

Building a stronger future: How Skanska empowers women-owned businesses

■ Investing in the growth and development of women-owned and other diverse businesses enhances the supply chain and contributes to the strength of the industry overall.

By COURTNEY FRAGA
Skanska

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR WOMEN-OWNED VENDORS

In the construction industry, cultivating a diverse supply chain is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic imperative.

Diverse suppliers infuse unique perspectives, drive innovation and creativity, and strengthen community ties, leading to more resilient and adaptable business operations and improved project outcomes. Partnering with businesses owned by women, minorities, veterans, and other underrepresented groups fosters economic growth within communities and has benefited both suppliers and our team at Skanska in myriad ways.



Fraga

Our commitment to working with women-owned businesses has never been stronger. Two of the programs that have been instrumental in growing our supply chain are our Construction Management Building Blocks (CMBB) program and our new Excellence in Construction Leadership Program (ECLP), which empower women-owned and other diverse businesses to thrive in a competitive market.

EMPOWERING WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

Launched in 2006, Skanska's CMBB program is a free 10-week virtual and in-person coaching and educational series designed to equip women-owned, diverse and small businesses, vendors and suppliers with the knowledge and resources needed to succeed in the construction industry. The program covers topics such as bidding, contracts, safety, business development, and project execution, providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of working with large general contractors like Skanska.

Here in Seattle, we had 13 graduates of CMBB in 2024, seven of which were women-owned businesses. They represented industries ranging from asphalt paving to electrical, daylighting to decorative concrete, and dry-wall to construction cleaning. Each one took away their own mix of learnings, from learning new technologies and software to jobsite safety compliance refreshers and more.

One of our recent graduates, Melanie Parrett, vice president and co-owner of Hot Mix Pavers, said, "Anyone who wants to play in the big leagues needs to take this course. What to look for, how to bid, how to bill, how to be more professional while you're doing it - all of that is covered. CMBB has given us a lot of confidence to pursue larger projects."

Since its inception, CMBB has made a significant impact. Nationally, more than 800 companies have participated in the program, collectively securing more than \$740 million in contracts on Skanska projects since CMBB was created in 2007. This success underscores the program's effectiveness in preparing women-owned and other diverse businesses to compete and excel when working with Skanska and in the larger construction sector.

Building upon the success of CMBB, Skanska launched the Excellence in Construction Leadership Program (ECLP) last year. This nomination-based, executive-level program brings together Skanska's leadership team members with executives from diverse local businesses across regions to promote diversity and inclusion within the construction industry supply chain.

Among the 14 participants selected nationwide was Division 9, a woman-owned and Seattle-based business specializing in flooring and interior finishes. For Melissa Rossi, owner of Division 9, participation in the ECLP program marked a significant milestone in her company's 23-year history. Since taking over the business, Rossi has navigated the challenges of becoming a certified woman-owned business and further expanding Division 9's capabilities in the healthcare, education, and government sectors.

"When I took the leap to buy out the business, I put everything on the line," said Rossi. "Skanska's ECLP program was a game-changer for me as a new leader, providing direct access to Skanska's leadership team, whose guidance and mentorship gave me actionable tools to shape the future of my business. This support was instrumental in helping me secure certification as a women-owned business in just two months - an achievement I had struggled with for nearly a year prior."

ECLP is the first of its kind program in the construction industry to focus specifically on nationwide peer-to-peer relationships with trade partners. It is designed to facilitate ongoing access, knowledge-sharing, and mutually beneficial partnerships between Skanska and diverse business executives who are ready to take on larger roles - both on Skanska projects and in the industry at large.

A COMMITMENT TO LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS

Skanska's approach to supplier diversity extends beyond training programs. The company is committed to building long-term relationships with suppliers, recognizing that their success contributes to the overall strength of the industry. By investing in the growth and development of women-owned and other diverse businesses, Skanska not only enhances its supply chain but also promotes economic inclusion and community development.

Growing a diverse supply chain in the construction industry requires intentional efforts to identify, develop and collaborate with underrepresented businesses. Skanska's CMBB and ECLP programs exemplify how targeted initiatives can empower women-owned vendors, providing them with the tools, knowledge, and connections needed to thrive, while also strengthening our projects and contributing to a more inclusive and dynamic construction industry.

Courtney Fraga is supplier diversity manager for Skanska USA Building.



