

# Celebrating International Women's Day

for  
lifting  
professionals



## Kiwi women in cranes ARE BREAKING THE BIAS

### **Tuesday March 8 is International Women's Day.**

*The 2022 theme is #BreaktheBias, aiming towards a world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination. A symbol of crossed hands has been adopted to signify the wish of women world-wide to break the bias they face in many areas of life, not least in employment.*

Sarah Toase, CEO of the Crane Association NZ, says her industry has an increasing number of women who have broken the bias and are developing good careers with cranes. Sarah selected the three women to profile – Sarah Staples, India McKay & Catherine Dudson.

They are all proud of what they do and what they are achieving.

The Crane Association of New Zealand wants to highlight to women, especially younger ones thinking about careers or new options, that the crane industry offers some great opportunities; you can train, work, travel and progress in a sector where almost literally, the sky is the limit.

“ Women are now working across all industries previously dominated by men”, observes Sarah. ‘The crane industry is no exception. Attitude rather than gender is the deciding factor for many crane companies when looking to hire trainees or operators.

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Sarah says the industry is drastically short of operators but whilst women account for half of the New Zealand population, they only make up 3% of roles “on the tools” in the construction industry.

“It makes sense then, to actively recruit women into the crane industry. I celebrate the women in this article who represent our female operators. Not only are they successful, they’re enjoying their job and are valued by their colleagues and employers. They work hard to prove themselves and are seen as equals among their peers.”

Sarah acknowledges some bias still exists but says if employers and workers are conscious of it, it can be broken down with tools that are readily available for businesses through various organisations such as BCITO, Trade Careers and Diversity Works NZ.

“It’s a fact that a diverse workplace is more productive, has stronger problem-solving abilities and less staff turnover.”

A diverse workforce will also contribute to the sustainability of the crane industry in New Zealand.



"The benefit in highlighting the success of these female operators, is the idea that "she has to see it – to be it". Women of all ages and stages need to be shown other women working in non-traditional roles, as it fosters belief that these roles are open to them.

"I would encourage anyone, both men and women to join the crane industry. It offers good money, a chance to progress and really have a career. The crane industry is made up of a large number of family businesses, they're hardworking and genuinely care about their workers. It's a great place to go to work everyday."

**Sarah Toase as CEO of Crane Association NZ has done her own basic introduction to rigging.**



## Sarah Staples Smith Crane & Construction

### **Q. Where and when and what level did you start in the crane industry?**

A. I started working for Smith in 2013 in Christchurch. I was on the demolition team taking down earthquake-damaged homes on the cliff tops around Sumner. This was my first experience of the industry and I was working with Brett Price who was operating Smith's Kobelco 7150. He actually encouraged me to pursue the crane industry as a career.

### **Q. What are you doing now?**

A. I'm operating Smith's Terex CTT721/40 tower crane. We're currently contracting for Hawkins and are constructing the new Royal NZ Airforce hangars at Ohakea which will eventually house four new P8A Poseidon aircraft (replacing our current Orion maritime surveillance aircraft.) Smith has five cranes on the site and the scale of the project is impressive.

I'm also currently training as a mobile crane operator and spending some time on the ground with the boys as a dogman.

### **Q. What do you most like about your job?**

A. It's like playing giant Tetris! (a puzzle video game.) Each piece of the structure we're assembling has to be put together from the base to the top. I really enjoy the challenging aspects of my job and that there are plenty of opportunities to learn more.

**Q. What's good about working in the crane sector?**

A. It's given me the opportunity to travel all over the country and I've worked with lots of different people on a variety of projects. Smith also has a really good team of people who I enjoy working with.

**Q. It's mostly men working with cranes; any insights on how that's been for you?**

A. I think there are always challenges in any industry or sector that's predominantly made up of one gender. The guys on my team always have my back and treat me like I'm just one of the boys. When there have been very rare or isolated incidents, I also know that I have the support of all the management team, from my supervisor through to the owner, Tim Smith.

**Q. What future do you see for women in the industry?**

A. It would be great to see more women working with cranes. As it's not recognised as a trade apprenticeship, though, it can be hard to draw men or women into the industry.

**Tim Smith**, Managing Director, Smith Crane and Construction (SCC) says after joining the team during the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery, Sarah's previous work experience as an STMS, great attitude and personal drive opened the door for her to train as a Rigger Dogman.

"Traditionally it's a male dominated industry; Sarah is a fantastic example of the changing attitudes towards women working in the Crane and Construction Industry. As one of our highly experienced and respected Tower Crane Operators who gets on well with her colleagues, Sarah has learnt the ropes, ground up, before progressing onto the cranes and is one of a growing number of women working for SCC.

Tim says with an eye for accuracy, excellent work ethic and valuable part of the wider team, Sarah has always been an asset on any construction site and to SCC.

