As perceptions change and women see construction work as a rewarding, well-paying option, plentiful employment opportunities await women willing to break down the barriers.

YES WE CAN!

Naugatuck High Wraps
My Days at O&G: Lorel Purcell
Building Communities
Growing up surrounded by the construction industry, I remember there weren’t many women around the job sites my dad or my grandfather would bring me to. I would hear stories about superintendents and foremen – all of them men – accomplishing amazing things, and I’d also overhear stories I can only categorize as “for boys only.” I remember questioning ever being a part of any of it.

My dad, however, had other plans for me. He was always looking for opportunities to get me involved in the things he believed I would love if I gave them a try. He had to push me to join an all-boys hockey team when I was eight. Twelve years later, after my seasons playing ice hockey on the Colgate University women’s varsity team had ended, hockey had become a popular women’s sport. Today my daughter is one of eight girls on her team and it’s become commonplace to talk about women and ice hockey.

In construction, women are making advances as well.

When I began working for the company, on the Sarah J. Rawson Elementary School in Hartford in the fall of 2004, there were only two other women in field management positions at O&G. It felt a little like joining an all-boys ice hockey team all over again. Today more and more women are appearing on our job sites in trade and management capacities. In fact, of the 32 hires in the Building Group over the past five years, nine of them were women in field management positions. That represents 28% of our total hires. The work is challenging and it demands more than forty-hour workweeks. I applaud these women (and their male counterparts, too) for their work ethic and many contributions. I am extremely proud of what I have seen happening at O&G.

Historically the presence of women in trades or construction management positions nationwide has been low. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, our percentage in the construction workforce in 2015 was just 7% of the total, or about 929,000 women.

We are seeing colleges and trade schools responding to this imbalance, encouraging women to pursue careers in construction and technical specialties. I’m hopeful, as stereotypes are fading and younger girls in middle and high schools are realizing they can succeed in the field, that we will continue to see more women joining the construction workforce.

There is certainly a lot of opportunity awaiting them. Companies across America, including ours, are eager to fill positions with qualified women. We are enthusiastic recruiters at the college level. We encourage teens at high school career days. We also invest in long-term, on-site efforts like the successful “Platt Builds” program at Orville H. Platt High School in Meriden that immerse interested boys and girls in the building process.

What I didn’t know I’d find when I started at O&G in 2004 was that I’d witness a rise in the number of women in construction that paralleled the rise of women playing ice hockey when I was younger. The positive change over the years in the sheer numbers, the attractiveness as a career, and the “enlightened” men who are supportive of women confirms that we are on the right track.

I write this letter to honor National Women in Construction Week, March 6th to 12th. We believe it is important to recognize the gains that women have made, and will continue to make, in our industry and at O&G.

Christina Oneglia Rossi
Project Manager, Special Projects Group
YES WE CAN!

The historically low participation of women in construction is slowly yielding to growth as stereotypes fade and awareness builds.

Tracy Garofalo will tell you that working in construction was never on her radar growing up. Secretary, waitress, painter—these were the jobs she held, switching from one to the next but not finding satisfaction. In 1989, in her twenties and unfulfilled, she applied to both the local post office and to a contractor looking for carpenters, deciding she’d go with the first offer she got. And that’s how the work she had never even considered has turned out to be a perfect-fit career.

Garofalo has always had a steady energy about her, prefers being outdoors, was a rock climber undeterred by heights and challenges, and felt satisfaction working with her hands. Beginning with an apprenticeship in 1989, and moving to O&G in 1999, she has been outside working as a journeyman carpenter ever since. “I just didn’t ever think of it before,” she says.

That could summarize the state of affairs for women in construction today: a longstanding lack of awareness is gradually giving way to the realization that women can, in fact, perform at high levels and earn a good living in the construction industry. They can, in fact, do the work that had been always assumed to be the exclusive domain of men. They can excel at work they had never considered.

