



Left to Right:
 Kristin Green, Welding
 Melinda Ohlrogge, Welding
 Shenell Davis, Welding
 Victoria LeMay, Welding
 Jennifer Wasmundt, Cabinetmaking
 Alissa Hawkins, Construction Electricity

Top Row:
 Chiharu Miller, Cabinetmaking
 Marnee Good, Cabinetmaking

We Can Do It! the modern day “rosies”

Like Rosie the Riveter, today's tradeswomen are getting their training at Saint Paul College

On radios across the country in 1942, the popular tune *Rosie the Riveter* played over the airwaves. It was World War II, and most of the men were serving in the military – leaving vacancies on factory assembly lines across the country. Those factories needed welders, riveters and other trade workers to make the weapons and planes required for the war effort. To fill the void, women were asked to take the jobs formerly thought of as “men’s work.”

As part of the War effort, our St. Paul Vocational School offered women free training, and recruited them with slogans such as “I’m Doing This to Help My Boy! Get A War Job Too.” Women were trained in Welding, Machine Shop, Aviation Mechanics, Aircraft Fabrication, Aircraft Sheet Metal, Power Machine Operation, Mechanical Drafting and Electrical Assembly.

While these women proved they could do their jobs as well as the men, few women kept these jobs after the men returned from the War. Yet with their dedication and hard work, “Rosie the Riveters” helped pave the way for the tradeswomen of the future.

Today's Tradeswomen

Today at Saint Paul College, 24 women are enrolled in the College's trades programs including welding, carpentry, cabinetmaking, construction electricity, auto body repair and more. Together, they're proving these well-paying, hands-on jobs are not just for the guys.

Cabinetmaking student Chiharu Miller and welding student Kristin Green are two of those women. With a four-year degree in interior design already under her belt, Miller decided she wanted to go back to school and learn a trade. "I knew if men could do it I could do it," says Miller. "I was going from a female-dominated industry to a male-dominated field, but that didn't stop me from doing what I wanted to do."

Currently working as a hairstylist, Green had a similar attitude when she entered the welding program at Saint Paul College. "I wanted to choose a trade that was completely different, but one I could also use artistically and creatively if I wanted to," says Green. "I have been a hairstylist for six years, but I have also been in the construction industry as a laborer and found I really enjoy hard work."

The opportunities for women in the trades at Saint Paul College don't stop with the students. Instructor Julie Selton has been teaching in the construction electricity program since 1999. "When I entered the field in the 1980s, there were only a couple women out there," says Selton. "By that time I had done many different jobs and realized I enjoyed math, science and working with my hands. I did it because that was what I liked to do."

Advantages Abound

Women like Selton, Green and Miller have discovered the many advantages of working in the trades including on-the-job training opportunities, good wages, autonomy and the ability to use their hands. "I enjoy this work because I'm not using just my head or just my hands – I'm using them both," says Selton. "There is definitely a creative aspect to the work, because every job is a custom job and you need to apply what you've learned to achieve your goals."

Green has also enjoyed developing the creativity needed to become a successful welder. "The hands-on aspect is so rewarding," says Green. "You need to have a delicate touch, you need to have patience and you need to focus on what you're doing from the moment you lay that first bead through the end of your project."

As for the challenges of being a woman in a male-dominated field, these three say surprisingly few issues arise. "If you are

willing to learn and do the work, there is no reason to worry," says Miller. "Just have a good attitude and be a good student, and you can rise to the top of the class."

Future Opportunities

According to Selton, there is a lot of potential for women in the trades. She uses her field of construction electricity as an example. "There are so many opportunities and with just two years of schooling you have a lot of flexibility to move around in your career," she says. "There is maintenance electrician, electrical estimating, teaching or electrical sales. With additional experience, you also have the chance to start your own business and become an entrepreneur."

They recommend that – as with any career – women think about their skills and abilities to determine whether a trade is right for them. Important characteristics for trade workers include good problem-solving skills, a love of hands-on work, an ability to do physical labor and an aptitude for math and science. "It's a great time to be in school, and if you have a skill set like welding that you can bring to the table it's going to give you a big advantage," says Green.

Women who are returning to school are also considering how they can combine new skills with their previous knowledge. "As an interior designer I saw there was often a communication barrier between the designers and the trade workers – they were speaking different languages and had different ways of seeing things," says Miller. "I think people like me who learn both sets of skills can help bridge that barrier."

One thing is clear, Saint Paul College's modern-day tradeswomen are learning new skills and applying them in fresh, creative ways. Much like Rosie the Riveter, they're helping to redefine and reinforce the role of modern women in the workplace and break ground for future generations.

Instructor Julie Selton with two of the more than 60 students currently enrolled in the Construction Electricity program. For fall 2010 the College projects more than 950 students will be enrolled in Trade, Technical and Apprenticeship programs.



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Trade, Technical, & Apprenticeship Programs

Auto Body Repair	Machine Tool Technology
Automotive Service Technician	Manufacturing Technology
Cabinetmaking	Pipefitting
Carpentry	Plumbing
CNC/Toolmaking	Sheet Metal
Construction Electricity	Truck Technician
Land Surveying	Welding