

Partners **IN** Progress

SMACNA & SMART—Building a Future Together

April 2021

Who you are tomorrow begins with what you do today ...





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SMACNA & SMART—Building a Future Together

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Women in the Sheet Metal Industry... *Have Come a Long Way*

Those of us who were watching television in the late 60s through to the 1980s might remember an iconic ad campaign telling women: “You’ve come a long way, baby!” The message was women were as free as their male counterparts to fill their lungs with nicotine, tar, and the 700 or so other chemicals present in cigarette smoke. The prevailing opinion among advertising professionals is that the campaign did an effective job of capitalizing on the women’s rights movement by featuring independent and sophisticated looking women smoking Virginia Slims designed “Just for Women.”

Spin the calendar forward to 2021. Swap out the trendy pantsuit for Carhartt’s and the cigarette for a power tool, and we can make the bold statement that women in the sheet metal industry have indeed come a long way in the past several decades.

Women in construction now have a week dedicated to their professional and technical achievements. SMART and SMACNA celebrated that week March 7-14, 2021, by honoring the accomplishments of those women who have smashed glass ceilings and excelled in what used to be mostly a male-only profession.

SMACNA National has its first female president in 76 years, and that dedicated woman is the first-ever president to serve a double term—an act to help the association and the industry navigate the challenges presented by a global pandemic.

Two years after the current SMACNA president leaves office, the second female president will take that office. Notably, that future SMACNA president now serves as the management co-chair of the Best Practices Market Expansion Task Force, which is responsible for developing the *Partners in Progress* Conference and all related programs and services, including this publication.

SMART has its first-ever female in a top staff leadership position, assistant to the general president; its first female business manager in a production local union; and its first female building trades business agent. These last two women are both assigned to key international union committees, including the Best Practices Task Force.

We dedicate this issue of *Partners in Progress* to the inspiring women whose work strengthens our industry and our national and local associations and unions.

In 2021, SMACNA and SMART both have active women’s committees that promote equal opportunities, equal pay, and fair treatment and respect for all who work in our industry. See page 4 to find out why programs like this are so important to recruitment and retention.

On page 8, SMACNA President Angie Simon and SMART General President Joseph Sellers, Jr., reveal the factors that led both organizations and leaders in the mechanical and electrical industries to form a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



(DEI) Task Force. Simon and Sellers discuss the short- and long-term objectives of the program, which include fostering an industry-wide culture of DEI that will help the associations recruit, retain, and provide opportunity and equality to a wide range of talent.

Curious about the best social platforms for communicating recruitment information? On page 10, two top-performing apprentices share their recommendations. Also, John W. Danforth Company and Local 83 explain how they work together to encourage female employees to explore opportunities and share their experiences.

Studies show that most new entrants into construction are referred by family or friends. Turn to page 13 to learn how a mother’s drive to learn and succeed in a traditionally male-dominated industry inspired her daughter to pursue a sheet metal apprenticeship.

This month’s “My Journey” on page 7 follows the career path of Fatima Ware from her apprenticeship with Local 33 through to the opening of her own contracting business. Fatima shares her story, hoping that it will inspire other Black women to take leadership roles in the sheet metal industry.

Part II of our series on the History of the SMACNA-SMART Partnership rounds out this edition of *Partners in Progress*. Those of you who read part I last month saw the picture of the very first SMACNA-SMART joint meeting in 1946—a very distinguished group of gentlemen working on behalf of the industry. Today, women have a seat at tables where important industry work is being performed. There is still much work to be done to ensure a DEI culture in our industry, but there is no arguing that we have come a long way, baby, from where we started. ■

COMING TOGETHER

When it comes to guidance, opportunity, and mentorship for women in sheet metal, it's women's groups for the win

By / Jessica Kirby

Nearly 70 years ago, 16 women came together with something in common—they were all working in construction and seeking mutual support in a male-dominated field. They founded Women in Construction in Fort Worth, Texas, and were so successful that they gained their national charter in 1955, officially launching National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) that year.

Fast-forward to today, and NAWIC is still inspiring women in the North American construction industry, and their work is paying off. The group's Women in Construction Week, held March 7-13 this year, raises awareness and prompts networking, educational, and recruitment opportunities for women in the trades across North America.

Thanks to NAWIC's pioneering work, things are dramatically different for women in construction in 2021. They are seeking (and achieving) successful positions on the tools and in construction offices, they are a sought-after demographic for multiple reasons, and they are smashing glass ceilings all over the place. However, there are still barriers and, like their sisters from seven decades ago, they are still gathering to support one another, share information, and increase visibility for women in the trades.