Melissa Rossi, middle front, owner of Division 9, participates in a recent Skanska Excellence in Construction Leadership Program in Atlanta.



Skanska's ECLP program brings leadership team members together with executives from diverse local businesses to promote diversity and inclusion within the construction industry supply chain. Photos courtesy of Skanska USA

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Stairway to leadership: women in construction management

■ *Though they are underrepresented, UW's female construction management students are collaborative team players who are ready to lead.*

By **DARLENE SEPTELKA**
University of Washington

The Bachelor of Science in Construction Management (CM) at the University of Washington (UW) is a comprehensive four-year degree designed to prepare students for leadership roles in the construction industry. The program covers essential topics such as business management, project management, construction technology, and safety regulations. The program encourages students to explore the potential of the built environment and provides an excellent entry point into the industry, especially for women. Our graduates are fully prepared to pursue various careers in construction management, including roles such as project managers and field engineers.



Septelka

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), compared to degrees in architecture (ARCH) and civil engineering (CE), CM programs are underperforming in attracting women. Our UW CM Program has performed better than the national average over the past 10 years, and our current Class of 2025 has 16 women students, representing a quarter of the class.

Women in UW's CM program excel in both academics and leadership roles. In the classroom they perform exceptionally well, making up 25% of the top 20% of their senior CM cohort, and many have received scholarships. This year, 17 women competed on teams at the 38th annual Associated Schools of Construction (ASC) Regions 6 & 7 Student Competition. Notably, two of these teams had female representation of 50% or more, with one team achieving 2nd place in the national competition for Sustainable Building.

Women in CM are also making significant contributions to professional associations. For example, two women are currently serving on the Executive Board of the University of Washington's Associated General Contractors (AGC), including as president. Their active involvement in and out of the classroom demonstrates that our female CM students are collaborative team players and have the potential to step into leadership positions, even though females are underrepresented in the CM program by one to four.

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LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The question is, why construction? To gain some insight and explore some answers, I asked this question to the women in our CM senior class. Most of the women said they learned about the CM program after they entered college. Some found the program through friends, while others found it after becoming disinterested in their chosen academic pathway. A few learned about the program from taking an elective class or attending CM department or student events.

Several women chose to pursue CM due to their interest in the courses, the promising career opportunities, and the higher pay compared to architecture. Some were inspired by the dual degree (Architectural and CM) advantage to enhance their industry understanding. Another saw CM as an alternative to engineering and the preference for the business and tangible aspects of the built environment.

Additionally, a passion for building and problem-solving, along with a desire to create a diverse and inclusive construction industry, motivated another to choose this path. One student noted, "I have always known I learn best when participating in hands-on learning, so when I found out my classes involved making concrete... I was hooked!"

A few of the women students had a family member or friends working in design or construction that influenced their decision. For one student, parental encouragement played a role, as they were convinced of the new opportunities it would provide her. Childhood experiences, like building a chicken coop with their dad, inspired one student to seek a career in engineering and design. Another student noted seeing the fulfillment their dad found in the construction industry influenced their decision to pursue a similar path.

The most rewarding aspects of the CM program for these students included building connections with industry professionals through career fairs, guest speakers and internships. The opportunity to apply classroom knowledge in real-world scenarios, and develop essential skills in leadership, problem-solving, and team coordination has been highly fulfilling and empowering for them. One student noted: "Had I taken these CM courses before my architecture studios, my designs would have been ten times better."

Some students did recognize they faced challenges in the CM programs, often related to gender dynamics in male-dominated classes. They overcame these challenges by relying on support from female classmates and friends, pushing through discouragement, maintaining resilience and continuing to voice their opinions despite feeling their contributions were undervalued. One student noted, "Honestly, I just ignore it."

To encourage more students to pursue a CM degree path, they suggested increasing awareness through better advertisement of the major and campus events. Some noted that more CM exposure within the College of Built Environment (CBE), such as through classes, site visits, or mentorship, would help students when considering career choice. Others suggested starting outreach efforts earlier, during high school.

INTERNSHIPS: FROM BOOKS TO BRICKS

All the students participated in internships, rating their experience 4.3 out of 5 stars, which helped

affirm their career choices. Many enjoyed the team environment and real-life applications, with some finding a deeper connection to classroom concepts. One student was still undecided between architecture and working for a general contractor.

