



## Podcast Transcript | *The Fix*

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**Guests:** Kristen Fallon, Co-Founder, Let's Build Camp

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00:00:06 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Welcome to The Fix, the podcast made for the trades, where we sit down with inspiring individuals across the trades to discuss their unique take on the industry, including career paths, job site stories, overcoming challenges, and everything in between. I'm your host, Katherine, a marketer here at Oatey, with my co-host and friend, Doug, one of Oatey's resident experts in all things trades. The Fix is more than a podcast. It's a community, a community built to support tradespeople and inspire the next generation of essential pros. Let's start the conversation.

00:00:41 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Well, Doug, I have to tell you, we have another superstar on our podcast today.

00:00:48 **Doug Buchan**

You know, I always say how excited I am, so I think the listeners already know that I'm just excited all the time, but I'm telling you, today's guest, we're bringing a lot of stuff together. Let's think about it, girl power. Yeah. Okay, we're bringing trades. Yeah. And then what do you love more as a kid than going to summer camp, right? Oh my gosh. Well, we're bringing it all together today with the trifecta, and we have the guest who is bringing the Camp for Girls for construction. This is phenomenal.

00:01:12 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I love it. Well, what a great introduction. Kristen Fallon is the co-founder of Let's Build Construction Camp for Girls. Welcome, Kristen.

00:01:21 **Kristen Fallon**

Thank you very much for having me on the program today.

00:01:24 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yes, this is so exciting, and I know that we kind of got connected through a guest we had on our last season, which was Paige. So can you tell us a little bit about your personal journey and what inspired you to co-found the Let's Build Construction Camp?

00:01:40 **Kristen Fallon**

So I have been a part of the construction industry my whole life. My father was a plumber, and I ended up coming into construction just, I needed a job, and I found a really great opportunity with a construction association here in Eastern Pennsylvania. And with my journey with that association, I had noticed, you know, some differences, like there are a lot of men in the industry, and an opportunity came up for my organization to partner with another organization, another national construction association. And we were looking for ways to partner together to do some really great work here in the Lehigh Valley. And with that, we were talking about different ways. What can we do together? And my other co-founder, John Lattin, had an idea of hosting a construction camp, typically for girls, and because he has four daughters at home. And I'm all about female empowerment. There's, like I said, there's not many females here in the industry. And I was looking for ways to make a positive impact

00:02:49 **Kristen Fallon**

and show girls that they have a place here that's equal in the industry, no matter what part of the industry you wanna be a part of. You could be a part of building manufacturing, architecture,

engineering, and the hands -on construction trade. So that's how the Let's Build Construction Camp for Girls came about.

00:03:06 **Katherine Lehtenin**

That's really exciting. And I love that you partnered to be able to kind of accomplish that. So how many years has Let's Build been in program?

00:03:17 **Kristen Fallon**

So we started a meeting about the program in April of 2016. And our first was held in June, 2017. And with our first camp, we hosted 20 girls that were ages 14 to 18. And now, since then, we've expanded to girls ages 12 to 18.

00:03:34 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Oh, that's really exciting. Wouldn't you have loved that for your girls, Doug?

00:03:37 **Doug Buchan**

My goodness, yes. I used to have to sneak them onto job sites. Now we have opportunity just to bring them. That's great.

00:03:45 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Well, and they probably would have liked to experience it more with some of their friends. I mean, even though it was kind of cool to go with Dad on the job site, it'd be kind of fun for them to do it together with other girls. Oh, absolutely. Yeah, that's wonderful. So can you explain a little bit of maybe some of the challenges you faced in increasing female participation in the AECM, which, tell us again what that is, industry, and how the Let's Build addressed these challenges.

00:04:11 **Kristen Fallon**

So that is architecture, engineering, construction, and manufacturing. Great. So all of our industries are really tied in together. And that's why we wanted to allow girls to explore all facets, because there's so many different opportunities within this industry. And some of the challenges that we have experienced have been just getting girls to understand like an opportunity to explore. The public schools are often blessed with allowing kids to explore different types of careers, and especially directing them to go to a career technical school. And our solution to that is hosting this free week - long camp where girls can get an introductory course into construction specifically. And in our camp, we actually teach nine different trades, carpentry, electrical, HVAC, plumbing, masonry, painting, roofing. I know I'm missing a few. Sorry. So much in one week. We wanted to kind of help out not just the schools, but also the kids, allowing them to explore this. And then hopefully by the end

00:05:27 **Kristen Fallon**

of camp, they'll understand the benefits of attending a career technical school. And we can help direct them to go to one of our local schools here or get them on that correct career pathway towards a four -year education in architecture, engineering, or construction manager.

