A PROFILE OF
ELAINE COPE

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Finding her path into the trades

Growing up in a family of office workers, Elaine never imagined a career in the skilled trades. While working as a tow truck driver to help pay for school, she completed an electronics technician program. After graduating, she worked in biomedical engineering at a local hospital, where she often collaborated with electricians.

While renovating her first home, she took an evening home wiring course. Her instructor recognized her talent and encouraged her to become an electrician, a career she hadn't previously considered.

After lots of persistence trying to find an employer willing to hire her, she succeeded and this is what makes Elaine a pioneer. Why? Because in 1982 she became the first female electrical apprentice in Northern Ontario, and opened the door for every woman apprentice who followed her into that trade.

What she enjoys about being an electrician

Elaine loves the variety that comes with being an electrician. She enjoys solving problems as well as the physical work, especially as she sees a complex project finally come together. With new products and processes always changing, she always has something new to learn.

The impact of mentorship

Mentorship has been a big part of Elaine's career from the very beginning, starting with the instructor who encouraged her to become an electrician. Along the way, other mentors inspired her to become an instructor with the IBEW and to get involved with provincial and national apprenticeship skills committees. Eventually, she started to take on leadership roles that allowed her to give back to the trade. Nearly 30 years later, she still teaches part-time for IBEW.

Growing as a mentor

Elaine joined the National Mentor Development Program because she is passionate about promoting careers in the skilled trades, especially to women, and is always looking for opportunities to learn something new. Now, as an Apprenticeship Officer and Regional RAP Coordinator, she spends much of her time visiting high schools to encourage students to consider a career in the trades. She says the program gave her another opportunity to continue growing while strengthening the various ways she supports others.

Although Elaine has mentored many people throughout her career, the program has helped her realize just how often mentoring takes place in everyday interactions. This program has given her greater self-awareness, confidence and a better understanding of the impact mentors can have in the workplace and in the personal lives of apprentices and mentors. Looking ahead, she also sees mentoring as a meaningful way to stay involved in the trades as she begins thinking about her retirement.

A pioneer former apprentice, Elaine highly recommends the program to anyone interested in mentoring. "There is a lot of growth and development as you move through the sessions. It is very supportive and positive. It was a very good experience for me, and I learned a lot about myself. I love that the group felt so caring and inclusive."

SUPPORTING EQUITY IN TRADES

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