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Number of women in skilled trades bigger than ever this International Women’s Day

Industry Training Authority celebrates rising number of female apprentices in B.C.

Vancouver, B.C., March 8 – The Women in Trades Training (WITT) initiative, funded through the Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Agreement (LMA) and overseen by the Industry Training Authority (ITA), is celebrating the increase in the number of B.C. women launching careers in the trades this International Women’s Day.

To date, 2,000 women have participated in Women in Trades Training programs across B.C. since the initiative was first established in 2008. Women in Trades Training connects women of diverse backgrounds with funded opportunities to pursue non-traditional careers by training to be plumbers, electricians, carpenters, sheet metal workers and other skilled tradespeople. Since 2009, the percentage of women apprentices in B.C. has risen from 8 per cent to 10 per cent, with significant increases observed in non-traditional trades, such as, welding and heavy equipment operation.

“B.C.’s economy is booming and skilled tradespeople are in demand. Women make up over half our population – we need their help if we’re to fulfill B.C.’s potential prosperity,” says Kevin Evans, CEO, Industry Training Authority. “It’s great to see more and more B.C. women choosing skilled trades careers.”

With B.C. on the cusp of a major development boom and more skilled tradespeople retiring each year, experts are predicting a skilled labour shortage of 160,000 by 2015. “The Women in Trades Training (WITT) initiative is a key part of unleashing B.C.’s future workforce,” says Erin Johnston, Manager of Labour Supply Initiatives, Industry Training Authority. “We offer women technical training in a range of trades, employability skills and access to mentors through our seven service providers around the province.”

The Women in Trades Training (WITT) initiative is overseen by ITA, the provincial crown agency responsible for managing B.C.’s industry training and apprenticeship system. The Initiative helps women who are unemployed or employed but lacking formal certification to become skilled and in-demand tradespeople by offering tuition for training programs and financial assistance for tools, books and childcare subsidies. It also provides women with general skills upgrading, career counselling, on-the-job training and introductions to potential employers.

Shelley McIntyre, a heavy equipment operator in Nanaimo, is one of the 2,000 women who has benefited from the Women in Trades Training (WITT) initiative. An outdoors type who loves both motorcycling and biking, she chose to move up to bigger machines. The support of both ITA’s Women in Trades Training (WITT) initiative and her employer, Island Aggregates, made her the competent operator she is today, says Shelley.

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Funding provided through the Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Agreement.
“There is a stereotype. However, the help of great Women in Trades Training instructors and classes, along with a very female friendly workplace, made the learning a lot easier,” says Shelley. “I like being outside. I like driving the equipment and being part of the team and seeing what you accomplish every day.”

ITA’s Women in Trades Training (WITT) initiative currently funds seven programs operated by partner organizations across the province, and is part of a long-term strategy to match the skills of women to B.C.’s labour needs.

Download the Women in Trades Training infographic to learn

See Shelley McIntyre in action. Watch our Women in Trades Training video.

Learn more about ITA’s Women in Trades Training initiative and how it is helping meet B.C.’s labour demands: http://www.itabc.ca/women-trades/overview

Additional Quotes: Pat Bell, Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training: “Ensuring that British Columbians have the skills and training they need to be first in line for jobs here in B.C. is a top priority for government. Programs like Women in Trades Training are helping women break through barriers to employment in the trades, and now approximately 10 per cent of all apprentices throughout the province are women.”

Hon. Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development: “Our government is focused on job creation and economic growth and we recognize that the biggest challenge to this is our current skills and labour shortage. This is why it’s important that we work with our provincial counterparts in B.C. to support initiatives such as ITA Women in Trades Training (WITT), so that we connect more of our talent to the needs of the skilled trades sector.”

For interviews, or more information, please contact:

Jennifer King
Edelman, on behalf of ITA
Direct: 604-623-3007 x 240
Cell: 604-710-6382
jennifer.king@edelman.com