

A Look At Women In Unusual Occupations

By Karen Parker
Post Staff Writer

Take a look in the latest "Occupational Outlook Handbook" and you'll discover descriptions of thousands of jobs within American industry.

Some are clerical, requiring good typing and stenographic skills. However, many are more strenuous muscle building jobs like firefighting, truckloading and heavy construction work. Sounds like a job for Superman, right? Not necessarily. There are more and more Superwomen today who are accepting jobs that even in 1983 cause people to take a second look.

Becky Brown is accustomed to the stares and pointing fingers as she stands alert on a fire truck from Station Four enroute to an emergency. She began her career as a firefighter in September, 1980. She was the first woman in Charlotte to accept the challenge. Since then five other women belong to one of the 24 stations in Charlotte.

"I never thought I had a chance to become a firefighter when I used to talk to a relative about his job as one," Becky pointed out. "He often encouraged me to give it a try. Then one day my mother was looking through the ads in the newspaper and saw where the fire department was seeking a firefighter. Mom was joking about me applying for the job; however, I decided being a firefighter was something I really wanted to do."

Becky visited the fire department personnel office and soon thereafter was taking the physical and written examinations. Her eyesight was accurate; her heart rate was steady. She was a healthy individual. But could she pass the palms-away pushups, the situps, and the 1.5-mile run one after the other without collapsing? "I had prepared myself for the worse, in case I did not perform well," Becky admitted.

Actually, she performed superbly and at that moment realized she "had set herself back unnecessarily. After that I just took one day at a time," she added.

Becky was sent out on her first alarm before she had even completed training. She recalled battling a warehouse fire all night just one month after she began training for her career. Knowing how to apply water to an uncontrolled blaze is not enough when you're a firefighter. Becky explained she sometimes feels like a chemist

Partners

Continued from Page 10

ed of them, effective ways to give help, and the many ways Partners will support them in their challenge," noted Hoey.

Both Partners do indeed face a challenge. Hoey is the first to admit that the "relationship isn't all fun and games." Sometimes the youth will be troubled and will expect the Senior Partner to share in the frustration. However, he quickly added, "There are many joys about this program." He was particularly referring to the fact that a Senior Partner can help a youth establish a productive life.

All volunteers for Partners do not have to be assigned to a Junior Partner. Volunteers are needed for administrative assistance and for organizing recreational and educational programs. Since Partners is a private non-profit agency it is always grateful for Contributing Partners. These are companies and individuals in the community who make financial contributions to the program.

Senior Partners will always have the assistance of counselors who are staffed with the Partners program. Statistics provided by Hoey indicate the Partners program in other areas has reduced repeat offenses among youth, 25-35 percent. It had also increased school attendance. The program serve young people between the ages of 10-18. The Partners office is located at 700 East Trade St. in room 200. To make inquiries, people should contact William Hoey at 332-3407.

or a medic as well. Knowledge in all those areas are important she noted.

Emergencies allowed no time for Becky to wonder or worry about how the hundreds of male firefighters felt about her breaking way onto their turf. But during the quiet times at the station there was time for Becky to make such observations.

"A few of the men were stand-offish; but most of them just saw me as another on their crew and helped me as they helped each other, Becky proudly spoke. "We've always been like a family."

Even when another station was short of workers

and Becky had to fill in, she didn't run into many men who felt she had overstepped a woman's career objectives.

It's not being the first woman to achieve the title of firefighter in Charlotte that makes Becky appreciate her job. "I spent one year at North Carolina State and it wasn't such a good one. However, being a firefighter is a challenge to me," Becky expressed.

She's relieved she has discovered professional talents. "I really enjoy my job. There is never a boring moment and I always expect the unexpected," Becky presented.

She has no intentions of

stopping at her position as a firefighter. Presently she is working on a degree in fire science at Central Piedmont Community College to enhance her knowledge and her career goals.

While Becky is in combat with Charlotte fires, Debbie Martin is underground splicing cables. She is a cable splicing technician for Southern Bell. The 29-year-old weighing in at 100 pounds, stated she often wonders, "What's a nice girl like me doing in a place like this - climbing around in muddy pits and breaking fingernails?"

"I answer that with, you're in a decision-making, good paying job."

Debbie wouldn't trade either for anything. Every workday she goes to a different site in Charlotte, crawls underground and begins to splice phone cables. Then she must connect them to the main cable which stretches to the central office. One wrong move or one incorrect splicing procedure, and Debbie is responsible for someone's telephone service being disrupted. "I must be careful, because in this field the customer comes first," Debbie insisted. There's no acceptable excuse for displeasing a customer.

Before Debbie can even begin to splice cable,

which she has been doing for two years, she must be capable of reading the blueprints. "The blueprints are coded to show every cable in the area where I'm working," informed Debbie. "I must understand my instructions and the codes to perform my job correctly."

Debbie and one other woman are the only women thus far to have jobs as telephone cable splicing technicians in Charlotte.

As far as Becky is concerned, "It's equal opportunity all the way now. I encourage women to look at all jobs; no matter what it is, if you want to do it then go ahead."



Becky Brown

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