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Bureau of Labor & Industries

Press Release

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BOLI continues spotlight series on active Oregon apprentices

Today's spotlight: Laborer AJ Banuelos

PORTLAND- The Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI), home of the state's Apprenticeship and Training Division, is continuing its special series of spotlight articles on registered apprentices—workers earning living wages while learning the skills for a career in their chosen trade. The Apprenticeship and Training Division monitors all registered apprenticeship programs in the state to ensure maintenance of standards and to promote participation by women and people of color.

Apprentice Spotlight: AJ Banuelos

Despite coming from a big family of union tradespeople, Anjanet “AJ” Banuelos never thought seriously about apprenticeship. Or at least not until she was looking for work, drawing public assistance and trying to take care of three kids. Pre-apprenticeship training through [Constructing Hope](#) seemed like an option, but chance landed her in [Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc's](#) pre-apprenticeship program.

AJ hasn't looked back. Now less than 500 hours away from 4th term as a laborer apprentice, she seems far away from the clerical work that she thinks high school prepared her for. With not only the skills but the social network that OTI helped her to build, AJ feels like she's on solid footing—and wants to offer the same confidence and opportunity to succeed to others.

“I volunteer a lot with OTI, let them use my story, anything I can do,” AJ says with a smile. “And the supportive services, like childcare—I'm always telling other apprentices, do you know this help is out there?”

Noting that finding childcare when your days aren't 8 to 5, Monday through Friday, especially when you're on a job out of town and need a provider who can accommodate that, AJ emphasized, “Childcare is a huge issue.” She likes the BOLI-ODOT workforce partnership's support for childcare expenses, per diems and other efforts to keep Oregon apprentices in their programs and on the job—she just wishes even more help was available.

AJ is far from complaining about apprenticeship in Oregon, though. Asked what else she might be doing today, she laughingly said, “I don't even know.” After a moment more of thought she says with characteristic honesty, “I don't even want to think about that.”

Downplaying her own hard work to get where she is, AJ is quick to express thanks to OTI especially: she recalls their pre-apprenticeship program making her interested in every trade except roofing, when she came in leaning strongly towards becoming an electrician. The experience was so positive that AJ, something of a good-will ambassador for OTI, sent her daughter to a Building Girls Construction Camp earlier this year—and reports that the “girly girl” was really excited about all that she learned.

OTI's supportive environment and strong foundation not only helped AJ start on the right path, but also provide great examples for her suggestions for helping to keep other apprentices on the path to success: mentoring and networking among apprentices to share information and foster other mutual supports. AJ sees tips on simple things like helping to understand difficult bosses as a great gift from older apprentices to younger ones, and just between starting apprentices opportunities to carpool or suggestions on good childcare providers can be invaluable.

AJ's perspective on Oregon apprenticeship came with no pulled punches and no whitewash, but plenty of optimism. She's ready to be on the front lines working to make apprenticeship even more accessible and more supportive of future apprentices. That level of energy and commitment should come as no surprise, though, from a woman who spent three months travelling from her Troutdale home to work on the west side of the Willamette River required riding the bus, MAX train and street car—all three, both directions, every day for three months.

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