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he first thing you notice about environmental consultant partners Jackie Hockenberry and Wendy Melius is their humility. Interviewing one at a time would prove difficult since neither seems to enjoy talking about herself. Instead Melius ticks off all of Hockenberry's technical experience and Hockenberry lists Melius' civic activities and groups.

The two women co-founded the East Taylor Township-based Melius and Hockenberry ten years ago after working together at another environmental firm. Melius brought her experience in wetlands and environmental assessments to the company, while Hockenberry specializes in hydrogeology. Together, with their small staff, the firm works as a subcontractor for larger consulting firms, specializing in wetland delineation and mitigation, stream and watershed assessment, groundwater and hydrogeologic services and state and federal permitting.

"I was raised on a small farm," Hockenberry says, noting that her rural childhood influenced her in her occupation choice. "I was around water all the time, basically." But that doesn't mean she didn't receive flack for her choice. "My father always used to wonder what I was going to do with it," she says. "Twenty-something years ago even geology was not a common thing. You say that to somebody — and my dad was one — 'What are you going to do with a degree in that?'" On the other hand, Melius attributes her brother, a mining engineer, as influencing her, but also adds, "I knew I didn't want to sit in an office all day."

Although there is a fair amount of paperwork and office duty required for the government permits that the pair prepare, the women do much of their work out in the field, sometimes in extremely rural locations where cell phones refuse to work and MapQuest directions do not lead. They've run into timber rattlesnakes and bears, had the difficult tasks of managing 14 college students on-site at one time, and fallen into probably more than their fair share of streams, marshes and ponds.

Despite their knowledge and over 40 years combined experience in the field, the women admit that sometimes clients are hesitant to believe that women can do a scientific job. "I think sometimes with certain clients ... they look at us as women and 'what do they know?'" she says. "But once we sit down and talk with them and we explain the process and they know we are knowledgeable in our field, then there's not usually an issue. But first impression — 'Oh, it's two women. Are they going to get dirty?' Well, yeah!" she says, noting that the company is certified as a woman-business enterprise by the Pa. Departments of Transportation and General Services.

Through travails, including woodland creatures and initial skepticism, Melius and Hockenberry have persevered for a decade, and plan to keep on. "Wendy and I have enough diverse background of things that we really complement each other," Hockenberry says. "We look at things differently, but we look at things the same in some respects. I wouldn't want to [have the business] without Wendy." JM

# Jackie Hockenberry and Wendy Melius: *The Perfect Team*