Students encountered various industry challenges and learned the importance of addressing issues promptly and the amount of desk work required compared to fieldwork. The construction phase of their internship also limited the depth of their learning, such as whether they were assigned to closeout. Overall, they emphasized the need for clear communication and proactive problem-solving in the industry, highlighting how project assignments can influence what you learn during internships.

CLIMBING THE RUNGS: EMPLOYMENT

The majority of UW's CM women have already secured a job after graduation and suggest companies focus on health, well-being and a supportive environment. They value competitive pay, good benefits, gender balance, fun work culture and work-life balance. A welcoming atmosphere, diverse workforce, and treating women candidates with the same respect and consideration as any other candidate were crucial in making their employment decisions. To attract and retain women candidates, they recommended businesses create an inclusive environment, support women's voices, offer equal pay and opportunities, maternity leave and affinity groups.

This women cohort, understanding the challenges and barriers ahead, is determined to overcome them. Their passion for design and construction and commitment to contributing to the built environment outweighs the possibility of a few bumps on the road they could face. In the survey, students ranked the industry in several areas, with opportunities for advancement and support, networking, and mentorships the highest. On the lower side, they ranked the representation of women and the challenges and barriers faced by women lowest.

Many students highlighted the importance of mentorship in their studies. Mentors provide encouragement, support, and valuable career advice. After graduation, students plan to seek mentorship through their company's programs and connections, with some considering joining NAWIC.

Their advice to young women considering a career in construction emphasized confidence, persistence and resilience. Be a team player but be prepared to assert yourself and create your own space in conversations, as biases may still exist. Know when to seek support from allies and managers. Lastly, don't hesitate to ask questions, as others likely share the same queries.

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Now to the elephant in the room - DEI. As someone who started her career in the early 1970s, I wanted to hear what these young women thought about DEI as they prepare to begin their careers in a predom-

See STAIRWAY — page 6



UW's Construction Management Class of 2025 has 16 women students, about a quarter of the class, and 10 of them are pictured here. Images courtesy of Darlene Septelka

Industry Ranking on a scale of 1-6. Color code indicates median response with average score noted in (parentheses)

1	Representation of Women - The proportion of women in various roles within the construction industry.	Fair (2.86)
2	Opportunities for Advancement - The availability of career growth and leadership opportunities for women.	Good (3.86)
3	Workplace Culture - The inclusiveness and supportiveness of the workplace environment for women.	Fair (3.57)
4	Educational and Training Access - The accessibility and encouragement for women to pursue construction related education and training.	Good (3.71)
5	Support Networks and Mentorship - The presence and effectiveness of support networks and mentorship programs for women in construction.	Good (3.86)
6	Technological Impact - The role of technological advancements in creating opportunities for women in the industry.	Good (3.71)
7	Perception of Change - The overall perception of progress and positive change towards gender diversity in the industry.	Good (3.67)
8	Work-Life Balance - The industry's support for work-life balance, particularly for women.	Fair (3.00)
9	Policy and Regulation - The impact of government policies and industry regulations on promoting gender diversity.	Moderate (3.00)
10	Challenges and Barriers - The extent of challenges such as harassment, gender stereotypes, and other barriers faced by women.	High (2.43)

Rank Q1-8	Very Poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Impact Q9-10	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Minimum	No Impact

A survey of UW's women CM cohort found students felt most positive about opportunities for advancement and support, networking and mentorships, and more negative about the representation of women and the challenges and barriers faced by women in the industry.

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Building relationships to grow women's role in construction

■ A Q&A on how powerful partnerships can be instrumental in increasing diversity in the industry and improving the bottom line.

By **BRIE CRITES** and **RYAN CLAYTON**
Special to the Journal

Brie Crites, president and owner of Farwest Fabrication in Puyallup, and Ryan Clayton, SVP/General Manager for Skanska USA Civil in the West, sat down this month to talk about their two companies' decades-long partnership and the growing role that women play in the construction industry. Farwest currently is working with Skanska as a supplier of piles and steel for the temporary trestle Skanska is using during the construction of the new Portage Bay Bridge.



Crites



Clayton

Q As the president of a local small business, how have your relationships within the industry helped with your success?

