Women finding their place in trades positions

By Grace Palmieri

Natalie Childers used to work in security at the Eskenazi Museum of Art. When renovations began on the museum’s roof, Childers faced the possibility of being laid off for three months.

She decided instead to take a job in landscaping with IU Facility Operations.

“I think a lot of women don’t think they can do this kind of work,” Childers said. “They’re afraid to apply for it. I lucked into it ... I loved it and they loved my work, so I got to stay.”

Here in Facility Operations, there are women in all facets of service jobs from electricians to landscapers to custodians and mechanics.

The women working here bring their own experience and skills to these positions. Kathy Grant, Sign Shop Supervisor, said gender doesn’t come into play, it’s more about how she approaches her job.

Grant, who previously owned her own business, said that recent technology improvements have changed the workflow and opened the door for more women in service and management positions.

A major consideration for some women was the ability to work and still have time to raise a family. Jana Cragen-Reese, Zone 2 Supervisor, who has been with IU for four years, has three children.

“Being a mom and being a woman does bring its own way of thinking and different approaches to problem solving,” she said.

Shelley Kern, an electrician and single mother of three, is an 18-year IU veteran. She said she loves the kind of work she does and it’s always cool to see the diversity of people around campus.

The benefits of her job allow her to take time off when she needs it in order to spend time with family.

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Internships help fulfill IU bicentennial plan

The Office of the Vice President for Capital Planning and Facilities offers several paid internships to provide students with opportunities to gain real world experience.

The IU Bicentennial Strategic Plan lists “Career Preparation” as one of its goals, to be achieved through several campus initiatives, along with internships “to connect the campus with the community in ways that promote students’ educational and career aspirations.” Through VPCPF, students can work in the areas of Communications, Interior Design, Sustainability, Engineering/Utilities, Architecture, Real Estate, and Landscape & Public Space Planning.

Casey Byrnes, Assistant Architect: I’ve benefitted most from the wide diversity of projects and people I interact with daily. Had I interned with a private architecture firm, the projects probably would have been similar in nature and, for the most part, I would have worked solely with other architects. I also wouldn’t have been able to interact with clients, user groups, and contractors as often as I do here.

Cassie Heeke, Communications: Interning at the Service Building has been a great experience. Not only have I been able to work on my PR and design skills, but I have also learned so much about what goes on behind the scenes to make IU a truly beautiful place for its students.

Will Drews, Sustainability: For my Office of Sustainability internship, I have been working on a campus wide tree inventory. This internship has been very beneficial to me because I have developed as a project leader. In addition, I have enjoyed working with both the academic and operations divisions of the campus, since my mentors are in both the Office of Sustainability and Landscape Services. It has helped open my eyes to how the campus operates.

Kathleen de Onis, Education and Research: This internship has been immensely helpful for cultivating my sustainability interests as a Ph.D. student interested in teaching and research. The opportunity to organize our grant and fellowship programs has offered me a behind-the-scenes look at how these programs unfold and the important contributions they make to faculty and undergraduate and graduate student success. I also have enjoyed working with faculty from across campus who research and teach about sustainability topics.

Pallet Project

Every year in the U.S., one million acres of trees are cut down just to produce wooden pallets, or skids. Every year, millions of those pallets are thrown in landfills.

The Service Building Green Team is working to lessen the amount of pallets VPCPF throws away by transforming them into bird and bat houses.

Graduate Architecture Intern Casey Byrnes has worked on designing a kit that would make it easy for anyone to put together the houses with a hammer and nails. She hopes Greek houses will eventually be able to put together and sell the houses as a green philanthropy.

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“I think anybody can be an electrician if they go through the process of learning it,” Kern said.

Gina Hill, whose job focuses on mowing and mulching, agreed that it took time for her to gain credibility with her team, but through her hard work she’s earned the respect of her coworkers and her leadership.

Tammy Morrison, a crew leader who works mainly with perennials, trimming, weeding and planting, has been at IU for five years.

“We need more women. I know that,” Morrison said. “I just think it’s important to have women in all fields, no matter what it is.”

“I think a lot of women don’t think they can do this kind of work. They’re afraid to apply for it. I lucked into it ... I loved it and they loved my work, so I got to stay.”

–Natalie Childers

Natalie Childers maintains the beauty of IU’s campus every day.
Utility locates pick up speed during summer months

By Cassie Heeke

Every once in a while, when strolling the beautiful campus of IU, you see squiggles of bright spray paint on the street signaling new developments.

“That’s me,” says Brady Jackson.

This is the busiest time of year for Jackson, the Utility Locate Technician for Facility Operations. Any time there is construction or renovation, Jackson is close by. His workload increases by about 500 percent from winter to summer, but 13 years at Facility Operations and 20 total years as a locate technician have prepared him well.

When he receives a request ticket for a utility locate, the Utility Information Group (UIG) has three days to mark the utilities and issue a digging permit stapled to a map with the area outlined. The permits expire after seven days, so UIG must reissue permits for projects that go on any longer. Some projects can take years to complete.

Jackson said he issued about 250 permits per month last summer. He relies on time management and prioritization to do as much as he can. Jackson’s supervisor, Utility Information Supervisor Don Goodwin, Jr. and Utility Documentation Technician Kevin Mingee occasionally help with the locates.

Most of the time, Goodwin’s role is to meet with the contractors who are planning to break ground — whether they’re digging 6 inches to plant flower bulbs or 8 feet for a water line.

Jackson said when he first started at Facility Operations, he thought he knew what he was doing. However, the IU campus is so dense with utilities and has less above-ground access points, it brings a whole new set of challenges. “It’s never boring,” Jackson said. “You know where you’re going to be, but you never know what you’re walking into.”

“Breaking Bad” actor recognizes IU landscaping

Actor and IU alumnus Jonathan Banks made special mention of Facility Operations team members when he visited campus for the first ever IU Day.

“You walked out that door today and did you see how beautiful the landscaping is?” he said.

Banks, who is best known for playing Mike Ehrmantraut on “Breaking Bad” and “Better Call Saul,” received an honorary doctoral degree from IU on April 10 and spoke at the IU Cinema two days later. In his opening and closing statements, he encouraged everyone in the audience to write thank-you notes to those responsible for the beauty of campus.
Maxwell Hall has received a unique upgrade. Facility Operations renovated a doorway in the over 100-year-old building to make it accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), all while keeping the building’s history alive.

Using a laser machine, Kathy Grant, Sign Shop Supervisor, made templates of the intricate patterns from the old wood around the doors, and Carpenter Wes Jones recreated the design using those templates. “A set of doors in the building needed updating to comply with the ADA, so Facility Operations is trying to replace the doors but keep the building’s character,” Jones said.

Maxwell Hall was originally constructed in 1890. In 1979, it was listed on the Indiana Register of Historic Places, along with many of the Old Crescent buildings.