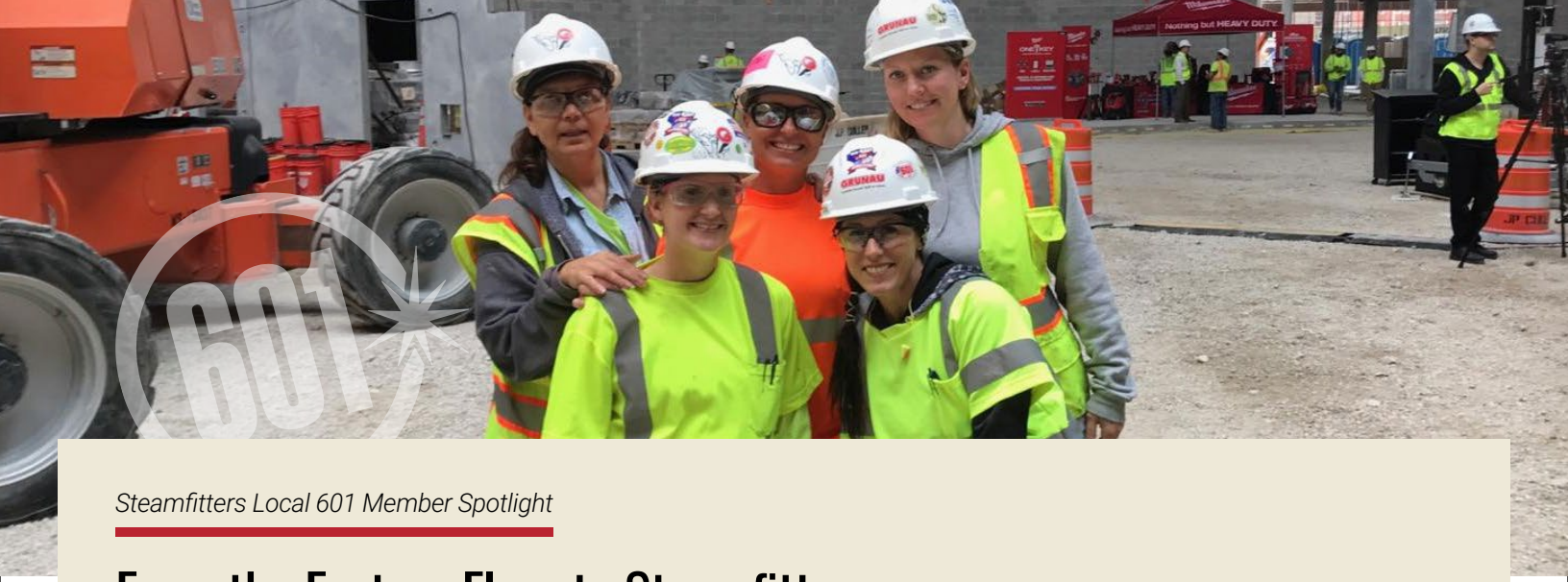


Steamfitters Local 601 Member Spotlight

From the Factory Floor to Steamfitter: Linda Smikowski's 30 Years with Local 601

In 1995, the factory where Linda Smikowski worked for fifteen years shut its doors, leaving her to patch together odd jobs that paid so little she'd have needed two of them just to match her old paycheck. After seeing a news segment on women entering the trades, she made some calls and found her way to Big Step and Steamfitters Local 601. This year marks her 30th anniversary with the union, and she reflects on her membership here.

FINDING HER TRADE

Linda weighed several trades,— painting, electrical, plumbing — before steamfitting won her over.

"Being a Steamfitter involves so many types of work from welding to pipefitting and it can take you to so many interesting job sites. Plus, the pay and benefits are just terrific."

While applying for jobs, she recalls hoping Local 601 would call back because, after an interview and an aptitude test, she felt it was a good fit. The call came, and she accepted a pre-apprentice position that kick-started her decades-long career.

ONE OF 18, THE ONLY WOMAN

When Linda started at Local 601, she was the only woman in her class of 18. She recalls there were other women entering the trades back then, just not that many, and she's glad to see more women considering it today. She's always felt treated fairly by her peers: "Every job has its personality conflicts," she notes, "and steamfitting was no different," but her experience with Local 601 members was overwhelmingly positive. "I think they appreciated that I always gave it my best, even when I needed to stay after hours to practice my welding."

One foreman, Bob Koeprick, mentored her throughout her apprenticeship and was initially skeptical of her abilities. But it wasn't long before he requested her for jobs, noting "Your work ethic is amazing, and you've earned real respect from the guys on the crew." Linda credits every foreman and tradesman she worked with for her success.

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- Linda Smikowski, Local 601 Member and Steamfitter Sister

BUILDING A CAREER, ONE JOB AT A TIME

Linda started her steamfitting career in a service role before her superintendent moved her into construction. She loved the physical work, and she never hesitated to ask for a hand when she needed help. Over 25 years, her job sites have included the Fiserv Forum, office buildings at Miller, and the MMSD sewage plant. One of her favorite jobs was the Oak Creek Power Plant, a job she worked from start to finish.

That track record paid off: Linda went on to become a foreman herself at Oak Creek Power Plant and lead steamfitter in Grunau's copper shop. Taking on leadership roles takes real communication and organizational skills, she says, "but ultimately, you are only as good as your crew."

STARTING THE STEAMFITTERS SISTERS

About six years ago, Linda noticed that the women of Local 601 were missing a place where they could meet and talk through situations that arise on the job, from a female perspective. She brought the idea to union leadership, who immediately supported it, and the Steamfitters Sisters were born. The group meets monthly and also gives back locally with many community service projects. Linda just attended her seventh Tradeswomen Build Nations conference in Houston with three other Local 601 Sisters and encourages other tradeswomen to attend, as it offers a lot of education, inspiration, and networking.

The group also inspires the next generation to consider the career. Linda likes to say "Just go for it." While it can be intimidating, it's helpful to ask questions of another woman already working in the field.

WHAT THE UNION HAS MEANT

Linda sees Local 601 as part of her family, and, as a retiree, she now enjoys the picnics, rallies, and dinners that she and her husband attend. She also greatly values the healthcare, pension and 401(k) that have helped her with a comfortable retirement. And even now, she knows that if ever she wanted to, she could go back to the union hall and find work.

"Thanks to Local 601 for the opportunities you gave to me over the years. Without that union job, we wouldn't have had the financial security to enjoy some of the joys of retirement that we are now."



THE BOTTOM LINE

The skilled trades are facing a serious talent shortage. The contractors who will win the next decade are the ones who can attract, train, and retain the best workers in the field. Union affiliation with Local 601 offers a direct path to all three. Linda Smikowski became a member because the advantages were clear. She also wants to help encourage the next generation of apprentices. Better workers. Stronger benefits. Real flexibility. Measurable growth.

Interested in learning more about what Local 601 membership could mean for your business? Reach out to start the conversation.