Julie Muller is executive vice-president of SMACNA-Western Washington. In 2014, she spearheaded the development of Women in Construction Week activities for the sheet metal industry in the Greater Seattle Area, and about the same time, she and SMACNA President Angie Simon founded a SMACNA National Women's Committee initiative.

"We knew we needed to stand out as leaders in our industry and help affect change a little at a time," Muller says. "We have so many successful women in our industry and believed it was—and still is—important to tell their stories and foster mentorship for women considering a career in sheet metal."

The national Women's Committee holds a session at SMACNA's annual convention and hosts an on-going list-serve through which women and men are invited to participate in creating programs and initiatives that recruit and retain women in the sheet metal industry.

"For the past two years, we have hosted a Women's Alliance Summit where we meet for two days to discuss the issues women in construction face and the solutions we need to create a more inclusive workplace culture," Muller says. "We are also looking at developing a mentorship program through which women in construction can connect with experienced female





sheet metal industry leaders or offer their experience to mentor women just getting started in their careers.”

Mechelle McNew is chair of SMART Women, a group the International founded in 2017. At that time, representatives from the International attended the Women Build Nations conference, and during the caucus by trade, they heard some of the real issues that were affecting SMART women on the job site. Under General President Joe Sellers’ leadership, the union decided to take action.

The SMART Women’s Committee advocates for women, mentors new and potential members, and offers opportunities to network and participate in workshops and events that allow women to develop skillsets required to take on leadership roles within the union.

“The industry is experiencing a high rate of retirement, and we are in need of a skilled workforce to replace these members,” McNew says. “All of the SMART Women initiatives address issues that hinder us from recruiting or retaining a skilled workforce.”

These initiatives at the national level are gaining ground as more women are exposed to the possibility of a career in the construction industry. Moving forward, there is still work to do.

“We must improve the workplace environment by removing hazing, bullying, harassment, and discrimination,” McNew says. “We also need to take a close look at childcare and other issues outside of work that affect who can enter our industry.”

It is no secret that North America is facing a labor shortage and while the upside of that is doors are opening for women and other minorities, attracting women to construction is one thing, but keeping them is quite another. According to NAWIC, women working in construction numbered 1.5% of the entire United States workforce in 2018. At that time, approximately 1,106,919 women were employed in various occupation sectors of the industry, making up 9.9% of people working in construction.

Though rarer than in the past, there are still instances where bullying and hazing exist, the pressure is still on to “be like



TOOLS AND TIARAS

Who says that the tools are not for girls?

“Tools and Tiaras does more than celebrate women in trades,” says Leah Rambo, director of training for Local 28. “It is also a chance to lift up young girls who some day may want to pick up the tools and pursue a career in our industry.”

Tools and Tiaras holds monthly workshops for girls and women and summer programs for girls interested in mechanical, industrial, technical, and trades (MITT) careers. Most importantly, it motivates young girls and women who dream of having a career in the male-dominated construction industry, encouraging young girls and women already in the field to expand their horizon and set them on a path to the peak of their careers.

The organization wants women and girls to come forward and shatter the stereotypes against them and show the world what they are truly capable of doing. Its mandate is to connect young girls with mentors, leaders, and professionals to help girls get the support they need at all stages of their journey.

Tools and Tiaras wholeheartedly believes that girls can do every and anything and it aims to help girls learn trade skills by exposing, inspiring, and mentoring them to excel in these areas. It wants to empower girls to be trailblazers.

“Making intentional changes to the way we view and portray what some in society constitute as women’s work will help foster the change in our industry and our union that our world needs to open up more opportunities for all,” Rambo says.

Visit toolsandtiaras.org to learn more and to support this amazing cause. ■

"We were women with electricity in our veins, cement dust on our shoes, sawdust on our minds... busy, busy, busy, filthy things."

*Alice Ashley
One of the 16 NAWIC founders*



one of the guys" to fit in, and women still may be passed over for advancement opportunities because their familial obligations are different from men's. Meeting these challenges and fostering career development opportunities, training, and mentorship are all key components of successful retention, and they are areas that the sheet metal industry does exceptionally well. The training opportunities offered through the JATCs and iTi are second to none, and the benefits are enough to convince anyone to take a second look. While women in the United States earn on average 81.1% of what men make in general employment sectors, the gender pay gap is significantly smaller in construction occupations, with women earning on average 99.1% of what men make.

According to many, it is mentorship that is needed most. The ability to connect with those who have gone before you and receive guidance and support is one important element of mentorship—another is simply identifying with others who look like you on the job site.

Jacki Valdez has been a construction professional for 18 years. She writes about the importance of mentorship in *Construction Executives*: "The goal is for mentorship to be based on communication and trust—helping women see the value in themselves and driving them to achieve," Valdez says. "In short, it's about empowerment."

