



Rachael Baresh leads BNBuilders' Special Projects Group.

Photo by Maria Lamb

# A Woman’s place is every place

By **RACHAEL BARESH**  
BNBuilders

In the mid-90s, I was a student at the UW, considering a major in construction management, so I took a job as a student helper in their construction offices to get a taste of the work, where I split my time between jobsites, filing and performing other administrative duties.

One morning, I walked into the trailer as a meeting was starting; a man asked if I was there to make coffee. I was taken aback — while the question was fairly innocuous, the tone of delivery made it clear that I did not belong. As a young woman, this small incident made me wonder if I could be taken seriously in this industry. So, I left the UW to rethink my career options. It took a few years, but I came back to it.

## EARLY DAYS

While I was enrolled in the University of Washington’s construction management program, out of a cohort of 60, only 12 of the students were women in my graduating class. Likewise, when I did my internship with a large national general contractor, I noticed there were very few women in project management, probably less than 1%. Not too surprising, given that the construction industry has historically been male-dominated, but it made it difficult to see a clear path for myself. I did not see any female role models.

My first job out of college, I would often encounter men on the jobsites that would ask me if I was bringing lunch or coffee or referred to me as a secretary. It would infuriate me, until one day I realized they aren’t used to seeing women in their workplace. They are trying to greet me but don’t know what to say. I realized their actions weren’t an act of blatant disrespect but rather part of a deeper, pervasive mindset regarding gender roles.

There was no unkindness to it, just an antiquated world view that needed to be changed. With time, I realized I need to be part of that change. To insist that I be treated no differently than men and point out “teachable moments” where things were said or done that could be interpreted as sexist. I needed to become the female role model that wasn’t available to me; to show up, move up, and nurture the next generation of women in construction.

## EVOLUTION OF AN INDUSTRY

I joined BNBuilders in 2005 and, at that time, was the only woman in project management.

I loved the company, loved my coworkers, and the energy that it brought. I knew it was where I belonged. In the nearly 20 years since I first started at BNB, we’ve had tremendous growth. In 2005, women made up 6% of our operations staff (just me!); that number is now nearly 25%!

There have been some major shifts in the industry that have contributed to this growth. Project teams have grown significantly to include detailed preconstruction planning, higher safety standards, an increased emphasis on sustainability, and integration of innovative technologies. And generally, construction has become a more viable and welcoming career path for young women, especially on the project management side. We’ve still got a ways to go on the field side, but strides are being made.

This increased integration of women has had a domino effect of progressing construction culture. With more and more women entering the field, their presence is becoming normalized, and their contributions recognized. There is more work to do; women make up half of the population after all, but the progress has been huge.

## CONTINUING THE FIGHT FOR EQUALITY

When you become accustomed to being the only woman in the room, it is easy to feel a sense of competition when other women come along. It’s a scarcity mentality, believing that there is limited space for you. What I’m seeing in the industry now, which I am so proud of, is that women are supporting and celebrating each other; recognizing each other’s gifts and lifting each other up. We’ve realized that there aren’t a finite number of seats at the table — there just needs to be a bigger table.

At BNB, I believe that we exemplify this abundance mindset. We have an amazing group of women who celebrate each other’s successes (literally with wine!) and provide a support system for challenging times. I try to make a point of reaching out to new women hired and check in with them after the first few months. For us to continue this momentum, we must nurture the next generation of women coming into construction. At BNB, we have done this through several pathways:

- **Women In Construction Group.** We meet monthly and have regular events across our offices. This group continues to evolve as BNB grows and has

become an incredible support system for women in the company.

- **DEI Committee.** Our DEI Committee is critical to ensuring there is a place for everyone at BNB. It is committed to bridging the gap between the field and office workers, diversifying our leadership, and making sure every voice is heard.
- **Construction Inclusion Week.** For Construction Inclusion Week, we not only make sure our leadership has the tools they need to support their teams, but we also create a space for open conversation and honest feedback in the form of a company-wide town hall. Offering opportunities for everyone’s voice to be heard is an integral part of creating a sense of belonging for our employees.

