



5 NUMBERS THAT MATTER FOR WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

Here are five industry trends:

National growth: As high as 14%

As of 2022, women made up 10.9 percent of the overall construction workforce nationwide, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The number has remained somewhat flat since 1990 – hovering between 9% and 10% – but saw a slight bump beginning in 2016 and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of January 2023, 1,284,000 women were employed nationwide in construction.

Yet, last November, The Washington Post came up with a different number. The publication, using data from BLS as well as the Economic Policy Institute, said that 14% of the construction workforce was female. Those workers held jobs in all aspects of the industry, including office and management positions.

The Post's analysis also revealed that on a national level, between 2016 and 2022, the number of Hispanic women entering the construction industry grew more by 117 percent, with many of the women working on construction sites as opposed to the back office.

Local growth: California ranked No. 38 out of 50

According to the Post's analysis, California ranked California 38 out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia with 10.5 percent of the construction industry workforce being women. The three jurisdictions at the top – Washington, D.C., Arizona and Florida – all had female employment in the industry at between 14.5% and 17.6%.

Going deeper, the industry news site Construction Dive found that in San Jose, just 9.7% of the 35,000 local people in the industry were women. That's a sharp difference with San Francisco, which had 17% of its 17,650-person construction workforce being women. Construction Dive found that San Francisco had the third largest percentage of women working in construction throughout the United States.

Set against that backdrop is an overall need for more people to join the industry. In a 2018 survey by the Associated General Contractors of America and Autodesk, 78% of California construction companies had trouble finding skilled workers. Every role – from drywall installers to bricklayers; sheet metal workers to plumbers – were difficult to fill.

From future growth to representation, here are trends and developments to watch.

BY ANTHONY DUIGNAN-CABRERA | Contributing writer

Women in the construction industry are experiencing somewhat of a growth spurt nationally, hitting historic levels in the workplace and seeing a smaller pay disparity with men than in other industries. But there are still trouble spots, both nationally and in California. ¶

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WOMEN WHO LEAD IN CONSTRUCTION

ROLL CALL

WOMEN LEADERS AMONG SILICON VALLEY'S BIGGEST GENERAL CONTRACTORS

Among the 44 companies ranked on the Business Journal's 2023 List of Silicon Valley General Contractors, just one is led by a woman, Skyline Construction CEO Jessica Carps. A majority have women in senior positions, primarily serving in financial, human resources and marketing roles. Here's a breakdown of some of the women from those companies who are working in Silicon Valley. The companies are listed in order of how they appear in the List.

Devcon Construction
Milpitas

► **Daisy Pereira**, senior vice president of construction

► **Justine Pereira**, vice president

Novo Construction Inc.
Menlo Park

► **Chris Fonseca**, chief financial officer

► **Sarah Garcia**, director of diversity and inclusion

► **Lei Liang**, director of human resources

DPR Construction
Redwood City

► **Jody Quinton**, Northwest regional leader and leadership team member

► **Angela Floyd**, chief financial officer

► **Amy Iannone**, leads insurance risk management function

► **Jorinne Jackson**, director of human resources

XL Construction
Milpitas

► **Angeles Garcia**, director of health care

► **Laura Guzman**, vice president of marketing and communications

► **Carol Mckenna**, vice president of people

Level 10 Construction
Sunnyvale

► **Kelly Hoskovec**, project executive

► **Sarah Larson**, project executive

► **Tatyana Aprelenko**, controller

► **Kristen Chidester**, director of marketing

Webcor
San Jose

► **Mei Lin Wolff**, executive vice president and chief people officer

► **Allison McCue**, senior vice president for project planning

Truebeck Construction
San Mateo

► **Kathy Reiner**, chief financial officer

► **Tiffany Avila**, vice president for marketing and communications

VOICES FROM THE INDUSTRY

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION SHARE THEIR VIEWS

To get a better understanding of what it's like to be a woman working in the construction industry, we reached out to three local industry leaders — Michelle Acosta, vice president of operations for Acosta Sheet Metal Manufacturing; Jean Bjork, the owner and CEO of Bjork Construction Company Inc.; and Jessica Carps, CEO of Skyline Construction — to get their take. These interviews were conducted via email.