Carpenter Tracy Garofalo on I-95 at the New Haven Joint Venture
At O&G, jobs that support the field work are numerous and often filled by women: contracts, billing and receiving, insurances, claims, human resources, IT, document control, safety and more. There are the company’s retail stores with saleswomen and counter help, and for the quarries and plants scale house operators and dispatchers and drivers. But openings are often unfilled for the women who chose field work as laborers, journeymen, engineers, foremen, superintendents and project managers, drivers and equipment operators.

In America, using the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 2015, only 7% of people employed in construction are women – this at a time when more than 70 million women are seeking work.

Brian Turmail is Public Affairs Director at the Associated General Contractors of America. He sees many firms wanting to hire women. “It’s not a question of folks not wanting women,” he says, “it’s women not wanting to work in construction.”

The biggest employment paradigm shift in America happened when we entered World War II. Women had to fill 16 million jobs vacated by men headed for military service. With participation rates of working-age men dropping and baby boomers retiring en masse today, women may again be our greatest untapped resource to fill the thinning ranks. The Bureau of Labor Statistics finds that women in construction are among the most fairly compensated, earning an average of 93.4% of what men do, compared to an 82% average across all other industries.

So why the low participation in construction, even in high-paying jobs with benefit packages that don’t require a college degree?

It could be due in part to recruiting that is stuck aiming at men. Or the family of stereotypes that say women aren’t cut out for heavy construction, that work is dangerous and unsafe, that women will be belittled and sexually harassed at work sites.

But perhaps, at its root, it’s image. Perhaps the quickest means to overcome misperceptions is parents and counselors at middle and high schools seeing construction as viable for women and begin steering young ladies that way.

“It’s a battle of perception,” says Building Division Vice President Aaron Mednick. “Most parents don’t know that their daughter can pursue a rewarding career in construction.” But that is changing. With a pool of talented women gradually deepening, O&G has been able to hire more women in the last five years than it had in the prior ten. “Women need to know they’re in high demand in construction,” says Mednick.

The best spokespersons for working in construction are other women who have already succeeded in the field. “A lot of times, we think of heavy lifting – the labor side of it – but that doesn’t represent the full spectrum of jobs,” says Jennifer Willkerson of the National Center for Construction Education and Research. “Once women know there’s a place for them, and it’s something they really can do well, they love it.”

Take Gina Palano, a young project engineer at O&G. Building was front of mind early on. She grew up around trades: her father and grandfather were Rhode Island masons. That immersion gave her an attachment to building and a joy in seeing things made by hand. While in college Palano co-opped with a regional construction firm and was hired by them when she graduated with an engineering technology degree. In Palano’s experience, her work has taken place on a level playing field. “It was a little daunting at first, being the only woman on a job site. There were uncomfortable moments like

left to right, top to bottom Some of O&G’s women who work in the field: Debbie Ackerman, heavy haul truck driver Kim Paolino, apprentice laborer Melissa Castro, project manager Toya Rivers, carpenter Diane Maltese, project engineer Carrie Rux, document control specialist Robin Listorti, project engineer Danielle Taylor, carpenter Deb Mittica, laborer Diana Mileski and project engineer Gina Palano.

“Women need to know they’re in high demand in construction.”

Aaron Mednick, Vice President Building Division
my first project meeting and being the only woman at the table though after the second or third meeting I felt totally comfortable. I have to say that I’ve been treated very fairly,” she says.

A document control specialist in the Heavy Civil Division at the New Haven Joint Venture, Robin Listorti understands that women may need to prove to the doubting Thomases that they can hold their own in a male-dominated industry. But to her, male versus female has been a non-issue. “There are a lot of women on this job and they get a lot of respect. O&G has great guys. The company has a knack for picking good people, men and women. Women here are treated no differently than men.”

