

# 'I Earn a Good Living Doing Something I Love'

October 6, 2017

[http://www.ibew.org/media-center/Articles/17Daily/1710/171006\\_GoodLiving](http://www.ibew.org/media-center/Articles/17Daily/1710/171006_GoodLiving)

**The gender pay gap is shrinking, but it's happening at a glacially slow pace. One place where it's smaller than average though, is the unionized trades. And collaborations like that between Oregon Tradeswomen, a nonprofit that supports women in the trades, and Portland, Ore., Local 48 are bringing great career opportunities to more and more women.**

"We are completely committed to supporting women and minorities in the trades and have been for years," said Local 48 Business Manager Gary Young. "Oregon Tradeswomen has been a tremendous partner in that effort."

Only 3 percent of tradespeople nationwide are women, though in Oregon it's 7 percent. Kelly Kupcak, Oregon Tradeswomen executive director, credits that in part to the construction boom, but also to their partnerships with trade unions.

"Working with locals like 48 is critical," Kupcak said. "Without it, we're working in a vacuum."

Local 48 was a sponsor of Oregon Tradeswomen's annual career fair in May, offering financial support as well as the use of its training center to the 2,000-plus attendees. Members also led workshops on how to wire a light and build a transmitter and light display.

Both organizations recognize the need to grow the workforce, said Bridget Quinn, workforce development coordinator with the NECA/IBEW Electrical Training Center.

"This job is the reason I can buy a house," said Kara Edwards, an inside wireman and member of Local 48. "The chance to earn a good living doing something I love, why wouldn't I want to do that?"

Too often though, women and girls don't even consider the trades, Quinn said.

"It never even enters their minds," Quinn said. "It's not until they get an opportunity like the career fair and meet a woman in the trades that it seems like something they could do."

Usually if a girl is interested it's because her parents encouraged her, Quinn said, which doesn't happen often.

“Parents are terrified their kids won’t go to college. They equate it with failure,” Quinn said. “They do it with sons as well as daughters, but daughters are also dealing with gender norms where counselors and teachers won’t even talk to them about the trades. That makes it harder for them to break out.”

If the career fair is any indication, once girls are given the chance to explore the trades, they take to it just as eagerly as boys do.

“The volume in the building was insane,” Quinn said of the training center during the career fair. “There was a lot of laughing and smiling.”

And when people do enter the trades, they do so without having to repay student loans.

“A job in the trades, with wage parity and no student loan debt, is a ticket to the middle class,” said Ninth District Vice President John O’Rourke. “It’s important to promote this opportunity to everyone in our community, including women and minorities.”

Quinn and Kupcak both noted the need to not just recruit but retain women and girls. That means promoting mentoring. It also means getting men on board and decreasing harassment. All Local 48 apprentices get sexual harassment and diversity training, Quinn said. They’re also in the process of implementing the Green Dot program, a bystander training that focuses on reducing bullying and sexual harassment.

“If you speak up, it slowly starts to change the culture,” Quinn said. “It’s like what happened with safety. You used to have this macho culture where safety gear wasn’t manly or cool. Now it’s totally different.”