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## Sellwood Bridge project builds diverse workforce, creates opportunities



*Nick Tizo and Pauline Kienlen work for CBK Constructors on Sellwood.*

**T**he Sellwood Bridge, built in 1925, had a number of deficiencies. So the project team created a plan to build a new bridge with multiple improvements, including a seismically stable structure, a wider bridge to accommodate 12-foot travel lanes and two 12-foot shared-use sidewalks.

Construction for the project, with costs more than an estimated \$229 million, began in December 2011, but it took nearly a decade to plan and design. The Sellwood Bridge Project was the largest construction manager and general contractor project, or CM/GC, in Multnomah County's history. The contract was awarded as a joint venture to Slayden Construction and Sundt Construction as general contractors. In addition to Slayden and Sundt, the project enhanced local firms by providing opportunities for them to fabricate materials and construct the bridge.

### Enough work to go around

Diversity played a large role in how — and who — would build the new structure. The diversity initiative plan created by Multnomah County

and Slayden-Sundt JV established a robust subcontracting plan for the construction phase of the Sellwood Bridge Project.

The plan included:

- Workforce development.
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program, also known as DBE.
- Disadvantaged, Minority, Women and Emerging Small Businesses program, with a goal to award 20 percent of total contract dollars to these firms.
- Workforce goal of 20 percent for apprenticeship participation.
- Workforce diversity goals of 20 percent minority workforce hours and 14 percent women workforce hours.



*Flagger Anna Williams, with Northwest Flagging, enjoys telling her children and grandchildren about her experiences.*

“We had more than 290 apprentices on the job who worked more than 130,000 hours,” said Jill Wolf, Multnomah County project manager. She said the project had substantial minority and female participation, surpassing the goals at 38 percent and 21 percent, respectively.

“The construction industry should be inclusive of women and minorities,” said Maurice Rahming, owner of O’Neill Construction, DBA O’Neill Electric, a DBE firm on the job.

“Jobsites should reflect the diversity of

Oregon. This project is a good example of diversification in practice.”

At ODOT, we’re committed to increasing diversity and inclusion in employment, apprenticeship participation, training resources and opportunities for highway construction jobs throughout the state. Specifically, our Office of Civil Rights has programs that encourage and support the participation of DBEs and other minority- and women-owned small businesses in contracting opportunities, and as well as programs that support women and minority apprentices. On the Sellwood Bridge Project, more than 90 total contracts were awarded to DBEs.

### Getting hands-on experience

For those on the job at the Sellwood Bridge Project over the past four years, it became more than building a new structure. Elisa Campbell, a journeyman at O’Neill Electric, started working as an apprentice in 2011 and has been at the Sellwood Bridge for the past two years.

Each day, she said, she learned something about being an electrician.

Campbell said she was able to work close to home and create a work-life balance that allowed her to care for children as a single mother.

"The supervisors and foreman are great to work with," she said. "We all work close together and take care of each other."

Dan Wagenknecht, O'Neill Electric project foreman, said it was great to see Campbell grow throughout the projects they have worked on.

"She will soon be ready for her own O'Neill Electric work truck and crew," said Wagenknecht.

Jory Robertson, an apprentice at Pacificmark Construction and a student at Northwest College of Construction, said the apprenticeship allowed him to earn more money and better support his family. He said it's not without hard work, however.

"This is a great opportunity to rise out of your situation," Robertson said.

### Overcoming challenges

At the end of 2016, the project is nearly complete, but it presented plenty of challenges along the way.

"This was a CM/GC project with continuous changes. We had major challenges to meet the requirements of the project in the design and construction phases, but eventually we

coordinated and worked collaboratively with all the stakeholders to deliver the project as planned," said Sam Hunaidi, ODOT Region 1 Project Services manager.

Like most complex challenges, projects often evolve over time.

"As the Sellwood Bridge Project comes to a close, we are happy to report some great successes," said Wolf. "While it was a challenge to manage the paperwork tracking for more than 200 sub-contractors, our efforts resulted in many opportunities for workers to learn valuable job skills and advance toward journeyman status."

Before joining the Sellwood Bridge project in fall 2016, Tanner Greeson, an O'Neill Electric apprentice, said he didn't know opportunities like this existed.

"I like to see how all the hard work turns into a finished project,"



*The owner of Pacificmark Construction, Mark Matthews, is proud of his apprentices and of his company's work as a disadvantaged business enterprise.*

Greeson said. "The job is physical and tough, but it is very fun and rewarding."

Aanna Williams, a flagger currently working with NW Flagging, appeared energetic and happy to be on the project by her smile and enthusiasm. She said, "I really enjoy what I do."

After being laid off from her office job, Williams was at a loss for how to support her family. At a recommendation, she tried flagging — and she's has been part of the Sellwood Bridge Project family since 2012.

"I enjoy telling them [her kids and grandkids] about my experience," Williams said.

She's now looking for her next adventure: earning certification to become a traffic control supervisor.

"Never give up, and go as high as you can," she said. "Don't be afraid to try something new and take a new step."

### **Success is at hand**

The opportunities highlighted above and the overall success of the Sellwood Bridge Project would not be possible without the collaboration and partnership between ODOT, Multnomah County, the city of Portland, and contractors and subcontractors.

"It has been a pleasure being involved with the Sellwood Bridge project over the last four years," said Mark Matthews, owner of Pacificmark Construction Corp. "Pacificmark's focus concentrated mainly on the condo reconstruction phase I and II. We oversaw that portion of work using 100 percent certified DMWESB subcontracting firms. This is a success in our community."

The commitment of our co-workers, colleagues, contractors and other professionals to diversity and the tireless efforts put in to ensure opportunities for workforce development, DBE participation, and women and minority apprentices further helped provide economic success for both the Sellwood Bridge community and a whole lot of Oregonians.

For more information on the Sellwood Bridge Project, visit [the project website](#).

*Submitted by Katie Gillespie*

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