



DRIVER MYRNA CHARTRAND OF PORTAGE TRANSPORT INC.
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MADE FOR THE ROAD FOR THE FREE PRESS BY HOLLI MONCRIEFF

Some little girls want to be princesses, pop stars or astronauts when they grow up. Myrna Chartrand wanted to be a truck driver.

“My mom always said that if there was a road to the moon, I’d be on it,” says Chartrand, whose father and brother were both in the industry. “I always liked driving and road trips.”

After tagging along with her brother on a trip to New York, Chartrand was hooked. She was determined to become a driver, and she got her wish. She’s been working with Portage Transport for the past six years, and says it’s the perfect job.

“I came into it with almost no experience, and I was making the top wage right away,” she says. “I like that I have the flexibility to plan my day without someone looking over my shoulder.”

The friendships she’s made with her fellow road warriors are one of the best parts of the job, Chartrand says.

“I’ve met so many people on the road that I’m still friends with. When I come across my friends or people I know and we get to talking and laughing, it really breaks up the day. The friendships out here are what makes the job.”

Her friends back home have to be very understanding. Chartrand is on the road more than she’s in Winnipeg. She’s able to visit with local friends and family only about four days a month.

“I don’t know how many times I’ve had to cancel on friends. The times I miss out on certain functions and family events are hard, but everyone tries to work their schedule around mine,” she says. “Everyone has been understanding — they get that it’s my job.”

Women account for only three per cent of Canadian truck drivers, but Chartrand says female drivers have become more accepted over the years.

“I’ve noticed lots of young girls in their 30s and 40s

getting into it and driving by themselves,” she says, adding that most female drivers used to work with a male partner. “People are accepting it more. I’ve had guys say that women do a better job because they pay more attention to detail.”

Most of the female drivers she meets are single. Some do have a partner at home, she says, but never children.

“I don’t know anyone who’s doing this with a child,” she says, adding that the time spent away from home would make raising a family extremely difficult.

In the years she’s been driving, she’s been made to feel uncomfortable a few times, but never unsafe. Her biggest struggle is finding a bathroom.

“Guys can go anywhere, but obviously with women, that’s not the case,” she laughs. “I plan my day around when I’m going to find a bathroom.”

When Chartrand started driving, she felt she had to work harder than anyone else just to be accepted. That’s no longer the case.

“I’ve never been made to feel like I wasn’t one of the guys, and I never feel left out. We’re all here to do the same job — everybody is working as a team,” she says. “I still have to deal with those people who put women down and get vulgar right away. But it’s just talk — I’ve never had anyone approach me or try to take anything from me.”

With more drivers retiring and the labour shortage becoming a significant issue, there’s never been a better time for women to break into this male-dominated industry.

“I encourage women to get into it if it’s something they think they’d enjoy,” says Chartrand. “I think we make great money, we have a good health plan, and I really enjoy it, but I started out with a great support system. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. We’re all here to help.” ■

WOMEN WITH DRIVE IS TRUCKING HR CANADA’S NATIONAL PROJECT TO PROMOTE WOMEN IN FREIGHT TRANSPORTATION

Currently in Canada, women make up:

- 3% of truck drivers
- 3% of mechanics, transport trailer technicians, and cargo workers
- 11% of managerial staff
- 25% of freight claims and safety, and loss prevention specialists
- 18% of dispatchers
- 13% of parts technicians

OBJECTIVES OF THE WOMEN WITH DRIVE NATIONAL PROJECT:

- Raise awareness among women of the various career opportunities that exist in the trucking and freight transportation industry
- Raise awareness among employers of recruitment and retention practices that can better support the integration of women into the workforce
- Develop practical tools to support connecting women with careers in trucking and freight transportation

The trucking industry in Canada is full of opportunities and possibilities and the potential for career progression and growth is excellent.

The industry presents a huge economic opportunity for women to seize hold of these jobs in trucking, particularly in the traditionally male-dominated occupations such as transport trailer technician and truck/transport mechanic, and most significantly as truck drivers, whether as owner-operators, or in the private or for-hire companies. All current research indicates that labour shortages resulting from an aging workforce are particularly acute for the trucking sector. Our workforce has a lower percentage of young people and we are below the national average with regards to the participation rate of women.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EMPLOYMENT ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN IN THE TRUCKING INDUSTRY

Trucking HR Canada has spearheaded the development of a national advisory committee which will lead the development of an employment action plan for women in the trucking industry.

This plan will include:

- A national employment strategy
- Identification of best practices
- Identification of challenges, including existing barriers
- Promoting the trucking industry as an industry of choice for women

— source: Trucking HR Canada

