



NEW Deal

New York Partnership Aids Women, UBC

By KAREN GELLEN

Construction isn't all that's booming in New York City—so are opportunities for women in the UBC.

The New York City District Council is meeting the strong market demand for trained hands by opening up careers for women in the construction trades. At the council's Labor Technical College, women participate in hands-on training every week, sawing, measuring, hammering, framing out and hanging doors, framing partitions, and hanging drywall.

Michael Forde, the council's executive secretary-treasurer, created these opportunities by forging a partnership in 2004 with NEW—Nontraditional Employment for Women—to conduct pre-apprenticeship training for aspiring tradeswomen and to introduce them to the union.

"Of course we're proud of bringing more sisters into our union," said Forde, "but this effort is about providing our contractors with the best people available."

NEW was founded in 1978 to recruit and train women to enter New York's construction trades. Hundreds of women aiming for apprenticeship slots work in teams at the Labor Technical College each year to learn basic skills in carpentry, including those of millwrights, floor coverers, cabinetmakers, and dock builders.

The NEW partnership sharply increased the percentage of women in the District Council's apprenticeship programs by providing qualified, career-oriented women who understand their responsibilities as union members.

Training Director Martin Daly, a UBC member since 1962, worked with the Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee to put Forde's diversity plan into action. While federal guidelines set a 6.9 percent standard for women's employment in construction, women fill a record-setting 11.2 percent of the council's apprenticeship slots this year. And Daly is aiming higher.

"With the city facing the biggest building boom in its history, the concern is that the building trades unions will not be able to fill the contractors' employment needs with qualified workers," said Daly. "The district council is expanding its apprenticeship and training programs and will fill the apprenticeship slots with qualified apprenticeship candidates, male and female."

Daly also stressed that the union can only succeed with members who understand their responsibilities both to the union and the employer and produce quality work on the job site.

"Judging from past experience, working with NEW, and seeing the qualified female apprentices," he said, "I see women playing a more significant role in the union movement."

As the Labor Technical College increased its training programs this year, it hired journey-level UBC member Liz Sgroi, a NEW graduate who has worked



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in the drywall industry, been a shop steward, and now brings those experiences to her job on the training staff.

"The New York City District Council is setting the example for all of the city's construction unions," Sgroi said. "The district council has really stepped up to the plate when it comes to welcoming women into the trades. Martin Daly sends a clear signal that we're all in this together, and he walks the walk by really opening the doors for motivated, capable women."

"In partnership with NEW, the Labor Technical College gives women the unique opportunity of training in a situation that's very similar to the jobsite," says Sgroi. "Each class builds a complete room in an LTC workshop, reading blueprints, lifting and carrying drywall, framing, woodworking, hanging doors—everything that's expected on the job."

Once women get their UBC cards, keeping them on the job is a key District Council priority. After the International convened a UBC women's conference in 2002, the District Council formed a Women's Committee to "promote strength, unity, and retention." To help women succeed, the Women's Committee runs a men-



toring program that matches volunteer journey-level carpenters—both men and women—with female apprentices to provide extra support and guidance.

Steering Committee member Elly Spicer credits the "perfect partnership" of the Labor Technical College, NEW, and the Women's Committee with bringing many more women into the UBC and enabling them to build solid careers. "EST Michael J. Forde and Director Martin

Daly have provided access like never before to the Carpenters' apprenticeship program, while NEW provides women with the qualifications and motivation the UBC requires," says Spicer. "And these new apprentices are getting involved in the Women's Committee to support each other and get the information and resources they need to succeed on the job."

Key to this success, said Spicer, has been combating the isolation that has driven many women out of the trades. "The District Council's strategy of bringing women into the UBC as a group, through NEW's training cycles augmented by the Women's Committee support system, shows a real commitment by all three entities to develop a productive, diverse, and dynamic labor force." ✓

Sisters Find Home in Brotherhood

Union sisters will help write the next chapter in the Brotherhood's history. While female members have long strengthened the UBC, a looming shortage of trained construction hands and the benefits of union membership have made the Brotherhood a career option for more women.

A recent federal report forecast that job opportunities for carpenters are expected to be excellent over the next decade. Contractors in many areas are reporting difficulty finding skilled carpenters to fill voids created by demands for new construction and the retirement of baby boomers.

Those forces have opened doors for women, and nowhere have they swung wider than at the UBC's New York City District Council, which filled 11.2 percent of its current apprentice class with women.

"It is time the building trades apprenticeship programs stop looking at the percentage of women in the trades just to meet affirmative action goals, put gender aside, and recruit new workers based on qualifications and abilities," said Martin Daly, the council's training director. "I see the New York City District Council's apprenticeship programs in the future having women represent a minimum of 25 percent of apprenticeship slots."