BRIE CRITES (B.C.): Having good relationships with suppliers, vendors and contractors continues to be a necessity. As a small business, we understand that communication, defined project requirements and prompt payments are vital for success — along with our reputation of doing the work and doing it well. This has allowed us to steadily build relationships with contrac-

tors like Skanska that in turn sustain continuous work. Relationships built on mutual respect and trust allow local, small contractors like Farwest to feel supported by the contractor and confident that materials will be delivered timely to allow us to do our part of the project.

Q What are some of the challenges you have experienced as President of Farwest?

B.C.: A big challenge I face is that people I interact with don't always understand and appreciate the amount of time and effort I put into learning and becoming an expert in running all aspects of a construction business. Some of that comes from being a woman in the industry. I have found that learning the art of negotiation, effective conflict resolution styles and gracefully dealing with those who operate in the old way of doing business has helped me jump the many hurdles that come with these challenges.

Q What do you think are the main barriers women in construction face today?

B.C.: A big barrier is the perception that the construction industry is not for women, especially the physical aspects of working in the field. Education and empowerment are the best ways we can support women in the AEC industry. This can be accomplished through mentor programs, internships, cross-training opportunities and advancements of technical skills.

I was recently a judge for a local trade organization that introduces the trades to high schoolers. I

was pleased to see a handful of young women learning to weld and even more pleased to see that their skills and efforts were being recognized and supported. I feel like there is a positive change taking place within the industry. We are creating and maintaining a culture that's based on support and advancement that allows for women and men to work equally, leading to relationships that are built on mutual respect.

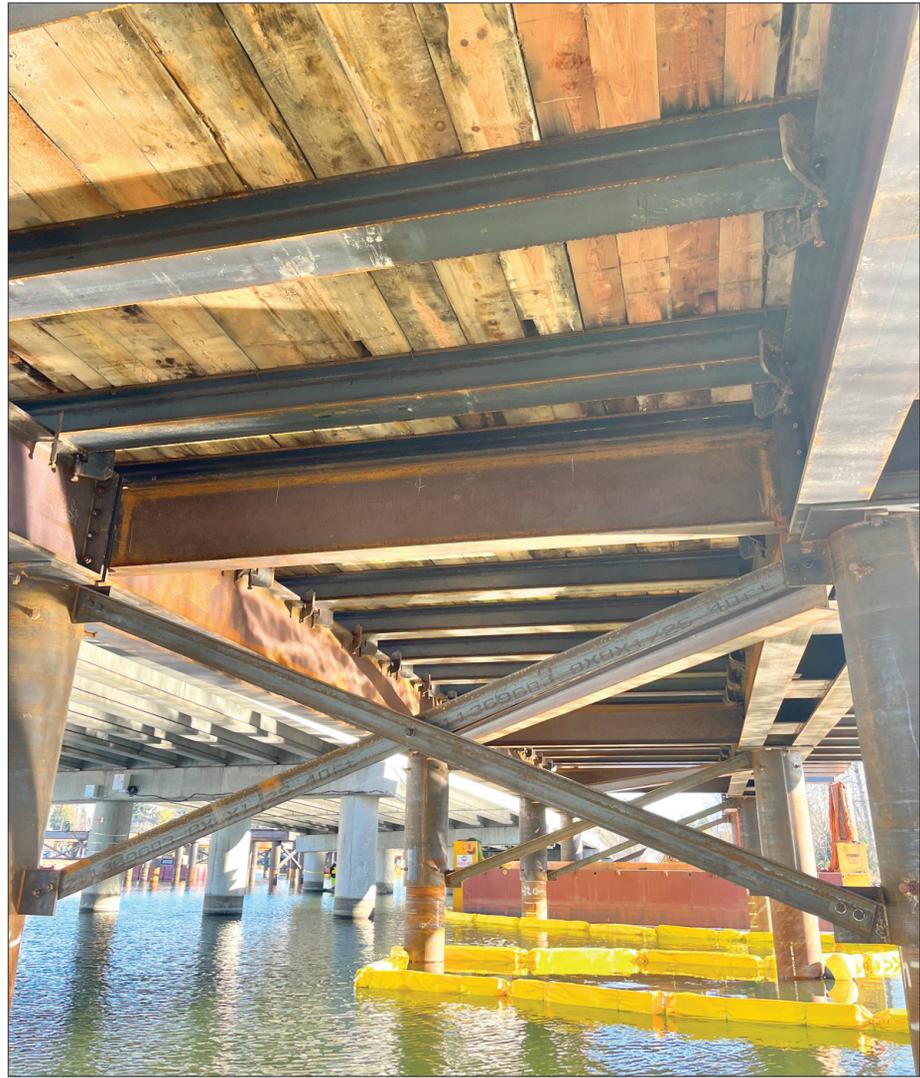
Q What are some things AEC businesses can do to support women-owned businesses across the industry?

