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Special to The Daily Reporter

Erin Bertocchi’s career is just beginning, but she already has an idea where she’d like to end up.

“Project manager is a first goal,” said Bertocchi, a project engineer with Mortenson Construction. “Past that, I’m only 25, so I’m thinking more in the next 10 years. But the final goal would be to find the type of construction that I enjoy most and stay within that. It’s great to have knowledge in different types of projects with construction, but I’m hoping within a couple of more projects, I’ll know where my heart is, where I fit in.”

Since joining Mortenson in 2012, Bertocchi has crisscrossed the Midwest from Mortenson’s headquarters renovation outside Minneapolis to a community center expansion in Dickinson, N.D., and, most recently, in Sheboygan for Acuity insurance company’s $130 million expansion, which includes a 65-foot Ferris wheel.

“My job is basically to make sure that the subcontractors in the field have the information they need to do their jobs and build something and make sure it’s being built correctly. I’m kind of a liaison between the architect and the subcontractors,” Bertocchi said. “Every day is different. I don’t know what I’m getting into. And I enjoy the range of projects and the areas of the Midwest that I’ve seen.”

But after traveling for nearly three years, Bertocchi realized she needed a change.

“With all that moving around, it’s been a challenge to kind of find where I fit in,” said Bertocchi, who recently transferred to Mortenson’s Milwaukee office to focus on Wisconsin-based projects.

“It’s always kind of been where I wanted to end up. Wisconsin is always where I felt I wanted home to be,” Bertocchi said.

The move has not only brought Bertocchi closer to her family in Wisconsin, but also to her roots in Gwinn, Mich., a town of about 4,000 where she was raised and where her family owns a grocery store and two convenience stores.

“It makes that moving around a lot easier, knowing that I’m still within a distance of family and friends,” she said.

Having their support, Bertocchi said, is part of the reason she had the courage to walk away from the family business and pursue construction.

“I am the first. Everyone else in my family has worked in the family business,” said Bertocchi, who grew up bagging groceries and working the register at the family store.

It’s a decision her family has supported completely.

“Basically, we didn’t have permission to go directly into the family business,” Bertocchi said. “My dad wanted us to go and explore so, in the end, we couldn’t blame him if we didn’t do what we wanted to do.”

For Bertocchi, that turned out to be construction. And, even though she hasn’t found her specialty, Bertocchi said she’s enjoyed the opportunity to find that path at another family-owned company.

“I think I’ve found my home,” she said.

The Daily Reporter: When you have a bad day, what keeps you coming back to work?

Erin Bertocchi: Every project, big or small, I am placed on a construction team. That team quickly becomes a support system. When I have a bad day at work I know my team members will pick me up and get me back on track. It would be unfair to just give up. We all have our roles and the responsibility to the team to do our part. The commitment to my responsibilities and the people I work with is what keeps me coming back.

TDR: What is the most useful thing you’ve learned since starting your job?

Bertocchi: Always ask questions. I had very little construction experience when I started with Mortenson, and I learned that my most valuable resources were the men and women in the field and construction trailer. If I ever have a question, I find a person who has been doing that job for years. People are willing to share their knowledge and experience; all you have to do is ask.

TDR: What is the one luxury item you cannot live without?

Bertocchi: My iPhone. I constantly use it to listen to music, catch up on podcasts, watch my TV shows, navigate my way around this new city, and stay in contact with my family. FaceTime may be the greatest applications there is.

TDR: What do you miss most about your childhood?

Bertocchi: I grew up on a lake in a small town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The thing I miss most about my childhood is spending the summer months on the pontoon boat with my family. That doesn’t get to happen nearly enough anymore.

TDR: What was your first concert?

Bertocchi: My first concert was N*Sync at Miller Park in 2001. My dad, who owns a grocery store, ordered far too many cases of Oreos in order to get me the tickets! It was a dream come true for any 12-year-old girl.

TDR: What song is in heavy rotation for you right now?

Bertocchi: This may be my guilty pleasure, but I can’t stop listening to Blank Space by Taylor Swift. Every time it comes on I crank it up and sing along.

TDR: What do you consider your biggest achievement?

Bertocchi: After spending 4 ¹⁄₂ years in college, my biggest achievement was being able to find a great career with Mortenson that allowed me to pay off my student loans two years after graduation. Not to mention, it took a big weight off of my shoulders.