Sowing the seeds of empowerment comes, in part, by having a mentor who is a strong leader, someone who can lead by example and show the mentee the way to independence and self-sufficiency.

"The idea is not for mentors to manage, but rather for them to provide support as women take on new responsibilities," Valdez says. "That allows women the chance to make a project and a position their own. Mentors can also be great sounding boards, listening and offering guidance about how to deal with a variety of situations, even difficult ones."

This is exactly why women's groups are taking hold and helping SMACNA and SMART move closer to meeting the ambitious goal of doubling the number of women in sheet metal by 2025.

"We have certainly gained speed and traction," Muller says. "Our initiatives and programs have gained more acceptance and following as people realize the value in recruiting women and how gender equity is a win-win for our entire industry. Moving forward, we are expanding our efforts to incorporate diversity and inclusion into our programs and initiatives so there are more voices at the table."

SMACNA-Western Washington's initiative with Local 66's women's group is a prime example of how labor-management partnerships at the local level can make or break an initiative's success. "The Local 66 SMART women's committee has been instrumental in helping us with our initiatives," Muller says. "They are a 50-50 partner in everything we do and provide."

Collectively, SMACNA and SMART are in a good position to foster women's programs and support. By combining resources, initiatives, and effort, the associations can go beyond optics to affect workplace culture and create meaningful progress.

SMACNA and SMART's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement is a joint initiative and thru the Best Practices Market Expansion Task Force there are funds allocated for Diversity and Inclusion Projects, as well as recruiting efforts that are jointly funded.

"The top down approach is the best way to initiate change," McNew says. "With SMART and SMACNA working together, our members can see the importance of changing our culture to one that is welcoming to all." ■

Jessica Kirby is a freelance editor and writer covering construction, architecture, mining, travel, and sustainable living for myriad publications across Canada and the United States.

FATIMA WARE: MY JOURNEY

Journey person Sheet Metal Worker President and Owner, WTD Mechanical LLC.

When I entered the sheet metal industry, I went through a program called Union Construction Industry Partnership-Apprentice Skills Achievement Program (UCIPASAP). We visited all the unions, and I applied for the electrical and sheet metal.

When I finished my sheet metal apprenticeship in 2016, I decided it was time for a change, not just for me, but for the construction industry. I was the only person in the room who looked like me. I realized that the sheet metal industry needed diversity. I started my own company, Cleveland-based WTD Mechanical LLC, as an effort to change the narrative in the sheet metal business.

I faced a steep learning curve in starting my own business. I bumped my head so many times because I just didn't know things like what paperwork needed to be filled out. But I had great mentors, like T.H. Martin Inc. President Tom Martin, and being a part of SMACNA helped me navigate those early years.



I have worked on some great projects, like University Hospital, Case Western Reserve University, Global Center for Health Innovation & Convention Center, Health Education Campus (HEC) of The Cleveland Clinic, MetroHealth transformation project, and several Cleveland and Lorain Public School building projects. I established the Cleveland District Women's Committee at Local 33 and am currently serving as chair.

Working in the field gives me a feeling of empowerment because I can use my hands and tools to build and manipulate metal to do anything I want it to do. Looking at a completed



building is gratifying because I know I made it possible. I often drive by buildings and say, "I built that!"

For people considering a career in sheet metal, I would say: Go for it. It can make your life better. Just understand that it is not a walk in the park.

I hope my work will encourage other Black women to take leadership roles in the sheet metal industry. Going from just wearing your tools and installing ductwork to being an owner is a huge challenge. I think the impact of my work will be to open avenues for other people so that I won't be the only person in the room who looks like me.

For some reason, I thought I would be working in a comfortable environment doing math problems to figure out what was needed, not being outside in all temperatures. So initially, I wasn't thinking of it as hard work until the day I actually started. And what a surprise it was. Yeah, I could have quit. I don't know why I continued to choose it every day. I was thinking that maybe the trade chose me. ■

SMACNA-SMART: STEPPING UP FOR INCLUSIVITY



By / Robin Brunet

As SMACNA's first female president, a successful mechanical engineer, and a respected executive in the industry, Angela Simon strongly endorses workplace diversity and inclusion. But in the summer of 2020 she turned endorsement into action when, during the protests of George Floyd's murder, nooses were hung on several job sites supervised by Black project managers.

Simon says, "It happened in Florida and Iowa, and it did not involve sheet metal workers, but it demonstrated that discrimination is, unfortunately, still alive and well on many levels, from overt to subtle. I thought it was time to focus on positive change."

