

# Women in our Industry

## Dr. Marie-Noëlle Bonicalzi

Dean  
Canadian Automotive Institute  
Georgian College



### Up to the industry challenge

At the beginning of her automotive career, Marie-Noëlle Bonicalzi was pumped up, “dying to get training about the automotive industry.” Lacking access to formalized training on automotive sales and dealership management, she had to create her own path, by trial and error, learning every aspect of running an automotive dealership.

### The love of the business brought her to teaching

Bonicalzi fondly recalls working in the industry and maintains strong ties to it to this day. The motive power industry “is a wonderful industry to work in, so dynamic, with a lot of humour in it.” Bonicalzi comes to this opinion on the basis of 12 years of working in the industry, starting as an accountant in a Volkswagen dealership, then as a dealer principal for Hyundai and subsequently, Nissan. “I liked everything about this business, the challenge, the transactions, the business aspects,” she says. “Most of all, I enjoyed training the employees.” This, and the desire to take on a new challenge, drew Bonicalzi to join the faculty at Georgian College’s Canadian Automotive Institute in 1993.

### Choosing Georgian College

“I wish that when I was younger I’d had access to a program like this, to be better prepared, but there was no such school.” says Bonicalzi, “It would have been so much easier.” She is delighted to be involved with the CAI’s programs that enables today’s students to “begin their careers with a good education. With that, they go so much further in the industry”. It is with great pride that Bonicalzi notes that, by the time convocation came around for the 2007 graduates, all but one of them had already found employment in the automotive field. Many go to dealerships, many to head offices in manufacturing, finance, sales, or technology.

From 1993 to 1997, Bonicalzi served as the Coordinator of the bilingual program at the CAI. As a CAI team member, she has taught courses in statistics, finance, marketing, research, ethics and entrepreneurship, as well as presenting seminars for Chrysler and for CAI Corporate Training in both English and French.



### Learning by Doing - The Georgian College Auto Show

For Georgian College students in the automotive program, their first school year starts off in top gear. These 120-150 students have just three weeks from the time they step in the door until they act as ambassadors to some 20,000 visitors at the annual Georgian College Auto Show, the biggest outdoor Auto Show in North America. Totally student-run, this event is organized by a team of captains and co-captains made up of returning students who apply to be selected for the positions.

As Bonicalzi explains, the Georgian College Auto Show represents a “natural link with the manufacturers who give funding to the College. The Auto Show, is seen by manufacturers not



as an opportunity for selling cars, but as an opportunity to get a real return on investment: to train people to go into the industry, to have them learn about industry products, to work together to put together an event of this scale. It’s also the first opportunity students get for networking. This is how they find their first co-op placement. Many manufacturers look at them and see who has the most potential, even as far as giving them a job after graduation.”



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## Dr. Marie-Noëlle Bonicalzi continued

She has also succeeded in bringing an automotive certification course to the Canadian Automotive Institute on the strength of the partnership she has cultivated with the Ontario Motor Vehicle Industry Council.

### **Champion of lifelong learning**

Although Bonicalzi may not have been in a position to take advantage of the combined academic and industry training that the CAI currently offers, she has taken full advantage of opportunities for ongoing professional development, since joining the CAI's faculty. Her first focus was on becoming fluently bilingual, making full use of the "wonderful complete immersion" opportunity that teaching in a bilingual environment offered her. She went on to win the 2004 Georgian College's Board of Governors' Professional Development Award, which recognizes a demonstrated ongoing commitment to maintaining currency in a faculty member's profession or vocation. Georgian fully expects staff members to take individual responsibility for remaining current in their chosen fields by actively participating in ongoing professional development and personal learning. While at Georgian, Bonicalzi has, while professing to be "not a really academic person" obtained a

Doctorate of Business Administration from Argosy University, a Master of Business Administration from the University of Québec in Montréal and a Certificate of Administration from the University of Québec in Trois-Rivières.

### **The female factor**

Despite the occasional hitches related to being a female principal dealer in a traditionally male environment, Bonicalzi thrived well enough on her innate business sense to find herself joining the dealers' performance group.



For today's students and soon to be future employees, "gender doesn't enter into it." In recent years at the CAI, women have made up 16-20% of the students in the program. Bonicalzi sees no particular need to recruit young women differently, "those that are here, are here for the same reason as the young men. It's because this is what they want to do". The women expect to be treated the same as the men, and Bonicalzi makes sure that the CAI lives up to that expectation. "On my own sites, I tell my 'girls', don't ever settle for less than respect."

As to the working environment in the industry at large, Bonicalzi muses, "Industry needs better education overall. It results in more ethical and more professional behaviour in the workplace, greater respect for diversity and women in the workplace." The Canadian population, particularly around Toronto is getting to be more and more international, more and more diverse. All the more reason, thinks Bonicalzi, for the type of industry-based business education that CAI offers, to prepare the future employees to deal with the broader range of clientele coming to dealerships, including more women and older people.

### **The Canadian Automotive Institute currently offers:**

***AUTO Business Admin - Automotive Marketing  
(English)***

***Administration des affaires marketing automobile  
(Bilingual)***

***Automotive Business Studies Certificate of Achievement***

***Bachelor of Applied Business - Automotive Management - AUTM  
Automotive Marketing Qualifying Bridge - AUBR  
(1 semester)***

***AUTM Bachelor of Applied Business-Automotive Management  
(4 year)***

For further information, please visit:  
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