

Women in construction

RESCON is proud to mark International Women's Day on March 8. In honour of the special occasion, we have put together the following article featuring a number of women who are working in Ontario's construction industry or connecting women to careers and jobs in the industry. Some have graduated from the Residential Construction Management post-graduate program at George Brown College in Toronto that is offered in collaboration with RESCON.

By Grant Cameron

As a child, Bijal Dalal was fascinated by tall buildings and the challenge of trying to figure out how they were built. That curiosity and deep interest eventually led her to pursue a career in construction.

Today, as a junior estimator with Tribute Communities in Toronto, she has the answer to her question.

She's been working in the construction industry for several years now after graduating from the [residential construction management post-graduate program](#) at [George Brown College \(GBC\)](#) in Toronto.

The co-op education program is offered in collaboration with the [Residential Construction Council of Ontario \(RESCON\)](#) and provides students with a range of skills to work on low- and high-rise projects.

Students complete a four-month semester followed by an equal amount of time in the field with a RESCON firm and gain experience in estimating, scheduling, controlling costs and complying with regulations.

RESCON manager of government and stakeholder relations Amina Dibe says women presently make up about seven per cent of skilled trades workers in Ontario, so more must be done to raise awareness of the great opportunities that are available to women and girls in the construction industry.

"We need more women to enter the construction industry, and the George Brown College residential construction



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– Bijal Dalal

management program is a direct pipeline to entry-level jobs in construction management with RESCON builder members,” she says.

For Dalal, who immigrated to Toronto in 2017 from India, graduating from the GBC-RESCON program enabled her to begin a career as an estimator.

“Through RESCON, I had a great opportunity to learn about high-rise construction and practical aspects of the industry,” she says. “Also, the RESCON co-op program helped me to get my foot in the door.”

The rest, as they say, is history.



Bijal Dilala

Dalal was hired by Tribute and is now working on getting her professional quantity surveyor designation and gaining more knowledge and experience in the construction estimating and cost-control field.

It's a very demanding and rewarding career, she says, with numerous professional development opportunities.

"Construction is full of challenges and every project is unique. I would strongly suggest that more women get into the trade and construction. There are many different roles and construction is full of opportunities."

Tamara Baptiste, another graduate of the GBC-RESCON program, is an architectural projects co-ordinator with the Regional Municipality of York. She provides technical expertise in the planning, design, implementation, and management of projects for the housing facilities managed by the region.

She started in the industry doing operations, project management and administrative work for a residential and commercial project contractor. She also did similar work at a project in Fort McMurray, Alta.

"I really enjoyed my experience in the construction industry and, although I did not know much about all the different opportunities it had to offer,

"I had this feeling I was missing something and wanted to know and



Tamara Baptiste

learn more to see where I could go with it," explains Baptiste.

After graduation, she went to work at The Daniels Corporation and eventually moved into her present role.

"I made this shift from site construction because I wanted to experience and learn the process before a construction project started," she says. "Theoretically I knew, but my style of learning and really understanding is to do, and I needed to be part of the steps to get there - the other side of things."

Meagan Donnelly of Whitby who was featured in a [Job Talks Construction video series](#) that was commissioned by RESCON and other industry partners, is an insulator and member of Drywall Local 675.

She'd been a social worker but wanted a change and a friend told her to check out construction. She did and has been working in the industry for several years now in a crew of eight men.

"Some women may find that a bit intimidating in that field, but honestly, they have been extremely welcoming, and I couldn't be happier," she says.

The view of the industry many people have - like men whistling and shouting misogynistic comments - is far from accurate, in Donnelly's experiences.

"I've been treated with respect and have been seen as a valuable asset to



Raly Chakarova

any project I've been on."

While the job is a lot of hard work and not for everyone, Donnelly notes many women would love the trades.

Raly Chakarova, executive director at [BOLT Charitable Foundation](#) which helps under-resourced youth connect to careers in construction, says the industry is a great career choice for anyone who enjoys being part of a team, who is a critical thinker and detail-oriented, and especially those who are creative and enjoy building something with their hands.

"What's more, is that these jobs tend to be well-compensated with family-sustaining wages, they have skills-security and portability in a disruptive and quickly changing world, they are in-demand and will be for the foreseeable future.

"Unlike some other industries, they have both a clear career progression and a diverse one. And last, but certainly not least, they offer a feeling of fulfillment, accomplishment and pride ... to point to something and say, "I built that.""

Chakarova says that girls thinking about their future careers and women looking for a fulfilling career change shouldn't be put off by antiquated stereotypes or limit their dreams to "traditionally female" careers.

"Take a chance and look closer at the construction industry and all the opportunities within it."