

Placing Women in Good Paying Jobs

Group offers pre-apprentice training

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

When Alexandra Brucculeri returned from the Peace Corp all she could find was low-paying nanny work. So she decided to pursue a course few women might consider: carpentry.

Although Brucculeri chose an unconventional vocation, she had help.

People typically associate blue-collar construction jobs with salty Carhartt-clad men. However, Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. has been working since 1989 to change that perception by helping women break into well-paying trades.

It offers a pre-apprentice training program that teaches women everything from how to swing a hammer to basic work site etiquette.

After completing their stints as trainees, Oregon Tradeswomen helps place them in an apprenticeship program that puts them on the fast track to landing good-paying blue-collar jobs as mechanics, plumbers, electricians, and other vocations.

"It's accessible," said Brucculeri of why she signed up with the program.

On a soggy morning in northeast Portland, women clad in work boots and hard hats lug long wooden boards across the sawdust-covered floor. The screech of electric drills and the rhythm of hammers pounding nails into wood saturate the air as trainees with Oregon Tradeswomen Inc. renovate a building for JOIN, a non-profit organization that advocates for the homeless.



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Amy James-Neel (from left), an instructor with Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc., goes over a blueprint with two trainees, Carol Caplinger and Alexandra Brucculeri.

These are living wage jobs. This about economic justice.

— Amy James-Neel, Instructor

Two women erect a metal frame for a wall while Amy James-Neel, an instructor, looks over their shoulders to make sure it's plumb. James-Neel explains that training women for these jobs can be

a challenge.

Young girls aren't encouraged to learn how to use tools, said James-Neel, who added that she has had to prove herself on job sites while working as a carpenter. But as she's watched her trainees get good jobs as plumbers and electricians, she realized it's worth it.

"These are living wage jobs," she said. "This about economic justice."