The result was a joint statement issued by SMACNA and SMART on February 17, 2021, vowing to engage in ongoing discussions about recruiting and retaining a diverse and inclusive workforce, in order to benefit communities and strengthen the unionized sheet metal industry.

The statement notes that a series of initiatives aim to shift the mindset of labor and management to welcome skilled workers, "while embracing differences in age, ability, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, national origin, language, marital status,

political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other characteristics that make individuals unique."

Joseph Sellers, general president of SMART, is equally motivated to enact change. "I first became aware of the need for diversification 25 years ago in my home Local of Philadelphia when, as a training coordinator responsible for recruitment, I would visit communities to tell people about opportunities in our industry," he says.

Sellers went on to spearhead a variety of diversification programs, but he says his efforts assumed added importance about seven years ago when members of SMART's Women's Committee approached him with stories of discrimination. "I read an experience of one of our sisters that was vile, horrific," he says. "The realization that this was happening regularly compelled us to redouble our efforts to end inequality of any kind."

"One of the biggest problems we face is unconscious bias, which is prevalent and extends into training, and it must be dealt with," Sellers says. "So, when SMACNA approached us to set up a joint diversity and inclusion task force, we were eager to participate."

"One of the biggest problems we face is unconscious bias, which is prevalent and extends into training, and it must be dealt with," SMART General President Joe Sellers says. "So, when SMACNA approached us to set up a joint diversity and inclusion task force, we were eager to participate."

The joint effort also included the CEOs of the Mechanical Contractors Association of America (MCAA) and the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA) and the presidents of the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA) and The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). "They were on board immediately," Simon says. "They appreciated the gravity of the situation."

One of the more obvious consequences of bias is job numbers. "In the trades overall, women account for only 4% of the workforce, and that percentage hasn't changed in 20 years," Simon says. "In our industry, women account for only 9.5% of the workforce, and they are mostly in accounting or administrative positions, not technical. Indeed, the number of women who make it through apprenticeships is far lower than the number of men."

SMACNA and SMART have agreed to establish, with the help of experts, a strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) plan with long- and short-term objectives that will be evaluated and adjusted annually. Initiatives include developing web-based training for coordinators and trainers across the United States and Canada, and developing a curriculum that spans the entire length of apprenticeship, so graduates regard DEI as part of the culture, much the same as they do safety.

Arguably, the joint effort couldn't have come at a more opportune time. "About 40% of our workforce is retiring in the next few years, and we're already short of talent," Simon explains. "It makes sense that in our effort to achieve inclusivity we explore relatively untapped recruitment markets, including women and people of color."

At Western Allied Mechanical, Simon is also reaching into the community in another way. "This summer we'll stage the Heavy Metal Summer Experience in Menlo Park, a six-week program that will introduce high schoolers to union job opportunities in mechanical construction and show them the basics of sheet metal, piping, and plumbing construction," she says. A similar camp will be held by Hermanson Company in Kent, Washington.

For his part, Sellers is confident that positive change will happen if leaders adhere to a simple principle. "We all need to listen," he says. "Seven years ago we listened to the brave members of our Women's Committee, and this led to resolutions, such as a commitment to double the number of women in SMART by 2025. It's made us better as an organization, and by working together we can continue to improve."

"This joint effort is a cultural change, and it may take many

years to move the needle," Simon says. "I plan to continue working on this after I retire from Western Allied, which will give me more time to devote to this important issue."

"I'm very hopeful for the future," she adds. "Our people appreciate what's correct and not correct, and attitudes really do change over time. What all this boils down to is providing opportunity and equality to a wide range of talent—and that's a classic win-win scenario." ■

Robin Brunet's journalism has been published in over 150 magazines, newspapers, websites, and other media across Canada and the United States since 1982.



SMACNA-SMART Joint Statement on Diversity and Inclusion

■ SMACNA and SMART recognize that diversity strengthens our workforce, benefits our communities, and makes the unionized sheet metal industry stronger and more competitive by reflecting the communities where we operate and the people we serve. To affirm our commitment to diversity and inclusion, we have agreed to develop, with the help of experts, a coordinated strategic plan with long-term and short-term objectives which will be evaluated and adjusted as necessary. Our unified goal is to shift the mindset of management, labor leaders, and our respective memberships to recruit, welcome, and retain the most competent and skilled workforce available while embracing differences in age, ability, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, national origin, language, marital status, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other characteristics that make individuals unique. SMACNA and SMART are strongly committed to take the necessary steps to achieve our goal of a diverse industry with no tolerance of bullying, harassment, or discrimination. We will provide regular updates on our progress on the strategic plan and on our continued work to promote our shared values of diversity, inclusion, and equity. ■



SOCIAL REACH

JW DANFORTH AND LOCAL 83 EMPOWER APPRENTICES TO RECRUIT AND INSPIRE THEIR PEERS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA.

