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CONTACT: Mandy McMillen
Operating Engineers Local 3
(916) 993-2047, ext. 2505

JOB-TRAINING PROGRAM LEADS TO HOMEOWNERSHIP **Local woman finds career and independence in the trades**

OAKDALE – With the housing prices soaring in California and minimum wage jobs rarely affording people the chance to purchase homes, Kristyn Pair’s story is not that unique. After graduating high school, she couldn’t afford to pay for schooling, but she also didn’t qualify for financial aid, so she found herself working four jobs at one time and sleeping on friends’ couches just to make ends meet. When she landed a job making just over minimum wage as a bank teller, she still struggled.

“I was a single woman just trying to support myself, and I was really struggling,” she said.

A family friend mentioned she try a career in the skilled trades, as the Operating Engineers Local 3 Journeyman and Apprentice Training Center (OE3 JATC) located in Sloughouse, Calif., provided an opportunity for her to learn a trade and earn money while she went through the program, all free of charge upon acceptance. Pair thought it an impossibility.

“I can’t do that kind of work,” she said. “I didn’t even learn how to drive a stick shift before I was 30. I got my nails done and wore skirts to work!”

Operating the big dozers she saw on the highways was not something she would ever even consider, but she was desperate. She took the minimum qualifications test, which consisted of basic math and reasoning, and she earned one of the top scores. Before she knew it, she was enrolled at the OE3 JATC, staying at the dorms there and learning in the classroom and in the field how to handle that giant construction equipment she had been so intimidated by.

Before long, Pair realized that she could actually do it, and that she didn’t have to settle for low-paying jobs in customer service ... or sleeping on friends’ couches. Kristyn studied hard and ended up scoring at the top of her class on the written exams and creating the best housing pads, though she may not have had the fastest time in doing so.

“I would take my time and make sure I was doing it right,” she said. “... I knew that I could do it. I knew by the end of each week, OK, I might not be the best at this, but I can get it done ... This is something I never thought I would be doing but how awesome that I can actually do it.”

Today, Pair is a top-notch journey-level gradesetter, which means she is making way beyond minimum wage and is responsible for reading plans and making sure jobs get built properly. She occasionally operates big equipment as well. Because of all this, Pair was able to buy her first home in Oakdale this year, the first one in her family to ever do so.

She has broken the stigma about what anybody (not just women) can do, when they put their minds to it.

“It takes some common sense, some reasoning ability, and then you’re good to go. They [the instructors at the OE3 JATC] will teach you everything you need to know. Be willing to put yourself into it, and you can do it.”

Kristyn Pair is available for an interview or photo shoot. She can be reached at (417) 546-7624, e-mail: kristyn.pair@gmail.com. Photos attached.