00:05:43 **Katherine Lehtenin**

That's great. So, I mean, coming off of that, do you have any success stories of previous camp sessions or how Let's Build has impacted some of the lives of campers that have been there?

00:05:54 **Kristen Fallon**

Absolutely. I have so many stories throughout the years, and I'm already starting to tear up. This is something I'm known for. One of my favorite stories, we're a very inclusive camp. We want to make sure that people with diverse abilities have an equal opportunity to explore this industry. And one of our girls, she had autism and she had just graduated high school. She wasn't quite sure what career she was going to do. And her mom asked us, can my daughter attend camp? We're like, absolutely. She's very welcome. And we'll let her explore to the best of her ability. And the construction part was a little bit difficult for her. However, with her abilities, when we took all of the girls to one of our

building product manufacturers, ATAS International, which is a metal roofing manufacturer based here in Allentown, Pennsylvania, she lit up on that tour because she loved the repetitive sound of the metal coming down the line and the cutters cutting the metal. And it was comforting for her. It

00:07:05 **Kristen Fallon**

was ASMR. And I'll never forget at the end of the day, she grabbed onto my shoulder and she said, I want to do this. I want to do this. Can you help me do this? And we were like, absolutely. So fast to the end of camp, it was a couple of days later and we host a celebration where the girls can spotlight what they accomplished throughout the week. And her mother came in and said, she had tears coming down her eyes. And she said, thank you so much for showing my daughter she has a place somewhere. And when we started this, we never expected anything, to transform somebody's life, but just to show a girl with diverse abilities that she has a place somewhere. And it was just, it was so transformative. And we've had a lot of stories throughout the years where we've helped girls who weren't quite sure where they were going in their life. And then they found a clear direction and we've helped them go off to college. We've helped fill out their college applications along with them, provide letters

00:08:09 **Kristen Fallon**

of reference and just be there as a mentor to them. And that's been the most impactful part of this camp. Hands down. Oh my gosh.

00:08:17 **Katherine Lehtenin**

You got me tearing up now.

00:08:18 **Doug Buchan**

My goodness. I tell you, you probably have many success stories, but. That was awesome. I can't imagine any of them topping that for goodness sakes.

00:08:27 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I mean, and what a great highlight of, so true, everyone has an ability to do something. It's helping children figure out what it is that they're good at and how they can succeed, no matter if they have challenges or if they just don't understand or they haven't had exposure to it. So I think it's wonderful. And I'm sure, to that mom, you really helped change the forward path for that daughter. So that's pretty remarkable.

00:08:57 **Kristen Fallon**

And throughout this camp, we don't just teach them about the technical side of the industry, but we're also trying to work on building the girl's confidence, their self-esteem and their leadership skills, because those are great skills for a person of any age. And we're trying to plant that seed at an early age so those girls can go out into this world confident and ready to kick some butt. That's awesome.

00:09:21 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah, I really do think that is awesome. I love the fact that they're surrounded by other females. Okay, so that gives you comfort in itself. I love the fact of you're giving them multiple trades to get experience to. We talked about that several times, Catherine, on our show. One of the questions I have is, how do you get the funding that you need to keep this camp operational?

00:09:47 **Kristen Fallon**

So we have been so fortunate. The construction industry is a tight-knit industry. And when we are out and about, we talk about what we're doing from a proactive standpoint to address the workforce shortages. And that alone is a great reason for different companies to get involved with us, because this camp is free for girls to attend. We want to ensure that there's no economic barriers to prevent their families from sending the girls to camp. And we're fully funded by AECM support, industry support. So we never have a shortage of companies that are stepping right in line to help support our efforts. And not just financially, but also through volunteering. If they can't make a financial donation, they can come volunteer and share their experiences and be there to mentor the girls throughout their career journeys.

