

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

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Victoria Hartman says pursuing a career in the construction industry is an excellent way for a young person to enter a lucrative field without carrying a large student debt that other vocations might require.

"There is always going to be a need for the trades, if you enter this field you'll always be able to find work and you'll be able to do it without a boatload of debt. I'd recommend this for anyone," she said.

For Fairley, while progress has been made, and increasingly women are thinking of construction as a career path, the present small percentage of female involvement is an obvious sign that there's still plenty of room for improvement.

"There's no escaping the fact that the older segment of our industry is leaving which creates a real potential for women. We're now acutely feeling what a labour shortage does to construction and it's not a problem you're going to fix by looking at only 50 per cent of the population, you simply have to put it on the table for the other 50 per cent as well, make it an option and women will recognize it and take it," she said.

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Expanding Female Membership A Goal Of The MCABC Mechanical Contractors Association of BC: Province's Largest Trade Association

By David Holmes

VICTORIA – The largest trade association in the province, the **Mechanical Contractors Association of British Columbia (MCABC)** is quite literally the official voice and advocate for the province's mechanical sector. Originally founded in 1905, the MCABC currently has a membership that includes approximately 200 companies – firms directly responsible for employing thousands of workers around the province.

"Our members look after plumbing, heating, ventilation, air conditioning and the fire protection components of a building. Our members essentially look after all of the guts of the building. I like to think of the electrical as the nervous system and we look after the guts," explained the MCABC's Executive Vice President **Dana Taylor**.

As with most aspects of the construction industry in Canada, employment in the mechanical sector continues to be dominated by men, a trend that is slowly starting to change as women increasingly recognize the potential benefits of pursuing a mechanical systems career.

"I really do think things are changing, but only incrementally



Mechanical contractors are the professionals who look after all of the internal systems found within buildings

at present, however at five per cent of the workforce, it's a number we've seen for a long time," he said.

"While the male to female employment ratio in the trades hasn't changed much in recent years there's been a definite change in the various support roles related to our sector, including project management, contract administration, estimating and design – essentially the softer side of the industry."

The demanding physical challenges of a mechanical career aside, Taylor admits that

workplace resistance to female participation in the industry is a factor. "We have low female participation in the trades and in construction generally, in large part because we are a male-dominated culture and we have to look at that. We need to identify the barriers which include issues of harassment. The hard physical work may be a part but add to that a hostile work environment, and ask what woman would want to work in such an industry?" he said.

"Women have made more inroads from the management side

of things. There has definitely been some improvement in areas such as equipment handling. But not really in what you'd have to describe as the field work in the trades itself – so clearly that is an area where there certainly is plenty of room for improvement moving forward."

Construction work provides a good living to many who develop the trade skills, acquire the experience of supervision, and for some who go on to project management and eventual business ownership – women included!

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WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION NETWORK CELEBRATES FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

VICA Organized Groups Created To Promote Construction Careers For Women

NANAIMO – The roots of the **Vancouver Island Construction Association (VICA)** can be traced back more than a century, with its membership quite literally responsible for turning a wilderness into a prosperous and contributing part of British Columbia. Today, serving the institutional, commercial, industrial, civil, and multi-residential construction sectors on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and other coastal areas of British Columbia, VICA continues to be an advocate and champion for the Island's construction industry.

But like all parts of society the face of the construction industry in Canada is changing, with women playing increasingly important roles in all aspects of the sector – from ownership and managerial positions to frontline labourers working on jobsites across the nation. For **Rory Kulmala**, VICA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the increasingly important role women are playing in the workforce couldn't come at a

better time as the sector is facing a pending labour shortage as the Baby Boomer generation heads into retirement.

"Construction drives approximately 8.6 per cent of British Columbia's GDP and is ranked as the number one employer in our province's Goods Sector. With such inertia within the construction industry, we predict that by 2026 we will be short over 14,000 jobs in our province alone. Nationally, the statistics are similar. There has never been a better time for women to enter the trades, and the proof is in the numbers," he said.

One way that VICA has helped to encourage women to consider a career in construction is through the organization of its highly successful **Women in Construction (WiC)** network, which only recently commemorated its fifth anniversary. With one chapter based in Nanaimo and a second in Victoria, WiC is a venue that allows female construction industry workers to meet, mingle, share ideas, and work out solutions in a positive and informative setting.

"We have somewhere around 150 participants right now, with about 40 or so regularly turning out for our meetings, and new faces being seen all the time, which I find especially encouraging," explained **Tina Bos**,

Chair of the WiC Nanaimo chapter.

Working within the industry for the **Herold Engineering** group, Bos says a core mission of WiC is to provide education and information for women. "The goal is to educate people about construction as a career option, and inform them that this is a potentially lucrative path that women can and, frankly speaking, should take," she said.

"We encourage people everywhere to celebrate women in construction. We want to help elevate them and to essentially get more people interested in construction. It's a great field and women shouldn't be intimidated. If this is what you want then by all means just go for it – you won't be disappointed."

For Kulmala the time is right for women to step up, fearlessly and take their place in this crucial segment of the nation's economy. "I see women who have proven their ability to work in construction, demonstrating a level of competency and drive that is comparable to any man on site, in the office, and at the table," he said.

"Having a gender-biased opinion that women are not capable to meet the demands of construction is simply false; these women have proven their ability to succeed within any tradecraft that our industry offers."

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