

Contractor Lady Renovates PCC Classrooms

Sharon Maxwell-Hendricks comes full circle from student to career

Sharon Maxwell-Hendricks is known as The Contractor Lady. And this summer, she returned to the place where she began her career in the construction industry, Portland Community College.

"This is definitely coming full circle," said Maxwell-Hendricks, who completed the Cascade Skill Center's Construction Trades Program and an associate's degree in business and political science more than 20 years ago.

"This is my neighborhood where I was born and raised. People know me in the community as a general contractor, or The Contractor Lady. I have a passion for what I'm doing. I enjoy the fact that my vision is coming true to be able to employ people from the community, and also to make connections in the trades for the people of color who traditionally are under-utilized in this workforce."

As part of a property tax bond levy to expand and renovate facilities, Maxwell-Hendricks Boanerges Group, a general contractor based on North Vancouver Avenue was selected to remodel two classrooms in Jackson Hall and one in the Student Services Building on the Cascade Campus.

Her company renovated the rooms so that PCC can replace existing hard-wired computer workstations with standard classroom tables, chairs and Netbooks, lightweight, inexpensive, wireless laptop computers. The Netbook technology is a pilot project to take advantage of this new flexible classroom

space to serve the growing number of students on campus.

Instructors will distribute Netbooks to students when needed, or store them in a locked cart in the classrooms when not in use. Each cart holds 24 laptops and plugs into the wall to recharge batteries for the next class. The new room configurations can accommodate between 24 to 38 students.

The previous configuration of computer labs limited the type of instruction in the classroom and restricted an instructor's ability to use large or small work groups and different classroom seating arrangements.

Maxwell-Hendricks said working with PCC was an opportunity to showcase her company's work.

"It allows people to see a small business, a women-owned and African-American-owned business, in action. That definitely does something to people in the community who see folks they know doing the work."

Maxwell-Hendricks has owned Boanerges Group for 13 years and the majority of her business is in the neighborhood where she grew up. The company handles multiple projects at one time and is involved in as many as 200 projects per year. With 50 employees, she tries to find enough work to lessen the blow in the off-season from December through February, so she doesn't have to let anyone go.

"We're trying to build our capacity as a company so that we're more in control of the work so we can



The Contractor Lady graduated from PCC's construction trade program 20 years ago and is now owns her own construction agency. Her firm, the Boanerges Group, recently finished work on a remodeling project at the Cascade Campus.

create better opportunities to keep our employees working all year around," said Maxwell-Hendricks. "The PCC job has been a huge opportunity for us as a business because we're located right here in North Portland and the majority of our workforce lives and works here. As a company our size, we need to have a continuum of work so we can keep the same workforce going. A project this size helps that to happen."

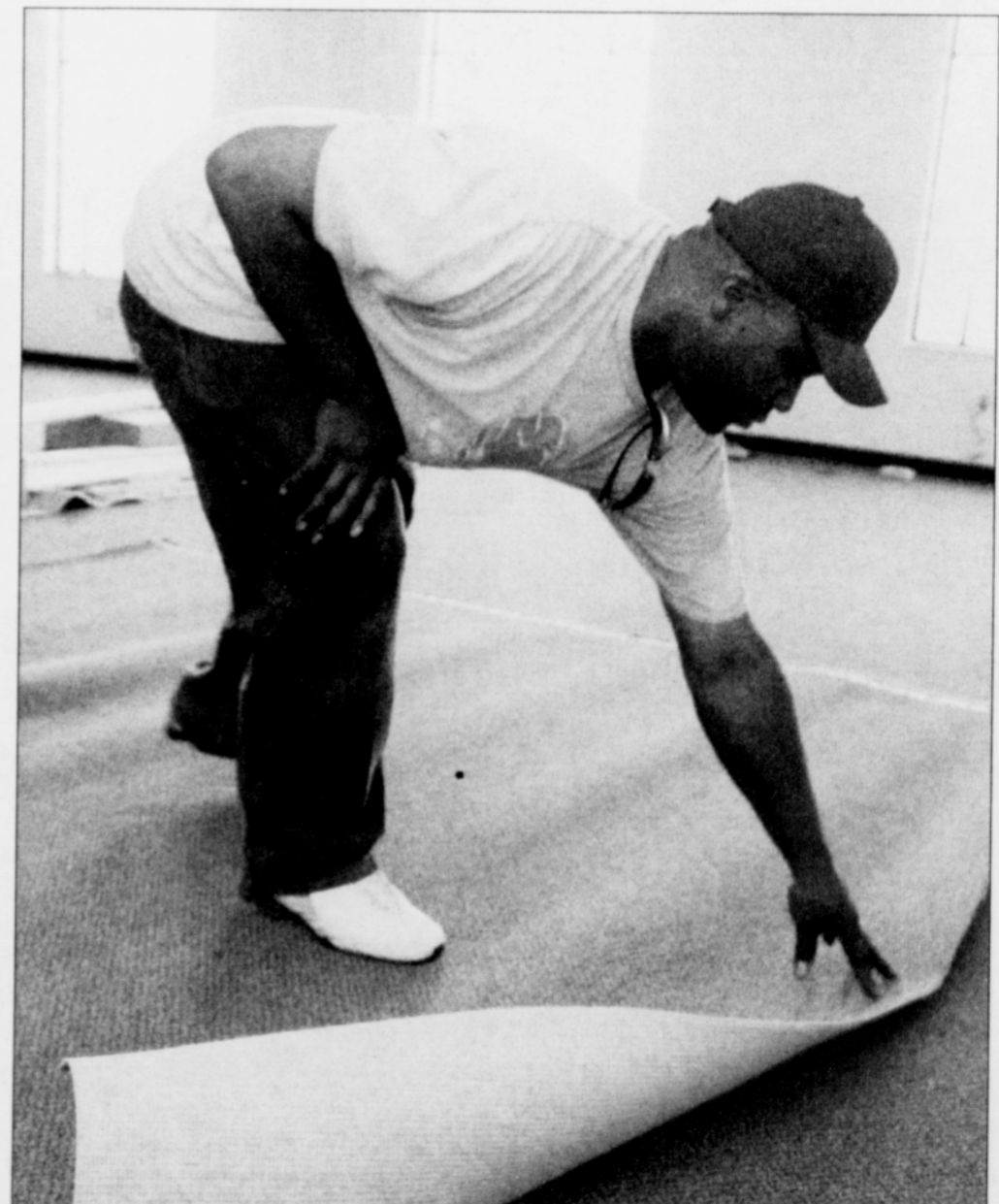
Community is a big part of what Maxwell-Hendricks does. For years she toiled as a sprinkler fitter and

journeyman in neighborhood projects like the Rose Quarter, bucking the trends of being female and a minority in a mostly white, male workforce. But today, she hasn't lost that sense of community and uses her company to spread the word of opportunity to people in North Portland, including hosting a summer work program where she brings youths from the community to her projects not only to work, but to see their potential.

"It's a great way to connect their education to career choices and see the opportunities for their future," she said. "That was part of my vision for me in getting into construction; to be part of the rebuilding of the community when it had gone through such a blight. When I went through the training at PCC I took the courses that would allow me to start my own construction company. That gave me a hope, a vision that one day I would own my business."



Sharon Maxwell-Hendricks, the locally-owned owner of the Boanerges Group, a contracting agency with 50 employees, inspects remodeling work her firm completed on the Cascade Campus of Portland Community College in north Portland.



Boanerges Group field superintendent Bart Jenkins inspects the new carpeting for of the Student Services Building at Portland Community College's Cascade Campus.