

National Association of Women in Construction Space Coast connects members with industry resources, professional development, and networking opportunities

By Ken Datzman

Now is the perfect time for women to consider a career in the \$2.1 trillion construction industry.

The employment opportunities, across a spectrum of positions, have never been better. And, according to industry forecasts, the demand for skilled trades is only going to increase in the years ahead. As the construction industry faces a growing workforce shortage, it sees the recruitment of more women as one of the solutions.

“The opportunities today for women to build careers in the construction industry are plentiful,” said Kate Howick, president of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) Space Coast Chapter 355. “Our organization is working to get the word out that there is a viable career path in construction for women.

“Construction is not just pick up a hammer and off you go. There are so many various aspects to the industry. Construction jobs for women include project management, estimating, project accountant, administration, marketing, electrician, safety and compliance, and executive leadership. The different skill sets and teamwork make it all come together on a project.”

Job openings in the construction industry are near record levels, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Currently, there are about 450,000 job openings in construction, much higher than the average number of job openings in that industry in the last seven years.

Women make up 9.9 percent of the construction industry in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That percentage represents 1.1 million women in construction jobs. Sales and office occupations employ the largest number of women within the construction industry.

The construction industry will need to attract an estimated 501,000 workers on top of the normal pace of hiring in 2024 to meet the demand for labor, according to a proprietary model developed by the Associated Builders and Contractors. In 2025, the industry will need to bring in nearly 445,000 new workers in addition to the normal hiring to meet industry demand.

NAWIC was founded in 1953 by 16 women in the construction industry to create a support network. It gained its national charter in 1955.

The NAWIC Space Coast, in its 26th year, is one of more than 115 NAWIC chapters around the nation. The chapter provides women in construction with support, networking and mentorship, career development opportunities, leadership training, and more.

Certification programs are offered through the NAWIC Education Foundation. The certifications include Estimating and Scheduling Practitioner, Construction Bookkeeping Technician, Construction Document Technician, and Construction Industry Specialist.

“The certification programs help people build their knowledge and skills in the industry,” said Howick. “The programs are available to members and also to people outside of membership.”

In addition to Howick, the NAWIC Space Coast leadership team includes: Terri Hart, vice president, V.A. Paving Inc.; Teri Kelly, secretary, United Rentals; Sheri La Shier, treasurer, Maverick Constructors LLC; Cherly Foley, director, Florida Surety Bonds; Terri Holmes, director, David Boland Inc.; Donna Skarosi, director, David Boland Inc.; and Julie Gleason, immediate past president, Cemex.



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Kate Howick is president of the National Association of Women in Construction Space Coast Chapter 355. There are more than 115 chapters nationwide. The local chapter is 26 years old. The organization is an advocate for women to pursue careers in the construction industry, where jobs are plentiful across many occupations, from project managers and engineers to sales and accounting. Howick is director of operations at Danella Companies in Melbourne, which provides construction services to the utility industry. Howick is a former educator and U.S. Army veteran.

Women working in construction are eligible for NAWIC membership, including women builders in the trades, project management, marketing, and administration. Women in industries that serve construction businesses — such as finance, legal, insurance, and other complimentary companies including interior design firms — are also welcome. There are various types of chapter memberships, including Active, Corporate, Associate, Student, and Retired.

The local group meets once a month at different sites around the county. “We have a long county (72 miles),” said Howick. “When we host our chapter meetings, it is like taking a culinary tour of Brevard, meaning that our dinner meetings are held at different restaurants and establishments throughout Brevard.”

So far this year the venues have included Dixie Crossroads Seafood Restaurant and More in Titusville, Brano’s Italian Grill in Cocoa Beach, and Frankie’s Wings and Things in Melbourne.

The meetings feature a speaker. “These are professionals within the county who address the members on a construction-related topic. We try to find local experts who can provide insight and information and share it with our members. There are professional development opportunities at these meetings,” she said.

The next membership meeting is set for Thursday, May 2, at Moon Hut in Cape Canaveral. The meeting is from 6–8 p.m. The address is 7802 N. Atlantic Ave.

To learn more about membership, visit www.NAWICSpaceCoastFL.org.

