

Women gaining traction in trades

By **STEVE MacNAULL** Oct 21

The Daily Courier

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As the only women on construction sites, Casey King and Sarah Rea have heard their fair share of whistles, cat calls, lewd and crude comments.

"You have to have a thick skin," said Rea, an apprentice electrician who attended the recent Empowering Women in Trades conference at Kelowna's Okanagan College.

"I either ignore the whistles or whistle right back. It usually calms down once the guys know I'm there to work and I do a good job."

King, a carpentry apprentice, puts men behaving badly in their place right away.

"Women who work in the trades have to be a particular personality," she said.

"They have to be prepared for some harassment and have it not bother them. I tell them I'm there to work and then proceed to do a great job. And I never date a guy from work." The Empowering Women in Trades event brought together women apprentices, tradespeople, employers and college officials.

"We're running the \$1.3 million Women in Trades pilot project to get more women into the trades," said college trades and apprenticeship program administrator Nancy Darling.

"Since March, we've enrolled 135 women in trades programs and expect to have 200 by the time the pilot closes in March 2010."

The pilot will go as far as paying the woman's

tuition, books, tools, clothing and even a transportation allowance.

However, the pilot project is just one part of a comprehensive plan to get women into the trades, where the money is traditionally better than the secretarial pool.

A decade ago, only four per cent of the enrollment in trades programs — including the traditionally female-heavy hairdressing and culinary trades courses — were women.

Today, women make up 25 per cent of the enrollment, including trades that were previously men-only, such as carpentry, electrical, welding, automotive repair and heavy equipment.

"I actually started out in hairdressing school," King, 23, said with a laugh.

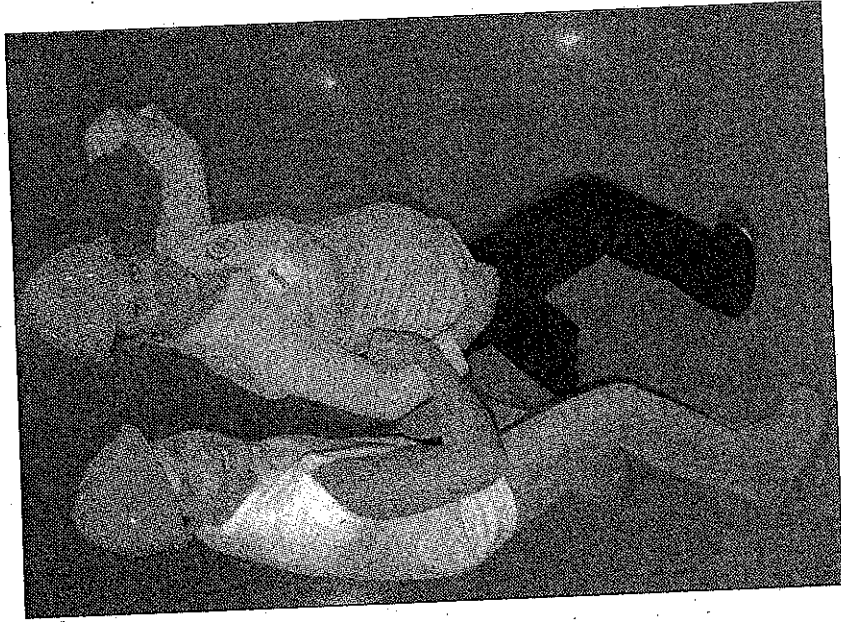
"But I didn't like the setting, the politics. I actually prefer to work with men rather than women."

As a third-year carpentry apprentice making concrete forms for Bayline Construction in Coquitlam, King likes working with her hands, the sense of accomplishment when giant foundations are formed and making good money.

Third-year apprentice electrician Rea is currently 5 1/2-months pregnant and taking a break from her work at Horizon Electric in Kelowna.

"I love working with my hands and with tools," she said.

"It's satisfying to wire a house or put in all the data lines for a business."



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Casey King, left, a carpentry apprentice, and 5 1/2 month pregnant Sarah Rea, an apprentice electrician, attended the recent Empowering Women in Trades conference at Kelowna's Okanagan College.