What's been your biggest challenge being a female business leader in the construction industry?

Bjork: My biggest challenge is being taken seriously in this industry. I have been on construction sites to meet with contractors, owners and design professionals, where a question is asked, and they look to my younger male assistant to answer. It really highlights the level of unconscious bias towards women in construction, but the great news is that I've seen change when it comes to women being accepted as equals. In my 35-plus years of construction, I have seen the most progress in the last few years. Women are a big part of construction's future and change is happening for the better.

Acosta: Having to take even more steps to "reach validation" is the first challenge that comes to mind. For example, at industry-specific events, I've often been asked, "so, who's your husband?" ... There have been countless instances where I am wrongfully judged by my appearance before being asked about my value, experience, or contributions to the industry. I've faced other, more diffi-

cult challenges, but I think this one is relatable to many women in my niche of the construction industry.

Is there an advantage to being a woman in this male-dominated field?

Bjork: The advantage is that we are usually the only female in the room. We stand out, and that's fantastic in any industry. Also, I think most women are good multitaskers, and that is a trait that is required to be successful in this industry.

Acosta: Absolutely. Think about it this way: any time something is "not like the others," it gets noticed. Very often, I'm one of the few, if not the only, women golfing at an industry fundraiser, in the sales meeting, etc. I choose to take advantage of this, and not let it deter me. Since the battle of "being seen" is already won, I capitalize on the opportunity to showcase my value and contributions.

Carps: Women are natural, social connectors and bring a level of empathy to difficult conversations and transactions. This lends itself nicely to instinctual negotiation strategies that

MEET THE PANEL



► **Michelle Acosta**, vice president of operations at Acosta Sheet Metal Manufacturing



► **Jean Bjork**, president, Bjork Construction Company Inc.



► **Jessica Carps**, CEO of Skyline Construction

look for mutually beneficial resolutions, versus a traditional, hard-line approach.... Women look at complex problems from a different lens and ultimately add a balanced perspective that benefits all stakeholders.

What would you like to see happen to increase the ranks of women in the industry?

Bjork: We need more blue-collar women in the field. For that to happen, childcare needs to be more accessible to women who have to be on job sites by 6-7 a.m. Currently, the largest problem for blue-collar women is that many day care facilities don't open until 7-8 a.m. Also, women apprentices don't need to be the ones cleaning the job site, they need the training to do the job so they get the experience needed to be equal to their male counterparts. We also need more female leaders in the construction industry. Women in senior positions are not the norm.

Acosta: I'd like to see the continuation of demographic-focused groups, such as Women In Construction—A Bay Area SMACNA Mission Partner group. These groups help bring a sense of belonging to those that need it. There is a strong sense of community in these groups as they offer help and guidance in a specialized way.

Carps: There are lucrative and exciting career opportunities in the trades that provide career advancement, strong benefits, work-life balance, and the ability to create meaningful impact within our local communities. As a society, we have neglected to share that narrative with young people, especially young women, and we have yet to remove the stigma associated with selecting a trade school vs. a university education. **Z**

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Future growth: 3% of young people are thinking of a construction career

In simple terms, the construction industry's labor shortages are rooted in an image problem. While the Covid-19 pandemic caused a slowdown in the industry, the number of young people pursuing construction as a career has been declining.

A National Association of Homebuilders survey from 2017 revealed that only 3 percent of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 were interested in pursuing construction as a career, according to an article in the industry publication Builder.

The survey found that 63% of undecided young adults said there was no or little chance they would consider a career in the trades no matter the pay. When asked why, 48% said they wanted a less physically demanding job while 32% said they believed construction work to be difficult. When asked about compensation, more than 20% said they might be interested if the pay was either \$75,000 or \$100,000 but for 43%, no pay amount "could make them give the trades a second thought."