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The local chapter has 33 members and is growing. “It’s a good mix of members,” said Howick, director of operations at Danella Companies in Melbourne, which provides construction services to the utility industry. “The chapter members include businessowners, project managers, and engineers, as well as people working in accounting, administration, sales, human resources, training, and other fields. We have a diverse skill-set within our member ranks.”

She added, “The interesting thing about the construction industry is that everyone seems to have made a different journey to this career.”

Howick herself is a former educator. She taught mathematics for 12 years at Viera High School. She taught everything from geometry to calculus.

“But I took a detour, joining the Army, before going to college, becoming a teacher and then changing careers and getting into the construction industry,” she said.

Howick grew up in a construction-oriented family. Her mother, Kim Brown, was the chief executive officer at Boys Electrical Contractors LLC for many years. She recently retired as CEO.

After graduating from Cocoa High School, Howick enlisted in the U.S. Army and served three years. “I thought I was going to travel the world, but ended up in Fort Benning, Georgia, not far from home. I was a petroleum supply specialist. I drove a truck, as well as other vehicles. This was in the mid-1990s and not many women in the Army were petroleum supply specialists. I have always liked being in the ‘boys world.’ That has been a niche for me.”

Her first job out of the Army was working for Ivey’s Construction Inc. on Merritt Island. “In the early 2000s, my mother and I attended a NAWIC meeting. I was part of Ivey’s Construction team at the time. That was my first experience with NAWIC. I enjoyed it and learned some things.”

Howick used the GI Bill to attend college. She earned her bachelor’s degree in mathematics education from the University of Central Florida and has a master’s degree in education for Walden University. Howick also earned the Project Management Professional certification awarded by the Project Management Institute.

Now as president of NAWIC Space Coast, Howick is looking to raise the nonprofit organization’s visibility in the community and inform more women about careers in construction.

“It is an inspiring career path. More women need to think about this field as a career. We are reaching out to students in Brevard. We offer a \$2,000 scholarship through the Brevard Schools Foundation. The application window is January through March,” said Howick.

She said the scholarship award “targets a high school senior who is interested in venturing into the world of construction as a career, be it engineering, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, and other areas, or any of the trades. The scholarship is to attend college, a community college, or attend a trade school.”

Additionally, the NAWIC Founders’ Scholarship Foundation assists in providing the construction industry with trained employees through higher education, either college or trade school.

Each year, the Founders’ Scholarship Foundation awards more than \$100,000 to worthy recipients in construction-related programs. Award amounts range from \$500 to \$2,500. To learn more, email NFSF@nawic.org.

The local chapter does community outreach with elementary students. The NAWIC takes part in the annual “Block Kids” construction challenge. “This is a

national competition for students in kindergarten through sixth grade,” said Howick. “Last year we partnered with the Central Florida Girl Scouts at their STEM weekend event. The students compete and try to advance to the regional and national levels for Block Kids.”

The competition is designed to introduce them to construction careers. The students are given various materials — mainly LEGO — to complete a construction-related project in under an hour.

“They are provided with a certain number of blocks of different sizes and shapes. They have a rock, a string, and a piece of foil. Their goal is to build something. To hear the inspiration behind their build and to hear their details was remarkable. Everyone involved with Block Kids had a lot of fun.”

She said about 60 Girl Scouts participated in the Block Kids program last year.

“There are other programs that chapters around the nation have successfully implemented and we are looking at some of them. We need to have the resources and funding in place to get them off the ground. We are a nonprofit.”

Recently, the local chapter celebrated “Women in Construction Week,” a national event that the NAWIC has held since 1998. The event serves as a platform to highlight the strides made by women in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Each year, chapters and companies across the country recognize the event through raising awareness about the opportunities in construction, and giving back to their communities. NAWIC Space Coast hosted various events March 3–9 around the county as it marked Women in Construction Week.

On the community-service side, the local chapter “built planters and did landscaping for the Women’s Center in Titusville,” said Howick, adding that members of the chapter are actively involved in helping nonprofits, including Aging Matters in Brevard’s Meals on Wheels program and Take Stock in Children, a program of the Brevard Schools Foundation.

“Helping build communities through member volunteerism is part of our mission as an organization,” said Howick. “We are empowered and inspired by the charitable work we do in the community.”

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