



CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Women make up only 10.9 percent of the construction industry. Of that group, even fewer are on job sites. In most cases, only about 1 out of 100 workers on building sites are women.

In a predominantly male profession, it can sometimes be challenging for women to be heard or get answers to their essential questions – especially in training. Ayanna Bell, an Apprenticeship Coordinator for the Carpenters Training Center and member of Local 22 in San Francisco, certainly felt some intimidation when she started as an apprentice. She was hesitant to ask anything of her instructor, despite the point of training being to ask questions.

After a successful welding seminar at the Pleasanton Training Center, in which many women were encouraged to attend, Bell had the idea to create a training program that catered specifically to women and would help them receive answers to questions that are sometimes difficult to ask. She soon enlisted the help of Scott Lewis, the Executive Director of the Carpenters Training Trust Fund for Northern California, and representatives from the

Bringing More Women into Our Craft and Union

union to create a one-day training in woodworking. The day would act as a pilot program for a possible pre-apprenticeship program for women.

“I wanted to create a relaxed space where apprentices could come and feel comfortable and have a little more time with the instructor,” Bell said.

In April, women from across Northern California came to Pleasanton to participate in a course on building single-whalers – concrete wall forming. The people who attended had similar reasons for taking part in the training.

“I like safe spaces, said Adrian Persico of Local 713 in Hayward. “I showed up to learn all the secrets. I love knowing how things work and creating with my hands.”

“I want to learn how to build,” said Angela Moreno of Local 22. “Having the tools to build what I want is an accomplishment and a sense of independence.”

The instructor, Jeff Finke, wanted to pass on his knowledge to the women in attendance and hoped

the course would help build their confidence and independence. But primarily, Finke wanted to teach participants how to keep a job because “if you work and show up willing, opportunities will be there.”

The women participating were able to utilize Finke’s knowledge. “For example, they asked Finke how to cut wedges and read and use the speed square,” Bell said of the attendees. “The small details and skills help when you’re in the field. As soon as you learn a task, no matter how small or big, it immediately boosts confidence.”

Participants felt that the training was a success and are hopeful for a future pre-apprenticeship program geared toward supporting women in the trade.

“I absolutely think this will bring more women into construction,” said Felicia Harper of Local 713. “It gives us the ability to get hands-on training and ask questions without feeling intimidated. It’s also refreshing to be surrounded by other women because it’s not like that in the field.

Moreno agreed and said it was “way more comfortable working with more women.”

The future of women in our trade looks bright, judging by the people who attended the weekend event.

“The biggest thing that was very impressive to me is that this event took place on a Saturday, it was Easter weekend,

and it was raining. These apprentices still showed up,” said Bell. “They were willing to work all day. The drive, ambition, willingness to learn, and feedback from the instructor were impressive.”

The Carpenters Training Center is gearing up for the women’s pre-apprenticeship program to become a reality. Its managers have been reviewing course material and structuring a program that will empower a future generation of women. In addition, they plan to have a woman teach the course.

LEARN MORE: Readers can keep up to date about the status of the apprenticeship program at Norcalcarpenters-training.org and on Facebook at [@NorCalCarpentersUnion](https://www.facebook.com/NorCalCarpentersUnion).



Clockwise from left: Felicia Harper, Angelina Moreno, Adriana M. Persico