Debbie Ackerman always liked working with her hands. She transitioned out of a 19-year career in factory machining and tool-and-die making to join the company in 1999. She eventually became O&G’s first female labor foreman. “O&G was looking for girls, I wanted out of being stuck inside a shop, so I applied,” she says. Seventeen years later, she is active everywhere on a job site, working mostly with men and helping things get built. “When I started I saw you have to earn respect no matter who you are. You need to pull your weight and be durable. You need to show you’re knowledgeable and teachable, then people will work with you.” She recalls being new and handed a difficult situation with no direction as to how to resolve it. It was a test, she saw afterwards. Using common sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare sense she took care of it and her stock rose. She dismisses the rare

The National Association of Women in Construction promotes its annual Women in Construction Week to get the word out to the culture, and to women and girls especially, that construction is a real and profitable career choice. This year WIC Week ran from March 6 to 12.
For Naugatuck High School Principal Janice Saam it was a first. “No one here had any idea of the impact building and renovating would have. If it hadn’t been for Lorel in preconstruction and then Joe, Roger and Mike* being so responsive to all our needs, and talking me off the ledge some days, I don’t think we could have gotten through this major project so smoothly. Their workmanship was also great. They were right on top of the work and they took every detail seriously.” The school’s auditorium, shown here, is a spectacular highlight of the project. Other features at the 331,000SF school on its 14-acre site include Veterans’ Field and Sports Complex, a greenhouse, science labs, band room, chorus room, and more.

* Lorel Purcell, Joe Vetro, Roger Johnson and Mike Brennan
The recently dedicated Naugatuck High School auditorium awaits decades of school and community functions. Designed by architect Kaestle Boos Associates, the 665-seat facility features high-end theatrical production amenities and energy-efficient lighting.

TV production studio, computer labs, kitchen, cafeteria, pool, two gymnasiums and numerous other structural and decorative upgrades throughout. The Naugatuck Board of Education also now resides on the campus at the school’s southernmost wing. O&G concluded work at the end of March.
What’s your “safety perspective?”

Our perspective on life forms and changes based on the people we interact with and the experiences we have, both good and bad. Our perspective reflects who we are and reveals why we act the way we do.

Whether or not we are aware of it, we all have a perspective on safety, from as routine a thing as using a kitchen knife or driving to the job, to the hazardous skilled work we perform every day.

Over the course of your life your perspective has been shaped by parents, siblings, loved ones, teachers and co-workers. Take driving. If you were held accountable for safe driving by a parent, that shaped your perspective on the topic.

Some of us have had our perspective shaped by tragedy or injury (see Caswell’s story, below). Your safe driving today could be the result of luck the day you walked away from a severe accident and decided to no longer speed or text while behind the wheel.

Entering the safety profession I did not anticipate that my perspective would change so significantly after working in construction. For the last 12 years I have seen more injuries and accidents than I thought I ever would. Each presents a unique lesson, often on details we missed or seemingly minor things we let slide until the day they caught up with us. Unlike classroom training, this training comes with great hardship for co-workers, companies and loved ones.

Don’t get me wrong: freak accidents do happen but they are not the norm. The majority of accidents are preventable. As a group we need to shape our perspective so all of us can continue to return home each night to the ones we love.

For those of you who have had your safety perspective shaped by accidents or tragedy, I hope you do not forget the lessons learned. For anyone who hasn’t had their perspective changed by an event, learn from those who have and be pro-active with safety lest you become a statistic. Share your perspective with loved ones and co-workers and help shape what they believe and how they act.

Don’t deviate from your plan

Adapted from a “Toolbox Talk” by Safety Manager Caswell Sewell

In October of 2011, I was helping a friend cut a tree I could see would pose an issue with the way large branches hung over the house. My friend had climbed up and straddled a large branch to tie a rope so I could pull it away from the house.

That’s when the plan started to change. Instead of climbing back down to cut the tree he decided to make the cut while straddling the branch. When he asked me to tie a rope to the saw so he could lift it up I told him I was not comfortable with him cutting the branch that way. After a back and forth discussion I gave in. It was a decision I will regret for the rest of my life.

As he cut the branch it split, sprang back and struck him in the face. I watched him fall 15 feet to the ground and saw the running saw land on top of him. I ran to him and knocked the saw away. He was not breathing. His face was severely fractured. I began performing CPR when he coughed.

“Thank God!” I sighed.

My friend is alive because I knew and was able to perform CPR. But he nearly died because I gave him permission to deviate from the plan.