00:10:43 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Well, I know for us here at Oatey, we're super excited to be able to be your sponsor this summer, as well as we're gonna be volunteering and helping and giving supplies to help with camp. So it is our honor to be able to do that. And we so appreciate the work that you and your team are doing to bring the trades forward, because that's what we all should be looking at doing, to try to get people to understand there's an opportunity for them.

00:11:09 **Doug Buchan**

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

00:11:11 **Kristen Fallon**

We are so grateful for Oatey to come on board with us, because again, it's not just about the hands - on construction, but it's also the manufacturing side and sales and marketing. It's all aspects. And for you to get involved in the way with product support, financial support, and volunteer support, you're just knocking it out of the park. We're happy to do that.

00:11:34 **Katherine Lehtenin**

That's for sure. Very happy.

00:11:35 **Doug Buchan**

Quick question. Could you, at a high level, walk me through a typical day at one of your camps?

00:11:42 **Kristen Fallon**

Sure. So it is intense. We, it's a very packed week for the girls. So we start bright and early at 7 .30 AM. It's, you know, typical industry start. And we go all the way through four o'clock in the afternoon. And

typically what we will have the girls do is we sit down for a quick little safety tailboard, make sure that they are apprised what they're gonna be doing for the day, make sure that they're gonna be doing it safely. So our main instructors will kind of go through a tailboard just to make sure that the girls are cognizant of the potential dangers that are ahead for the day. So, you know, for carpentry, we want to make sure that they're using their drills properly. We teach them how to use that. And then making sure about safety glasses, work gloves, things like that. And then we'll talk about exactly what we'll be doing for the rest of the day. You know, how to assemble the walls or the electrical. And each day is kind of carved out for dedicated trades. So for instance, on our

00:12:45 **Kristen Fallon**

first day, we do the rough carpentry. We frame up the walls, and we'll do a little bit of an architecture and interior design discussion. Also in engineering, just to make sure the girls understand the design behind it and how to make that structure safe. And then they also get to choose as a team, we have them all work on teams together to build these structures. They're six foot by eight foot structures. And they will work as a team to come up with a design concept. How do you want this final product to look like? So we try to incorporate a little bit of, you know, the form and function into that first day. Second day, we go straight into electrical and HVAC plumbing. And then Wednesday, we give them a break. We go on field trips. So that is our day to go to a building product manufacturer so they can see firsthand how these products that they're using are made. And we'll also go to an architecture and an engineering firm so they can see firsthand what it's like to work in those firms

00:13:47 **Kristen Fallon**

and talk to experts in their field and be there to help guide them what career paths they need to go on, whether it's a two -year school, four -year school. And then Thursday is the finished carpentry. So we're doing drywall that day. We're also working on masonry, window installation, and I'm trying to remember what else we do. We do so much. Yeah. And then Friday is their day to be free and creative. We keep them on such a tight structure. So Friday is their day to be creative. And we work with Sherwin -Williams to come and give the girls paint and they can make their structures into a beautiful room that day. And then they get to do interior design where they're putting the wall sconces on and just decorating it and making it look aesthetically pleasing to show off to their parents.



00:14:46 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Wow, very cool. And that's so cool. I'm telling you, I would have loved this. I know.

00:14:50 **Doug Buchan**

You're building your own basically mini home.

00:14:54 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I know, but even just the opportunity to learn so that when you become a homeowner, when you're living on your own, when you want to make a decision of what I want to do with your career, it just gives you that option to learn, which just is no longer really available within the school's four walls anymore.

00:15:09 **Doug Buchan**

Oh, absolutely not.

00:15:10 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Well, as we're talking about this, what is some of the advice then that you would give girls about getting into the AECM industry? And what are some of the closing remarks that you give to your students and your campers on the last day when they leave?

00:15:27 **Kristen Fallon**

Well, the big part that we try to tell them is to believe in themselves and their capabilities. That's a huge part because girls' confidence typically goes down at the age of eight and it continues to go down, especially while they're in their teen years. And so we teach them throughout the week, believe in yourself, believe in your capabilities. You are smart, you're intelligent, you are driven. Look what you can accomplish in just one week. So that's really like the basis. And then, and with advice, we are

here year round to help support them from a mentoring aspect. We'll have girls ask us, what do I need to do? Do I need to go to a career technical school? Do I need to go to a two -year college? Do I need to go to a four -year college? And we'll tell them exactly what types of courses that they need to take or just any other like apprenticeships. We also help them if they want to go directly into the trades, we'll even help get them partnered up with a local contractor so they can go

00:16:32 **Kristen Fallon**

into an apprenticeship program.

