



For Immediate Release

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Chicago Women in Trades Receives Unprecedented Grant of \$2.1 Million to Encourage and Train Women in the Skilled Construction Trades

CHICAGO, IL (October 4, 2004) – For a quarter of a century Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) has helped women gain access and find success in high-wage, high-skill jobs in the construction trades. Nontraditional occupations offer women wages and benefits far exceeding wages in female dominated fields and combat the persistent wage gap between men and women’s earnings. A journey level tradeswomen earns approximately three-and-a-half times the wage of a childcare worker, a job typically filled by women.

CWIT anticipates significantly expanding the numbers of women they reach and support through an unprecedented \$2.1 million grant to the organization announced Monday by the U.S. Department of Labor.

The Women in Skilled Trades (WIST) project, the first-ever of its kind to receive a national grant, was announced this afternoon at the Elk Grove Village Training Facility of the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters, which has long worked with CWIT. U.S. Department of Labor Assistant Secretary Emily Stover DeRocco presented the grant to Lauren Sugerman, founder and president of Chicago Women in Trades, and Geri Harston, board chair of the CWIT.

“Women come to us looking to gain access to high-wage jobs in a key sector of our state’s economy. WIST will expand the work we do throughout the northeastern region of the state,” said Lauren Sugerman, president of CWIT. “This program will ensure that women, an untapped labor pool, have the necessary access and training to secure highly skilled, good quality positions, and the support system to allow them to succeed in those positions. The construction industry and our society as a whole benefits each time an additional tradeswoman is trained and is at work in our community.”

WIST will create a vast network of community and public partnerships to assemble a bridge to construction jobs that provide self-sufficient wages. While the skilled trades have been stable and well-paying options for men for centuries, women, despite their increased numbers

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in the general workforce have not seen the trades as an option. In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, while women account for less than 3% of high-wage skilled trades jobs, they compose more than 60% of minimum wage employees. CWIT has worked to eliminate the barriers normally associated with women entering the skilled trades – from lack of knowledge of opportunities, entry requirements and support during rigorous training programs.

“This nearly \$2.1 million grant will help train women for good paying jobs in the construction industry which is desperately seeking workers,” said U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao. “There is a shortage of skilled workers in our country, and this grant supports the Administration's commitment on training workers to help them access good paying jobs in high growth industries.”

Through the three year grant, CWIT is building a network comprised of the Metro Chicago Workforce Boards, the Building and Construction Trades Councils of Chicago and surrounding counties, the Construction Industry Service Corporation, the Builders Association, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Illinois Department of Labor, and 21 community colleges and 19 career centers to do outreach and training. In addition, the program will assess the effectiveness of outreach, training and industry placements throughout the three-year process to determine best practices and systemic improvements.

Esther Lopez, Governor Blagojevich's Chief of Staff for Labor and Professional Regulation said the project is great for Illinois. “This project will make Illinois a leader in the fight against the wage gap that keeps women poor and underemployed. The state's workforce development system will benefit from the collaborative project and offer a model to other regions of the state interested in replicating CWIT's success,” said Lopez.

“Always a steadfast and effective partner in our quest to attract more women and minorities to the trades, this is a hard-working and dedicated organization quite deserving of this support,” stated Martin Umlauf president of Chicago Regional Council of Carpenters. “Working together through the Women in Skilled Trades program, we are confident that the numbers of women in our ranks will grow and that the commercial and residential builders of Illinois will enjoy the benefits of our efforts.”

Currently, the organization works locally through two training programs along with a variety of outreach and education activities. **Tradeswomen of Tomorrow** offers nontraditional career awareness and hands-on exploration for elementary school girls and support and mentoring project with Chicago Public high school girls in nontraditional vocational classes. CWIT's core program, the **Technical Opportunities Program**, is a pre-apprenticeship training for adult women providing instruction in test preparation, basic technical skills, physical fitness, hands-on experience, and job readiness. This twelve-week, 170 hour, hands-on course offered in collaboration with a local city college, trains 80 to 90 women annually in three sessions. The program averages a 70% placement rate. In 2004, the program assisted over 150 women to apply for apprenticeships, of whom 91 were accepted into apprenticeship programs and other nontraditional occupations in manufacturing and transportation at an average wage exceeding \$13 per hour.

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The northeast Illinois construction industry will face a significant shortage of skilled labor in the future, adding 5,400 new positions annually and requiring a total of 38,000 workers in the next decade. While some workers are changing careers, many workers will be retiring, without sufficient numbers of replacement workers projected to enter apprenticeships. Between 1988 and 1997, the percentage of skilled construction workers between the ages of 25 and 34 declined from 37.5 percent to 28.5 percent while the percentage of those between the ages of 35 and 44 jumped from 22 percent to 31.5 percent over the same period, according to the Associated General Contractors of America.

Kina McAfee, CWIT board co-chair and a teacher at the Chicago Regional Council of Carpenter's Apprenticeship and Training program, host of today's ceremony, offered her insight into the impact of the project. "Once women are trained and prepared for careers in the trades, they will find the work satisfying and financially rewarding, just as I have found in my career," said McAfee.

CWIT is a nonprofit organization committed to improving women's economic equity by increasing the number of women working in well-paid, skilled trade jobs traditionally held by men. For more information, visit www.cwit2.org.

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