



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago

# Press Release

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## Chicago Women in Trades/National Women Apprenticeship Day observed



*In the photo (front, from L to R): Sarah Joy Liles, pipefitter and CWIT board secretary; Eileen Pollard, accountant and CWIT board treasurer; Laborer Ora Staniel, Local 2; MWRD Vice President Barbara McGowan, MWRD Commissioner Debra Shore, Ella Jones, retired sprinkler fitter from Local 281, (back, from L to R): CWIT Executive Director Jayne Vellinga, MWRD President Mariyana Spyropoulos, MWRD Commissioner Cynthia Santos and MWRD Commissioner Kari Steele.*

The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD) Board of Commissioners recognized the 35th anniversary of the founding of Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT) and National Women in Apprenticeship Day by presenting a resolution at the Nov. 17 Board meeting.

Although the skilled-trades workforce in Illinois numbers more than 300,000, fewer than three percent are women. The resolution honors an organization that has expanded opportunities for women to enter the skilled trades, including those whose contributions help the MWRD operate smoothly every day.

“The work of the trades is vital to our success at the District, just as it is to the success of the broader economy,” said Commissioner Debra Shore. “It is heartening to see women participating in this important sector of the

workforce – getting the job done and making the economy grow.”

As one of the first women to win county-wide election in Cook County, the late MWRD Commissioner Joanne Alter was both a supporter and a hero and inspiration to many of the founding members of CWIT. In 1987, CWIT founded the Pre-Apprenticeship Tutorial Workshop, now known as the Technical Opportunity Program, which gives approximately 75 women a year the opportunity to participate in a 12-week, 180-hour pre-apprenticeship program that prepares them to compete for and successfully complete construction trades apprenticeships.

CWIT has been designated as the Technical Assistance Center for the Midwest Region by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Apprenticeship and is a *(continued)*

## Chicago Women in Trades/National Women Apprenticeship Day *(continued)*

participant in several local and national workforce organizations. The week of Nov. 14-20 was designated as National Apprenticeship Week, and Nov. 17 was designated as National Women in Apprenticeship Day.

“The commitment of government agencies in ensuring that women have equitable employment opportunity on publicly funded construction work is critical to increasing women’s access to and retention in these careers,” said CWIT Executive Director Jayne Vellinga. “CWIT has

been grateful for the support of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District, which has provided opportunity for so many women to build lasting careers in the trades, and is honored by this recognition of our 35th anniversary.”

“Congratulations to Chicago Women in Trades on this anniversary and thank you for your commitment to protecting our water environment,” said President Mariyana Spyropoulos. “The District cannot protect the water environment without the work of our talented tradespersons.”

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### Recovering Resources, Transforming Water

*Established in 1889, the MWRD ([www.mwr.org](http://www.mwr.org)) is an award-winning, special purpose government agency responsible for wastewater treatment and stormwater management in Cook County, Illinois.*