



# women unlimited news



**Tara Taylor** "You've got to ask who's in the room!"

Creativity pours through Tara Taylor's life like a river. She is an actress, a singer, a filmmaker and a producer. She established a theatre association to give African-Nova Scotian artists greater opportunities to express 'our stories in our voices.' Named after her great-grandfather, the Charles Taylor Hall Theatre and Media Arts Association already has a number of successful ventures under its belt and plans for a permanent theatre structure to be built in North Preston. Oh, and she's on her way to becoming a Civil Engineering Technician. At first, this doesn't seem to be an obvious choice, but it's all about creativity.

Tara came to her career choice through Women Unlimited. When she found out about this program, she was on EI and interested in establishing a new career path. Initially she thought she'd find her place in Architectural Engineering, because it would call upon her talent for drawing and design, as well as her analytical skills. However, when she did her hands-on Civil Engineering test drive, she found her forte. "I didn't even know what Civil Engineering was!" It was a program that didn't box her into one thing but opened the doors to creating roadways and bridges, structures and systems.

Before she could get into the Civil Engineering program, Tara needed to complete a summer physics course at Dalhousie University. She says the Women Unlimited team pushed and pushed to get her into that physics class because, "They wanted to see my dream happen!" That dream is "Wearing a graduation gown one evening and going to work as a civil engineer the next day." She passed her physics course and started in her program at the NSCC Waterfront Campus.

This is where two of her passions collided. She went to her instructor, Chris Davison, and asked him for help with her theatre plans. The plans needed scaling and cost estimates. He suggested bringing together students in other program areas into a Civil Building Technologies Club. Students from Environment Engineering, Architectural Engineering, Civil Engineering and Drafting could meet, share their skills and ultimately, support each other as they sought employment in their fields. That club became a reality.

The club members decided they also needed a way to meet and engage employers. What about an Industry Networking Night, which would draw together a broad cross-

See **Tara** continued on page 4.

## Did you know?

Since 2006, **510** women have participated in Women Unlimited programs.

Did you know when you improve a woman's economic situation there's a **'ripple effect'** on her children, family and community?

This was sent to us from Michelle Bonnenfant, Pipefitter/Steamfitter Apprentice:

*I am happy to say that my children are following in mama's footsteps! My son is now a certified heavy equipment operator in Saskatchewan! He went from depression and no education to having a great life. I told him if I could do it at 38, he could do it at 22. He tells people that his mom inspired him to do what he wanted in life. My beautiful sixteen year-old daughter is now recognized as one of the best horse trainers in Nova Scotia. She even has first aid training for horses and humans alike. She has worked with abused horses and turned them into great riding horses. Her horse took first place in all shows, and he's only 3 years old! She was asked at school where she got her skills with tools and electrical systems, and she told them she learned from her mom. Women Unlimited did not just help me in my pursuits, it has continued into the next generation. It's a great feeling to be able to inspire both my daughter and my son. Thank you so much!*

Finally, did you know that by increasing workplace diversity in the trades and technology fields gives employers an edge in an increasingly competitive global marketplace?

**That has to be good for all Nova Scotians.**

## A New Normal ... Valuing Diversity

It has been said, 'If you're not at the table, you're on the menu.' We know that if you are at the table — your voice is heard. And it's at these tables where policies are developed, systems are created, budgets are determined, work plans established and critical decisions are made. We know if the people seated at the table all look alike, their decisions end up benefiting them and people like them. We also know that it takes a minimum of 30% from any under-represented group to sit at the table before that group has an impact.

So, what does diversity mean, and why does it matter? Diversity means valuing difference. It means when you surround yourself with people from different cultural and racial backgrounds, different genders, different socio-economic realities, different abilities and with different generational interpretations, you experience a richness of skills, abilities, ideas, insights, innovations and perspectives. What does inclusion mean? Inclusion means encouraging, embracing and valuing that mix of people — creating a culture that supports the diverse group.

But many people in Nova Scotia don't surround themselves with diversity. They live in neighborhoods and communities with people who are just like them. They work in companies or institutions where the majority of employees are just like them. They aren't exposed to diversity and don't really know why it matters. And yet, if we don't embrace diversity and inclusion as our new normal — our communities, our workplaces and our institutions won't survive in this fast changing and interconnected, globalized world.

