voltage lighting.

Swetesich got started when she and landscaping and irrigation professional Paul Leon commiserated about their careers. During one of their conversations, the proverbial light bulb went off. They decided to



PAUL O'NEILL, TRIBUNE

ALL LIT UP: Michele Swetesich, president of Night Art, sits with just a few types of landscape lighting samples Thursday in her Scottsdale office.

combine their expertise — she as a businesswoman and his 20-plus years of irrigation work — to form a lighting and landscaping company.

Swetesich likes hands-on work. She aids clients with designing low-voltage lighting, but can be seen digging to install lights. She doesn't mind getting her hands filthy and working up a sweat.

"If you are in the field in this industry, you do get dirty," Swetesich said. "You have to work hard and, especially here, work in the heat. You wind up staying out late, especially when you're meeting clients to talk about design. This isn't a job for timid women."

Timid, Swetesich is not. Intelligent, she is. The Phoenix resident realized early on that learning everything she could about low-voltage lighting was a plus for her and the business.

Everyday People

Everyday People is a weekly look at people with ties to the Scottsdale area who might not otherwise be in the news. If you know someone you think would make a good subject for Everyday People, e-mail John Leptich at jleptich@aztrib.com or call (480) 970-2333.

To complete certification, Swetesich passed an exam and completed hands-on tests covering troubleshooting, design, installation, voltage drop, lamps, transformers and maintenance of low-voltage lighting.

"This industry is not as simple as putting down wire and connecting lights to a transformer," Swetesich added. "You have to make sure you're using the proper materials and that you're doing things safely. The wrong connections could burn a house down."