

The Modern Day Rosie The Riveter

Remember the WWII propoganda posters with Rosie the Riveter and the slogan "We Can Do It" created by Howard Miller in the early 1940s? The image of a lady wearing a bandana and industrial coveralls flexing her biceps? But who was this "Rosie" person and why is she so important for the women of today? Step back in time to find the answers.

December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor is bombed by the Japanese and the United States entered WWII. Four days later, Germany and the U.S. declared war upon each other and the U.S. becomes heavily engaged in both the Pacific and European theaters of war.

On the U.S. home front, men and women were being shipped overseas and factories were being transformed to supply the war with weaponry, ammunition, armored vehicles and aircraft, and other equipment needed by the armed forces. This transformation created an increased demand for workers and with the majority of men away at war, women were asked to enter the workforce for the first time.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, from 1940-1945 female employment grew from 28% to 34%.

Women were filling the traditionally male dominated roles of welders, machinists, riveters, etc. In Yankton, many women managed the family farm or were trained in jobs such as control operators at WNAX radio.

While many women joined the war effort out of necessity or purely patriotic duty, many young

women saw these jobs as an opportunity for independence and freedom. This was a chance to earn their own money and build new comraderies with other women.

When the Germans surrendered in 1945, WWII officially ended. Men returned home and needed jobs. While some women kept working, some lost their jobs, and others left the workforce to start families.

Today's Rosie the Riveter

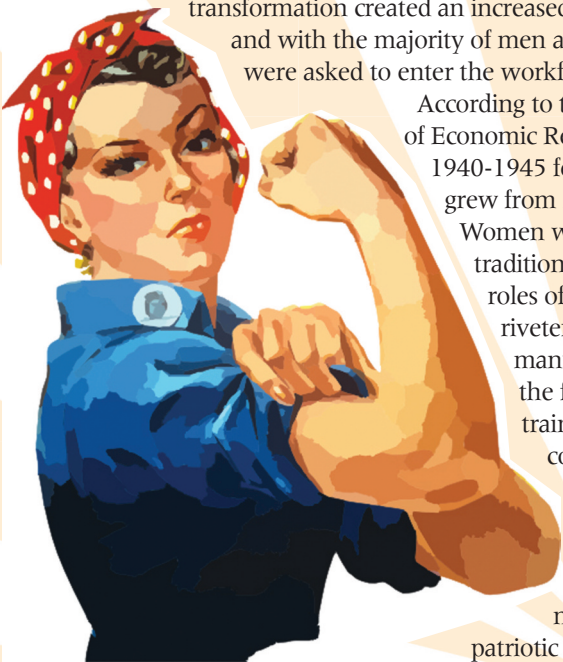
The Rosie the Riveters of the 1940s started a revolution proving to women they could succeed in a male-dominated workforce. While the Rosie of WWII was primarily characterized as a blue collar, mechanic type woman, today's Rosie's are software developers, engineers, and CEOs of multi-million dollar companies in addition to filling roles as heavy machine operators and welders.

Today women have a presence in industry however, nationwide there is shortage of women employed in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations. According to the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, fewer than 30% of manufacturing employees are women. Of this percentage, women comprise 62% of workers in office and administrative positions and 35% of sales employees. These percentages are greatly reduced when considering the number of women in production, transportation and material moving, natural resources, construction and maintenance occupations.

To address these shortages, strides are being made to increase STEM program participation with girls as young as elementary school; there are programs to equip women with the skills and knowledge for manufacturing careers through vocational and college programs; there are efforts to increase the number of women in leadership positions; and employers are developing mentoring programs so women in all areas of manufacturing have role models.

Another approach is heightening the awareness of the opportunities careers in manufacturing offer women. New to the community this fall: the South Dakota Center for Enterprise Opportunity (SD CEO), located on the BHSU main campus in Spearfish, hosted the first annual Women's Business Conference in Yankton. The 'Rosie the Riveter' themed conference featured women from across the state, including Yankton and BHSU, as speakers. The goal of the conference was to highlight women in manufacturing, business, and other industries and provide educational and networking opportunities.

With over thirty businesses categorized as manufacturers in Yankton this translates into opportunities and a high demand for a large skilled and educated workforce. One of the ways these workforce demands are being met is through educational programs and training through Black Hills State University (BHSU), the Regional Technical Education Center (RTEC), and Mitchell Technical Institute (MTI) located in Yankton.



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■ COMMUNITY continued on page 20