Safety only works if you are not afraid to say “NO!” to changes in a plan that youknow could endanger life or limb.

Have a plan to perform a task safely and do not deviate.
You could say Lorel Purcell is a construction first responder. When the Building Division is selected to manage a construction project, it’s on her shoulders as the Division’s sole pre-construction manager to chart a course for the work for years to come. “I’m involved in setting up the degree to which the project will succeed,” she says, “which I think is why not too many people want to do what I do.”

Every strategic decision Purcell makes carries through the duration of a job. It’s a responsibility that draws on her field experience and intuition, requiring a tough hide as well. “You’ve got to be able to live with the fact that you can’t get every detail right every time,” she says. “I try to catch everything but I’m not perfect – and I can work with that.”

Back in her days as a project manager she found herself critiquing plans. “I’d say, ‘We should know better, we’re experts.’ I didn’t understand how there could be a weak instruction or how we’d miss something. Now,” she says with a sardonic grin, “I get to be the one to try to plug holes and take the blame for missing the obvious.”

Purcell was hired as a project engineer in 2000. For eight years before she had worked a short stint at a desk in Manhattan (“Got so I couldn’t stand being in the city...”) and then at West Point, out on job sites around the campus, which better suited her. Both assignments were for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Though she was hired as a project engineer, the same job title under which she had worked at the Corps, Purcell quickly understood that “project engineer” could mean different things in different organizations. She told her boss, Reece Hoben, “I’m being wasted here, just so you know,” and he moved her to project management, doing the things she’d trained in the Corps to do. Five years in the field later, in 2005, Purcell became a “precon” manager.

The position is a tight fit to her skill set and temperament. She’s hyper-organized. She loves the calculations and detail and can handle the pressure. She is skillful at creative problem discovery – scurrying plans to anticipate what could go wrong in building a job and solving it before it even happens. Purcell isn’t intimidated in meetings where she is often the only woman present. “In those situations I just don’t think about female or male,” she matter-of-factly states. “I’ve just never acknowledged that someone might have a problem with it. I have a degree like other people, I’m licensed like other people, what difference does it make if you really stop to think about it.”

Purcell works with the design team (the architect and mechanical/electrical/plumbing consultants) and the owner’s representatives during preconstruction planning. Municipal and private owners hire O&G to manage the construction and be their expert advocate. Purcell guards their interests as she determines how best to build the building, how to pull the most effective schedule together, how to assign the work. “You have to follow up on every minor detail, because even a single comma matters in the meaning of a paragraph.”

One of her most important tasks is seeing that the design stays on budget. Another is tracking design progress against the schedule. Both are essential to getting work off on the right footing.

As pre-construction manager, she and the project executive are the faces clients first associate with their O&G experience. It’s here that the soft skills in Purcell’s repertoire come into play: walking uninitiated owners through a maze of details, anticipating and answering questions in “non-engineer” language, and being on call whenever client concerns arise. When her work is done and the contract is ready to transition into actual construction, the hand-off can be intimidating for those clients who feel as if their timeline is being cut. Again, Purcell’s ability to smooth the rough edges helps make the difference between a frantic and a satisfied, confident client.

For the last several years she has been invited to speak to construction management underclassmen at Central Connecticut State University. It’s not the technical elements of project management and pre-construction she dwells on, it’s those soft skills. “I tell the students that the secret to managing a project successfully is effective communication – ‘Did everyone hear and understand what you just said?’ – and satisfying the client. We live in a very small state. Owners know each other and they talk. You are the face of your firm on a project. If you do a solid job, that client will endorse you and your firm to future clients.” Point taken.
The volunteer spirit is alive and very well at O&G Industries. Our employees at facilities and projects across Connecticut are active participants in their communities, often where the needs are the greatest. It is our culture as good corporate neighbors to strengthen the communities where we live and work.

Most of the causes we actively support align with education, healthcare, environmental stewardship and safety. Year-round our employees give back, serving individually, in small groups or as large teams participating in charity events.