RYAN CLAYTON (R.C.): A good way for AEC businesses to support their partner women-owned businesses is to work to understand the challenges they face in our industry. From there, we should look for ways to navigate those obstacles collaboratively so that we can use our individual resources to provide opportunities that align with the expertise and capacity of the business.

As a large contractor, Skanska has a unique opportunity to support women-owned businesses across the construction industry. We can help with growing their personal networks and highlighting the great work they do on our projects — celebrating them amongst our colleagues and even our competitors. We've found that having a bigger and more diverse set of suppliers has strengthened our business, and I believe if more companies grow their supply chains in a similar fashion, it will only benefit our industry.

Q From the perspective of a general contractor, what makes a good small business partner?

R.C.: The best small business



Farwest fabricated the piles and steel here in the underside of the temporary trestle Skanska is using during construction of the Portage Bay Bridge. Photo courtesy of Skanska USA

See **RELATIONSHIPS** — page 6

Women driving innovation in construction

■ Effective leadership isn't just about making decisions — it's about managing relationships, fostering collaboration, and driving results with a people-first mindset.

By **BIANCA HUFF**
BNBuilders

Women in STEM bring powerful strengths and perspectives that elevate teams and drive innovation — especially in industries like commercial construction. While everyone's talents are unique, research highlights several areas where women often stand out. My own experiences as a woman in construction reflect the data that shows women are natural collaborators and communicators in addition to master multitaskers — all valuable skills for the highly technical nature of construction.



Huff

women contribute to and shape the construction industry. Effective leadership isn't just about making decisions—it's about managing relationships, fostering collaboration, and driving results with a people-first mindset.

Precision and attention to detail shine in data-driven roles like engineering and analysis, where accuracy matters most. Studies also show women excel in ethical decision-making and risk assessment, taking a thoughtful approach to long-term planning and sustainable solutions. And when it comes to multitasking and organization, they're pros at balancing complex projects while keeping the big picture in focus.

As the leader of my company's Innovation Committee, I took a strategic and people-centered approach to setting up collaboration processes. I chose user-friendly technology to encourage participation, recognizing that overly complex systems could be a barrier. To ensure transparency and buy-in, I clearly explained my decisions — detailing how information would be shared and who was involved in shaping the process. Before the kickoff meeting, I actively sought feedback from colleagues to fine-tune the setup and address potential challenges.

Throughout the process, I kept the broader organization in mind, focusing on how the committee's work could benefit all employees. This thoughtful approach paid off: the kickoff meeting was well-received, team members felt confident contributing, and other departments expressed interest in adopting similar methods. The experience underscored an important lesson—effective leadership is about more than having the right tools or plans; it's about cultivating an environment where people feel valued, heard, and inspired to collaborate.

TECHNOLOGY: THE KEY TO INNOVATION

Technology is what allows us to design better, be more efficient, and collaborate more effectively. This mindset has shaped my career, particularly in my tireless pursuit of technology—both new and existing. I have always been willing to test, fail, and iterate when there is a clear benefit to

adoption, and that willingness to experiment has set me apart from my peers.

In fact, women leaders in STEM are often the first to embrace emerging technologies and foster innovation, driving progress in areas like biotech, green energy and AI. These strengths position women to thrive in commercial construction — a field built on collaboration, innovation, and the kind of multidisciplinary thinking STEM professionals bring to the table. My extensive exposure to technology has made me comfortable with experimentation, something that felt daunting early in my career but has since become a defining strength.

