

There's No Such Thing As A Man's Job Anymore

3 Gutsy Blue-Collar Women 3 Happily Raking In The Green

The pay is better, the jobs exciting and plentiful, and the field's wide open for the right women. BY KAREN KRAMER



Working in a field traditionally dominated by men has never been easy, but it has often been attractive: The pay is better, and the jobs are more plentiful. But more and more, lately, women are working in so-called men's professions—not just for the salary but for the challenge of breaking barriers, both societal and personal.

CELESTE FRAIZER: The Only Female Fire Fighter In Her Town

Ask any little boy what he'd like to be when he grows up, and chances are one of the things he says will be a fireman. But for Celeste Fraizer of Scottsdale, Ariz., this had been *her* dream as well. For many years, the notion simply sat in the back of her mind because the obstacles seemed insurmountable and the timing was wrong.

Today, however, Fraizer, at the age of 37, routinely braves flame and smoke for Rural Metro Fire Department in Arizona, and is the only female fire fighter in Scottsdale.

"When I was a young woman, I didn't fit the height and weight requirements. I'm 5'4" and 125 pounds, and the cutoff was 5'5" and 135. I was also raising two children."

In addition, Fraizer's husband was *very* cool on the idea. A fire fighter is often away for 24-hour stretches, and the environment is nearly all-male. "We never even got so far as his worrying about the physical risk," says Fraizer. But when she and her husband di-

Karen Kramer is a free-lance writer and documentary-film producer.



At 5'4" and 125 pounds, the petite but mighty Celeste Fraizer is worth her weight in fire-fighting ability.

vorced several years ago (and the physical requirements changed), she was ready: "I knew it was my turn to do what I'd always wanted to do."

Fraizer passed the tough physical test, which is the same for men and women. "I've always had a lot of upper-body strength," says the petite but mighty Fraizer. "When I was a kid, I could beat my brother arm wrestling. I had also been an aerobics instructor for 15 years."

Unlike her former husband, Fraizer's 14-year-old daughter, Ivy, and 16-year-old son,

Brandon, are completely behind their mother's choice of profession: "At first it scared them that their mom was out doing this, but I explained how concerned the department was about safety and the high level of skill required, so now they're real comfortable with it." Having their mom away for long stretches of time *has* forced them to be self-reliant, but they are also proud of their mother, often bragging to friends.

Still, the work is grueling both physically and emotionally. When Fraizer enters a burning structure, she is wearing 50 pounds of fire-fighting suit alone, lugging a hose, the equivalent of 60 pounds, and carrying at least a 10-pound ax. Temperatures are 300° to 400°, and she is on her hands and knees because at any point the smoke above her can catch fire (a "flash over"), which means the entire room ignites, including the atmosphere. In addition, there is the stress of dealing with injured people, especially children in pain, whom fire fighters can only "stabilize and protect."

"I would hesitate to recommend this job to a woman, unless she were in top physical form," says Fraizer, "and unless she really had the *desire*." Starting salary for a fire fighter is \$26,000, but there is the possibility for advancement. Fraizer's ultimate goal is to make captain.

Taking aerobics still keeps Fraizer in shape, but back when she was teaching, they led to one embarrassing incident: "My pager went off while I was in class one summer. I jumped in the car in my little bra top and briefs. The fire was so close, I could see the smoke from the parking lot. I just threw my fire-fighting gear on top of what I was wearing. It took us a long time to fight this fire, and when we were done, the captain wanted us to cool down—drink water, make sure we were okay. I

whipped off my jacket, and there I was standing on the "fireground" with fire fighters and the captain and officers all around, and I had practically nothing on underneath. Everyone laughed, and to this day, I haven't really lived it down."

Razzing aside, Fraizer feels the rewards of the job are enormous, and she shares a camaraderie with her colleagues "that I've never come across other than in my family. There are bonds that are unbreakable."

MAURA SPERY:

Housepainter To The Stars

When Maura Spery was 15 years old and living in the small New England town of Stonington, Conn., she took a summer job painting wood and clapboard houses. Now, 17 years (and many occupations) later, she is a painting contractor specializing in residential and small-business interiors in New York City.

When Spery first moved to New York, she worked in a Greenwich Village real-estate office. Eventually, she attempted to open her own business, a gourmet deli and café in a neighborhood that was rapidly changing. Unfortunately, the neighborhood was changing for the worse, and the café went under. She tried waitressing for a while, but her desire to be her own boss was reinforced by working for a man "who was out of his mind."

