

Honoring Women’s History Month: Meet Four Women Who Promote Healing and Hope

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The month of March marks Women’s History Month, a time to honor the contributions of women to history, culture, and society. In February 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the Week of March 8, 1980 as National Women’s History Week and in 1987 Congress designated March as “Women’s History Month.” Since 1995, each president has issued an annual proclamation designating the month of March as “Women’s History Month.”

This year’s observance centers on the theme, “Providing Healing, Promoting Hope.” The theme is both a tribute to the ceaseless work of caregivers and frontline workers during the pandemic and also a recognition of the thousands of ways that women of all cultures have provided both healing and hope throughout history.

The Port of Portland is home to extraordinary women who embody this year's Women's History Month theme through their unwavering dedication to their work and care for the community. Get to know four of these employees who provide healing and promote hope:

Lani J. Hill (she/her) **Fire Marshall AO**

What made you want to be in Fire Service?

After working over 25 years in the fire service including forest firefighting, Airforce Aircraft Firefighting for the Portland Air National Guard and an Oregon State Firefighter at PANG Base, I came to a point in my career where I wanted to challenge myself and dive into the fire prevention and inspection side of the fire service. The majority of my career was spent on the south side of the runway and this was a transition that I was pursuing for many years as a firefighter. When the opportunity opened up at PAF&R for the fire prevention and inspections department, I knew I wanted the opportunity to grow and serve the PDX family and community.



Lani Hill

What is most rewarding about your career?

I have the privilege of working with a diverse group of people who bring different insight, views, and experiences to each and every day. I am an influencer and mentor of young adults, advocate for women in fire and EMS, and supporter and member of the LGBTQ+ community. I feel as if I am in a place in my career where my voice matters and the work within my own department as well as the NWFireDiversity council will make someone's journey perhaps a little better, breaking a bit more glass, and open the doors for many women and minorities who wish to earn a family wage and serve their community.

Who inspires you?

There are so many who inspire me. It can be a number of folks depending on my mood or the task at hand. Inspiration can come from ordinary people doing extraordinary things. I see it every day! It can be a quote, an article, perhaps some moment when someone overcomes challenges which would set most back, it's crossing the finish line last, it's the last second shot...it's the person who continues on no matter what. Those are who inspire.

What is the best advice you have been given?

“Oh honey, you are never done being tested.” This was said to me after I had graduated from PSU. Thinking I was done with “testing” and wondering why I would be tested since I had just graduated college, I was very disappointed to say the very least, and she was so very right! The life journey is a never-ending test.

What advice would you give to young women who might want to do the same career in Fire Service as you?

Go for it! There are many firefighters, men and women, who want you to succeed. There are resources and opportunities for you. Ask for help, surround yourself with those who can guide you in the right direction. Look for volunteer or other educational opportunities to take the steps needed to prepare yourself for the journey. Get fit physically and mentally.

Emily Rice (she/her) IT Senior Manager

What made you want to be in Information Technology?

I’ve had exposure to information technology (IT) for most of my life, but it wasn’t until after college that I realized I had any interest in having an IT career. My dad began working in IT as a software engineer when I was very young and for many years tried to get me interested in computing. I remember he wrote some simple computer games for me which must have been really slick back then in the early ’80s! I appreciated and enjoyed the games he made me, but I never developed an interest in IT or computing as a career.

After college I found myself working for a couple of small web development startups towards the end of the dot com boom in the early 2000s. I was initially resistant to a long-term career in IT because I didn’t really know where I fit in. However, I was excited by the possibilities that technology — especially the internet at that time — brought to organizations to reach more people and to do work more effectively and efficiently. Over the course of the next several years I created a career niche as someone who effectively bridged technology with people and organizational business needs. Now, over 20 years into my career in IT, I can say I truly enjoy the work that I do and I am grateful my path led me to IT despite my initial lack of interest. And now my dad and I can share our IT stories with each other, and I laugh at the fact that his nudging me towards IT actually succeeded!



Emily Rice

What is most rewarding about your career?

I enjoy seeing the possibilities of technology connect with organizational business needs to create great outcomes for people. So often we think of IT as just technical skills related to software and equipment. But what's much more interesting and rewarding to me are the human aspects of IT, like how technology really can enable efficiencies and improvements to empower people in their lives and work, or the importance of organizational and cultural change that comes through the adoption of technology. It's extremely satisfying to me to see people work through what may be a technically challenging situation and come out the other side with a great solution, improved processes, healthy working relationships and prepared to tackle the next challenge as a strong team.

Who inspires you?

I immigrated with my family at a young age, and I still have strong ties to my family in the Philippines. Witnessing the challenges my family and other immigrants experienced made me more sensitive to the experiences of those who are marginalized in some way by society. My years in IT have also opened my eyes to the experience of women and nonbinary folks in IT and the challenges they/we experience. The people that most inspire me and that I look up to the most are the people who do the tireless work every day to help change our systems, society, and our world to lift up those who have been marginalized and create systems of equity. These inspiring people include some full-time community organizers I work with through my volunteering in our local Filipino community, but they also include several people I work with here at the Port who make it a point to infuse the work they do every day to forward DEI. Step by step, they are all changing the world for the better!

What is the best advice you have been given?

Along the lines of the great quote, "be the change you want to see in the world," the best advice I was given was to "create the community you want to have in the world." These two actions go hand in hand in my experience. As a young woman in IT who didn't immediately see a career track mapped out ahead of me, I found various people along the way who shared insights and encouragement that collectively helped create pathways and career possibilities we may not have known were possible. It has been deeply empowering to see the power that comes through the process of creating community, providing each other mutual support, and being cheerleaders and advocates for each other. I am grateful to be involved with the W+IT group at the Port which has been a wonderful example of this type of community.