"Sarah's expansive portfolio of qualifications demonstrates the scope and variation available for career progression in this industry while learning on the job and being part of a sustainable construction workforce in NZ," says Tim Smith.

## India McKay Pollock Cranes

India McKay is 19 and works for Pollock Cranes, based in Tauranga

**Q. Where and when and at what level did you start in the crane industry?**

A. I started at Pollocks at 15 years of age, working part-time after school, weekends and holidays as a labourer doing jobs around the yard. Towards the end of college, I was considering going to university to study forensic science but decided against it due to the lack of opportunities in that area in New Zealand. Pollocks offered me a full-time apprenticeship to become an operator which would involve studying and obtaining my heavy traffic licences and all crane qualifications including rigging and crane operating tickets. When I started full-time I studied and obtained my Class 2 oversized load pilot certification and spent several months with our heavy haulage division which helped me get to know my way around the country with an oversized vehicle including the heavy haulage routes. While doing the piloting I studied my rigging and slinging and mobile crane certificates, eventually starting out on our smaller cranes (13T-25T All Terrains) firstly in the depots then onsite under supervision.

**Q. What are you doing now?**

A. I have been operating for about 8 months and am currently driving Pollocks 60T All Terrain Grove. I have also recently obtained my Class 4 full licence.

**Q. What do you most like about your job?**

A. I like that every day is different and there are always



new challenges. There is a lot of problem solving and I am constantly learning on the job. I'm lucky to work with a good team of mentors who are very patient and forgiving and always willing to take the time to teach me. I have also had the privilege of learning about the new technology Pollocks have in their machines which I think is pretty cool.

**Q. What's good about working in the crane sector?**

A. Everything

**Q. It's mostly men working with cranes; any insights on how that's been for you?**

A. Some people are definitely taken back a little when they see a woman show up on site to operate the crane but I don't think a woman is any less capable than a man at operating a



crane. The only disadvantage I've found in my job is that I'm not physically as strong as the guys. I'm lucky enough to work with some understanding guys who are willing to give me a hand without judgement, moving heavy blocks and rigging gear around. I have personally found there are a variety of attitudes towards women particularly younger ones operating cranes. The majority are supportive and encourage breaking the gender stereotypes. You get the occasional person with old fashioned views thinking it's a man's job and a woman isn't capable of it. I find that only encourages me to prove them wrong and be better at my job.

**Q. What future do you see for women in the industry?**

A. I definitely would want to see more women out there in the cranes. The younger generation in particular should consider the crane industry because operators are so in demand in New Zealand - it's an aging workforce. There are so many opportunities and career paths within the industry as well. I have also found that choosing a trade over university

gave me a financial advantage over my classmates by getting good pay and lots of hours without having to deal with the costs of university. I found it particularly helpful with the high cost of living in New Zealand.

**Wayne Slater**, Managing Director of Pollock Cranes says India is an asset to the business just like the rest of their 65+ employees.

"I spent time with India teaching her to operate our 13 tonne and 25 tonne cranes in the yard. She picked it up very quickly. Her eye for detail with paperwork is exceptional, very smooth operating and she has the right attitude "listen & learn".

He says they teach them once and teach them right at Pollock Cranes.

"Ours is family-cultured business and we have no issue with employing woman in our company. If they are all like India I would employ them tomorrow!"

## Catherine Dudson, 30 NZ Crane Hire

**Q. Where and when and at what level did you start in the crane industry?**

A. I was living in Canada and met a female crane operator and decided I'd quite like to do that. I went back to the UK and did a two-week training course and started emailing for jobs but got no local replies. I started emailing NZ and got replies so I booked my ticket and came straight over.

**Q. What are you doing now?**

A. I'll have had five years in June at NZ Crane Hire. I operate the 13-tonne crane here and sometimes I'm the dogman. I've just got my Class 4 licence which means I can drive bigger cranes and I'm really looking forward to that.

**Q. What do you most like about your job?**

A. I love that every day is very different. You can be lifting an aircraft engine one day and the next you are at City Rail Link or lifting an air conditioning unit on a building site. It just changes every day.

**Q. What's good about working in the crane sector?**

A. I think you can always work upwards. There are different cranes, different challenges. There's also a level of respect for everyone within the crane community.

**Q. It's mostly men working with cranes; any insights on how that's been for you?**

A. The guys at NZ Crane Hire are great. They definitely treat me as an equal. They know my strengths and I'm not



intimidated to ask them anything. On sites, you do get some strange looks at times but the good by far outweighs the bad

**Q. What future do you see for women in the industry?**

A. I think in 10 years' time, there'll be a lot more women. You don't leave school knowing about the opportunities in cranes and more needs to be done about that. Every year though I see more women in construction and we'll see more women on cranes as part of that.