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SAIA SCAFFOLD & ACCESS
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WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

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WOMEN ARE VALUED LEADERS AND EMPLOYEES IN
THE SCAFFOLD AND ACCESS INDUSTRY.

BY CATHEE JOHNSON PHILLIPS

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) website states that an estimated 65% of the construction industry work on scaffolds. Since 1996, women have comprised around 9% of the construction labor force, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Recently, that percentage has slightly increased. In 2019, women represented 10.3% of the construction labor force of 11.3 million workers.

The Scaffold & Access Industry Association (SAIA) has long recognized the valuable contributions of women to the industry. Since 2000, the association has presented 28 awards to 13 deserving women, and, in 2016, the association elected Paula Manning, part-owner and executive vice president of Century Elevators, as its first woman president. Today, seven women serve in volunteer leadership positions, and many more women are active SAIA members. The SAIA staff itself is comprised almost entirely of women.

Recruiting more women into the scaffold and access workforce could be beneficial to the industry, certainly by helping to reduce the ongoing labor shortage but also in

other ways. Research by the National Bureau of Economic Research suggests women are more likely to work cooperatively than men and that having women in leadership benefits a company's overall collaboration and production. A March 2020 blog published by Autodesk Construction Cloud states: "While only around 13% of construction firms are women-owned, out of this small percentage, 9% of these firms achieve revenues of over \$500,000 or more. When compared to the 8% of all firms achieving this threshold, it's clear that women in leadership are making a huge impact on profitability for companies."

There are several ways to make the scaffold and access workplace more attractive to women. Some of these are involving women in the recruitment process, providing family-friendly work policies and benefits, and providing personal protective equipment designed for women.

Eight women in the industry have graciously shared their stories with the *SA Magazine*. Their words provide insight into making the workplace more attractive to women, and their real-life advice will help other women to succeed in the industry.

CO-PRESIDENT STAND UP FOR YOURSELF

Julie Rainville, co-president of Fraco, grew up watching her father work in construction. He was a single parent, juggling between his masonry business and raising three kids. She and her sister were raised in a house full of construction workers, since her father's office was in the family home. She remembers going with him to job sites during the weekend.

She said, "I'd sit on a pallet of brick and watch him lay bricks. As a kid, I loved it. I felt like I was part of his team and loved the camaraderie and the friendship between him and his colleagues. At 16, I worked for his masonry company. It was very challenging physically for a young lady, but without knowing, I was getting more and more comfortable in the construction world."

She went to university dreaming of working in refugee camps; she wanted to help others and felt attracted to different cultures. When she was finishing her master's degree in sociology, her dad approached her to see if she wanted to join the family business. Her sister had joined the family business a couple years before, and he wanted to give her the same opportunity.

She thought: Let's try it out.

That first year, 2003, she went from being the receptionist to serving as a legal assistant, before she told her sister that maybe it wasn't her cup of tea. "My sister asked me what would make me happier, and I said: project management. That's what hooked me: in some ways, I was coming back home," she said. "I grew up on job sites, being with workers and customers. It was a very intense job for a woman with three young kids, but I loved it."

Besides being a mother taking care of three young children,

there were other challenges she had to face. Most of the customers were professional, but she had to terminate some business relationships with customers who were not able to deal with a woman.

She said, "I could immediately feel the vibe of a company with the superintendent in charge of the crew or the owner. When the superintendent was respectful, that set the tone for his team to be respectful, the opposite was true as well. I could see the impact of the leader on his team right away."

Later in her career, when she was in sales, she also had bad experiences with customers drinking too much and trying to go further than a business relationship. She learned a few things: Don't accept a one-on-one dinner invitation from a customer; a lunch is always better; and don't stay late at business events, because alcohol destroys inhibition.

Salary is another issue. She said, "My sister and I were surprised when we discovered that we had the inclination to pay women less than men, even if they were in the same position. We were contributing to inequity – without even knowing. Is it because the women asked for less? We weren't sure, but we corrected it right away.

"I will always love the construction industry and most people are good, nice, and professional. We can talk about the challenges and still appreciate the good parts."

She finds the construction industry amazing because every day the industry is contributing to building the world of tomorrow: "I love to run or drive in a city and see projects we have worked on; those buildings will last for decades. I also love architecture and all the technical challenges



WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION MAKE 94 CENTS FOR EVERY DOLLAR EARNED BY MEN.

that go with it when it is time to imagine different ways to give access to those special buildings."

She shared the following advice for women in the industry:

- Doing a great job is the best way to gain recognition in any industry.

- Finding a good mentor is very helpful.
- Stand up for who you are and do not accept disrespect.
- Don't try to act like a man to gain respect; use your strength and listen to your feelings.
- If you come from a family business, don't try to be your father, just be yourself.

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