



# Together We Stand Building the Future of Women in the Trades

At a trades career conference, a potential future apprentice is trying out a welding simulator. It's a little uneven at first, but soon the hand steadies and makes a nice, clean virtual weld.

That hand belongs to a 15-year-old girl. And she's the future of the industry.

A skills shortage is coming in the construction trades. Over the next 10 years, as tradespeople retire but the demand for skilled trades increases, it's estimated that about 300,000 new workers will be needed to fill the gap. Right now, women represent only 4% of the construction trade workforce. That's a huge untapped pool of talent for the

trades to draw upon. The question is, how does the industry attract female workers into a "non-traditional" employment sector?



Welding simulator in action.

Stacey Benedictson is at the forefront of that effort. She is a Journeyman Red Seal Welder working with Sarens Canada. She's been at it for 10 years, earning her ticket in 2008, and has been a member of Local 955 for over a year. She is active in efforts to recruit women into the skilled trades, representing IUOE in the Build Together program.

Build Together: Women of the Building Trades is a national program supported by Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU) that seeks to identify and break down barriers to women entering the trades. They offer support and mentorship to women starting out





The Union has always stood for equality for everyone in the workplace. Dedication and hard work are not exclusive to any gender.

or currently working in skilled trades. “The goal,” Benedictson says, “is to let women know there are very good career options out there, and there’s support if needed.”

Build Together representatives attend events across the country, including trade shows and career fairs. Benedictson attended Skills Canada Alberta’s Girls Exploring Trades and Technology (GETT) Conference in Edmonton in May. “I had a group of girls from Grades 9 to 12. I was their mentor for the day,” fielding questions about the demands and rewards of her job. She also represented Local 955 and

Build Together at CBTU’s Annual Conference in Gatineau, Quebec in May, and has a busy lineup of events to come.

The effort is worthwhile. When Benedictson was starting out, just 10 years ago, there was not much in the way of support or information for women entering the trades. The entire segment of the population was simply not marketed to.

Unlike most, Benedictson did have some degree of female mentorship; her sister was a Welder at a shop that hired her on as a

Burn Table Operator in 2005. “She helped me out and taught me some of the tricks of the trade, gave me pointers on welding and helped me start out reading blueprints.” But it was Benedictson’s drive to succeed and provide for her family that led her to pursue welding as a career. “I have three children and a husband. We’re very busy. I’d like to give my kids stuff that I wasn’t able to have when I was a kid. Financially, it’s helped support our family, and with the Union benefits, it’s helped out even more.”

The benefits of Union membership extend to the culture of her work environment. Benedictson recalls, “At previous shops, before I went Union, I felt that I was getting paid under rate because I was a female. They would treat me differently. Some comments would be made because I am a ‘girl.’ I learned to stand up for myself and speak my mind.”

In the Union environment, she says, “People are great. There’s zero tolerance for harassment. With the group of people I work with now, I don’t have to deal with that at all. The Union’s been very supportive.” This is very encouraging for women looking at the Building Trades, and offers a compelling case for choosing to work Union.

Benedictson has made the most of training and skills development offered by Local 955 and Sarens Canada. Courses she has completed include CWB Welding Inspector Level 1, Standard First Aid, Fall Protection,



The future of the building trades at Skills Canada Alberta’s Girls Exploring Trades and Technology (GETT) Conference in Edmonton, May 2015.



Talking shop with Ken Burke, Country Manager of Sarens Canada and Chairman of the Board of the Association of Equipment Management Professionals (AEMP).

H2S Alive, Confined Space Entry/Monitor, Aerial Platform Safety, and Skid Steer, as well as the Local 955 Job Steward Course. “I’m really glad I found an employer that is able to give me opportunities I didn’t have in the past.”



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And Benedictson intends to share those opportunities with as many women as possible. She acknowledges the physical demands of trades work, but points out that technology has really narrowed that gap, making creativity, problem-solving skills, and the capacity to keep learning more important than physical strength alone. The construction industry is no longer just "a man's world," she states: "If I'm capable of doing it, then it's anybody's world. I really enjoy it, I find it relaxing. It is a challenge some days. I do get dirty at work, but then on weekends I can clean myself up and look like a lady."

Careers in skilled trades have so much to offer women of all ages and walks of life. For young women just entering the workforce, Benedictson notes, "You're not going to make this kind of money working at Starbucks pouring coffee all day. It gives you job stability and financial stability."

For women already in the workforce looking to make a change, she advises, "You're never too old to get into the trades. There were people I went to school with, men and women, in their 50s getting their welding tickets. It's an industry for all people."

Representation, mentorship, and support go a long way to making skilled trade careers accessible and appealing to the half of the population who has only just begun to consider the possibility. That's what Benedictson and Build Together have to offer. "If they need the support, I'm there to help them," she says. "You can do anything if you set your mind to it. Don't let anyone tell you something's not possible. If you want it bad enough, you will make it happen. Never give up."

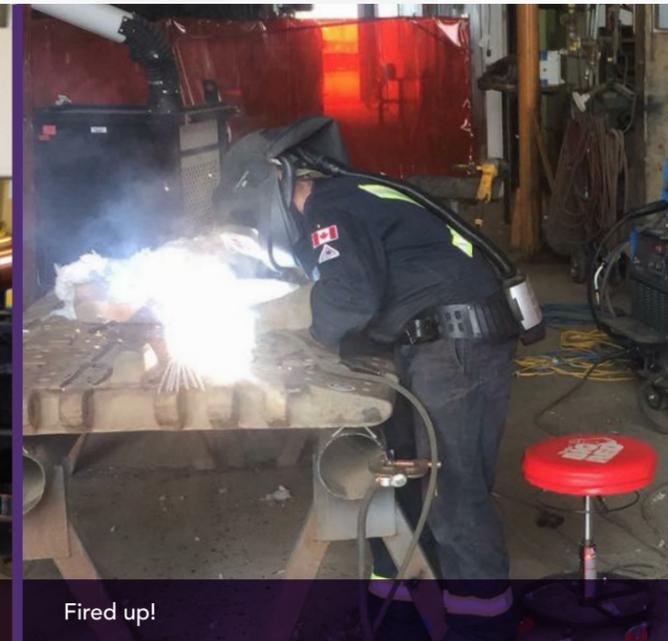
The Union has always stood for equality for everyone in the workplace. As Stacey Benedictson demonstrates, dedication and hard work are not exclusive to any gender.



Build Together representatives meet Justin Trudeau at the Canada's Building Trades Unions (CBTU) Annual Conference in Gatineau, Quebec, May 2015.



On the job with Sarens Engineer Megan Tomkow.



Fired up!

**BUILD TOGETHER**  
WOMEN OF THE BUILDING TRADES

For more information about the Build Together program, visit [www.buildtogether.ca](http://www.buildtogether.ca)  
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