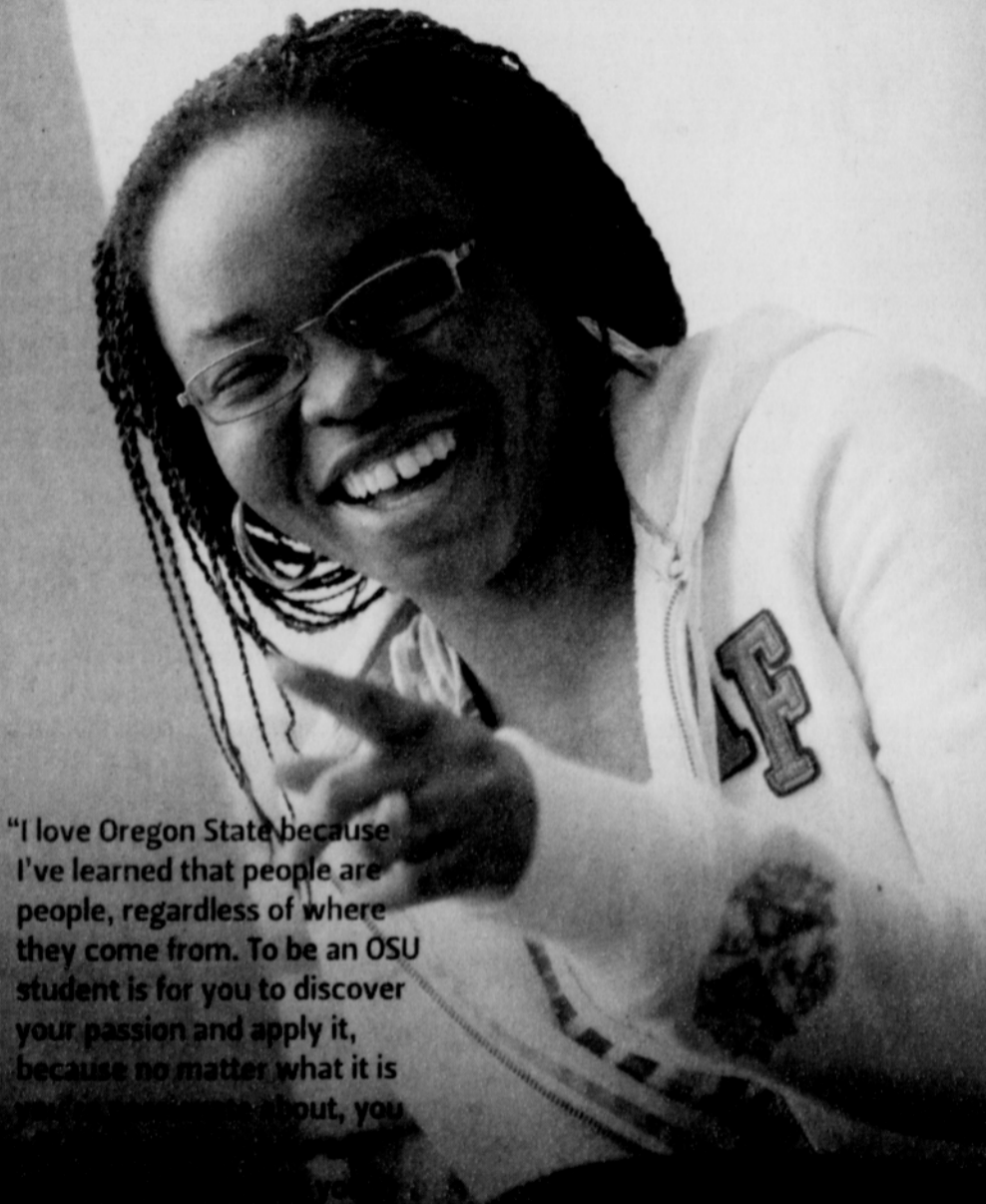
According to the Bureau of

Labor Statistics, the median wage for a childcare worker (a job traditionally filled with women) is \$9.12 an hour. An electrician or carpenter can expect to make between \$18 and \$22 an hour. However, labor bureau studies still show that men dominate these industries.

But that's not stopping Melissa Jackson, who used to work in

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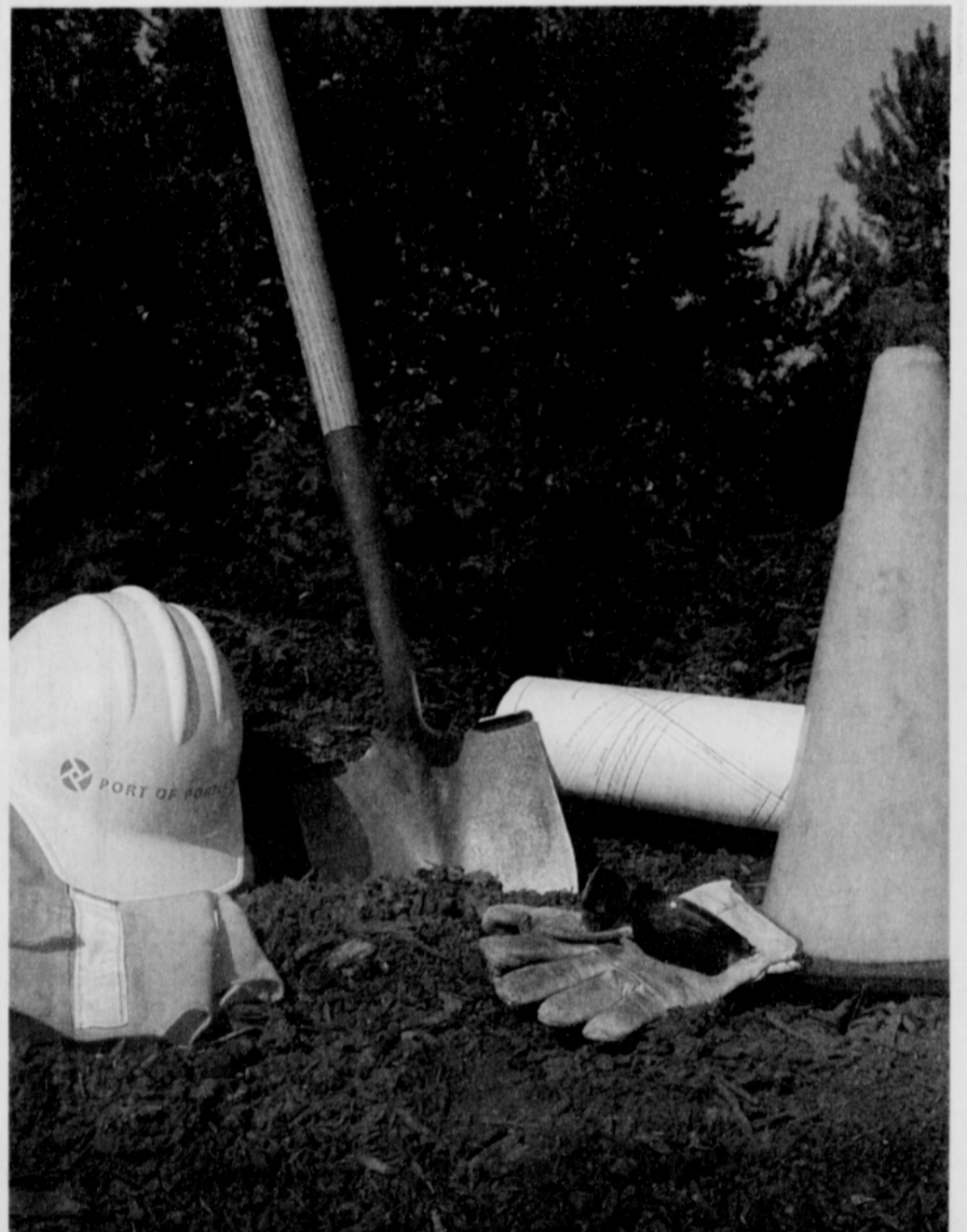


"I love Oregon State because I've learned that people are people, regardless of where they come from. To be an OSU student is for you to discover your passion and apply it, because no matter what it is, when you talk about, you

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