

Profile: Esther Satele

Esther Satele is one of a few women who have turned to iron work as a career – it’s tough work, but she’s a tough, competitive lady.

“I won’t ever forget that day when my husband’s friend said that I wouldn’t last a day in the field, it made me want to prove him wrong,” Satele recalls. And she did.

“I enjoy climbing up in the sky. I feel free when I’m up in the air,” says Satele.

The number of women turning to construction careers is growing as more efforts are made to recruit women to high-demand jobs, such as iron work. While the numbers remain small, women are turning to the trade because of the great income potential and pay equity through unions.

Satele says she loves her job because of the good wages and health insurance, which are crucial for supporting her five children. She acknowledges the work hasn’t been easy, but it’s always been rewarding.

“I would go home with raw shoulders from carrying the rebar, but somehow I managed to come back every single day,” says Satele, who went from rodbusting to “bolting up” or putting together the skeleton iron work on buildings.

At 49 years old, Satele celebrates 18 years with Ironworkers Local 378 in July 2015. She came to California by way of Hawaii from American Samoa.

Satele doesn’t have family members who are Ironworkers, nor does she know anyone in it. She got into the trade as a dare.

She spent six years tying rebar after she turned out from the apprenticeship in 1999. You often will catch her developing welding and other skills at the training center in Benicia when she isn’t on a job site.

The support she receives has been a key part of her success, she says.

“I also think the fact that my union brothers and sisters will always be there for me is priceless.”



Satele upgrades her skills at the training center.