"For years, I had painted apartments on and off for extra dough," Spery continues, "and I was sort of the 'family housepainter,' so when a subcontractor friend offered me a painting job he didn't want, I hired two people and took it. It was a big job, and at one point, I inadvertently stripped the veneer right off some doors that the owners had assured me were solid oak. Yeah, in the beginning there were some jobs where I wound up making \$2.00 an hour."

Spery's real-estate and subcontractor network soon yielded steady work. At the same time, she taught herself how to do very fine plaster restoration ("A friend of mine bought a house upstate, and I learned on that"), and she has since earned a reputation for doing extremely high-quality work. "I do what's called upper-end work. I don't do landlord-type paint jobs, where you just throw the paint on the walls."

Most of Spery's clients come to her through word of mouth. Three years ago, she did some work for the architectural design firm Pierce Allen, who has sent her such celebrity clients as Tommy Tune, Kevin Kline, and Phoebe Cates.

When work is pouring in (business is seasonal) or a job is particularly big, Spery hires several people to work with her, including her sister, who does fine painting work such as decorative cloud ceilings. In keeping with the employment scene in New York, where no one is what they seem, almost all of the hires are artists—musicians, painters, photographers. Spery herself is a musician, in the stereotyping style you might expect: "I sing, and play raucous rock-and-roll lead guitar."



Maura Spery is a housepainter by day, rock guitarist by night.

But how does a male career housepainter take to being supervised by a female? Jeff Smart, who's been painting houses for ten years, says of Spery, "There's no one better. She listens to everything you have to say and doesn't come off as a know-it-all—although I learned a lot from her. And other bosses stand over you and rush you. With Maura, there's never any pressure. At Ellen Barkin's place, we'd work 15 to 18 hours a day, but it wasn't even like working. It was just a lot of fun. I've never had a long day with her. And she bought me a guitar as a bonus."

Spery's client roster is constantly growing. She says, "I think a lot of my success is because I'm a woman. People feel much more comfortable having me in their house. Last year, we did a couple of actors' homes, people

who are on the road. They want to trust that you'll do a good job when they're not there. Plus, we're a lot neater than men. We tend to leave the place a lot cleaner."

If there are drawbacks to this work, they are, like that of Fraizer's, the physical demands. Five-gallon buckets of "joint compound" get heavy after a while, whether a man or a woman is carrying it, and Spery looks forward to handling the jobs in a more managerial capacity: contracting the work, ordering the paint and supplies, scheduling, overseeing.

Perhaps the music dream will come through, but in the meantime, Spery's \$50,000-a-year business has placed her well out of the "starving artist" category.

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DESK- OR OUTWARD-BOUND— WHICH TYPE ARE YOU?

BY CHRISTINE MUHLKE

For some women, a corner office and skyline view are the ultimate goal. For others, a four-wheel-drive truck and a mountain vista are their idea of bliss. What personality characteristics determine the color of your collar?

According to New York-based therapist Marlin S. Potash, every job requires following schedules, an ability to deal with people, and a capacity to look beyond the expected solution to successfully accomplish tasks.

The question is, are you an officer or an office worker? Here are some common characteristics of women in each profession:

Adventure-lovers are:

- Independent—they relish the ability to make their own decisions.

- Risk-takers—the scent of danger is intoxicating to them.
- Willing to break out of the norm (and put themselves in the male enclave).
- Aware that men's jobs (particularly unionized ones) are often better paying.
- Dependent on the project at hand for work (for instance, putting out a forest fire); each "job" is a piece of work in itself.

"Suits" are:

- Comfortable with traditional rules of etiquette and expectations.
- Team players who like to contribute to a larger (company) goal.
- At ease with a clear hierarchy and office politics.
- Content with clearly defined duties. Their responsibilities are often predetermined by their position.
- Great organizers and problem solvers. **W**



The telephone company tried to put Joyce Gallagher in a desk job, but she wanted to be outside.

JOYCE GALLAGHER:

Climbs Poles For Telephone Company

When the New York Telephone Company was slapped with a lawsuit in the mid-seventies for not hiring enough women in non-traditional jobs, they agreed as part of the settlement to place newspaper ads encouraging women to apply for jobs previously held mostly by men. Joyce Gallagher, of Brooklyn, New York, saw the ad and applied.