By Natalie Bruckner • Photos courtesy of McKenzie Loomis

Growing up, Makenzie Loomis had dreams of going to law school, getting a doctorate, and becoming a criminal prosecutor on big murder cases. Today, she is a first-year apprentice with Local 83 in Upstate New York and an advocate for women interested in joining the sheet metal industry. She also has a unique marketing approach that speaks specifically to her generation.

Her latest TikToks, which she compiled into a video called “A Day As A SMART Apprentice” for her YouTube channel, have received almost 2,000 views in just two months.

“I was getting ready to graduate top of my class, and I had to do some community service hours, so I shadowed the court system... and I was so bored!” Loomis says.

After this eye-opener, Loomis studied photography and then took a year off after college during which she worked as a server, trying to figure out what she wanted to do.

“I knew I loved welding and working with my hands, so I started looking into a welding school,” she says. “Then one day a regular who was in the sheet metal industry came into the restaurant and I asked him about welding school. He said, ‘I know you, and you’re going to hate welding and grinding all day. You should think about joining the sheet metal industry because even if you specialize in something, there’s always a lot more you can do.’”

When she heard about the JATC apprenticeship system, that school was free, and that she would get a good wage right off the bat, she applied that night. “It was the best decision I have ever made,” she says.

Thanks to women like Loomis, SMACNA and SMART’s goal to double the number of women in the industry by 2025 could well be within reach.

“Local 83 has been ahead of the curve by recruiting women and other minorities to the industry by engaging SMACNA contractors in the process and presenting a united front on inclusivity.”

***—Frank McGuire, business manager
Local 83***

In fact, Loomis says that after posting her YouTube video she had numerous people reach out to her for advice on entering the industry, and she has been more than happy to help. Even more promising, she is just one example of a new generation of strong female role models who have recently entered the industry and are helping diversify the sheet metal workforce.

Local 83’s Holly Bader, who currently works for VBI, Inc., is another inspirational example. Bader placed within the top three in her apprentice year at the last Region 1 Sheet Metal Apprentice Contest at the Sheet Metal Workers Local 17 Training Center near Boston.

For the first time, there were four women among 30 competitors representing Local 83 in Albany, New York; Local 58 in Syracuse, New York; Local 40 in Rocky Hill, Connecticut; and Local 28 in Queens, New York.

Bader’s entry into the industry was a little different. During high school she took courses that gave her a strong advantage entering the sheet metal industry—engineering, drafting, autoCAD, and CNC coding. However, Bader wasn’t aware of the JATC apprenticeship until years later when she attended a job fair in Albany. “When I talked with representatives from the industry, I realized it was right up my alley,” she says.

Bader couldn’t be happier with her decision. “I get to work and create things with my hands and use my problem solving skills daily,” she says. “I am learning skillsets I’d never have gotten elsewhere. These include simple things, like using hand tools efficiently, and more complex jobs, like welding. Growing up, I played a lot of team sports, and this trade really makes me feel like I’m on a team again.”

Loomis echoes these sentiments, adding that everyone in the industry has been very welcoming and the company she joined, John W. Danforth in New York, has always been helpful and inclusive.

In fact, the company has been so successful in recruiting women that their model is being duplicated across the country. “As a company, we engage and support different building trade associations, such as the National Association of Women in Construction, and we encourage and promote our women to explore these different opportunities and share their experiences as members,” says Chris Rose, project manager at John W. Danforth.



The company works closely with Local 83 and the JATCs to promote women in the workforce and show all the benefits that come along with it, but, as Rose says, “I think the most effective way to promote to women is for women in the trade to share their experiences.”

Both Loomis and Bader agree and are happy to share their positive experiences.

Frank McGuire is business manager for Local 83, and this is music to his ears. McGuire has been working alongside Local 83 organizer Phil Stenglein and JATC training coordinator Lawrence Warzek on recruitment efforts to highlight the many benefits of the industry to all minority groups.

“Over the years we have had many women in our union, and recently Local 83 has been fortunate to get more women applying to our apprenticeship,” McGuire says. “We have shown these women that they can make a better life for themselves and their families by becoming a member.”

McGuire says Local 83 has been ahead of the curve by recruiting women and other minorities to the industry by engaging SMACNA contractors in the process and presenting a united front on inclusivity.

“We work with our signatory contractors to make sure all members are treated with respect, so those members feel they are included in decisions that help our contractors and our

union grow,” McGuire says. “It is important that we educate those in our industry to know women can work side by side with all members and must be given the same opportunity to become an essential part of our trade.”