I take pride in my contributions as a woman within the construction industry. I am also keenly aware of ongoing challenges. Women are still judged differently than men and most still deal with disrespectful behavior on jobsites at some point in their career. Despite our strides, women comprise only about 10% of the construction workforce. Yet, with each new female hire and supportive male ally, we edge closer to achieving equality. My passion for this industry fuels my determination to persist until women secure their seat at the table.

*Senior Project Executive Rachael Baresh has been in the construction industry over 20 years and currently leads BNBuilders’ Special Projects Group.*

# Local NAWIC chapter lines up events

By **JOURNAL STAFF**

The National Association of Women in Construction says this year’s theme for Women in Construction Week, “Keys to the Future,” celebrates the strength and knowledge of women, and the vital role they play in shaping the future of the construction industry.

NAWIC held the first WIC Week in 1998 and it has grown each year since. Many of the association’s local chapters hold WIC Week events, which can include making presentations to high school classes, jobsite tours, luncheons and virtual events.

The Puget Sound Chapter of NAWIC is marking the week with events planned over five days.

Today, the local chapter is holding a virtual panel discussion covering diversity, equity and inclusion from women in the trades. The panel includes: Fiona Cleveland, Otis Elevator technician; Dominique Drago, journeyman ironworker; Jodine Hatfield, superintendent, safety professional and member of Pile Drivers Local 196; and Dawn Steinwright, carpenter foreman and UBC member. The panel moderator is Claire Dougherty, project engineer at Build Group on the First Light project in Seattle.

The panel will be live noon-1:30 p.m. Registration is at <http://tinyurl.com/NAWIC-2024panel>.

A candle craft night has been slotted for 5-7 p.m. Tuesday at Noir Lux Candle Bar in Seattle. Cost

is \$35-\$45. Registration is at <http://tinyurl.com/NAWIC-Candle>.

On Wednesday, the local chapter will hold a Rosie the Riveter-themed happy hour at Holmberg Mechanical in Bellevue. It will include speakers, a raffle, small business showcase and the chance to donate new and lightly used construction clothing to Rosie’s Closet, which benefits women who are new to the workplace, starting over or in need. This event runs 3:30-6:30 p.m. and costs \$25-\$60. More information is at <http://tinyurl.com/NAWIC-2024HappyHour>.

Another event, hosted by the local NAWIC chapter and the AGC of Washington, will be held 4-7 p.m. Thursday at Bellingham Golf & Country Club. This event will feature a panel with successful women in various roles within the industry, including architects, engineers, project managers and tradeswomen. There also will be a silent auction with proceeds supporting scholarships for women training in the trades through the Bellingham Technical College Foundation. Cost is \$15. Registration is at <http://tinyurl.com/NAWIC-Bham>.

The week will wrap up on Friday with networking at Ales & Tails in Woodinville. This event will be held 4-6 p.m. and attendees can bring their fully vaccinated dogs. Cost is \$35-\$45. More information is at <http://tinyurl.com/NAWIC-2024Ales>.

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# Paving the way: Our next generation of women construction leaders

By **DARLENE SEPTELKA**  
University of Washington

Women in Construction Week is a time to celebrate and raise awareness of women's contributions to this traditionally male-dominated industry. At the University of Washington, a dynamic cohort of women majoring in construction management within the College of Built Environments are embarking on their journey to enter the construction industry. Their vision, leadership, and determination serve as inspiring examples to other young women considering majoring in CM.

In this article, we will celebrate and explore the perspectives of five remarkable students and how their different paths converged onto the same road through the UW's CM program.

**CASEY LAWLER**

Casey Lawler, a senior majoring in CM and architecture, shares her journey into the construction industry, highlighting her passion for building and creating, which stemmed from childhood experiences building models and playing with Legos.

Initially drawn to architecture, Casey discovered the dual-degree option in architecture and CM during college, attracted by its hands-on approach and tangible knowledge. Despite not having family ties in construction, she found mentors and connections during college that shaped her career aspirations. Casey values the problem-solving aspect of architecture and CM, likening a building to a giant puzzle. She appreciates CM's active engagement with sites and witnessing design realization.