"I had been working for New York City for eight years as a case worker handling abused kids," she says, "and I wanted to do something more physical." A year after she applied, the phone company called her in to take a test, which assessed math and language skills. There is no physical or hands-on test; even mechanical skills are tested on paper.

When Gallagher was first hired, the company tried to put her in a desk job, but Joyce held fast. "I wanted to be *outside*," the 46-year-old says. Gallagher, who has been working for the telephone company for 14 years, is one of a handful of women service technicians.

"Jobs such as operators and directory assistants have been traditionally held by women," says Jamie Depeau, a spokesperson for the company. "Women hold about 10 percent of the nontraditional jobs, such as building mechanics, cable-splicing technicians, garage mechanics, and outside plant technicians. But what Joyce does—service technician, or installer—about 3 percent of these are women." Gallagher's pay is based upon an hourly wage (\$17 per hour), and the big-company health benefits are substantial.

"The job is physically demanding but not

difficult," says Gallagher, who is strong but of average build and not particularly muscular. "If there's trouble on a block, you can be climbing four or five poles a day for months. But I like the physical part of the job."

Gallagher also likes dealing with the public. She certainly finds all types in Brooklyn, but most of them are impressed by her. "Once, I was in an Italian-American neighborhood, and there were some men doing construction on the house where I was installing a phone. They hardly spoke any English. I had to climb their scaffolding once, and they also saw me carrying my ladder back and forth several times. When I was hauling the ladder one last time, one of the men said, 'You work'—and when he paused I thought he was going to say something rude—'just like a man.' But he had a big smile on his face, as if to say I was doing a great job. It was very nice."

Gallagher has earned the same respect from colleagues. Once they saw she wasn't going to ask for their help with the heavy stuff, they began to admire her diligence and stamina. Customers, too, treat her well. "People want me to feel comfortable because I'm the one who's gonna get their phone for them."

"I like when people respect what I do," she continues, even appreciating the backhanded compliments: "Sometimes teenage girls ask me why I've got men's shoes on. But they also want to know where they can buy some."

As more and more women enter the work force, like the three profiled here, they will prove themselves indispensable to the economy, and not just a fad that has peaked with the so-called Year of the Woman. **W**



Our Cover Model

One of daytime and prime-time television's most popular and respected stars, **Deidre Hall** has played Dr. Marlena Evans Brady on *Days of Our Lives* for a total of 13 years.

Her Real-Life Soap-Opera Plot

She's beautiful, she's talented, and she's desperate. After 20 years, two dissolved marriages, and a ghastly array of medical procedures (including many attempts at artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization), she is still unable to conceive.

In the meantime, her fiancé gets another woman pregnant, and the plot thickens. But here's where real-life has the soaps beat. The "other woman" is a surrogate mom who, nine months after having one of her eggs inseminated by Steve Sohmer, now Hall's husband, gave birth to a healthy eight-pound boy.

"I used to get a rush of satisfaction and celebration from career achievements," says a blissful Hall, "but they'd fade after a couple of days. The high from this baby never goes away. You never have to recommit or overcome a new hurdle. It's there all the time."

Her Single Years Were Very Exciting

"I was single for ten years, but I never got bored. I have exquisite female friends, so I'd organize these fun girl parties. I'd call six girlfriends, call in a hairdresser, we'd have a covered-dish supper, and all get our hair cut."

Married The Man She'd Been Engaged To Years Ago

"Steve's the great love of my life and always was. We were engaged 12 years ago, but we had different agendas, were on different roads, so we separated. In the intervening five years, I married and was divorced. I'd see Steve all the time and my heart would pound, but I'd remind myself, 'You tried it, but it didn't work.' As time passed, though, we both achieved a lot of the goals we'd been reaching for, and we were able to settle down together."

The Key To A Marriage That Will End "When One of Us Is In the Ground"

"We talk about *everything*. Like: 'God, you were great in bed this morning, you were so sexy...' We're both good about expressing our fears in the relationship, and Steve always makes me feel appreciated—if I cook a meal or am kind to one of his friends... This marriage is so rich, so solid. It will end when one of us is in the ground. There is no divorce."

"And we laugh all the time. He tickles my funny bone. We laugh until we weep." **W**

—Catherine Romano