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Mothers in construction: A pathway to family-sustaining careers - by Kanitra Porph

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Growing up in Boston, I never thought that I would one day become an electrician. I imagined myself working in an office, sitting behind a computer. But life had other plans for me, and after years of working in the administrative industry, I needed a change. I wanted a career that would not only provide me with a stable income, but also one that would offer me the opportunity to grow professionally and care for my family.

As a mother and as a soon-to-be-licensed electrician, the benefits that my new career in the union

construction trades have changed my life. Those include family-sustaining wages, affordable healthcare for my family, and continual professional development and training opportunities.

For women looking for a fulfilling career path, I would say take the leap and reap the rewards of work within the union building trades. You might find that you love it as much as I do.

When I was looking for a career change and higher wages, I discovered Building Pathways, a pre-apprenticeship program that helps women and people of color enter the construction trades. There, I learned the basics of the electrical trade, and was introduced to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 103. After graduating with 200-plus hours of classroom and hand-on learning experiences, I applied and was accepted to the apprenticeship program at the Greater Boston Joint Apprentice Training Center (JATC), a joint training program provided by the IBEW Local 103, and the National Electrical Contractors Association of Boston (NECA). I was on my journey as a union electrician.

Since then, I have learned so much about construction, and I have seen firsthand how it can provide women like me with stable and family-sustaining careers. The union construction trades offer strong wages, benefits, and job security, as well as opportunities for growth and advancement. As a Local 103 IBEW apprentice, I am not only earning a livable wage, but I am also gaining valuable skills and knowledge that will help me advance in my career through continuous training and upskilling opportunities.

But the benefits of a career in the union construction trades go beyond just the financial rewards. For me, being an electrician has given me a sense of pride and accomplishment. I love being able to work with my hands and see the results of my hard work. And as a single mother of an 18-year old and 5-year old, I am grateful for the flexibility that the construction industry offers. With my apprenticeship, I am able to work during the day and spend time with my children in the evenings and on weekends.

On behalf of the incredible women who are building our hospitals, schools, skyscrapers, affordable housing, roads and bridges, I encourage other women to look around and see how we are succeeding, together. The industry is changing, and more women than ever before are entering the trades every day. Massachusetts has the highest participation rate of women in apprenticeship in the U.S. With programs like Building Pathways and unions like Local 103 IBEW, there has never been a better time for women to join the construction industry.

So, to all the women out there who are considering a new career: Take the leap. The rewards are worth it.

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