Do you have any idea what it's like to be in the middle of a room filled with diverse women who are energized by the skilled trades and technologies? Their energy is palpable. Their insights are profound. And, their differences are embraced. At Women Unlimited, we experience that every day — it's our normal. So in this newsletter, we've shared stories of some of these diverse women. We work with women who have survived violence and abuse. And, we work with women who have changed their career trajectories to study skilled trades and technologies in Nova Scotia. These are diverse women who are bright, creative, skilled, hard-working and courageous — women who are changing the future of our institutions and workplaces. These are women who deserve to be at the table.

Is industry embracing diversity and inclusion? Emera Newfoundland and Labrador (ENL) established a Diversity Plan for the Maritime Link Project. The plan requires contractors to set and honour their own diversity plans as part of the procurement process. This means trades women, aboriginal peoples and others who are under-represented are being hired. In September, Women Unlimited and ENL partnered to host an employability session for women in skilled trades in Cape Breton. Relationships between organizations like Women Unlimited are being forged with industry. It appears that diversity matters at ENL, and that's a good step towards a new normal.

*Doreen Parsons, Women Unlimited Manager*



### Crystal Taylor

Crystal Taylor may be new to the position of Director of Diversity and Inclusion at the Nova Scotia Community College, but she is far from new to the work it entails. Diversity and inclusion stream through her work life, giving her both energy and hope, as they guide her forward. Among her ventures, she has worked as an entrepreneur as the President of CT-Ebony Consulting Company, as an educator in Dalhousie's Adult Education Program and in the University of New Brunswick's Provincial Management Development Program and as a Human Resource specialist with both the Provincial and Federal governments. She's even done an earlier stint at NSCC! "I've seen a lot of positive changes in workplace attitudes and behaviors over the years, but we're far from done. There's much more work to do to advance this important agenda. Women Unlimited's work to include diverse women in trades and technologies, where they have been historically underrepresented, is a necessary piece to move us forward."

Crystal first came to Women Unlimited in HRM as an educator, giving the women the tools and strategies they might need to counteract workplace harassment. When asked what that experience was like, she said, "I always walked away from those classrooms a better person. The Women Unlimited participants were so strong, so intent on learning and progressing. I recognized that I was a woman of privilege, and I deeply admired those women who had the courage to fight so hard to improve their lives."

Her next chapter with Women Unlimited began when she was working with Public Works and Government Services Canada. Approximately 400 million dollars was put on the table for the Sydney Tar Ponds and Coke Ovens Remediation Project. The purpose was to clean up a man-made environmental disaster and to involve the surrounding communities in both decision-making and in the work of remediation. Part of the strategy was a series of recommendations around working with under-represented groups ... with women, with African Nova Scotians and with First Nations peoples. As the Senior Advisor of Employment Strategies, this was Crystal's arena. She says the diversity strategy was, "designated, integrated, comprehensive and measured." And it was in that strategy she saw a place for a new Women Unlimited program at the Marconi Campus in Cape Breton, a legacy for which she is justifiably proud.

Crystal sees Women Unlimited as community building. If you help a woman, you also help her family. If you help a family, you are also helping to build the community around that family. So far, Women Unlimited at the Marconi Campus has supported close to 70 diverse women from 17 different communities, as they explore and train for careers in the trades and technology sector. This number includes Aboriginal women, African Nova Scotian women and women living with disabilities. It is crystal clear that NSCC's new Director of Diversity and Inclusion has already made a difference in many lives and communities, and it's equally clear that Crystal has every intention of remaining on that path. Women Unlimited celebrates and honours her for that! ♀



### Remembering Catherine "Catie" Elizabeth Miller

1985-2014

Women Unlimited, IT Campus 2012

Electrical Construction & Industrial, NSCC  
Waterfront Campus 2013

## Amy MacLeod *That's a smart welder!*



Amy with Brad Marchand at Phoenix's "Champion's for Change" fundraiser.

