

Equality Begins with Female Body

Learning self-confidence through training

BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

"Pile more of them on!" demanded a young woman whose shoulder already had a large stack of boards that the group was about to turn into a fence.

With the help of a former Olympian athlete, current students of nonprofit Oregon Tradeswomen Inc.'s Trades and Apprenticeship Career Class are not only mentally preparing for a career in construction, but are physically able to go to work.

"They're all really sore afterward, but they love it," says Katie Hughes, a youth-programming specialist for the organization.

Onlookers at the recent fence construction site on Northeast Seventh Avenue got a chance to see the extra sweat that women must endure to become craftspeople.

In an effort to be better prepared for an industry that pays women an average of 79 cents on the dollar paid to men, 19 women attending the state-certified pre-apprenticeship program received 10 hours of physical-fitness and strength training in the gym, in addition to the usual hands-on power-tool training, classroom instruction and field trips to local jobsites.

The strength-training component, taught by Stephanie Fisher, focused on upper-body strength, which Oregon Tradeswomen considers a key to success on construction sites.

"The gym is not just about strength—it's about confidence on the job. We're sending our women out strong and ready for work. Fitness is an essential part of our curriculum," said Dawn Jones, an instructor for the program.



PHOTO BY RAYMOND RENDLEMAN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

An Oregon Tradeswomen class gathers for a fence-building job on Northeast 7th and Failing Street. The local organization, with headquarters at Northeast 17th and Alberta Street, trains women entering the construction workforce.

The free seven-week program offered six times a year is designed to help women find highly skilled, high-wage careers in the building trades. Students receive 30 hours of professional instruction involving classroom time to learn about construction-meas-

urement techniques and fieldtrip time for hands-on residential or commercial experience at training sites like the one recently set up in northeast.

Oregon Tradeswomen has seen statewide improvement for women in the construction industry since it be-

gan activism during the 1980s.

"In the trades nationally, three percent of the people on the jobsite are women, but in Oregon it's 10 percent, and we'd like to think that we have something to do with it," says Hughes. The public is invited to an informa-

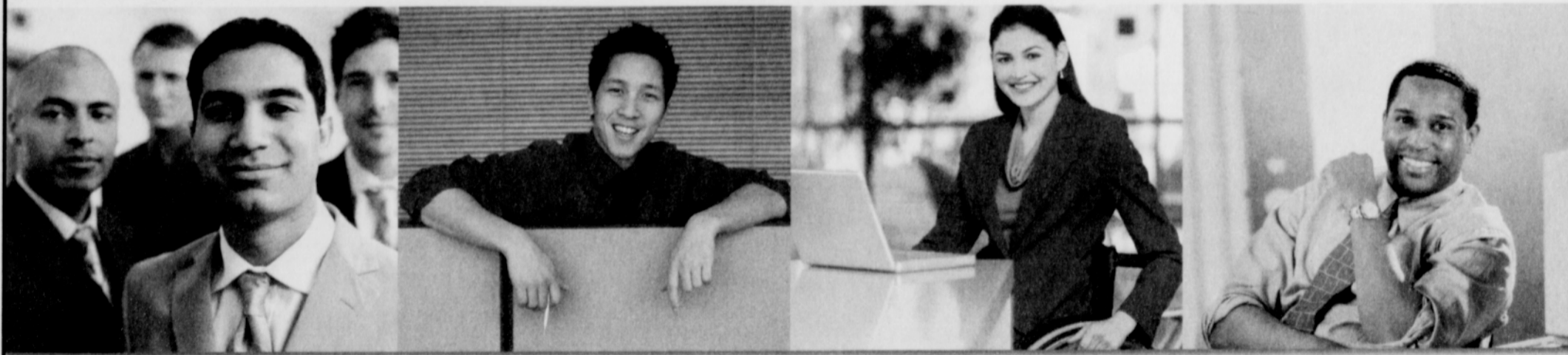
tional potluck Saturday, August 18 at Wilshire Park, Northeast 33rd and Skidmore, running approximately from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Other information sessions for

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