Contrasting her internship experiences at a small architectural firm and a more prominent general contractor, Casey gained diverse perspectives on the construction process. Her transition from architecture to CM was influenced by positive internship experiences, highlighting the practical application of knowledge and the hands-on nature of CM. She has a job lined up in CM after graduation.

Casey advises women considering a major in CM to have supportive mentors, stay curious, and not let setbacks deter them from pursuing their goals. She acknowledges the intimidation of being one of the few women in the industry. However, she encourages women to view themselves as potential role models and understand their positive impact. Casey urges resilience and determination in overcoming obstacles and focusing on personal growth.

**MCKAYLA BURKE**

McKayla Burke, a senior majoring in CM, found her interest in construction sparked by her childhood fascination with ski lift mechanics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she explored various career options. She discovered the CM program at UW, inspired by encouragement from a friend's father who worked in the field. Despite stumbling upon the program by accident, McKayla found it to be a perfect fit between business and engineering, aligning well with her interests and goals.

Throughout her internships, McKayla encountered supportive environments contrary to her expectations of being one of the few women. Her experience working for a contractor's special projects division, where around 80% of project managers were women, was incredibly positive. Working alongside other women in



Septelka



Lawler



Burke

leadership roles, McKayla appreciated the camaraderie and enthusiasm for the environment, finding it novel and enjoyable.

McKayla's internships helped shape her perspective on the construction industry. She acknowledges the UW's efforts in exposing students to successful women in the field, challenging stereotypes, and showcasing the achievements of women in construction.

McKayla advises aspiring CM majors, emphasizing the importance of thick skin and resilience in the face of societal norms and stereotypes. She encourages girls to pursue their interests in construction without being swayed by others' opinions, highlighting the rewarding nature of understanding construction mechanics and processes.

**CATHERINE DANG**

Catherine Dang, a senior majoring in CM, discovered her interest in construction through a serendipitous journey. Initially enrolled in business courses via Running Start during high school, Catherine's introduction to CM came through her cousin, who was in the program. Intrigued, she took a CM course during her first year at UW and enjoyed it. A chance encounter with a company representative at a career fair led her to apply for an internship, solidifying her interest in CM. She enrolled as a CM major and will graduate this June.

Catherine emphasizes the diverse opportunities available to women in construction beyond physical labor, including project management and leadership roles. She stresses the importance of perseverance and asserts that women's unique experiences contribute to producing high-quality work. Catherine encourages parents and students to challenge stereotypes about the industry, urging them not to be deterred by its male-dominated nature. She advocates for women to assert themselves in the field, noting a shifting culture where self-advocacy is increasingly respected.

Catherine's message to parents and children interested in construction centers around challenging stereotypes and embracing the industry's diverse opportunities. She encourages parents to support their children's interests in construction, emphasizing that the field caters to various skills and qualities beyond physical labor. Catherine believes that children who excel in leadership roles or enjoy problem-solving may find fulfillment in construction careers.



Dang

**FRANCES OUYANG**

Frances Ouyang, a senior majoring in CM, shares her journey of discovering her passion for the field after initially pursuing computer science. Intrigued by the idea of managing projects and teams to build tangible structures, Frances found satisfaction in contributing to the construction process. Growing up with parents involved in remodeling and a brother who is a civil engineer influenced her decision to pursue construction management, particularly in residential construction.

Frances strongly prefers residential projects and intends to pursue this area of construction due to her familiarity with and interest in it. Her dedication to her chosen field highlights her commitment to pursuing what she enjoys, regardless of challenges or demographics within the industry.

Frances reflects on the supportive community within the CM program, contrasting it with the competitive nature often found in business schools. She appreciates the collaborative atmosphere where classmates freely share information and help each other, emphasizing the collective desire for everyone to succeed. She anticipates that these friendships will continue supporting and assisting in various aspects of life after graduation.



Ouyang

**RACHEL LY**

Rachel Ly, a junior majoring in CM, embarked on her journey into the field fueled by her passion for PM cultivated during her involvement in DECA in high school. Encouraged by family friends in architecture, Rachel recognized the potential for growth and opportunity in construction, particularly in PM roles. Rachel embraced the supportive environment offered by the UW's CM program. She appreciated its smaller cohort size, and as a freshman entry, she enjoyed the early engagement with the industry and fellow CM students.

