

AIC's 2022-23 President, Suzanne de Jong, AACI, P.App

Career success **built on passion**

Whether in her personal life or her 32-year career in real estate appraisal, Suzanne de Jong possesses a genuine passion for everything in which she is involved. That passion has enabled her to be successful in all aspects of her life, including being recently elected the second female president in the 84-year history of the Appraisal Institute of Canada (AIC). Suzanne leads by example and is very much looking forward to the year ahead as the AIC continues to shape its future in an ever-changing marketplace.

Q: Can you elaborate on the career path that led to your current position?

Suzanne: After growing up in Mississauga, I enrolled in the economics program at Western University in London, Ontario. One of the courses that genuinely interested me was entitled Urban

Development (UD). After graduating in 1989 with a degree in UD, at a time when the economy was truly booming, I initially thought I would go to work for a developer back in Toronto or Mississauga. However, having grown to love the London region, I was fortunate to connect with Bob Hughes who owned a small appraisal firm in London known as Hughes & Associates. Doing junior research, I dealt with a variety of legal issues including a case of litigation involving contaminants leeching into a campground. It was very fascinating work that whet my appetite for the incredible variety of real estate-related opportunities and challenges that an appraisal career offers. My career path was set. Wanting to specifically increase my experience with residential appraisal, which I believe is the ideal place to start an appraisal career, I subsequently joined the Simmons Group headed by



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John Simmons. That company is now the Metrix Realty Group, and, although I actually left for a few years to try my hand elsewhere, I came back to experience and be part of the company's outstanding team atmosphere.

As my career developed during these years, I married, now have four children, earned my CRA designation in 1993 and my AACI in 2003. The appraisal field has given me amazing opportunities to grow my career while affording me considerable flexibility to spend time with my family and life outside of work. I cannot imagine doing anything else.

Q: Can you elaborate on the Metrix Realty Group and your role with the company?

Suzanne: Metrix is a full service commercial and residential real estate company. It is a large firm in the Southwestern Ontario market with 20 team members that include six AACIs, a CRA, and nine Candidates. Our company has a wide range of expertise including multi-family residential, commercial, industrial, hotels, expropriation, municipal work, assisted living facilities, feasibility studies and absorption studies, to mention a few. As a Vice President of Commercial Appraisal Operations, my greatest achievement and enjoyment comes from mentoring and working with a team of

young candidates. With a company-wide willingness to support one another, it is truly an amazing place to develop one's career. I am personally invested in the company and love coming to work each and every day.

Q: You obviously made a decision at some point in your career to become engaged in volunteer activities. Why did you make that choice and in what capacities have you volunteered over the years?

Suzanne: I have always had a genuine interest in volunteering, particularly when it involves education and helping members become competent in a wide range of areas of expertise. It means a great deal to me if I can help people succeed in this professional career. It makes me feel like I am truly making a difference. Here at Metrix, I work closely with three of our six Candidates and it is very satisfying to see them grow and develop. As individuals and as a company, we feel that mentoring is vitally important to a Candidates' success and to the overall well-being of our profession.

Beyond mentoring, I have also been actively involved with the AIC since the mid-1990s at the local, provincial and national levels. At that time, I was

fortunate to witness first hand AIC presidents like Allan Beatty and Dan Brewer who inspired me to be a spokesperson for our association and our profession. Since then, I have served on the Executive of the AIC's London Chapter, on the Boards of the Ontario Association and the AIC, and on the AIC's Applied Experience Sub Committee and Admissions and Accreditation Committee, to name just a few. With encouragement to get more involved at the national level from people like then president Dan Brewer and former CEO Keith Lancaster, I joined the National Board of Directors in 2018, and subsequently became a member of the Shaping our Future Task Force and now the President's Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). Becoming AIC President this year is an absolute privilege for which I am truly honored.

Q: You mentioned serving on the AIC's Shaping our Future Task Force and the President's Council on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Can you elaborate on the significance of these initiatives and where both are headed going forward?

Suzanne: The Shaping our Future Task Force is the biggest initiative the AIC has undertaken in the past 10 years. It is totally Member driven and has seen



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An avid outdoor enthusiast, Suzanne recently completed the iconic West Coast Trail, a multi-day backcountry hike of 75 kilometres in BC's Pacific Rim National Park.



It is important to remember that Shaping our Future is not about changing the profession, it is about challenging our Members to embrace change so that they can better succeed in their careers and businesses.

outstanding Member engagement through a series of town halls and questionnaires. Indicative of what this initiative means to our membership, almost 40% of Members responded to one of our questionnaires, which is a very significant level of member participation. With the guidance of this Member input, we were able to put together 21 recommendations that will define our direction and important initiatives for the months and years ahead.

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the profession, it is about challenging our Members to embrace change so that they can better succeed in their careers and businesses. From Machinery and Equipment to Reserve Fund Studies and a host of other new opportunities, our goal is to provide our Members with the tools to grasp those opportunities and make the most of them.

I truly believe that many of our Members do not realize how knowledgeable they are and,

consequently, undervalue themselves in the marketplace. We need to change that. Our Institute and our Members are held in very high regard in Canada and around the world. From our self-regulation, code of ethics and standards to our advocacy and education, our expertise and knowledge is being sought out by lending institutions, government bodies, developers, REITS and the general public. The Shaping our Future initiative will only enhance that position going forward no matter what changes occur in the marketplace.

As for EDI, the work being done in those areas is extremely important as well. Canada has a very diverse population and the Members of our organization need to more closely represent the diversity of our stakeholders. To accomplish that objective, we need to ensure that there are no barriers to entering our profession. While we are getting much better in this regard, there is still a long way to go and the EDI initiative is all about getting us there.

Personally, I am a white, educated woman who was brought up believing that a woman could do anything. However, I still experienced situations where I had to work harder and accept lower remuneration than my male counterparts. Women from racialized communities have it even harder due to other factors such as skin colour or language. No matter what their background, women in their 20s or early 30s can also have barriers due to having or potentially having children. The point I am making is that barriers can exist for a variety of reasons and we need to do everything we can to eliminate those barriers. We need to reach a point where people with equal education and ability can expect equal treatment and opportunity. The goal needs to be that the right person for the right job is the one who gets hired.



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Q: A year from now, when you reflect back on your term as President, what do you hope will have been the AIC's most significant accomplishments in that time period?

Suzanne: That we have successfully implemented many of the initiatives from our Task Force. We have invested the time and engaged the Members, we now have to ensure that we work at making the recommendations a reality. Some of the recommendations will take time, however, others can be implemented in fairly short order. My goal is to ensure that happens.

As a side note, I also know that the year ahead is going to be affected by significant economic concerns including

the impacts of extremely high inflation and increased interest rates. Where real estate matters are concerned, the AIC can provide understanding, clarity and guidance on these matters to government authorities, lenders, developers and the public to mention just a few.

Q: Finally, what advice would you give to people entering the appraisal profession?

Suzanne: For our new Members, I suggest they reach out to and seek information from other appraisers in every way possible, even if they do not know them. Whether through direct personal contact, attending chapter and

provincial meetings, participating in conferences, or serving on committees, they should take every opportunity to interact with their peers. They should think of themselves as sponges soaking up every bit of knowledge and experience possible. They will be amazed at how willing other appraisers are to share what they know.

For established appraisers, I recommend looking for ways to be more efficient and diversified. Never get locked into existing or singular ways of doing things. From emerging technologies to changing demands in the marketplace, there are always new opportunities to prepare for and embrace.