

Laura Roberts

Young Professional of the Year Award Finalist

It's hard to believe Laura Roberts has been in the workforce only four years, three of which have been at Xcel Energy as an engineer. She describes her work to people outside the industry as "designing and maintaining the natural gas system that heats their homes and offices." During Laura's time at Xcel, she has had the opportunity to manage numerous projects normally assigned to employees with more years of experience. She is involved daily in hands-on work, which involves everything from managing union gas crew work to overseeing special activities, including inoperable valves and odorant investigation projects to calculating and reporting reliability data. At present, Laura is filling in as gas systems engineering manager, while the current manager is on leave.



"Have you ever caught yourself saying things like 'young employees don't know the value of giving back, they don't know how critical volunteering is to our communities?'" asked Carol Wright, Customer and Community Service, Xcel Energy. "I've caught myself saying that many times. And then there's Laura Roberts. To have a young employee volunteer is cause for joy, but when this same employee not only volunteers her own time, but recruits other female engineers to also volunteer, and takes on the entire coordination for volunteer activities, and volunteers to be a point person, you know you have a gem."

Laura helps to make her community a better place, and leads many volunteer activities for Xcel including Habitat for Humanity, Brother's Redevelopment Paint-A-Thon, Junior Achievement, and Bonfils Blood Center. She is especially passionate about mentoring programs that offer her the opportunity to encourage young women to pursue science and engineering fields, and has volunteered with National Renewable Energy Lab's mentoring program.

In a career where women represent only about 25 percent of the workforce, Laura is passionate about supporting other women's success in engineering. She has become a leader in providing a perspective on women in engineering and has mentored new women engineers at Xcel for two years—only working for one year before she was serving as a role model and mentor to newly hired women employees.

Her article, "Direct Measure of the Hydration Number of Aqueous Methane," was published in the *Journal of American Chemical Society*. She also contributes numerous informal articles to colleagues on the value of volunteer work in the community.

"Laura has been in my unit for three years. During that time I have observed her to be one of my best employees at learning and placing into application the requirements of gas distribution engineering," said William Yenke, Manager, Gas Distribution Engineering.

“She has the unique ability to take a concept with minimal direction and forge ahead with a high degree of completeness. In a field where women are a minority, Laura is an outstanding representative.”

Laura is currently working on her Masters degree in Business Administration at the University of Colorado at Denver. She earned an engineering degree from Colorado School of Mines.

In her spare time, Laura enjoys spending time with her husband, Shawn, and occasionally convinces him to volunteer with her.