Rachel's internships have been instrumental in her professional development. She works as a PM assistant for the UW Real Estate Office during the school year and interned with a general contractor last summer. She valued the diversity and presence of women in leadership positions on the owner's side; however, she observed the contractor's side was less diverse. Nevertheless, Rachel found inspiration in one of the contractor's female principal, who provided mentorship and served as a successful Asian woman role model for her.

Rachel finds construction appealing due to the dynamic nature of the field, where each project brings unique challenges and nuances. Unlike desk-bound professions, Rachel enjoys visiting construction sites and witnessing tangible changes in her projects, highlighting the hands-on aspect of CM.

For incoming students considering a major in CM, Rachel advises building solid connections within the cohort at the College of Built Environments. She stresses the importance of collaboration and networking throughout one's academic journey and beyond for career advancement.



Ly

**CLOSING THOUGHTS**

My interview with these students has shed light on what younger women perceive as the opportunities and challenges in the construction industry. Overall, the interviewees had a positive view of the industry, embraced their unique perspectives in navigating male-dominated environments, and recognized the value their contributions can bring to industry.

In summary, some challenges they emphasized were the importance of diversity at executive levels to ensure visibility of upward career paths and caution against tokenism in DEI programs, which may overshadow skill and lead to adverse consequences such as impostor syndrome, leaving women feeling undeserving of promotions.

The persistence of the "boys club" mentality in workplaces underscores the necessity of implementing policies for diversity and inclusion at all levels. Additionally, the students discussed concerns about ageism in the industry, such as being perceived as too young to be taken seriously or overlooked for promotions, possibly due to being placed on the "mommy track."

It's worth noting that a woman's decision to join a firm can be influenced by the company's commitment to DEI initiatives, demonstrating a commitment to action rather than mere rhetoric: they walk the talk.

In closing, I'm deeply inspired by the determination and enthusiasm of these women as they prepare to enter the workforce. Despite our progress in fostering diversity and inclusion, women still only represent 12% of CM bachelor's degrees conferred nationally in 2021. While UW's diversity numbers are higher (17% in 2022), we must continue our efforts to encourage more young women to join CM academic programs.

*Darlene Septelka, FDBIA, is a professional teaching fellow at the University of Washington's Department of Construction Management. She has over 50 years of construction industry experience spanning the globe.*

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WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION WEEK 2024



# Women at Skanska hold industry’s ‘keys to the future’

By **MADELINE GELLER**  
Skanska

The construction industry is evolving. Today, we see more and more women at the forefront of this traditionally male-dominated industry, steering us into a more gender-inclusive future. Since 2010, the number of women in construction across the United States has grown by nearly 53%. While a notable increase, significant barriers remain on the path to a more equitable future, as today women represent just 10.4% of the overall industry.



Geller

At Skanska in Seattle, Courtney Fraga, Michelle Petterson and Mary Fialko are helping break those barriers by redefining roles, shattering stereotypes, and championing diversity. Working across Skanska’s three business sectors — Building Construction, Civil Construction and Commercial Development — each of these women boast unique roles including supplier diversity manager, project manager, and director of real estate development. While their jobs vary in scope, they all share an important commonality: They are keys to a future where the construction industry knows no gender boundaries.

Ahead of Women in Construction Week, I asked Courtney, Michelle, and Mary to reflect on their journey throughout the industry and their vision for a more inclusive workplace.

**Q: What is your role at Skanska and what projects are you working on?**

**Courtney (Skanska USA Building):** In my current role as supplier diversity manager, I focus on enhancing opportunities for diverse subcontractors and suppliers while actively engaging with our diverse business community to support their success across our projects in the Seattle office.

**Michelle (Skanska USA Civil):** As a project manager overseeing Skanska’s heavy-civil infrastructure projects in the Pacific Northwest, my responsibilities revolve around orchestrating the planning and overall execution process on our projects. I am currently focused on the I-405 Brickyard Interchange Improvement project where I oversee the development of the construction schedule (and) evolving project dynamics, ensuring the team works collaboratively throughout the project lifecycle.

