

INTERVIEWER: Buildings get built all the time, but have you ever stopped to wonder about the people who are building them and what their experience is like? That guy operating a backhoe, and the other one mixing cement, or that woman welding a pipe, and that man over there putting up drywall. What exactly is their relationship to the building that they're building?

As the crew poured sidewalks and planted trees outside, we went inside the Watson Institute's new 30,000 square foot expansion to talk to some of the people who made the project happen. We wanted to know who they are and why they do what they do.

SEAN MANNING: My name is Sean Manning. I'm the project superintendent from Shawmut Design and Construction. I think every project's been pretty unique. And I guess it's somewhat like reading a new book. You've got new characters.

NICOLE BLAIS: My name's Nicole Blais. I'm a senior project manager with Shawmut Design and Construction.

SUBJECT 1: My name is Evan [INAUDIBLE]. I'm with DiGregorio. And I've been with them for eight years.

AMANDA I'm Amanda Romano, and I'm a third year pipefitting apprentice.

ROMANO:

SEAN MANNING: You start off with the introduction.

NICOLE BLAIS: I went to school for architecture and graduated in 2000, so I've been in the industry for 18 years. I went straight into construction.

SUBJECT 1: I'm a laborer. I basically do everything from putting in pipes, getting sidewalks ready to get poured, anything you can think of. Well, I wanted to be a laborer, because they're the first ones on and the last ones to leave.

So when you first start a job, you get the laborer to go. He starts cleaning up whatever it is that needs to be done. And when the job is over, he cleans up, takes care of everything, so the job can be ready to open up. I'm always working. Very smart.

AMANDA Well, I originally went to college for drawing. I didn't know what I wanted to do afterwards. And
ROMANO: I just was, like, well, this is kind of like drawing. You just fit pipes mostly. So we do a lot of copper.

SEAN MANNING: The plot's different.

NICOLE BLAIS: The name of the project is the Brown University Watson Institute Expansion.

SUBJECT 1: The Watson Institute name-- some kind of, I don't know, institute for public housing. I don't know. You don't know what's really going on or who is going to be in these buildings, so you're just building them. Especially when you're just working job, to job, to job, to job, you don't really actually sit down and think about it.

AMANDA ROMANO: Once it starts coming together you can kind of tell, like, these are going to be offices, or these are going to be labs.

SUBJECT 1: Everybody's working, number one. You know, you're able to feed your family. So that's always a good thing. That keeps people happy.

SEAN MANNING: And you go through the climax-- is the project going to get turned over? Are you going to make it? I've read some long, challenging books in the past. But I take those books as a stepping stone for the next project and what I learned from that, what I try to avoid in the upcoming projects.

SUBJECT 1: Yes. Always. You're always trying to improve your skill. I'll never, ever, ever, ever be able to just stop. You're always learning. Every job you go to, you know it's going to be something different, so everything's always a new challenge, especially every job that you go to.

AMANDA ROMANO: It was the first time I had to spend a bit of time outside in the cold. It was, like, 20 degrees when it was just a slab, and there was scaffolding, and the steel was up. But it was just-- the concrete just sucks it right out of you, so that was challenging.

SUBJECT 1: If you're used to working in that environment, then it just becomes norm. It's just, like, OK, now, it's just another day at work. But when it's, like, three or four degrees, that's the problem-- the cold. Because your hands get numb. Your feet gets numb. And that's the problem.

AMANDA ROMANO: You can go inside. Or if there's a place to warm up, they'll tell you to warm up. And a lot of stubborn men won't do that. I will, though.

There's not many women, but there are a few carpenters and steel workers. I was only here for like two weeks in February. And then they brought me inside, because I couldn't do it.

SEAN MANNING: A good day on this job would be when we, as a team, plan an activity. And maybe it's a very

intricate activity or something where a lot of components need to come together. With all the preplanning, and all the hard work, and working as a team comes together and it's successful, that's a good day.

SUBJECT 1: Especially, like you said, when you go by and you're, like, wow, I've done this.

SEAN MANNING: I think one activity that stands out to me that was successful was the steel erection portion. The steel was delivered from Canada on large trucks. And trying to navigate that steel through these back roads in Providence, and get it into the site, and having the crane positioned in the right location, and the steel trucks being able to pull right in and unload the steel and erect it seamlessly was a great accomplishment.

NICOLE BLAIS: One of the features I like the most about this building is the agora. The size of it-- the complexity of behind the scenes building it-- things that people wouldn't see. There's fire shutters, and the construction aspects that no one's going to see because they're hidden, were pretty intricate and took a lot of time and money.

SEAN MANNING: Absolutely. Yeah. I think with the new building, with the curtain wall, and glazing, and the transition, like, where we could go out to the bridge here, kind of, turns into the renovation-- the house with the siding. So I think z kind of, brought it all together. The vision was, kind of-- at first, everybody questioned that.

But I think TMA, the architect, really brought everything together-- new and old-- in a very special way.

AMANDA ROMANO: The happiest point is probably finishing the job. Just completing it and seeing it all in it's all.

SEAN MANNING: Yes, I do feel the end is in sight-- the interior of both buildings, including the bridge. We're doing the finishes, we're working on punch lists. The site is starting to take shape now. We're just pouring sidewalks, we're just rough grading, starting the irrigation. So I do see the end in sight.

AMANDA ROMANO: No. I'm never sad when it ends, I don't think. As long as I have another place to go to. It's kind of nice to move on to something different.

SUBJECT 1: Yes. After you leave you do think about it, especially if you're going by another job site, and you're just seeing something. You want to stop by and just be, like, oh what are they doing?

Oh, he's at this phase, or they're at this phase. And so you actually do think about it. It doesn't stop.

AMANDA ROMANO: Yeah. When I go into a building or anything, I look at the construction. And I definitely have had dreams about pipe.

NICOLE BLAIS: I have gone back into a few. I've done a number of buildings around Brown campuses. So it's close and convenient to go back through them. I worked on Rhode Island Hall. I've worked on John Hay library. I've worked on the other Watson building, doing some upgrades there.

I don't tend to think about leaving a mark, but it is pretty interesting to drive by and see them after they're done. But I've never really thought about how long it's going to stay there.

SUBJECT 1: You know, some people love doing this. That's the whole thing about it. Some people want to just work outside or just love building things. And some people like staying in the office.

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