



Trailblazing women working on the Cowichan District Hospital Replacement

In this special feature written by Business Representative Kyla McCormick, we learn about the Cowichan District Hospital Replacement Project (CDHRP) and how it has helped to employ and support two women and their families. Special thanks goes out to our Shop Steward Steven Walker who helped coordinate these interviews to recognize his colleagues for their work and accomplishments.

This project is incredibly important to the communities of the Cowichan Valley in so many ways. Not only is it replacing an aging and overcapacity hospital with a much needed state of the art facility, it is also bringing a forward-thinking employer, the British Columbia Infrastructure Benefits Inc. (BCIB), which is making it a priority to hire local tradeswomen. This priority hiring practice led to two women Operating Engineers being hired from the beginning of the project. For the first three months of the project these two women made up 50% of the workforce.



Shauna Nash, 29-year member working at the CDHRP site.

In their field on the Island was difficult at first. They moved to Alberta early in their careers, like many other workers to take advantage of the boom there; however, the call of the Island brought them home.

Shauna is a 29-year member of the IUOE, who originally attended Malaspina College to take the heavy equipment operator course. There she learned to operate multiple pieces of equipment and was also the first woman to take the asphalt laydown course.

At the time, working in the construction industry as a woman was not easy. “Back in those days I may have put Shaun instead of Shauna on my resume to get a few jobs,” says Shauna. After the union realized what a trailblazer she was, she was approached by union representatives at the time

to tell her story to other women.

Currently at the hospital site she is operating a roller, which is a return to what she was operating on the Island Highway project years ago, and “stress free” as she put it. Thanks to BCIB’s priority hiring process, Shauna was at the top

of the list. When asked how she felt about working on the hospital site, she was quick to answer: “Ecstatic! It’s a great opportunity for a lot of local people and I’m excited to be a part of the team!”

Jessica Fletcher’s journey to the hospital site was very different. Jessica says she decided to make a name for herself by seeking out jobs in construction with no experience or training required. Her strategy was to find a company that would invest the time and resources to train her and work her way up the company from there. Her work ethic and quality of work quickly helped her find an employer that was willing to invest in her growth. She says it was her “nothing is impossible” attitude that has helped her find success in the construction industry ever since.

Jessica says, “In my ten years in the trade I have had some amazing mentors and coworkers who have helped shape me into the operator I am today, and I am very proud of how far I’ve come as a woman in the trades.” Her eagerness to learn has given her the opportunity to run many different types of machines, giving her a broad skillset and versatility. She says she is proud to break the stereotypes of gender-based roles and she wants others to know that being a woman hasn’t stopped her from succeeding in the industry.

“I am extremely proud to be a part of the Cowichan District Hospital Replacement Project. It is a huge local project in my community that is desperately needed! Not to mention it’s going to be pretty cool driving by it years down the road and saying ‘I built that!’”

Jessica and Shauna agree that becoming an Operating Engineer is about being a part of something big.

Thank you Sisters for sharing your journey and for inspiring future Operating Engineers and tradeswomen. 🍁



Jessica Fletcher working on the CDHRP site.