

Meet Sarah Listi: One Inspiring Maker

NEWS RELEASE BY STANLEY BLACK & DECKER

Northampton, MA | October 29, 2021 03:01 PM Eastern Daylight Time

Sarah Listi of Tool Girl's Garage didn't plan on a career in the trades. She just couldn't help but be drawn to it. Hitting the books in pursuit of a neuroscience degree, she realized she'd rather tell her own story. By building beautiful, functional pieces and renovating spaces, Sarah is making her mark on the world.

From tradespeople and engineers to philanthropists and innovators – get to know these inspiring individuals in the trades.

What inspired you to get into the trades?

I was lucky that I was raised around my mom who was crafty and my dad who was always doing home repairs. Some of my earliest memories were my dad working on renovating our house or making a Texas-shaped clock on the bandsaw. I really got to see firsthand how people create amazing things out of raw materials. When I became an adult and shortly after I had my son, I had gone back to school to pursue an additional degree for neuroscience, and I found woodworking to be calming. Not only did I have all this previous knowledge, but I just fell in love with the experience of making and going from an idea to this amazing end-product that was both functional and beautiful. I would credit my parents for inspiring me to get into the trades just by example, but also my son! Going to school or a traditional 9 to 5 spending so much time working for others didn't make sense when I could grow my own business and write my own story.

Can you tell us more about your current profession, how long you have been in that field and how you got started?

Tool Girls Garage wasn't really a business until about 3 years ago! When I first became a mother, I was very focused on being a stay-at-home mom, but I always tinkered. I was taking on small jobs with different custom woodworking, small renovations, and simple quick projects. As I got into it more, I was really fascinated by toolmaking and how manufacturing combined different features and materials to improve upon power tools, so I started writing tool reviews! I was a full-time mom and a full-time student, and I hit this crossroad, where I realized that woodworking was not just a method to relax myself, it was so much more than that. I realized I needed to decide whether to continue with

school or move ahead in woodworking – while I loved school and found it fascinating, it didn't light my soul on fire like my projects at home did.

What inspired you to be a maker?

I've always been lucky; my husband and kiddos have been phenomenally supportive and are amazed by the things I create. They're a huge part of where I draw creative inspiration from – they drive me to wake up every day and keep pushing and never give up. Sometimes you take a step back after a long day of projects and look at it through the lens of your kids or your spouse – it's very humbling to see the world in an alternate perspective. Even through late nights and deadlines, my family keeps me pushing forward and make the world a bit more beautiful. When my son was young, he was non-verbal which we later learned was autism, and there was this moment of me going back to school to go into neuroscience to study different treatments as well as research to improve not only his quality of life, but other kids as well. It was certainly something I had an aptitude for, but there was a moment where when he was a bit older, and I had to make something to meet his needs. It started with a stool, then refinishing furniture and he loved to be a part of the process. It was an amazing and humbling experience to connect with him in a way that I think would have been easy to undervalue. My son was huge in making Tool Girls Garage a reality. He doesn't realize it now, but he pushed me in the direction of realizing this thing was therapy, but now it's so much more.

What would you tell someone who is interested in exploring the trades?

Find a way to apprentice under someone, go to a trade school, take classes – even basic ones! Learn what you can to see if it's something you want to pursue. At the end of the day even if it doesn't end up being your final job destination, it's a stop that you're going to have so much experience from. Even if it ends up not being the fit for you, it's still going to be something you've learned from. At the end of the day, it's so easy for people to go to college, but college is not for everybody. It's great to get an education, but sometimes education is something that happens with your hands, in the muck of it, elbows deep in a problem and figuring it out. I would say if you have any interest in the trades, go for it!

If someone in middle school or high school said to you, my parents want me to go to college, but I want to go into a trade, what would you tell them?

Take school seriously! But, as a parent, what I would want for my kids is to be happy! Find a way to fulfil your needs and support yourself. Ultimately, all parents just want their kids to be happy – I think if you found something you're interested in, whether that is electrical work or carpentry, find a part time job over the summer or a way to gain some experience with that! Doing so can demonstrate to your parents that this is something you could realistically pursue, have a career in, and make money doing. Selfishly, I secretly

hope my kids go into the trades and I hope to continue to see other parents shift their thinking into seeing what the skilled trades could bring and how a profession like this could make an impact on your community.

What does the trade skills gap mean to you?

When we're talking about the trade skills gap, it means different things to different people. For me, what's concerning is as populations grow, we are seeing less and less people get into the trades. As the current group of people that are the skilled carpenters move on and retire, that level of experience can't be mimicked in 5 years. We need a bigger pool of people getting into it and learning from those people with 40+ years' experience to meet the skills gap. You know the old saying "they don't make them like they used to anymore" – that is pretty much true in every field and that's a testament to that skilled trades gap.

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