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Women in Oklahoma’s construction industry share experiences, challenges


By: **Kathryn McNutt** (https://journalrecord.com/author/kathryn-mcnutt/) // The Journal Record // March 21, 2023

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(https://journalrecord.com/files/2023/03/km-women-in-construction.jpg)

"You have to carry confidence when you're in a male-dominated industry," says Trista Shomo, senior safety manager at Manhattan Construction Co. Shomo is in charge of safety at the OKANA resort construction site in Oklahoma City. (Courtesy photo)

 (mailto:?subject=Women in Oklahoma’s construction industry share experiences, challenges&body=OKLAHOMA CITY – Trista Shomo works full time at the construction site of the \$400 million OKANA resort near the Oklahoma River. As the senior safety manager, she is responsible... You can read the content in details following link https%3A%2F%2Fjournalrecord.com%2F2023%2F03%2F21%2Fwomen-in-oklahomas-construction-industry-share-experiences-challenges%2F) OKLAHOMA CITY – Trista Shomo works full time at the construction site of the \$400 million OKANA resort near the Oklahoma River. As the senior safety manager, she is responsible for the planning and communication required to ensure all workers are safe.

"We're out of the ground now and we have a tower crane. Everybody's got to know what everyone's doing on site," Shomo said. Most days it feels like her "head is on a swivel."

When corrective action is needed, Shomo said her style is "more coaching" than fault-finding. She is "Mama T" to the mostly male crew, striving to build morale and offer support. If someone tells her, "You're too pretty to be out here," she takes that as a challenge.

Workers have different personalities and for some English is not their first language. It's her job to learn how to best communicate with and motivate each one, she said.

Shomo has spent 13 years in the industry and the past seven years working for Manhattan Construction Co.

"You have to carry confidence when you're in a male-dominated industry," she said. "You have to be true to yourself and always be genuine."

Among construction managers in 2022, there were 598,000 men and fewer than 10% as many women, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Women were even more of a minority among construction laborers. BLS reported 1,578,000 men in that category and only 3.7% as many women.

BLS shows that the gender pay gap for construction workers in 2022 was larger for laborers. Female construction managers earned roughly 89 cents for every dollar their male counterparts were paid, while female construction laborers earned only 80 cents.

A new study by Today's Homeowner reports across construction trade jobs, women are most represented in the occupations of painters and paperhangers (10.2%) and construction and building inspectors (8%).

The [study \(https://todayshomeowner.com/general/guides/women-in-construction/\)](https://todayshomeowner.com/general/guides/women-in-construction/) found that Oklahoma ranks 24th for the highest percentage of female construction trade workers. Out of 75,601 construction trade workers in the state, 2,054 (2.7%) of them are women.

It shows the five states with largest representation of women in construction are South Carolina, Georgia, Washington, Florida and Arkansas.

Jennifer Scott started working in the industry in 2005 on the West Coast, where she experienced more acceptance of women in construction than in this part of the country.

Three years ago, she joined Flintco, where today she is the project manager overseeing the \$200 million Integris Health Heart Hospital under construction at the Integris campus on Northwest Expressway.

At 5-foot-2 and not quite 120 pounds, she admits she doesn't look like the typical construction worker. "Everybody is bigger than me."

In general, the men at the construction site are "all pretty amazing to work with," Scott said. "Some find it charming that there are females."

She is there to observe safety, progress and compliance, and said she spends about 90% of the time in the trailer on a computer "managing the dollars and cents."

Teachers encouraged Scott to pursue engineering because she excelled at math. Thinking "the country will always need infrastructure," she earned a degree in civil engineering.

"My first job in construction (a children's hospital), I saw the impact of what a building could do for a community," Scott said.

"Construction's a great career for anyone, even in the trades," she said. "There's a lot of opportunity in construction for all people."

Tony DeStefano is vice president of human resources at Flintco, which has eight locations, mostly in the South. He said there has been a concentrated effort in the industry in the past decade to increase employee diversity both at the work site and in the office.

"Every time I'm out on a project I see a lot more women in skilled trade jobs," DeStefano said. "It can be a great and long career path, especially for those who aren't sure they want to go to college."

Certified carpenters, electricians and plumbers can earn \$25 to \$35 per hour with great benefits and overtime, he said.

CMSWillowbrook is a family-owned Oklahoma construction company that employs 27 women among a staff of about 150 employees, said Jessica Williams, marketing coordinator.

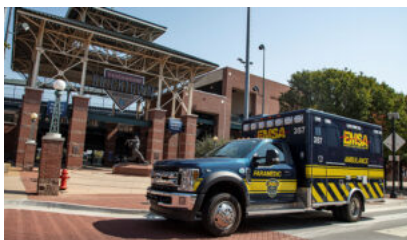
"One of our owners is a woman, Summer McClure," Williams said. "Women work in various areas of our company including the front lines."

The late Jan Dunkin, who was executive vice president of client services at CMSWillowbrook, was named 2017 Builder of the Year by the Associated General Contractors of Oklahoma, the second female ever to receive the honor.

Natalie Pagano, director of marketing and communications, said 14% of employees across all companies in the **Manhattan Construction Group** are women. In 2022, the group launched the BuildHER networking group for women and more than 80 women joined.

Manhattan Construction Group President Larry Rooney said the group "is focused on helping the strong women in our company build careers, not only in our company but in the industry. It's exciting to see the positive impact this group is having on our company by encouraging our emerging female leaders and outreach to women to join our industry."

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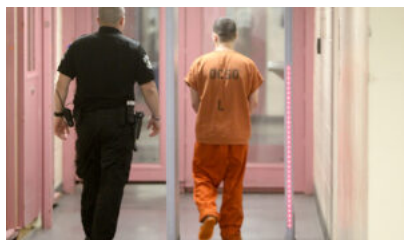


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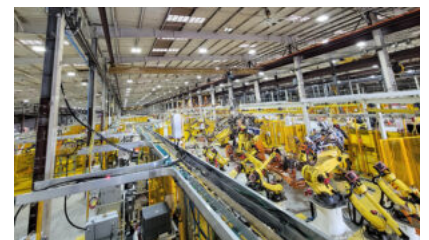


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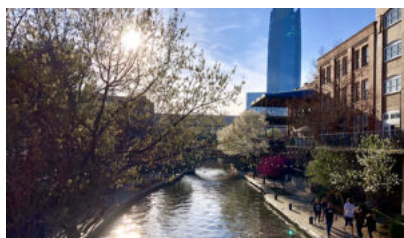


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