THE POWER OF ADVOCACY & REPRESENTATION

The women and men at BNBuilders have played a pivotal role in my success by opening doors, advocating for me in rooms I wasn't in, and placing their trust in me. The support of the female leaders in my company was especially impactful — they saw my potential before I fully recognized it myself, encouraging me to step into leadership, take on committee roles and engage in meaningful conversations. Their confidence in me was unwavering. This kind of support has reinforced

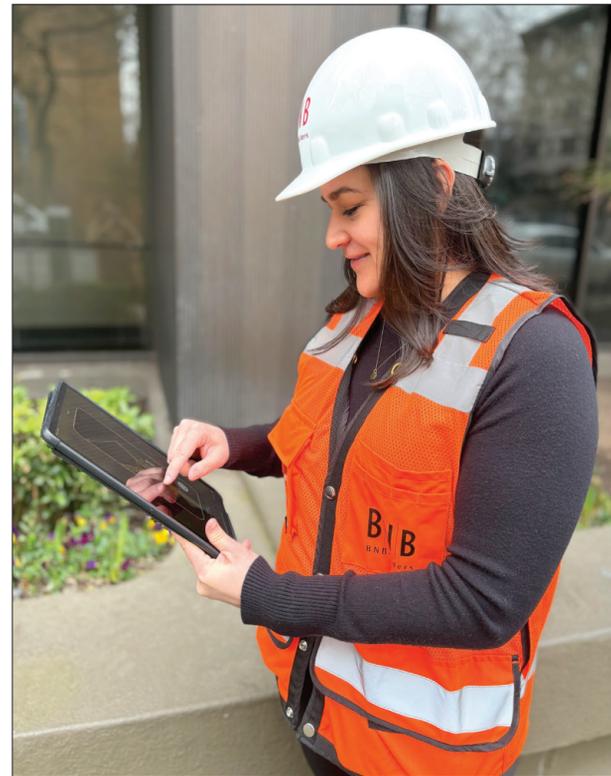
the importance of surrounding myself with people who uplift, challenge and inspire growth.

I learned to silence self-doubt by shifting my focus from comparison to action. Instead of questioning whether I belonged, I committed to doing the work I knew I was capable of. Over time, I built confidence through experience — studying, observing and executing. Beyond my own growth, I am committed to using my knowledge and experiences to uplift others, particularly women in leadership roles. I actively share insights on negotiation, team development, feedback strategies and value creation within organizations — helping others navigate their own paths with confidence and clarity.

ENCOURAGING MORE WOMEN TO LEAD

The construction industry is evolving, and with it comes a growing demand for skilled, innovative and collaborative professionals — qualities that women in STEM bring in abundance. From leading high-performing teams to driving technological advancements, women are not just finding a place in construction; they are shaping its future.

As the industry continues to



Bianca Huff is pursuing a Technology Management MBA at the UW Foster School of Business to further strengthen her expertise in business, technology and strategy. Photo courtesy of BNBuilders

See **INNOVATION** — page 6



CELEBRATING WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

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STRATEGIC AND PEOPLE-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

The ability to lead with empathy, awareness, and adaptability plays a significant role in how

A path to a fulfilling career in construction

■ Looking back on 25 years of success in the industry and what I've learned about stereotypes, mentorships and collaboration.

By **ELIZABETH RINEHART**
Walsh Construction

Women in Construction Week is a great opportunity to highlight how fulfilling a career in construction can be. While there have been stories about women facing barriers to entry and advancement in many industries, many women find their success is not only defined by their perseverance and skills, but also by the support and mentorship of the men they work alongside. This has certainly been my experience during 25 years in the Pacific Northwest's construction industry.



Rinehart



Elizabeth Rinehart surrounded by Walsh Construction project managers in the courtyard of Plaza Roberto Maestas, a project Walsh constructed for El Centro de la Raza in 2016. Photo courtesy of Walsh Construction

reflects more about them than it does about me as a woman. While some might see this as naive, I've found that assuming positive intent has served me well throughout my career.

For anyone considering a career in construction, remember this: You don't need to fit a stereotype to succeed. Your skills, creativity and determination are what matter most. Whether you're drawn to hands-on trades, leadership roles, design, or engineering, there's a place for you to make your mark.

CHOOSING A CAREER IN CONSTRUCTION

As a child, I spent a lot of time building things in my garage and in the woods near my house. However, as I progressed through school, it never occurred to me that construction could be a viable career path. I initially pursued a college degree in architecture before switching to urban planning.

Many women I've met in the construction industry describe their journey in one of two ways: "I was born into it" or "I fell into it." Those who grew up in a family construction business or around tradespeople learned early that this was an accessible career path. Meanwhile, the women who "fell into" construction often found their way there serendipitously, unaware of the opportunities in the field.