That’s not to say the road to attracting more women into the industry will be easy, but Loomis and Bader have some great ideas on that front. “We need to start educating students in the technology majors in high school about the opportunities an apprenticeship can offer and show them that college isn’t

“There is a tendency to focus on old-fashioned forms of advertising, like radio or having a Facebook page with posts, but that isn’t how the younger generation are getting their information.”

—McKenzie Loomis, apprentice



the only option,” Bader says. “Had I been informed of an apprenticeship that offered a great starting pay and benefits while going to school debt free, I’d definitely have skipped attempting college more than once only to accrue student debt.”

Loomis adds that there also needs to be a shift in the way the industry is marketed. “There is a tendency to focus on old-fashioned forms of advertising, like radio or having a Facebook page with posts, but that isn’t how the younger generation are getting their information,” she says. “We need to redirect our advertising and bring it into the modern age to appeal to a younger audience.

She says TikTok and YouTube are the best platforms for reaching her generation and having women spread the word will speak directly to younger women—more so than a white male who is age 40 plus.

In this regard, Local 83 has been working with young female apprentices as part of their recruitment efforts.

“Having a growing number of successful women working in the industry draws other women in to apply,” McGuire says.

Loomis and Bader are indeed great advocates who have chosen what they consider their lifelong career. For any young women considering sheet metal as a career, Loomis has this advice: “It can be very empowering to learn to work with your hands, and I would encourage every high school student to take a vocational class to learn hands-on skills,” she says. “At the end of the work day, when I look at what I’ve built, there is huge satisfaction.”

Bader adds, “For women who hope to have a family one day, the day shift hours may be appealing as, too, are the health benefits. After years working in the restaurant industry, working nights, weekends, and holidays, the day shift hours that come with sheet metal, having weekends off, the retirement, and many other benefits were very appealing to me. College isn’t the only option. I’m now able to enjoy family and friend events and holidays!” ▪

Natalie is an award-winning writer who has worked in the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, the United States, and Canada. She has more than 23 years experience as a journalist, editor, and brand builder, specializing in construction and transportation. When she’s not writing, you will likely find her snowboarding, mountain biking, or climbing mountains with her rescue dog.



Passing the Torch

Mother-daughter team finds fulfilling careers at H.T. Lyons and Local 19

By Deb Draper

Thirty-five percent of the sheet metal industry workforce will be retired or nearing retirement by the end of 2025, and although overall the number of workers in the industry is growing by about 20% per year, it isn't nearly enough to tackle the chronic shortage of skilled workers both today and into the future.

Women represent a huge, untapped reservoir of labor that SMACNA and SMART have been collaborating to recruit. With the current pandemic restrictions, contractors and Locals are turning to social media to get the welcoming word out to potential employees and tradespeople.

"We make a point of portraying women in our videos, on our website, and in our social media," says Gary Masino, president and business manager at Local 19 in Pennsylvania. "A couple of years ago, the women here at Local 19 started their own group, offering mentoring and speaking at trade schools and high schools to inspire women to look at our industry and to join the union."

H.T. Lyons, Inc., a signatory contractor with Local 19 and member of the Central Pennsylvania SMACNA, posted several LinkedIn articles highlighting women in its workforce for Women in Construction week. One of those articles featured H.T. Lyons employee Sherry Thomas and Local 19 apprentice Alexa Thomas—a mother-daughter team.

Sherry Thomas has been with H.T. Lyons, Inc. for almost 29 years, coming from her job as an aircraft maintenance technician in the US Air Force to business systems specialist in H.T. Lyons's company's service department. From there, she moved to the construction department as a construction coordinator, and for the past two years has been working as an assistant project manager.

"I was young when I left the air force," Sherry says. "I didn't want to go to college, so I got a job in the office at H.T. Lyons. Working with project managers on the job

Passing the Torch

and performing all their administrative duties, I learned quite a bit about the sheet metal industry and through hard work and perseverance, I was able to move ahead in my career.”

Sherry notes that about half her time is spent in the field at various job sites and the other half she’s in the office coordinating, scheduling, expediting, estimating, purchasing, maintaining cash, and working in labor relations. One thing her job isn’t, is boring. “I am the project manager on a few jobs all on my own,” Thomas says. “My goal is to capture the actual title of project manager by the end of this year—we’ll see how that goes!”

This drive to learn and succeed in a traditionally male-dominated industry has inspired Alexa. Alexa Thomas says, “My mom has been with H.T. Lyons for many years, so I grew up among all the people she’s now working with, including my training center coordinator. He talked to me about going into the trade, and it caught my interest.”