More equal pay: 94.3% in equity

Unlike other traditionally male-dominated industries, gender pay equity in construction is 94.3 percent, one of the smallest pay gaps across all industries in the country.

Yet, the sexism and the inherent

South Bay Construction
Campbell

▶ **Jerri Kroen**, chief financial officer and controller

Rudolph and Sletten
San Carlos

▶ **Marian Selvaggio**, vice president and general counsel
▶ **Dianna Wright**, vice president, business development for Northern California

GCI General Contractors
Mountain View

▶ **Amy Williams**, chief financial officer
▶ **Hayley Soderlund Macko**, principal
▶ **Maggie Duignan**, marketing director

Blach Construction
San Jose

▶ **Laura Bold**, vice president of finance
▶ **Kim Scott**, vice president of business development and marketing
▶ **Tierney Azzopardi**, director of human resources
▶ **Katie Ellington**, project manager

Preston Companies
Milpitas

▶ **Julia Salgueiro**, director of operations technology
▶ **Lauren Trekel**, human resources and marketing director

Michael Roberts Construction Inc
Campbell

▶ **Denise Wynne**, vice president
▶ **Christine Musitano**, controller

W.L. Butler
Redwood City

▶ **Gina Henson**, chief financial officer

Swenson
San Jose

▶ **Summer Ludwick**, chief operating officer

Bogard Construction
Santa Cruz

▶ **Lori Harris**, controller
▶ **Kimi Owen**, project manager
▶ **Gabriela Currid**, project manager
▶ **Frances Dacanay**, project manager

division of labor within the industry – historically most of the roles women held in construction were office, accounting and management-based, with an average of 1 in every 100 employees on a work site being female – remains a sticking point.

Last October, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo gave the keynote address at the North American Building Trades Union (NABTU) Tradeswomen Build Nations 2022 Conference in Las Vegas. She addressed the issue of sexism within the construction head-on.

“It’s 2022 – it’s time to say this is no longer acceptable,” Raimondo told the attendees. “Women don’t want to deal with the BS. They just want to do their jobs.”

Training the next generation: 4% of apprentices are women

State and local governments have teamed with industry players such as The Home Depot to fix the labor shortage as well as bring more women into the fold.

The Home Depot launched its “Path to Pro” skills program last year in California offering free job training to those wishing to start a career in construction. In some ways, “Path to Pro” is like Gov. Gavin Newsom’s planned apprenticeship program, unveiled in 2018, to train more than 500,000 in skilled labor apprenticeships by 2029.

Yet despite an initial push, California’s apprenticeship programs have stalled. In a progress report released last July the California Department of Industrial Relations wrote that the program

would need to more than double the amount of participants to reach its goal.

What is more discouraging is that, according to the report, in 2021 women made up just 4% of the total amount of apprentices in the construction trades with women making up just 7.5% of the overall participants.

California is not without successful, female-founded and led construction companies, Jean Bjork’s Fremont-based Bjork Construction and Kathryn Cahill Thompson of San Francisco’s Cahill Contractors, are leaders in their fields, but it’s their success that puts the lack of a larger female presence in the industry into such stark relief.

“We need more blue-collar women in the field,” Bjork told the Business Journal. “Also, women apprentices don’t need to be the ones cleaning the job site, they need the training to do the job so they get the experience needed to be equal to their male counterparts.”

Change may be slow, but it’s coming. According to Jenna Arca, director of workforce development at The Home Depot, the company “saw positive responses and engagement” from those who took advantage of the company’s free, self-paced training program.

“To date, we’ve had over 5,000 people start the training and over 1,300 graduate,” Arca told SVBJ, “which includes a graduate population of 25-30 percent women compared to the (10.9 percent) of total women working in construction.”



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