00:16:33 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Wow. Yeah, that's wonderful.

00:16:35 **Kristen Fallon**

And we've done that quite a few times. One of our larger sponsors is a carpentry contractor here in Allentown. And they've been with us since day one. They've been a financial sponsor. They've been an in -kind sponsor. They provide volunteers every single year. And we'll have girls that want to go into carpentry and we have directly placed them from camp into this contractor. And they've been a part of the apprenticeship program and now they come back as volunteers, which is, it's full circle.

00:17:05 **Katherine Lehtenin**

I love it. That is awesome. That is so cool. How many students or campers do you have that come through the program every summer?

00:17:14 **Kristen Fallon**

So we have 20 girls every year. We want to make sure that we don't have too many. We want to give them as much one -on -one support that we can and give them a really hands -on experience. And if you have too many girls, it kind of takes that away a little bit. So we have four girls to a team.

00:17:33 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Okay, excellent. So from when you started in 2016 to where you are today, and then where you want to go, how have you evolved? How have you adapted? And then what do you need to be successful, do you believe, in the future to continue with this program?

00:17:50 **Kristen Fallon**

Well, I really would love to see us go really national because just to help address the workforce shortages, there's so many. We always say, don't sit back and complain about it. Do something about it. Be proactive. So this is a great opportunity for organizations or companies to partner with another organization and help do something about the workforce shortages that are really impacting our industry. So that's definitely one of our goals. And we would even also love to expand this out to hosting adult workshops, like weekend workshops, just to enhance the skills of people who are just trying to do things around the house, but they're not quite sure how to do it. We can invite adults to come, like women specifically, to come and learn how to do the trades.

00:18:41 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Oh, I think that's wonderful. Yeah, so do I. Absolutely. So with our listeners out there, how can they help? How can they support? What are you looking for? And this is other brands in our space and manufacturers. This is also entrepreneurs and plumbers. What would you recommend that they could do to help support the Let's Build Camp?

00:19:01 **Kristen Fallon**

I would recommend to people, just like I said, there is, if you want to help address the workforce shortages, just reach out to us, see how you can set up your own camp in your own area and work with other area contractors, architects, engineers. It's a really great business development for your company too. You can work with people you've never worked with before to get more jobs. And that's actually helped out a lot of our contractors a lot by meeting different people. So they can do that. They can volunteer with different organizations such as Habitat for Humanity or with a Let's Build

Camp or financial support. We want to make sure that this camp is free so they can always donate. Donate is huge.

00:19:54 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Yeah, absolutely. Well, this has been so enlightening and I think there's a huge opportunity for the Let's Build Camp. And I love the fact that your eyes are set on that national penetration because I believe that there is definitely an opportunity. And I want to thank you for your time today. But before we part, any last hopes and dreams of what you would love to see for the trades as the next five, 10, 15 years?

00:20:23 **Kristen Fallon**

I would love to see a more diverse workforce. I would love to see people of all backgrounds and just be a part of this. It's just to represent what America truly is. And by working together, we can make the industry amazing.

00:20:41 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Well, that's fantastic. Absolutely. And totally agree with you. I think that there's a ton of opportunity for us. And I truly appreciate getting to learn a little bit more about you and the Let's Build Camp Foundation and some of the girls who have gone through your camp and appreciate you sharing today.

00:20:56 **Doug Buchan**

Absolutely. I think the passionate meter for Kristen is a perfect 10 on this.

00:21:01 **Katherine Lehtenin**

Oh my gosh, out of the park. That was great. Thanks, Kristen.

00:21:06 **Kristen Fallon**

All right, thank you so much, Catherine and Doug. I appreciate being on the Fix.

00:21:11 **Doug Buchan**

Have a great day. Bye -bye.

00:21:12 **Kristen Fallon**

All right, you too.

00:21:17 **Katherine Lehtenin**

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