**Mary (Skanska USA Commercial Development):** As director of real estate development, I oversee the financial performance of multiple projects including The Eight, a 25-story, Class A-plus office tower located in Bellevue, and a project we’re in the early design stages of right next door at Northeast Ninth Place and 106th Avenue North-

east. Additionally, I provide support for significant transactions within our portfolio.

**Q: How has the industry evolved in terms of gender diversity and inclusion since you began your career?**

**Michelle:** There has been a noticeable shift in the inclusion of women in day-to-day project discussions and in the comfortability to speak up. Prior to this, women had their voices “backed-up” by male counterparts and this change reflects a growing recognition of the value that women bring to the table in the decision-making process.



Petterson

**Courtney:** Representation has changed significantly over time. Initially, being one of the only women in engineering school and on my teams was intimidating. Now, I see project teams led by all women. This change, especially post-George Floyd, has influenced a significant shift in initiatives toward D&I efforts making a difference. More ideas are welcome, more conversations are happening, and with comfort in sharing our opinions, especially people of color and women in the industry, diversity of thought is winning, and new perspectives are heard.

**Q: What strategies do you believe are most effective in breaking down the barriers that deter women from pursuing careers in construction, and how can companies implement these strategies?**

**Mary:** To foster true inclusivity, companies must first acknowledge the diverse challenges women encounter throughout their careers and then adapt their approach accordingly. While adhering to general standards is important, flexibility is essential to accommodate the varying needs of female employees for retention. Mentorship across genders is vital for young men to learn from women in leadership and for young women to see their potential future paths.



Fialko

**Courtney:** My journey into construction came about due to my early exposure to the industry and the realization that it was an option for me. I believe investing in youth in construction can help them explore future career paths, particularly for women interested in engineering and construction. Programs like Camp BuildHER and ACE Mentorship create representation and enthusiasm for a more gender-inclusive future.

**Q: What have you considered your “keys to success” in excelling in the construction industry?**

**Courtney:** My keys to success stem from one of my all-time favorite books “The Four Agree-

ments” by Don Miguel Ruiz. It had a profound impact on me during a pivotal moment in my life when I needed to regain control. They include: 1. Be impeccable with your word. 2. Do not take anything personally. 3. Do not make assumptions. 4. Always do your best.

**Michelle:** My key to success has been recognizing that you can’t change others. We can foster personal growth and reflect on how our behavior influences outcomes and different reactions. One must also make sure not to lose themselves. You can be successful exactly how you are

if you listen to your gut.

**Mary:** My keys to success are my ability to see the big picture throughout a project lifecycle, while also paying attention to details — big and small. Additionally, transparent and proficient communication throughout is key.

**Q: What do you hope for the future/next generation of women getting started in the construction industry today?**

**Michelle:** Early in my career, I felt like I could never say no.

See SKANKSA — page 6

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Garner Construction was founded in 1992, and first operated a tower crane for Mortenson on the Physics & Astronomy building site at the University of Washington. Since that time, Garner has helped to shape skylines and communities across the Pacific NW and Hawaii, on over 500 projects, including the Mariner's Stadium, MoPop (formerly EMP), Seattle Central Library, Benaroya Hall, Seattle Federal Courthouse, MEB UW, Sound Transit Light Rail, and the Space Needle.

Over the last 32 years, Garner has employed many amazing tradeswomen, in spite of the obstacles and resistance women in the construction trades have and continue to face. Jackie is heartened by the expanding number of women in trades, and the increased recognition of the value and contributions women bring to the trades. She also hopes to see a more rapid expansion of diversity in hiring and contracting than has been achieved in the last 50 years. Garner Construction will continue to promote and advocate for women in the trades, especially in leadership and stakeholder positions, and we encourage industry leaders to join us.

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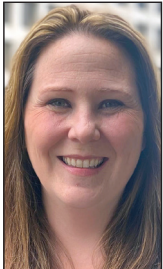


# A myriad of opportunities for women in the trades

By JESSICA PASSMORE  
Harts Services

When we think about women in the trades, one common visual is the allegorical cultural icon, Rosie the Riveter, who represented the women who worked in factories in the United States during World War II. At the time, with so many men going into battle, women were encouraged to take over the industry jobs that were left behind. This period in the history of the United States really opened the door to the possibilities and opportunities available to everyone — especially women — in skilled trades.

