



WOMEN OF STEEL NEWS

JANUARY 2024

FROM THE UNION

Register now for International Women's Conference virtual wrap-up

On February 29, 2024, at 8:00 PM EST, just in time to welcome in International Women's Month, we are getting back together to finish what we started in October!

Register NOW to be a part of the virtual conclusion to the USW International Women's Conference where we will hear from our union's leaders and learn about topics affecting women workers in the United States, Canada, and around the globe.

Can't make it on the 29th? We know life is busy and we've got you covered! We'll be sending out information on how to access the content online after the event. You'll be able to watch whenever, wherever makes sense for you.



[Click here to register!](#)

Introducing Sister Stories

Women of Steel (WOS) are a formidable presence within the USW and beyond. Day in and day out, we make our presence known, taking a stand, and persistently fighting for genuine equity.

Despite this, our stories frequently go unheard...**It's time we change that!**

Understanding the power of shared experiences, we are introducing a new monthly feature in the newsletter called **Sister Stories**. This section is dedicated to fostering learning and empowerment from one another. Sister Stories will shine a light on the struggles and victories of women across our union. Through sharing real life experiences on matters that are crucial to us, we will educate one another.

In this month's Sister Story, we spotlight **Sharon Stiller**, a pioneering figure in the Women of Steel program. As the former WOS Director and Assistant to USW International President George Becker, Sharon has been instrumental in shaping the program. She understands the significance of sharing our narratives and safeguarding our history, all while guiding and mentoring the next generation of Women of Steel.

-Randie Pearson
International Director of USW Women of Steel

First Women of Steel Director Sharon Stiller reflects on her legacy as a pioneer of the movement

Sharon Stiller isn't just a Woman of Steel – she's a pioneer who kickstarted the entire WOS program that has helped thousands of USW members become activists and changemakers.

Now retired, Stiller began her labor journey as a member and grievance chair of Local 13796, located south of Gary, Ind. There she worked at Northern Indiana Public Service Company for 25 years alongside nearly 2,000 clerical employees spread out across the northern part of Indiana.

This is where she gained experience representing a large body of workers, the vast majority of whom were women, inspired by the fervor of the time and place.

“Steel was very powerful in Gary then,” Stiller said. “There were a lot of modern mills. It was a hot bed of activity with a lot of young people working there.”

Stiller, who was promoted to a casual staff member and then a staff representative, said that the concept of the Women of Steel program originated in Canada and that, with the encouragement of her then District 31 Director, she began implementing a district-wide program focused on women's issues.

“Women wanted more input, especially those in basic steel,” Stiller said. “They were fighting to move into more specialized jobs and positions, but I didn't want to develop women just to move up in their own facilities; we were trying on a much larger scale to move them up in labor leadership.”



After showcasing what she could do with women activists in her district, Stiller joined USW International staff in 1998 as Assistant to the President under George Becker's leadership, advising him on women's issues. He then named her the first director of the Women of Steel department.

Stiller said that Becker was the right president at the right time to help spark a long-needed change.

"He was an old-guard president but had a vision about how the union was going to grow," said Stiller. "He could see women and other groups helping to grow and strengthen the union and the movement."

Stiller said that one of the biggest challenges was getting women to recognize that their experiences and voices were valid and necessary.

"You weren't just trying to change the culture, you also needed to find women who believed in themselves," Stiller said. "That was hard because women had never seen themselves in these roles before. They even had to learn how to speak up and use their voice and do that in a safe space."

Stiller also believes that the number one thing women in the union can do to make the transition from merely thinking about becoming a leader to living as one is to recognize the history and comprehensive importance of the movement as a whole.

"Your love of the union has to go deeper than just wanting higher wages," she said. "The union is every single person. You will not truly become a part of the union until you recognize that. It's not about 'me,' it's about 'us.'"

And what makes Sharon Stiller most proud to be a Woman of Steel?

"Seeing the wins that women from all walks of life are achieving," she said. "But there are also still so many women who aren't compensated properly or respected, and that will only change with a political movement. At the end of the day, I think we will do it. We will be okay."

Register for CLUW's 50th Anniversary celebration in Niagara Falls

The Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) is celebrating its 50th anniversary on Fri., May 10, in Niagara Falls, NY. The event will include a plenary, workshops, and a gala.

Register for your room at the Sheraton Niagara Falls before April 9 to secure the special rate.

[Click here to make your reservation!](#)