What advice would you give to young women who might want to do the same career in IT as you?

I'd pass on the advice I was given and "create the community you want to have in the world." There are so many paths available in IT that may not be apparent, but don't shy away from reaching out and connecting with others to learn about their journeys and the emerging ways

you may be able to build on the experience you already have. Be open to trying out new challenges even if you don't think you have all the qualifications on paper. Just try it out — as long as you learn from the experience, you won't fail!

Wendy Given (she/her) Art Program Manager

What made you want to be in Art Program Management?

I am continually enthused and humbled to my very core with the work that I do as it is so closely aligned with my education, employment experiences, personal values, beliefs and long-term career goals.

What is most rewarding about your career?

Managing the Port Art Program is an extremely rewarding and honorable way to work closely with, champion and widely exhibit the fine work of stellar local, regional, national, and international artists, creatives, and arts organizations in a unique and highly celebrated public sphere.

The sum and substance of my being are passionately embedded in art, thoughtful artistic expression and culture—the great connectivity of all peoples through the power of the arts. I have an unwavering belief in the intrinsically positive benefits of education, equity, inclusion, diversity (regarding people, disciplines, ideas, voices, and stories), and the importance of artists and artistic practices in this work.

I believe that artists, makers, producers and creators generate integral developments and fascinating contributions to humankind through observation and experience. I also strongly believe that the priceless gift of providing powerful exhibitions and opportunities for artists connecting to an audience can lead to invaluable growth and greatness. Highly crafted, uplifting and relevant presentations of contemporary artwork to the public can be both educational and inspirational.

Who inspires you?

So many people of all genders and ways of being—those who are living and those who have passed, including friends and family—as well as animals and plants. Artists, scientists, activists, environmentalists, musicians, filmmakers, writers, poets, philosophers, children,



Wendy Given

elders, etc. inspire me. All of life and death inspires me.

What is the best advice you have been given?

Listen, be kind, humble, curious, empathetic and grateful. Do not make assumptions about other people, their lives or their daily struggles. Allow and trust deeply in your intuition. Education is an integral lifelong endeavor.

What advice would you give to young women who might want to do the same career in Art Program Management as you?

Educate yourself! Study art, design and film history. Become an intern for the exhibitions or collections department at a museum you love. Advocate for artists and the arts. Work for both profit and non-profit arts organizations. Meet and make friends with as many artists and cultural workers as possible! Have interest in, educate yourself about, and immerse yourself in as many diverse cultures as you possibly can. Travel broadly! Learn how to design, prepare and install exhibitions solo (including spackling, painting and using power tools). Know how to properly handle and install artwork of all mediums. Learn color theory. Look at everything—everywhere. Keep an open mind and a generous heart. Be brave. Champion underrepresented artists. Understand that a career as an artist is a professional practice and should be treated as such. Learn arts administration. Curate an exhibition! Always generously compensate artists and arts workers for the important cultural work they provide. Know that art is subjective but curate objectively.

Cassie Hartless **Police Detective**

What made you want to be in Law Enforcement?

For as long as I can remember, I have always had an interest in law enforcement. As a young girl, any time I saw those red and blue lights I would get excited and wanted to know what was happening and what they were doing. I wanted to be involved.

What is most rewarding about your career?

Peer support is a vital part of law enforcement today. When I first became a police officer, I thought I was going to help a lot of people every day and though I do get to occasionally help people, the most rewarding aspect for me has been my Peer Support role. These last few years have been extremely challenging for everyone in law enforcement and in addition to the regular day to day stressors that officers face, things like Covid, riots, protests, feelings of seclusion and staffing shortages have taken their toll on our officers. I believe that these added stressors have caused many officers to consider leaving their law enforcement career

at one point or another. This really saddens me because I think we have some of the best officers in the state. Helping officers in any way I can is the most rewarding part of my career and something that I am very proud of.

Who inspires you?

Truthfully, I grab inspiration from so many people, both good and bad. Bad people inspire me to be better and good people give me strength and drive me to work harder. My mentor and role model is Port of Portland Sergeant Jan Childers. She is my biggest cheerleader and I aspire to be just like her. Sergeant Childers is an incredible leader, mentor, supporter and friend. If I can be half the woman she is, I would be incredibly proud of myself.



Cassie Hartless

What is the best advice you have been given?

The best advice I have been given comes from my husband. Every time I find myself struggling in the field of law enforcement, he reminds me, “Short term pain for long term success.” The past few years of law enforcement have been so hard, and I often come back to this advice to help me endure even the toughest of days.

What advice would you give to young women who might want to do the same career in Law Enforcement as you?

When I first started in law enforcement, I did not have much confidence, so my advice would be to find comfort in being uncomfortable and believe in yourself and your strengths. Being a police officer is an extremely hard and stressful job and you must accept that you will never have the same police call, that every call is different and therefore, you will never be completely prepared for the call you are about to go out on. For newer officers, the unknown can leave you feeling uncomfortable and vulnerable, but with experience comes confidence and after that, the job can become fun. Believe in yourself and anything is possible!

The Port’s Women+ Development Network (W+DN) employee resource group observed the month by hosting a series of events and activities including taking a deep dive on scientifically proven methods to deal with burnout. In partnership with the Native People’s United employee resource group, the W+DN also hosted a Without a Whisper documentary film and discussion event to support the Kenton Women’s Village.