As Alexa tells it, she attended State College PA for one year studying mechanical engineering, then went to the local community college to take drafting for CAD. “I enjoyed the classes, but I wasn’t fulfilled,” she says. “My entire life I’ve been inclined to do hands-on things. I wanted to see what I was drawing become physical. So, I started asking questions about the sheet metal trade, and last year I decided to go for it. I’ve loved every day of it since.”

Alexa feels grateful to be on her current job site with H.T. Lyons because the work involves a variety of duct types, which creates an environment ripe for learning for a first-year apprentice.

“This is pretty awesome for me,” Alexa says. “Sheet metal is a very versatile medium. Given the proper setting and opportunity, it creates paths to countless possibilities. In a way, it’s an art form. Last week, I even got to work a little bit on my own. I ran my own duct line through a couple of bathrooms, and that was very exciting.”

Currently working on the same site, the mother-daughter duo have the chance to see each other in their very different but connected jobs. “It’s a massive project,” Sherry says. “I assist a bit with purchasing and equipment rental, so I’ve walked through a couple of times. I’m very proud of Alexa.”



“I think this is a wonderful career with many opportunities and regular, guaranteed hours,” Alexa says. “Being a union member means a set future when you think about your family and how you want your life to go. It includes great medical benefits and early retirement; plus, it’s physically good for you—the job keeps you in shape.”

Both women point to pride in their craft as the reason they like to talk about their work, and they encourage other young women to consider a career in the sheet metal industry.

“I’ve found that the more seasoned union workers are very eager to teach you the ways of the trade,” Alexa says. “They know that with their knowledge and guidance, someday they will be passing on tools and techniques that are valuable to someone who has a passion for what our trade does.”

Masino notes that women have come a long way in the sheet metal industry, and Local 19 currently has close to 60 members who are women, several of whom are serving as stewards.

“We are constantly looking to bring women and minorities into our industry,” says Bill Dorword, business agent at Local 19. “In the sheet metal trade, we have the highest trained journeypersons and apprentices, and we need to attract the top talent. It doesn’t matter your gender or race. We want to be number one.”

An important part of staying on top is creating and maintaining strong labor-management relationships, he notes.

“Working our contractors in the apprenticeship program, we strive to fulfill the needs of the industry with skilled sheet metal workers,” Dorword says. “Together we can create a more diverse work culture that will benefit our union members and the industry as a whole.”

Roeland Hoeke, president of H.T. Lyons, agrees. “In our highly competitive market, it is extremely important that our union partners bring us the best trained, productive, and safest workers for building construction and maintenance services,” he says. “Working together on the Joint Apprenticeship Committees for recruiting and training, we strive to create a skilled and diverse work force. This allows H.T. Lyons and other SMACNA contractors to meet customer expectations for their buildings and benefits the union construction industry overall.” ■

From her desk in Calgary Alberta, Deb Smith writes for trade and business publications across North America.





Expanding the Partnership: Part II

The March 2021 issue of *Partners in Progress* examined the genesis of the national partnership between SMACNA and SMART in 1946 and tracked the major accomplishments and milestones through the first 50-plus years of their journey. Efforts during that time span provided a solid foundation that has allowed the national parties to work together in the best interest of the union industry for 75 years.

A successful partnership at the national level is certainly important, but positioning the industry for growth required another critical step and challenge—convincing local SMART and SMACNA affiliates that working together is the most effective way to advance the industry.

It All Started with MGB

SMACNA and SMART have been training their chapters and Locals on how to bargain new labor agreements for many years. That training typically covers bargaining trends, tactics, and legal rules that must be observed during bargaining. While those are important aspects of collective bargaining, what was missing from the traditional training were the “people skills” that are critical to reaching a successful agreement.

Chuck Corbett, SMACNA’s executive director of labor relations in 1996, honed his bargaining skills during his military career where he aspired to the rank of Colonel. Chuck had been

involved in numerous high level and sensitive negotiations, including service as lead negotiator on the Panama Canal Treaty. Knowing the importance of people skills and the ability to listen and collaborate, Corbett and his staff set out to identify ways to improve the bargaining experience at the local level.

Corbett’s staff recalls that getting support for joint training sessions was in some ways a tougher “sell” to some of the SMACNA National and Chapter leadership than it was to the SMART International Union. Former SMART General President Michael J. Sullivan was General Secretary-Treasurer of SMART in 1997 when SMACNA asked if SMART would agree to sponsor a joint training session for local bargaining parties.

“I fully supported offering joint bargaining training to improve communications and negotiations between local unions and their contractors and chapters,” noted Sullivan. “I saw an opportunity to demonstrate that the national associations were working together to do all they could to benefit the industry and improve our relationship. I believed this type of a program could serve to encourage all of the SMART local unions and SMACNA contractors to do the same.”

