

Community Focus

On the river

Meet LaHave ferry's first female employee

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Below the deck of the LaHave River ferry, a system of hydraulics power the wheel that pulls the cable that guides the Brady E. Himmelman from LaHave to East LaHave and back again.

This hidden world, with its low ceilings and smell of sea, is the domain of ferry engineer Angela Conrad.

Conrad grew up in West LaHave riding the ferry, and by age nine was making the crossings by herself to visit friends on the Riverport side. "I can't imagine what life would be like without the ferry here," said the 38-year-old diesel technician.

She remembers asking her fisherman father why there were no women working on the ferry. Since then, she's wanted to change that, and after completing a diesel repair industrial and marine program, and checking off a long list of safety and small vessel accreditations, she was hired in October 2014.

"I'm the first [woman] here in LaHave, which is awesome," said Conrad. "I mean, I always said there should be some girls working on the ferry, but who knew that it would be me."

Conrad is a graduate of a NSCC program designed to match women with careers in the trades. But from the beginning, Jeannie Eisnor, coordinator with Women Unlimited, says Conrad was unique.

She knew right away her goal was to work on the ferry. "And I thought to myself, that's a very specific career goal and there aren't that many people that work there," said Eisnor.

But Conrad was determined. "She knew what other types of training she needed to have, so she did her marine training on March break and her time off. She definitely had a plan and clear goals," added Eisnor.

A few weeks after Conrad graduated, a job on the LaHave ferry was posted.

The Women Unlimited program in Lunenburg and Queens was the first of its kind in the province, and has seen 147 graduates since starting almost a decade ago. Similar programs are now available in Halifax, Dartmouth and Cape Breton.

Still, only five per cent of trades people in Nova Scotia are women, said Eisnor.

"So many women not only don't consider that type of work, but maybe aren't encouraged. We see it in the school systems. We see it in people's families. That's



Angela Conrad grew up riding the ferry near West LaHave.

considered a man's job," she said.

Conrad says the ferry was her ticket to staying home in Nova Scotia, where she was determined to raise her family. She wanted her young daughter to have the same experience crossing the river as she did, and now she does. Her daughter even rides the ferry alone when Conrad isn't on one of her 12-hour shifts.

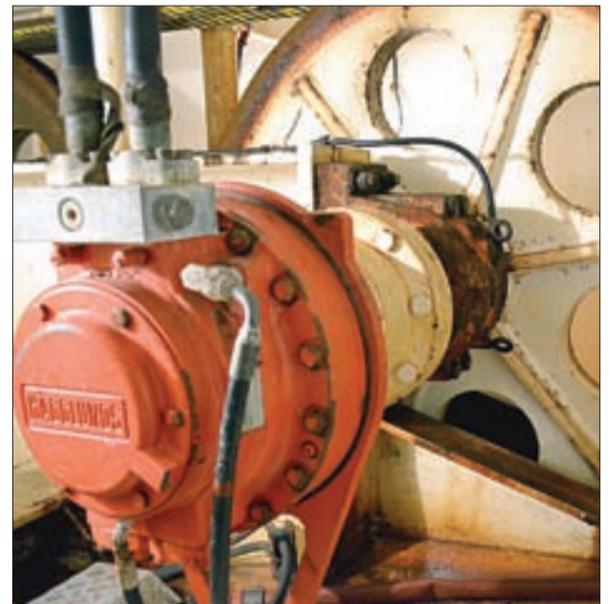
"She's like a real chatty little girl, but she sits in here right quiet and good," said Conrad with a laugh.

Conrad still lives in West LaHave, and knows firsthand the power the ferry holds for locals and tourists. "It really does connect the two communities," she said, adding the alternative is a 45-minute car ride around.

A ferry has travelled the LaHave since 1918. That first six-car boat was replaced by a cable ferry in the late '70s, and in 2010, the province unveiled the \$3.5 million Brady E. Himmelman, named in honour of the ferry's longest serving operator.

Conrad often fills in as captain, and although she's still many years from beating Himmelman's 35-year career, she's on her way.

"This is where I'll be. As long as the ferry is here, I'll be here," she said.



This wheels grab the cable that draws the ferry across the LaHave River.

The Brady E. Himmelman has been operating since 2010.



Conrad started working as a ferry engineer on the Brady E. Himmelman in October 14, 2014.



Conrad says her job is "kind of like a mishmash. It's not your typical marine engineer job," as her duties include taking people's tickets and customer service.