

# SOUNDLIFE

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DEAN J. KOEPFLER/The News Tribune  
Annalee Ogle, 42, is one of 95 members of the Sisters in the Building Trades networking group.



LUI KIT WONG/THE NEWS TRIBUNE  
Angie Rennaker of Graham, 20, operates a 10-ton, high-reach forklift while moving construction materials for the light-rail project at Sea-Tac Airport.



DEAN J. KOEPFLER/The News Tribune  
Angie Rennaker, 20, is a heavy-equipment operator.

## Sisters in the trades build a network

NIKI SULLIVAN; The News Tribune  
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Sixteen-hour days of moving dirt with huge equipment is hard enough. But finding the right work pants is what's really tough.

For the 95 members of Sisters in the Building Trades, which is made up of women in Western Washington who build, wire, plumb or tear things down, finding sturdy pants and steel-toed boots that fit is pay dirt.

Members discussed the conundrum at a recent meeting.

One woman said she bought children's work wear. Another said she asked a store to carry some women's items, but they flatly declined. At that, a rumble of displeasure spread across the room.

One woman piped up: "Guess we won't be going there anymore."

### WOMEN'S WORK

The building trades are no longer just for men. But while the number of women working in the trades is growing, they are still a small percentage of the overall work force. A woman in construction can still go days without seeing another woman on the job.

Sisters in the Building Trades was formed about three years ago to help form a network for those women.

Tami St. Paul, a training coordinator for a heavy equipment operating program who's worked in the trades for about two decades, said there "are still not as many women's faces out there," but was quick to add that there are more now than when she started.

Women are attracted to the trades for all the same reasons men are: The opportunity to work outdoors, earn a good wage and feel the sense of achievement that comes after building (or demolishing) something.

"I love it. It's the best thing I ever did for myself," said Angie Rennaker, a 20-year-old from Graham who started an apprenticeship in heavy equipment operation six months ago.

Before entering the apprenticeship, she worked as a receptionist in an office. Her brother, who also works in the trades, told her about the opportunity.

Wearing a camouflage hunting jacket, jeans and mascara, Rennaker looked at home at a recent Sisters in the Building Trades meeting.

“When I was a little girl, every time I saw a woman operator, I was envious,” Rennaker said.

Now that she’s one of them, she’s happy. “It’s fun. I feel like I’m working for an earning,” she said.

#### A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

But it’s not always so simple as loving what you do. Women in the trades often experience things men don’t have to worry about, part of the reason Sisters in the Building Trades meetings are important.

During a recent meeting, the group of women, most still in work clothes, talked about child care centers and baby sitters who were available before 6 a.m.

The early care is needed because jobs often involve early hours and long days.

As a single mother, Annalee Ogle, 42, had to find a way to take care of her child, do her job and, at one point, go to school. The group has helped her find child care, meet friends and network.

It’s also encouraging.

“It’s kind of nice to know there’s other women that are working just as hard out there,” she said.

“The kind of women that I want to see in (the trades) are women that are ready to stand the weather and get in there and work and climb walls just right along with the guys,” she said.

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#### **Sisters in the Building Trades**

**What it is:** The group, started about three years ago, is for any woman in Western Washington who works in the building trades.

**What they do:** In addition to being a network for women in the trades, the group is a resource, with lists of where to buy work clothes, where to find early morning child care and how to find a female mentor.

**Who runs it:** Melina Harris is the group’s president. The carpenter, from Kent, whipped the club into shape in the span of about a year by registering it as a nonprofit, setting up a Web site, securing a mailing address and making T-shirts. After ticking off the dates of each event, she proudly said, “Those are big dates. I’m not a lawyer.”

**When the group meets:** Times vary, so check the Web site.

**For information or how to join:**  
[www.SistersintheBuildingTrades.org](http://www.SistersintheBuildingTrades.org).