

**UNION DEMOCRACY**

# A sister to lead the Brotherhood

The 23,000-member Pacific Northwest Regional Council of Carpenters has a new top officer. Evelyn Shapiro, 40, won the most delegate votes in a Nov. 17 election to lead the region's largest construction union. She's the first woman ever elected to head a regional council of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. Labor Press reporter Don McIntosh spoke with her by phone Dec. 3.

**You have an unusual story: You went into a Carpenters apprenticeship after getting a degree in political economics from The Evergreen State College. What made you decide to take up the tools?**

In high school I was kind of a community service nerd. I did a lot with Habitat for Humanity, and just really loved the tools. My uncle was an electrician, but other than that, I didn't have a whole lot of trades connections. So I asked my neighbor who was in the trades if he could help me get in, and he suggested that he could get me in as a flagger, which didn't sound that fun to me. I

didn't really think too much of it at the time, but now having been in the trades for 18 years, I understand that it's pretty common to funnel women into flagger positions, which tend to be some of the more dangerous jobs and tend to be jobs with less advancement potential.

**What challenges have you faced as a woman in a trade that's overwhelming male — and what have you learned about how to cope with them?**

Oh gosh, that's like a three-hour-long conversation. But in our industry, any group that is not the predominant workforce is going to struggle with not having a natural and easy connection with training, with advancement, with referrals, with all kinds of stuff that automatically comes to folks who have connections. I think women and people of color suffer from not having those connections. I always say that women and people of color don't have any harder time doing the work, but they do get tired of doing the "second job" of having to prove yourself constantly on the job site, in terms of your capability, your experience, the ability for people to have confidence in you. Something that is really common in the trades is that no matter how long you've been in, people always assume that a woman is an apprentice. So I'd literally be running a high-

rise crew and people would ask me to talk to my journeyman, and I would say, "Sure, which one would you like?" referring to the many that were on my crew. As far as coping, it's based on creativity in whatever situation arises. It's important to recognize and understand who your allies are, because there's a lot of really great men in our craft who want women to be successful. Every woman also has to develop a little grit and creativity to deal with BS when it comes up.

**What kind of relationship does the regional council have with employers?**

It varies tremendously throughout our several hundred employers. There are certainly some employers who believe that the union is absolutely the way to go and wouldn't have it any other way, and want to make policies and contracts that their employees are going to be happy with. And there are employers who don't share that vision. So there's a pretty wide range.

**The Carpenters left the AFL-CIO in 2001, and there has sometimes been competition with other construction unions over craft jurisdiction. What are your thoughts on the union's relationship with the rest of the labor**



Turn to Page 11

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