In Greek mythology, the Phoenix is a large bird that rises from the ashes of its former self. It's an apt name for an organization, Phoenix Youth, which offers support to homeless and at-risk youth so they can recreate themselves into strong and productive adults. At 15 years of age, Amy MacLeod was one of those youth. She came from a background of abuse and addictions, and she lacked the discipline and education to make the necessary changes in her life. Now, at twenty-three, she's a second-year Metal Fabrication student at NSCC's Akerley Campus. She has a daughter who's thriving, a solid support network and a future she's building ... not by running from her past, but by learning from it and by standing strong in it. She is the essence of the Phoenix rising.

When Amy became pregnant with her daughter, she knew the life she was leading had to change. She had to move into a safe environment and away from negative influences. She had to get an education. She had to be able to support her child, no matter what. And she made all the right



Phoenix by Amy MacLeod, hand-cut with a plasma torch

artistic side loose ... with a welding torch in hand.

Not running from her past also allows Amy to give back to Phoenix Youth and the people who supported her through her most turbulent times. She has stood on the stage in front of, first, 850 people at the *Nutcracker Luncheon* and then, 1000 people at the *Champions for Change*. There, she told her story. By speaking out, she hopes to illustrate the powerful work done by Phoenix Youth and to raise funds so others, who find themselves in her same shoes, can also find the people to guide them onto a new path.

It was at the *Champions for Change* fundraiser that she fell into conversation with a man wearing a Phoenix House shirt.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Brad Marchand," he responded.

"And what do you do?" she queried.

"I'm in the NHL, and what do you do?"

"I'm in Metal Fabrication"

"What's that?"

"That's a smart welder!"

She is a smart welder and that's just the thing a Phoenix, who has risen from its own ashes, should be! ♀

## Susan Pushie *The first Woman Unlimited participant hired through Emera Newfoundland & Labrador (ENL) Maritime Link*

Susan's story begins in Sydney, Nova Scotia, where she and her husband raised their family. She worked in the retail sector ... often part time and with varying degrees of responsibility. Ultimately unsatisfied with this work, she decided to explore opportunities in the trades, which would offer her full-time work with better wages and benefits. She ventured "out West", where she took a heavy equipment operation training in Fort McMurray. Gaining employment in that field, Susan began that all too familiar trek between her work in the West and her home and family in Cape Breton. Yes, the money was good but the separations were hard on her and hard on the people she loved.

During her down time, Susan began to explore opportunities in the trades in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality. She paid a visit to the Ann Terry Project where they told her about Women Unlimited at NSCC's Marconi Campus. This program was an opportunity to explore other trades and technology opportunities that would expand her chances of finding work nearer to home. Susan applied to Women Unlimited's Career Exploration Program (CEP) and was selected for one of the 20 seats from a group of over 100 applicants.

She participated in the entire program ... going to all the shop visits, site visits and employer presentations with a keen eye on the many trades they



explored together. She never missed a day or a session in the program. Because of her exposure to a variety of work sites in Fort McMurray, she was an added asset to the program and to the other participants in it ... she was able to share her 'real life' stories of life in the trades.

Just weeks before the end of the CEP, she received a call from a local construction company who wanted to hire her for a heavy equipment operator position. She took the job. She could finally work in her trade in her own community! She started working on a major piece of road in Cape Breton ... a project that is ongoing.

While on that job, Susan was recruited by another local contractor, who is participating in the *Emera Newfoundland & Labrador (ENL) Maritime Link Project* in Cape Breton. They needed heavy equipment operators to help build the link, and Susan was identified through their Diversity Plan for that work. She is the first Woman Unlimited participant to be hired through this important project, and with diversity being a key workforce goal she won't be the last. Congratulations to Susan for having her cake and eating it too! In Susan's words, "I would like to thank Joneljim Concrete Construction Ltd. for their recognition of my skills, as well as this great employment opportunity here in my home town." ♀

## Crystal Conrad "I want to be sitting in your seat!"

Crystal Conrad does not shy away from hard work. She has her eyes on the prize, and she is steadily working her way toward it. Right now, she's on the night shift in the HRM's Transportation and Public Works garage, gearing up the snowplows for the winter ahead. In order to work a night shift, she's had to manage her life as a single mom with an eight-year old son, a part-time baby-sitter, and a supportive ex-partner. She's completed her four blocks towards her Red Seal, switching her head from night shift to the day shift and re-arranging all of her previous arrangements each time. None of this was easy.

