

Independent Electrical Contractors

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BRIDGING THE GAP FOR WOMEN ENTERING A MALE DOMINATE FIELD
How the Independent Electrical Contractors helped one woman transition from working a traditional job to a non-traditional career.

Deanna Hickman was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. She graduated with honors in academic from Armstrong High School. That is where she discovered her love for working with her hands, putting together, fixing and figuring out how things work.

While driving, the traffic light signals would always catch her eyes and she wondered "Who installed those lights, how do they work?" Never knowing what destiny waited for her.

At the age 21, Deanna worked as a concrete foreman, in which, she plied wood, putting up 4x6's, installing wall pins and assisted with the pouring of cement in wall forms. She enjoyed this very much but chose to resign in order to start a family.

After her youngest child turned 21, Deanna was eager to rejoin the construction world but making the transition from a traditional job, as an assistant property manger, to a non-traditional job was not easy. Deanna said, "I worried that the construction field would not accept me because of my size and because I am a woman, but the lord heard my prayers. One day I opened up the newspaper and there it was an article about New Choices for Women." This is a seven week program that made sure she was physically fit and gave her a over view of construction, touching the basics of welding, planning, drywall, roofing and electrical.

While in this program, Deanna found a passion in electrical. She stated, "I was amazed with the fact that there was always a lot to do and I never did the same thing in the same way twice." New Choices assured her that if electrical is what she wanted to do, then the Independent Electrical Contractors is where she needed to be.

Shortly after completing the New Choices program, Mrs. Hickman signed up for the (IEC) Independent Electrical Contractors Apprenticeship program. The IEC sent her out on interviews with three of their nearly 100 members, and she was hired on by Penco Electrical, an IEC Contractor. At Penco, the Superintendent, Jay Paxton, put Deanna to work in the warehouse for about five months. He wanted her to get familiar with the tools and material. Then she was put in the field as an electrician's helper.

Deanna said, "Being an apprentice with the IEC has been very beneficial. By attending class and working I have a better insight on how tasks should be completed in the field. I receive an automatic dollar raise every six months with considerations of my grades, work and attendance in the program."

When asked the question how has IEC helped with your transition she stated, "The electrical field has its positives and negatives for women but the positives far out way those negatives. Attending the IEC gave me a sense of confidence, boosted my self-esteem and independence. As a woman, I was able to come over in a predominantly male field and succeed in it. I wouldn't trade it in for the world."

Deanna is now a third year apprentice in training to be a lead man or we may say a lead woman. By her fourth year, her earnings would have almost doubled from where she started. Her goals are to become a licensed contractor upon completion of the IEC program.

Deanna's advice to all women who are interested in becoming electricians, "It's fun and rewarding but in order to be successful you are definitely gonna have to put in the effort, pull your own weight and don't be afraid to ask questions."

And I believe she found out how those traffic lights were put up!



If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with Natasha Joseph, please call 770/242-9277 or e-mail at natashaj@iecatlanta.com