

Tami St. Paul

I dropped out of college after 2 years, I had a 3.0 gpa. I couldn't find anything there I wanted to do that was going to make me a decent living. I like to work outdoors. I found out about apprenticeship while I was searching for what I wanted to do as a career, and applied to the Operating Engineers apprenticeship. I was accepted and have never looked back since.

I finished my apprenticeship and worked in the field another 9 years or so as a journey level operator. I interviewed for the dispatch position at my local and was hired. I worked there for a little over a year and a position with the training program opened up. My heart has always been with the apprenticeship and training program as without them I would never have gotten the opportunity to pursue a career I have come to dearly love. After all, who would have entrusted their ½ a million dollar piece of equipment to some, 22 year old gal they'd just met?

I got that job and have worked as the training coordinator for Locals 302 and 612 since June of 2000. I am now second in charge of the day to day operations of the training program. I get to go promote apprenticeship career opportunities at job fairs and career days as well as to the legislature and owners who make decisions on who will do the building work they have coming up. I get to tell people about the great opportunities available through apprenticeship. It is also part of my job to help today's apprentices have a successful and positive apprenticeship experience, like I did, and provide good workers for our contractors throughout Washington State.

I believe in the mission statement of the Sisters in the Building Trades, so much so that upon reading it, I sent a list of every person and entity that I thought would be interested in participating or could benefit from what this organization has to offer to them to help get the word out. I was able to help out a little to get us a presence on the web and helped with the graphics getting the newsletter out to the public too.

I believe this organization can be a real and effective tool in educating women about the opportunities that are actually out there and the very real and attainable financial and emotional satisfaction that can be gained through doing work you love. I believe that the networking, mentoring and brainstorming to solve problems can greatly improve a woman's experience working in construction. Just knowing that the challenges faced in the predominantly male oriented field of construction have been shared and faced by most of us makes them more manageable. The feeling that a woman doesn't face them alone and that there are ways to overcome these challenges must give a woman new to the construction industry the heart and some valuable tools to carry on when their chosen path becomes rocky and appears unmanageable.

The future of the construction industry (the very near future) will depend on our ability to help young women broaden the traditional scope of their gender identities and the limitations society attempts to place on their career choices. We will need to tap this largely untapped source of determined future skilled craft worker. We will need to nurture and encourage those who will follow in our footsteps and undoubtedly go beyond to be the future leaders of our industry.

I believe in the potential of this organization. The smart dedicated accomplished talented women I have met through this organization give me great hope for its success. We have the potential to be a major influencing force in shaping the future of our chosen career paths by recruiting, promoting, supporting and mentoring the women who may not even today know these opportunities are out there, how to make the most of them, and their own unimaginable potential to succeed in a big way by making an informed choice to step off the beaten path and choose a career in an industry that has incredible growth potential for the foreseeable future.