

What's the value of the Women Building the Nation conference?

May 18th – 20th, 2012

Sheraton Grand, Sacramento, CA

- This will be the second national multi-craft conference held in the U.S. since 2001. The official conference sponsors are the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO and the California Building Trades Council. In addition, several international unions are making donations to support the conference.
- The national conference is being piggy-backed to the Women Building California conference, which is heading into its 11th year. Last year's conference brought together close to 600 tradeswomen. That was a record-setting event and of course we want to beat that record this year.
- It is often difficult for women to work in the trades because they find they are the only woman (or one of a very few) women out on the jobsite. Being in a room with 600 other tradeswomen, who have a similar experience, is key to helping women break the isolation they may feel at work.
- The conference has several workshop tracks. There are workshops specifically for women who are in pre-apprenticeship programs or are considering trades careers—these include workshops on successfully applying to enter apprenticeship programs and surviving & thriving once in. There are workshops on “retention” that include setting up women’s committees, safety and health, mentoring, learning how unions are structured, dealing with sexual harassment. We have workshops on building leadership and getting involved in political and policy issues. We also have workshops to help women think about trades-related careers after they stop working with the tools. The goal of the workshops is to stay positive and look for solutions rather than griping about the present.

- We'll have speakers from the federal government and we'll also have dynamic tradeswomen tell their stories in a motivational way.
- The conference costs are kept extremely low to enable as many women as possible to attend. The sponsoring organizations underwrite significant costs of this event. Registration, if paid before March 31, is only \$75 per person. This fee includes you continental breakfast, lunch, snacks and reception on Saturday, and breakfast and snack on Sunday. The hotel rate is a low \$119 per night. In addition, the event is held on the weekend to avoid the need to pay lost wages for those who attend.
- As work is slow, it's hard to keep our members' enthusiasm high, but this event will go a long way toward keeping your female members motivated. We've always heard from Business Managers that this conference inspired the members they sent to feel even more positive about their Local Unions, to advocate for the trades and to take more responsibility—on the job and in their unions.

I don't know how many women tell me each year that they've been thinking about leaving the trades because it's hard, it's demoralizing, it's whatever.... But then they come to this conference and are reenergized for another year.

Years ago, women fought to get into law school and medical school, and now, women are in the majority in those schools. Years ago, women fought to get good building trades jobs, and now, they're still at only about 2% of the construction workforce. Women want to do the work and they can do the work. This conference provides the education, hope and support to help women to succeed in these careers.

*Debra Chaplan
Conference Coordinator*

*Tradeswomen from all over will be arriving and landing in Sacramento, CA on Friday May 18th, to connect and share travel and drive in, and to share rooms to help with the cost. Post, if you can help, or if you need help, and your ETA on the Facebook event page, "Women Building The Nation" Conference. I hope to see you there.
Melina Harris, Sisters in the Building Trades*