Originally, Crystal left her Port Hawkesbury home to move to Halifax and take NSCC's Deaf Studies program to become an American Sign Language Interpreter. "I'm good with my hands," she laughed, when we compared this to the program she actually completed ... Heavy Duty Equipment/Truck & Transport Repair.

This was something her Career Counsellor, Pauline Vickers, must have recognized when she recommended Women Unlimited to Crystal. In 2009, when she attended Women Unlimited at the NSCC's Akerley Campus, she tried all of the trades programs that were offered. She enjoyed electrical and millwright. She had originally thought she would like to be a heavy-duty equipment operator, but repairing them has her well positioned to move up the ladder. She graduated from the Heavy Duty Equipment/Truck & Transport Repair program in 2011.

When she interviewed for her position with the HRM, the Superintendent asked her where she saw herself working in the future. Was this her dream job? Her answer? "I plan on sitting in your seat!" Later, he told her that sealed the deal ... he was obviously looking for someone with ambition. Crystal is now the senior member of the night shift team and has her eye on a day job that would offer her and her son a more flexible



timetable. She's looking forward to writing her Red Seal exam and becoming fully certified.

What's next for Crystal? She's thinking about putting her current skills to work as a Service Advisor or as a Supervisor. What we know for sure is that Crystal Conrad has what it takes to become whatever it is she dreams! ♀

## Tara continued from page 1

section of industry employers and engage them with potential employees? Chris asked if they could pull together a proposal for the Student Association within a week. Tara's response, "You've got to ask who's in the room! I'm

a proposal writer and I'll have one on your desk tomorrow!" And she did.

So Tara's off on her next creative adventure. On March 5, there will be a cocktail party, complete with napkins sporting the Civil

Building Club logo and 150 invited guests. Included on the guest list is Stantec, future employer of Tara Taylor. Well, that's not quite in the bag yet but odds are, when Tara's in the room, good things will happen. ♀

## Women Unlimited's Employers

We would like to send out our appreciation to the following employers, who hired Women Unlimited graduates in their chosen fields:

ABCO Industries Ltd.  
Able Electric Ltd.  
ACE Machining Ltd.  
ADI Limited  
Aecon Buildings – Atlantic  
Air Wave Ventilation  
Alva Construction Ltd.  
Archie's Welding  
Atlantica Mechanical Contractors Inc.  
Balls Creek Alignment  
Belfor  
Canada Bread (Ben's)  
Canadian Piping Trades UA Local 56  
Canadian Welding Bureau  
Cape Breton Regional Municipality  
Capital Health  
Carpenters Local 84  
Carroll South Shore

CCT Controls  
Chester Building Supplies  
City Mazda  
Composites Atlantic  
Dalhousie University  
Dalhousie Agricultural College  
Department of National Defense  
Do All Industries Ltd.  
D.P.M. Solutions Inc.  
Easco Electric Ltd.  
Eco Electric Ltd.  
Eddy Group Limited  
Encanex  
ESSO  
FMF Cape Scott  
Fossil Power Systems Inc.  
Foxwood Contracting Inc.  
Gridline Electrical  
Grout's Welding  
Halifax Longshoremen Assoc. Local 269

Halifax Regional Municipality  
IBEW: Energize 625  
Irving Shipbuilding Inc.  
IWK Health Centre  
Joneljim Joneljim Concrete Construction Ltd.  
JW Lindsay Enterprises Limited  
Lunenburg Industrial Foundry & Engineering  
Mackay's Truck & Trailer Center  
Maritime Helicopter Project  
Metro Suzuki  
Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.  
MilAero Electronics Atlantic Inc.  
Naturally Nova Scotia Organics  
Nova Enterprises Limited  
Nova Wood Products  
Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal  
Nova Scotia Power

O'Reagan's Toyota  
Retire Well Renovations  
RKO Steel Ltd.  
Rod's Machine Shop Ltd.  
Saunders Mazda  
Silvercon Constructions  
Simplex Grinnel  
South Shore District Health Authority  
South Shore Regional School Board  
Stantec  
Sunsel Systems Manufacturing Corp.  
Sysco Atlantic  
THI Construction Limited  
Trican Tire Distributors  
Twin City Electric  
Wajax Industries  
Westin Nova Scotian Hotel