I'm encouraged by the growing number of people intentionally choosing careers in construction, but there's still much more to be done. The efforts of many in our industry to support pre-apprenticeship programs, inform high school counselors about career opportunities in the trades, and create events like WIC Week are invaluable.

I'm hopeful that through these efforts, we can share a more diverse, less stereotypical story of working in construction, and inspire future leaders in the field. By providing accessible examples, we offer a roadmap for those who may not have realized construction was a path they could take, just as I might have if I'd known earlier.

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES

The construction industry offers vast opportunities for people of all backgrounds, including women. I recognize that many women have faced discrimination or sexist treatment, especially in the past, I have not found my gender to be either a hindrance or an advantage in my career. I've chosen to approach situations with the assumption that how people treat me or speak to me

MENTORSHIP AT WALSH CONSTRUCTION

Last month, I celebrated my 20th anniversary at Walsh Construction. Over the years, I've been incredibly fortunate to be surrounded by talented, knowledgeable builders who have generously shared their expertise. I'm deeply grateful to the many mentors and teammates who have offered training, feedback and advice throughout the years. Their guidance has been instrumental to my growth from a project engineer to becoming General Manager of Walsh's operations in Washington. In this role, I'm committed to fostering an environment of mentorship and professional development.

Construction is one of the most collaborative industries out there. Every project depends on teams of diverse individuals working together toward a shared goal. Whether you're on-site or managing a project from the office, construction is all about teamwork — bringing together different skill sets, backgrounds and experiences.

For me, construction represents a satisfying blend of history, with knowledge being passed down through the generations, and adaptability, as each project is unique. As the industry continues to evolve, I hope more women will hear about careers in construction and actively choose to pursue them. I've found construction to be rewarding, challenging, and fulfilling in so many ways. Each project brings something new, and I continue to learn every day.

Elizabeth Rinehart is the General Manager of Walsh Construction, where she started as a project engineer more than 20 years ago.

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3 NIGHT OPTIONS

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Thu., May 29- Sun., June 1

Wed., July 30-Saturday Aug. 2

Wed., Aug 6-Sat., Aug 9

Fri., Aug 15-Mon., Aug 18

Mon., Aug 28- Thur., Aug 28

4 NIGHT OPTIONS

Mon., May 12-Fri., May 16
Memorial Day Weekend
(Discounted)

Mond., June 2-Fri., June 6

Sat., July 5-Wed., July 9

Sun., July 13-Thur., July 17

Sat., July 26-Wed., July 30

Sat., Aug 2-Wed., Aug 6

Fri., Aug 22-Tues., Aug 26



Sending our appreciation to all of the women in the construction industry who contribute to building our communities.



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Happy Women In Construction Week!

Innovation

Continued from page 4

embrace diversity, companies have a unique opportunity to foster inclusive environments that support and amplify women's contributions. For women in STEM looking for a career where they can apply their technical expertise, problem-solving skills, and leadership abilities in tangible, impactful ways, construction offers an exciting and rewarding path. The foundation has been laid — now it's time to build the future together.

Bianca Huff is the Senior Manager of Innovation & Operational Strategy at BNBuilders, leading efforts to foster innovation, optimize technology, and improve operational efficiency.

Relationships

Continued from page 4

partners are experts in their craft. They understand and communicate the limitations that come with being a small contractor, and bid work that is scalable to their capacity. This allows our partners to perform their scope of work effectively and with a high degree of quality.

When we started working with Farwest more than a decade ago, our first project was probably for a few hundred thousand dollars. Now they're playing a key part of our work on the L300 light rail project, the I-405 Brickyard project and the new Portage Bay Bridge, and their contracts probably have another zero on them.

Q. As a small, local contractor, what makes a good big business partner?

B.C.: A contractor that maintains respect for small business and the inherent limitations in resources make for excellent partnerships. As a small company we

operate on much smaller capital than large companies. What makes for a good relationship with a large contractor is prompt payment. Our most successful partnerships have a willingness to work towards excellence in communication throughout all parts of a project while maintaining flexibility when and where required.

Q. Do you have any advice for women in the AEC industry?

B.C.: Go for it! Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. This industry can provide an excellent career path that will offer many opportunities. The culture of the construction industry is in a dynamic place of change, and women are the pioneers. Follow your passion, learn as much as you can, take opportunities that inspire or challenge you, and most of all, enjoy the journey.

