

## Female-owned Balanced Electric keeps the lights on

By Aliya Hall

Balanced Electric, Inc., in Cheshire is different from most electrical contractors. The business is owned and operated by Michelle Ericson and Kim McBride, women who have found their place in a male dominated trade.

Both women have over 20 years in the electrical industry, and won the 2017 Tri-County Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year Award.

In 1989, Ericson worked as a laborer at Lee Construction when she met the owner of Builder's Electric and asked how she could become an electrician. He helped enroll her in an apprenticeship program and hired her.

"I thought that it looked easy, and I could totally do that work," Ericson wrote in her bio.

McBride grew up in a trade family; her father was a plumber. In 1993 she entered an introduction to non-traditional trades for women program at Portland Community College. From there, she applied into an apprenticeship program as well.

"I enjoyed the electrical trade because it gave me a chance to use my head as well as my hands, and have a variety of experiences and working conditions," McBride wrote in her bio.

The two met in December 2008 and "instantly hit it off and became friends," Ericson said. McBride said she had heard of Ericson. "this other woman electrician for years". They started to assist one another on various projects and found they enjoyed working together.

In April 2013, Ericson and McBride started Balanced Electric. "Balance is what kept coming up for a word as we started thinking of a name that represents what we thought was important at this time in life for starting a business," the bio said. "Our main concern was to balance friendship, family, work, fun, and community."

The company's mission statement is to: "Provide quality electrical work to our customers with honesty, respect, and craftsmanship while providing a safe and healthy work environment for all."

Ericson and McBride both offer their own specialties to the business. McBride works in the field with her apprentice, and Ericson manages the office and scheduling; she also tries to teach customers how to solve their own problems if it's a simple fix.

They overcame their biggest challenge three months after opening Balanced Electric, when McBride ruptured her Achille's tendon and the two reversed roles.

"In the long run it was good," McBride said. "I learned more about this end of the business. But we have our roles and we appreciate what the other one does."

Every day is different at Balanced Electric, McBride said. She used an example that last week she worked on upgrading the electrical system in a 100-year-old barn: this week she installed a generator.

Balanced Electric focuses on a variety of projects from business too residential and small, service jobs to custom homes. They are the local electricians for several wineries int the area, including Pfeiffer Winer – the company's first electrical permit.

"It's fun to create," Ericson said. "I sell Balanced Electric (to the client). 'My team will get this done for you.' I listen to their vision and my wheels start turning."

McBride said Ericson has a "designer vision" and a lot of clients don't realize what their options are. "I enjoy working with people and giving people what they want," she said.

For Ericson, getting referral calls and having their company be recognized is the most rewarding. "It's cool to be recognized as professionals. People respect us," she said. "We don't want to be average Joe electricians. We want to be different. We have people waiting eight to ten weeks and they're okay with waiting. It feels special."

In the future, Ericson wants to see Balanced Electric have a commercial space, but both McBride and her want to keep the business small.

As Ericson wrote at the end of her bio: "We truly enjoy working with so many wonderful people and being their electricians, bringing today's wants and tomorrow's needs to life."