

Seeing is believing for women in construction

By Brian Lynch

Americans don't think twice when they encounter a woman working as a police officer, scientist, entrepreneur, or reporter. But they are still surprised to cross paths with women in construction, for good reason.

Construction remains one of the most male dominated professions left in the United States. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that women hold just three percent of the seven million construction industry jobs in the United States. This isn't much different than the number of women in construction in the 1970s.

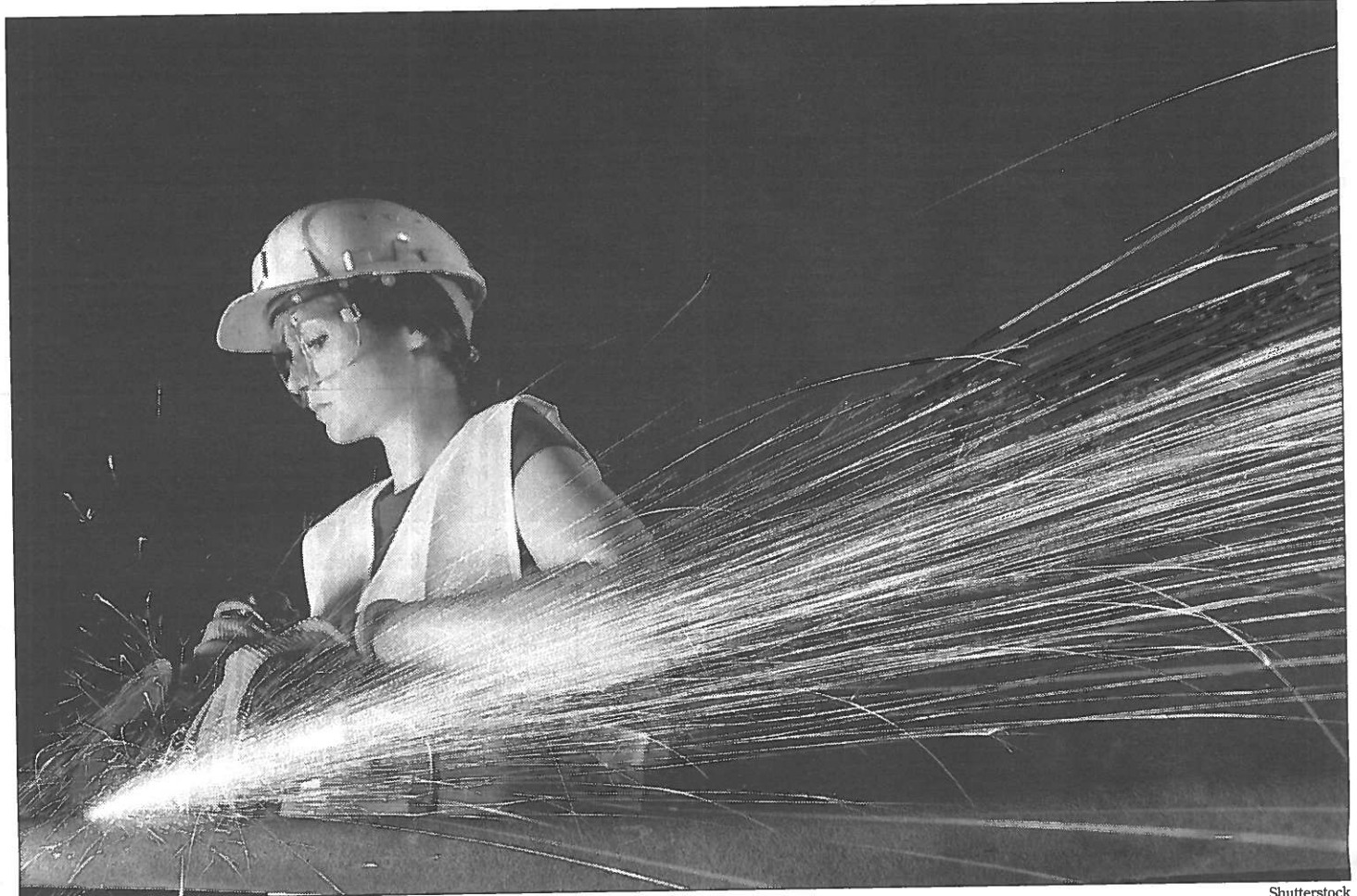
For the good of the construction industry and the American economy as a whole, this must change. Recruiting and training the next generation of craft professionals is crucial for the construction industry. Predictions about the supply of well-trained construction workers are pessimistic just as the industry is poised for tremendous economic opportunity. Women represent the biggest untapped talent pool available to fill 790,400 new construction jobs by 2024 created due to industry growth combined with a rapidly aging workforce.