Plans are on tap for a clearinghouse committee that will match the passions of our individual volunteers with opportunities for service, making an even tighter fit between the need and our response.

top to bottom  Brittney Gustafson was one of ten O&G volunteers who read to Torrington elementary school children as part of the Northwest Chamber of Commerce’s Read Aloud Day; in Meriden, O&G volunteers Seth Duke (left) and Mike Ferry (right) joined a team, including Meriden Councilman Miguel Castro (second from left) and Deputy Majority Leader Councilman David Lowell, rehabbing a home a la “Extreme Makeover” for a single-parent family; working with the Naugatuck River Revival Group and other area volunteers, O&G donated equipment and labor to help clean up the Naugatuck River and its banks between Thomaston and Waterbury, including the removal of more than 900 tires and 30 cubic yards of trash; Evan Nelson talked about being a project engineer and working in construction to several groups of interested upperclassmen at Wolcott High School’s Career Day.
The new elevator entrance addition to the Cathedral of Saint Joseph in Hartford is complete and will be dedicated in June.

The Archdiocese of Hartford selected O&G’s Special Projects Group to build the addition. Construction consisted of adding a 3,130 SF, two-floor structure on the west side of the Cathedral on Farmington Avenue in Hartford. The addition makes accommodation for the elderly and those with special needs, providing access to a covered drop-off point near the elevators and adding handicap-accessible lavatories to both levels of the building. Designed by PEPIN Associates, the addition matches the Cathedral’s limestone veneer and granite exterior and its Mid-Century Modern design.

A view of the western side of the new addition (foreground)

Nearly 40 years ago RALPH GATH hauled his first load of concrete out of O&G’s Waterbury plant, freshly hired by Bob Oneglia as a 24-year-old mixer driver. After a number of years on the road he was asked if he’d like to operate a concrete plant and jumped at the offer. For the last 30-plus years he had been the Danbury facility’s concrete plant operator, keeping it updated and running efficiently. Retirement will be bittersweet for Ralph: all these years later he hasn’t lost his love of construction and the work that he faithfully does. “What we do, this is where it starts. Concrete is the beginning of construction, it’s the foundation. I’m going to miss the give-and-take, working with the drivers and helping customers – the whole deal.” He often assists customers in solving their concrete queries, “putting them on the right road,” he says. While he’ll start retirement with a trip to the Cayman Islands with his wife, Sharon, he’s counting on coming back as a reliever whenever others need vacations or workloads run high.

“I enjoyed working with some talented, outstanding managers, guys like Tony and Joey Damiano, Tony Blanchard and Jim Gallagher. The Oneglias have always been great to me too,” he says. While he loves to work and be busy – he calls yard work and carpentry his hobbies – Ralph won’t miss the days of leaving his Torrington home at 4 AM and arriving back at 7 PM.

TOM PALMIERI worked for O&G his entire adult life, except for the one month with another contractor who was building bridges alongside O&G on Route 84 in Waterbury in 1978. The day their contract was completed and Tom found himself without a job he went and got himself hired by O&G and started work the next day. After 38 years as a triaxle driver out of Southbury, Tom made his final deliveries on April 22. “Funny thing. When I went to apply for my retirement package I told the fella behind the desk it was 38 years with O&G. He looked down at his papers, looked up again at me and said, ‘38 years?’ He couldn’t believe it.” It was a long, good run. It was his pleasure, he says, to work with all the drivers over the years. “I’ve known a lot of great people, some real outstanding people,” he says. The father of two grown children and grandfather of three, all of whom live nearby, Tom is “torturing” his kids and enjoying the turnabout. “I love my grandkids. I can go over to their houses, get them all ramped up and say, ‘See you later!’ I love it.” He gushes over his family. After the list of delinquent home projects is checked off, in about six months he figures (“I’m making my house a country club for me,” he laughs) Tom plans to travel to the Florida Keys to get licensed for diving, and eventually go check out all the food and sites of Italy that his buddies have been raving about. (Thank you, Ray.)
In the next edition of A COMPANY ON THE GO

SAFETY WEEK
2016 ROUNDUP

Highlights from across the company that put O&G’s CULTURE OF SAFETY on display

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