The program that SMACNA and SMART settled on was called Mutual Gains Bargaining (MGB), and it was led by a skilled and lively facilitator, Bernie Flaherty, a former

professor at New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell University. In later years, Flaherty worked as a labor-management consultant specializing in partnership and negotiations training, and he provided facilitation and mediation services across the globe.

The MGB training program was designed to increase the ability of labor and management to negotiate more effectively by turning face-to-face confrontation into side-by-side problem solving. The basic philosophy underlying the training effort was that industry survival and growth would be facilitated only through labor-management cooperation.

Early Efforts

SMART International representatives and SMACNA contractors and chapter executives who served as industry arbitrators for grievances and contract renewal cases were the “guinea pigs” in a pilot program that allowed the national associations to evaluate the feasibility of joint labor-management training programs.

The pilot program was well received by the arbitrators, but this was a group of individuals who were used to working together to resolve disputes. Others in the industry were skeptical that local labor or management groups would be willing to travel to a central location to participate in joint training with their bargaining counterparts.

Those doubts were soon dispelled. SMACNA and SMART planned a training session in New Orleans in February of 1997. While the maximum class size was 75 participants, more than double that amount of local labor and management bargainers registered, requiring the national associations to scramble to make logistical arrangements for a second training session.

Flaherty was not the kind of guy who would simply lecture for two days. He divided the participants into smaller groups composed of both labor and management representatives and had them participate in numerous problem-solving exercises. Tony Adolfs was a relatively new chapter executive for Chicagoland SMACNA when he attended the debut MGB program. “The interactive format kept the participants engaged and gave them hands-on practice in applying the MGB principles,” he recalled. “Bernie Flaherty was one of those unique individuals who was credible and relatable to both labor and management.”

Met with Success

Following the program’s successful launch, SMACNA and SMART continued sponsoring MGB sessions, training over 500 industry bargainers in the early years—and that training paid off.

Michael Sullivan observed that “Following training, we saw a reduction in the number of disputes brought before

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SMACNA and SMART may not have realized it at the time, but MGB training gave them the experience and results that allowed them to promote collaboration and partnering beyond the confines of the bargaining table.

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the National Joint Adjustment Board (NJAB), which meant more areas were able to settle their contracts and grievances where they should be settled—at the local level,” Sullivan said. “Throughout my time at SMART, I was in favor of joint programs that brought local labor and management groups together. While MGB focused on the bargaining process, it helped to improve communications overall between labor and management.”

SMACNA and SMART may not have realized it at the time, but MGB training gave them the experience and results that allowed them to promote collaboration and partnering beyond the confines of the bargaining table.

Part III of our series on the sheet metal industry’s enduring partnership will appear in the May issue of *Partners in Progress* and will examine significant 21st century developments. ■

THE MGB PRINCIPLES

The MGB principles taught to SMART Local and SMACNA Chapter Bargaining Committees by Bernie Flaherty in the ground-breaking joint MGB seminar are as relevant to bargaining and problem-solving today as they were in 1997.

- Problem solving is the focus, not winning or losing.
- Focus always on the problem, never on the people or personalities.
- Listen with an open mind.
- Focus on underlying concerns, needs, fears, and interests, not on rigid stated positions.
- Generate a variety of options for mutual gains before deciding what to do.
- Avoid results based on coercion.
- Base agreement on mutually agreed upon objective standards or fair procedures.
- Determine in advance what your best alternative to reaching agreement is.
- Value the long-term relationship.

Help Spread Awareness About Careers in Sheet Metal

My Job is My Gym

***"I get so excited when someone (especially a woman) comes to me inquiring about getting into the trades. It's the best decision I have ever made."
#mjmg***



***As I did more research on women in trades, and learned of the incredible benefits, I gave it a shot! And, I'm so glad that I did!
#mjmg***

#MJMG

Get the SMACNA-SMART Brand Ambassador Program Recruiting for You

The SMACNA-SMART Best Practices Market Expansion Task Force has launched a recruitment initiative to help address the industry's labor shortage issue. The Brand Ambassador program uses an evidence-based approach to attract new recruits to the sheet metal trade, leveraging the positive experiences of apprentices, journeypersons, and other members of the industry who love the trade.

Suggest your apprentices become Brand Ambassadors and actively spread the word about the advantages of SMACNA and SMART careers to friends and family via social media. It's easy! Those interested in being Brand Ambassadors should tag posts with the hashtag of our recruiting campaign #MJMG. Exemplary brand ambassadors will receive \$100 Amazon gift cards.

For more information visit facebook.com/IndustrialAthleteOfficial and instagram.com/industrialathleteofficial/



For more details on these and other resources visit pinp.org