The same individuals who don't picture a woman as a construction professional don't realize there are job opportunities for women, perhaps for them personally. Government and industry efforts are underway to change this impression.

The U.S. Department of Labor has established the "Women Build, Protect, & Move America" web portal providing information and resources helping women access higher-paying careers in construction, transportation, and protective services. It provides referrals to training and apprenticeship opportunities like those provided through the Associated Builders and Contractors San Diego Training Trust, support services, and tradeswomen organizations such as the National Association



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of Women in Construction. <https://www.dol.gov/wb/NTO/>

Closer to home, Future Construction Leaders of San Diego is a new nonprofit organization founded by the San Diego Chapter of NAWIC. It is dedicated to generating financial support for programs and services focusing on educating youth about career opportunities in the construction industry, encouraging young men and young women to consider careers as construction craft professionals, construction managers and supervisors, and eventually business owners. Future Construction Leaders raises funds to support programs and events exposing K-12 students to construction career opportunities. <http://www.futureconstructionleaders.org/>

This summer, 27 San Diego high school girls enjoyed the opportunity to learn about careers in construction through Camp NAWIC 2017, a hands-on free summer day camp. Camp NAWIC celebrated its tenth year of investing in the next generation of construction professionals at the Kearny High School of Engineering, Innovation and Design.

Camp NAWIC was created as a community outreach project to kindle interest among high school age girls in pursuing careers in the construction industry. Camp activities and projects are designed to challenge the students to discover their options. Girls learn teamwork and trade skills. Instructors and camp mentors are all construction professionals.

On their first day, the 12 first-time apprentices worked with sheet metal to build their own tool boxes, and the 15 journeypersons returning for a second or third year of camp began their work on a new storage shed for the athletic department. By midweek, the apprentices were learning about electrical work, and the journeypersons worked on the exterior siding

as well as roofing for the shed. By the fifth and final day of Camp NAWIC, the journey-person team completed the shed, and the apprentices built block planters in the new athletic field area. The apprentices also learned how to operate heavy machinery.

This is the kind of hands-on, direct effort we must support to build workforce capacity. Many women never even consider working in construction due to a lack of role models. At programs like Camp NAWIC, and other industry efforts, women learn there is a place for them in the construction industry, and they can thrive.

One of the best reasons for women to consider construction careers is financial. Construction has been successful closing the gender pay gap. Women out-earn men in several

male-dominated construction jobs including craft professionals, construction supervisors, maintenance painters, and aircraft and vehicle mechanics. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, 40 percent of all female construction craft professionals earn at least \$50,000 a year.

With increased competition both foreign and domestic, companies wish to grow their own talent of skilled laborers. The time is now for industry leaders, educators, career counselors, advocacy groups like NAWIC, ABC San Diego, and parents everywhere to give young women the opportunity to explore careers in construction. It is a step toward wage equality in the workforce for women while simultaneously addressing the skilled craft professionals shortage. It benefits everyone involved.

Brian Lynch is board chairman of the Associated Builders and Contractors San Diego Apprenticeship Training Trust. He has served in governing roles for ABC San Diego since 1995. Lynch also is president of Certified Air Conditioning, Inc., in San Diego.

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