R.C.: The advice that I have for

women in the industry will sound notably similar to the advice I would have for anyone in our industry. Build a strong network within your organization and beyond - that includes connecting with people up, down, and laterally along the chain of command.

Be clear about your goals and aspirations and constantly evaluate your comfort zone. The quickest way to get yourself stuck is to settle in once you get comfortable. And lastly, don't be afraid to advocate for yourself, but at the same time know that quality work and effective critical thinking, more often than not, will speak for itself.

Brie Crites has been president and owner of Farwest Fabrication for the past 15 years. Ryan Clayton is senior vice president/general manager of Skanska USA Civil in the West.

Stairway

Continued from page 3

inantly male-dominated industry.

While most students felt neutral about the role of DEI initiatives in their personal education path, they collectively agreed on the potential impact of eliminating DEI. They expressed shared concerns about the recruitment and retention of women in construction, fearing that a lack of DEI initiatives could deter women and other minorities from pursuing careers in the industry, adding to the decline of the construction workforce.

With executive pressure to remove DEI initiatives, students hope the industry will preserve such programs and recommend that companies continue with ongoing connections with organizations like NAWIC and employee support through bias-free training and inclusive strategies. Students stressed that their achievements should be measured based on comparable roles using the same metrics.

They advocate for equal recognition of women's accomplishments alongside men's as a crucial step towards true equality. One student summarized the group's thoughts, "I would prefer to be recognized for a 'construction' achievement rather than a 'women in construction' achievement."

REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

Let's take a quick look at employment possibilities for these young women. Over the last 10 years, construction employment for women in management

and professional occupations has seen significant growth.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Current Population Survey, the number of women in professional positions has increased by 111%, while those in management positions has risen by 81%. Traditionally, over the past 50 years, the largest sector of female employment has been in office and administration. However, this changed two years ago, and now more women are employed in management occupations. Over the past 10 years, women's employment in trade occupations has risen by 85%. However, it's important to note that there are 182% more women employed in management and professional roles compared to those in trade occupations.

This shift in employment for women in management and professional career paths is evidence that there is a need for more women majoring in CM and is excellent news for young women graduates entering the workforce.

But despite these positive employment numbers, we still have work to do regarding the percentage of workforce representation. Per the 2024 BLS data, women representation in professional occupations account for 21.9% of the workforce, reflecting a 5.8% increase over the past decade. In management roles, women represent 17.5%, with a 10-year gain of 3.7%. Sadly, women still represent only a 4 percent share of construction trade occupations, with a 10-year gain of

only 1.6%.

BUILDING A BRIGHT CONSTRUCTION FUTURE

Looking ahead five years, students anticipate significant technological advancements and increased sustainability in the industry. While there are concerns about women's representation, they are hopeful for more women in superintendent roles. Students aim to adapt to these changes, embrace technology and contribute to the industry's development through innovative practices.

Students are not just advocating for their own advancement but envisioning roles where they can actively promote diversity and mentor others. They are committed to pushing for equitable policies and fostering a supportive environment.

Their parting advice for young women entering this male-dominated industry was to be confident, deliver quality work, and build supportive relationships, echoing their own journey and the challenges they've overcome. They noted that most people they encounter in the classroom, office, or out on the site want to see them succeed!

NEXT STEPS: FINAL THOUGHTS

While promising opportunities exist for women in management and professional roles, we need to increase women's interest in construction to fill these roles. One

insight shared by these college women was there is still a need to get the word out earlier before committing to a college major. All of them found their path to CM after they started college.

We need to do a better job of early outreach to educate young girls that construction is more than physical work on a job site. It's an exciting field that encompasses technology, design, engineering, planning, project management and business leadership, offering a diverse range of career paths for women.

Pursuing a CM degree can open the door to management and professional positions, and pave the way for industry leadership opportunities. It offers a dynamic work environment, competitive salaries, and the chance to make a tangible impact on the world around us. Please encourage your friends, daughters, or anyone interested to explore the rewarding path of a CM degree as they consider their options and plan for the future. These women CM leaders are ready to lend a helping hand to guide them toward a career in construction.

Author's Note: I want to express my gratitude to the women who volunteered for the survey. Their voices have been invaluable to writing this article.

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