Wonder Woman in the Spotlight:
ON Semiconductor's Billie Johnson

When asked to name Wonder Women at ON Semiconductor, it was difficult to make a list of names without highlighting Billie Johnson, a long-running employee, who is an exemplary model of following your passions in and out of the workplace. We shared some questions with Billie about her time at the company and how she got involved in the community.

Where did you earn your degree?

I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in general engineering with emphasis in digital systems and controls. I also hold an MBA from Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho.

How long have you been with the company, and which roles have you taken on?

I have enjoyed a great career with ON Semiconductor for the past 22 years. I started in 1996 as an intern in product engineering, incorporating test time reduction routines into digital ASIC test programs. Upon graduation, I was hired as a test engineer. After four years, I took time off to focus on my MBA full time and came back to the company as a marketing intern. I gained invaluable experience during my last semester of graduate school, but I missed working in engineering. I convinced the physical design manager to hire me to do backend ASIC layout. And I have been in this role for almost 20 years. I love physical design because I can see the inner workings of an ASIC as I assemble the pieces. It is like getting paid to play Tetris. (Do young people even know what Tetris is these days?)

What advice would you give to women who are looking to work in the STEM fields?

I am having a hard time with this question. As someone who has never really fit many female stereotypes, it is hard for me to think about advice I would specifically give a "woman" because it really depends on the individual. The advice I would give anyone is – do it. Why not just give it a try? The earning potential for STEM careers is excellent, and a degree in a STEM field shows employers that the candidate is smart and capable of problem-solving and learning. The one thing I tell students in college classes is, "You're here in this room for a reason. Go ahead and take up space unapologetically, and look comfortable even if you aren't."

To whom or what do you credit your love of STEM?

My mother was a single parent who worked as a child protection social worker. She talked very openly with me about her finances and what the earning potential was for various college degrees. She was always adamant I choose a career that would lead to a healthier income in hopes I would not have the stresses and struggles she had. While I had a penchant for algebra in middle school and answers came to me quickly, it wasn't as much a love as it was a love and trust in my mom that led to my pursuit of a STEM career – along with a few nudges from my high school principal.

What do you like to do in your free time?

Southeast Idaho has some of the most extensive and beautiful mountain biking trails imaginable. From late March until early November, my wheels are in the dirt whenever I can make it happen. I have been assisting the human rights/gay-straight alliance clubs at three local high schools for the last five years, and I coach my two boys' Lego robotics teams. Since the ON Semiconductor Pocatello site has developed an educational STEM outreach program, I help out – often dressed in a cow suit and cape as the lesser known STEM superhero, The Cowculator.

What similarities do you see between your corporate job and your community service?

Engineering and service are about solving problems through collaboration, vastly different problems, but problems nonetheless. I have had the same core job for almost 20 years and have worked with the same core group of people. Working with young people and on various committees has helped keep some of my soft skills continuously evolving.

How does ON Semiconductor support your work within the community?

I have been fortunate to have managers who value work-life balance and see how critical it is for both my productivity and sunshiny disposition. My job will have software runs that take hours to complete. Thanks to VPN technology, I can log in every day between 5 and 6 a.m., and I can coordinate volunteer tasks around foreseeable long runtimes when necessary. (Mountain bike rides, too.)

In recent years, since ON Semiconductor has joined the Responsible Business Alliance, the top-down messages encouraging community involvement have been refreshing. I have enjoyed volunteering with my co-workers and feeling the corporate support for my personal endeavors.

What does diversity and inclusion mean to you?

I want to reflect on one experience from my past where a colleague would often ask recent college grads to the test floor as a training opportunity. Around the third time, I simply joined in as if I'd been invited. That experience led me to do three things: (1) Make an effort to be more outgoing and connect with colleagues and showcase my desire to learn, so they would invite me to training opportunities in the future; (2) increase my awareness of learning opportunities so I could continue to insert myself when necessary until those invitations started rolling in, and (3) to be aware of this exclusionary behavior in myself as I advanced in my career. We all have biases.

It is natural for cliques and friendships to develop at work, but I know how it feels to be excluded. Even more than that, I know what I had—and continue to have—to offer. Both my coworkers and I would have missed out if I did not insert myself into knowledge-sharing positions.

All of that leads me to think that the key to inclusion is intention—both in terms of requiring individuals to make a focused effort, acting intentionally to accomplish it, and in terms of the goal. The intention of inclusion may be to ensure that employees do not feel left out, but good ideas may reside in the minds of people very different from each other. Including different people leads to including ideas and perspectives, and that diversity can improve processes, flows and overall projects.