

Mentorship is Key

Increasing women's representation in non-traditional jobs requires role models. BY MARIE-FRANCE VENNERI



Traditionally, construction was not a field that women considered as a place to work. In fact, women historically were encouraged into teaching, nursing or clerical positions. Times have changed. Through government, industry and organizations, like Canadian Construction Women (CCW), there is a commitment to increasing women's representation in non-traditional roles like construction.

There have been several Canadian surveys conducted to understand the progress of women in non-traditional roles. In a survey conducted by Statistics Canada it was found that there has been an increase in women's presence in the work force between the years of 1976 to 2009.

In fact there have been a higher number of women graduating from post-secondary institutions (61 per cent of university graduates were women in 2007 compared to 56 per cent in 1992); however in trades, the proportion of women to men was still quite low at 1-2 per cent in 2007. In 2007, out of a total of 24,495 individuals who completed an apprenticeship training program, females accounted for 2,780 or 11 per cent. This proportion has increased from 1991 when it was at 6 per cent.

The construction sector council published a paper titled *The State of Women in Construction in Canada* in February 2010 in which they con-

ducted a survey to understand what influenced women in their decision to enter the construction industry. One of the factors listed as a barrier to entry was found to be that there is a lack of women role models and mentors for those interested in the industry.

This is where organizations such as CCW can help. Through the network of women in

**...there is a lack
of women role models
and mentors for
those interested in
the industry.**

the industry, from construction project managers to a variety of trades' women, they can help pair women together for mentorship or simple guidance. It is a great resource for women in the Vancouver construction industry to get support from other like-minded women who share the same type of experiences.

Women have more opportunities than ever for training and many schools encourage women to join the trades. The following is a list of some resources for women to gain more information about the trades:

1. The BC Government job plan website lists several programs and services to help people gain skills and find employment. Under the Women in Trades Training section see: www.itabc.ca/women-trades/overview. This is a great resource for learning about different trades, ways of getting trained and funding opportunities.
2. TradeWorks is an organization based in Vancouver that provides carpentry training to women and youth with multiple barriers to employment: www.tradeworks.bc.ca.
3. BCIT Trades Discovery for Women provides an opportunity for students to gain hands-on experience in a variety of different trades with the goal to help find the one trade that the student is passionate about: www.bcit.ca/study/programs/1190acert.

There are many challenges and unique situations in construction where it is beneficial to have people with a variety of backgrounds working on a solution. Women can provide a different perspective and contribute to a balanced work environment. **CB**

Marie-France Venneri, P.Eng, LEED AP BD+C, is a mechanical engineer at AME Consulting Group with eight years of experience in the industry. She is also currently the vice president of the Canadian Construction Women and has been involved with CCW since 2008.