

# Building Homes, Breaking Norms

*Reflected in history and development over time, the roles of women in the trade are growing as they continue to push the limit*

By Debb Long



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The transformation of our landscapes has been powerfully impacted over the last century. Consider if you will, the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in which 150,000 women served during WWII. Performing a variety of jobs including switchboard operators, mechanics, bakers, mapping at army post libraries and factory workers. The Tuskegee Airmen included women, including Sgt. Amelia Jones who worked for two years in the 99th Pursuit Squadron, enlisting in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in 1943 under Commander Benjamin O. Davis, commander of the Tuskegee Airmen.

These, and many other women, broke so many barriers, taking women out of the typical 'homemaker' role, adopting the slogan 'We Can Do It', which was part of a very famous poster created by artist J. Howard Miller as a work incentive for the Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Co.

Their dedication to the success of the United States has carved out and paved many avenues for the women of today. A 2023 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) report identified 1.3 million women in the construction industry, equating to 10.8% of the total workforce. Our industry contributes just under 14% of the Global GDP. While women still only represent a little over one-tenth of those involved, the prospects for women have greatly increased in this industry.

We have seen monumental growth opportunities for women in many areas and professions and there has been a substantial shift within the construction industry of women pursuing careers in various management roles including jobsite superintendents, project engineers, project managers, construction execs, etc. It wasn't too long ago that women's roles in the construction arena were either in sales and marketing or administrative supporting roles.

Today, project sites across the country (even globally) include women in many critical, technical and skilled positions, and this presence continues to expand in every imaginable realm, even those yet to be imagined. Oftentimes women pursuing positions in the trades come from family members working in the trades and growing up in a trade family being proud of their fathers, grandfathers and brothers and the work they did.

Technology continues to revolutionize our work tasks and in our day-to-day lives, and it is exciting to see new opportunities that come from these technical advancements. Women in construction play a vital role and will

continue to in the development and implementation of new processes and training and skill enhancements in the industry.

Many women have pursued careers that included challenges along the way, and how to identify solutions when seemingly insurmountable roadblocks appeared in the pathway. Climb that hill, forge that stream and learn along the journey what it means to lead from within one's self, pursuing dreams and stand strong in the face of adversity.

I have learned that we will not always make the right decision, and from our mistakes, we gain invaluable tools for future use. Striving to earn the respect of our peers, building the foundations, bridges and guidance markers along the way for those choosing this pathway who will follow. Reflecting for a moment on the "Field of Dreams" movie where Kevin Costner has a vision in remembrance of his father's devotion as a baseball fan. 'If you build it they will come'.... (this is what we as creative pioneers continue to do in our built world).

This industry has a history of being very cyclical worldwide, good times will follow bad and vice versa. Labor and material shortages are inevitable, so too are recessions and challenges to the insurance market due to wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes and floods just to name a few.

What is currently being utilized may well be obsolete in a decade, give yourself autonomy, despite your occasional hesitation to try something new, outside your comfort zone of current knowledge. It is ok to 'be confident' without worrying about being seen as an outcast, rabble-rouser or even 'out of turn' by speaking your truth.

After putting in the work and firmly grasping your idea or design as the solution to the end goal, do not hesitate to stand your ground out of fear that your audience may perceive you as less qualified being the only woman in the room. Repeat to yourself this phrase – "Do not assume I'm going to be a pushover, or that I'm less informed," for it has given many of us the wherewithal to endeavor onward with the feeling of achieving great things.

So, go out and learn, garner experiences in related as well differing fields of expertise to help grow your knowledge base and opportunities, with joy in knowing that our vitality depends on our learning new things – always. **BD**

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