

PROGRAM: Orleans Technical College

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By Philadelphia Sun Staff

For the past 50 years, Orleans Technical College (Orleans Tech), operated by JEVS Human Services, has educated women in construction.

As the so-called “Great Resignation” continues to unfold and the baby boomer generation retires, the trades are in desperate need of workers, and the interest in Orleans Tech continues to rise. This interest is especially strong with women. During National Women in Construction Week, observed this year from March 6-12, the school celebrated female students.

“For almost 50 years, women have been having success at Orleans Tech,” said Rodney Brutton, Orleans Tech campus president. “They quickly learn that not only do they survive in our classrooms. They thrive. When a student completes one of our 6-month day or 13-month night training programs, they graduate with a skill that they have for life. That skill can be used in countless ways, but most importantly they can be turned into careers that are in high demand.”

Thanks to a rapidly aging construction industry workforce, jobs are plentiful and offer excellent pay that includes starting salaries above the national median wage, the ability to earn six figures, and incredible stability. Once students graduate, Orleans Tech utilizes decades-old relationships with employers around the region to help find jobs for graduates. Many also return for additional education, stacking skills so that they can become entrepreneurs, opening their own businesses.

“More and more, we are seeing students come in looking to change careers after spending a decade or more working in other industries,” Brutton said. “This is especially true of the women who have been enrolling, and they are coming from past backgrounds of all kinds. Whether someone is making a career change in their 30s, 40s or 50s, and even 60s, people can learn a trade at any point in life.”

In addition to career training, Orleans Tech offers support services, scholarships, connections to resources, and more to prepare students for recession-proof careers. To go along with an aging workforce, the United States also has an aging infrastructure in need of repair, and a skilled

workforce will continue to be in high demand. By 2031, it is projected that 41% of the construction workforce will have retired, thus opening countless opportunities in the trades.

Georgetta “Penny” Wellman — who graduates from the building maintenance career training program on March 25 — previously received an undergraduate degree in physical therapy but realized that the career was too mundane for her after her externship. Patients would always come in with the same issues. Wellman,³⁴ eventually became a senior secretary in pathology, but when COVID struck, she decided that was enough.

“COVID hit, and I decided I didn’t want to be here,” Wellman said. “However, I didn’t want to go back for more school. We bought our first house in January 2020 and since it needed work, my interest in becoming a carpenter was piqued.”

Real estate investing has always intrigued Wellman, so she officially became a realtor in 2021 and decided that a trade would help her better understand real estate.

“I’ve been sharing my story, and so many people are getting excited about the trades,” Wellman said. “It doesn’t matter how old you are. You can change careers and do something different. I love the idea that I’m learning something that no one can take from me. I can have opportunities, no matter what.”

For more information about Orleans Technical College, visit: <https://orleanstech.edu/>.