Today, opportunities for women in the trades are increasing by the day. What was once a male-dominated field is now seeing more and more women join, and businesses are eager to have them in their ranks. The skilled trades of plumbing, electrical, and heating and cooling offer a solid career path and are essential to keeping our communities safe and healthy.



Passmore

### HOW TO GET STARTED

At the state and city levels, there are plenty of resources that can help women find their entry into the trades, including training and apprenticeship programs. Here at Harts, we host Harts Academy, a paid training and apprenticeship program that equips future tradespeople with the training and requisite practice hours they need to obtain their Washington state license.

During the three years required to earn a license, apprentices in the program participate in classroom learning, hands-on learning in a simulated environment, and on-the-job field training. Our apprentices assist and learn under our lead plumbers and electricians, helping to prepare jobs, securing the necessary parts and equipment for a jobsite, while working toward being able to complete jobs independently. Once the apprenticeship is

complete — they have accrued the state-required training hours and have passed the licensing exam — participants will go on to run plumbing and electrical jobs on their own.

### POTENTIAL EARNINGS, BUSINESS POSSIBILITIES

Across Western Washington, skilled labor is in high demand and, as a result, can be a particularly lucrative career. Plumbers, electricians, and heating and cooling professionals can make well over \$100,000 per year in service sales and installation. Along with the high earning potential, becoming a licensed trades professional ensures a stable, life-long career.

The trades are a vital service that withstand economic, political and social changes. While many tradespeople choose to work for an established company and can often take their pick of where to work due to the extremely high demand, some prefer going out on their own, which offers infinite growth potential (if they are willing to accept the associated risks). The greater Seattle area is a competitive market in the home services industry, but with the right training, experience and drive, professionals in this industry have significant income potential.

### FIELD AND NON-FIELD OPPORTUNITIES

While working as a skilled tradesperson is an excellent opportunity for women in the home services industry, there are also ample opportunities in support and leadership roles. Starting from the first point of contact, in the Puget Sound region, larger home services companies have a customer service department. These professionals play a critical role in the business as they receive all incoming inquiries — both over the phone and online — and book appointments. Their job is to do their best to fill the technicians' schedules, allowing them to complete jobs and ensuring that everyone makes a sustainable living.

Next up is dispatch. At Harts, these teammates are responsible



Harts Academy is a paid training and apprenticeship program for future tradespeople.

Photo from Harts Services

for ensuring that the right technician is deployed to the right project based on their strengths, areas of expertise and the location of the job. Our dispatchers also set expectations with our customers before the appointment and follow up with customers after the service is complete. We prioritize successful outcomes for our customers, and with the right person on the right job, we achieve just that.

Along with these two critical areas of expertise, there are additional support areas including install coordination, municipality liaison, warehouse management, accounting, marketing and operations. All of these service areas, including those tradespeople who work in the field, are critical to the success and growth of any company in the trades.

The perception of the trades as a “male-centric” industry is continually shifting as more and more women find themselves thriving in this career choice. For those who are willing to work hard, aren't afraid to get dirty, and are interested in continuously learning, the trades offer women — and everyone — a stable career course, high income potential and unlimited opportunity for professional growth.

Jessica Passmore is COO of Harts Services.

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“No other organization represents the construction industry as well as AGC.

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# Skanska

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This created a habit of being overworked and unintentionally enabled those around me to take advantage of that. Today, I know that many women across all industries still struggle with this — myself included. My key to success has been to learn when, where, and how to say no. I hope the future/next generation of women continue to create workplace cultures where women feel like they can set boundaries and not fear they will be seen differently.

**Courtney:** I hope they aren't afraid to try. If I learned one big thing while going to school for civil engineering, it's that it gave me the capacity to try many different roles. Additionally, know that your career is long — you can start in one place and easily shift to another if it doesn't fit. Construction is an ever-changing career. If it bores you or doesn't fit, try another role within construction. Find where your passion leads you and try it on!

*Madeline Geller supports communications for Skanska in Seattle.*