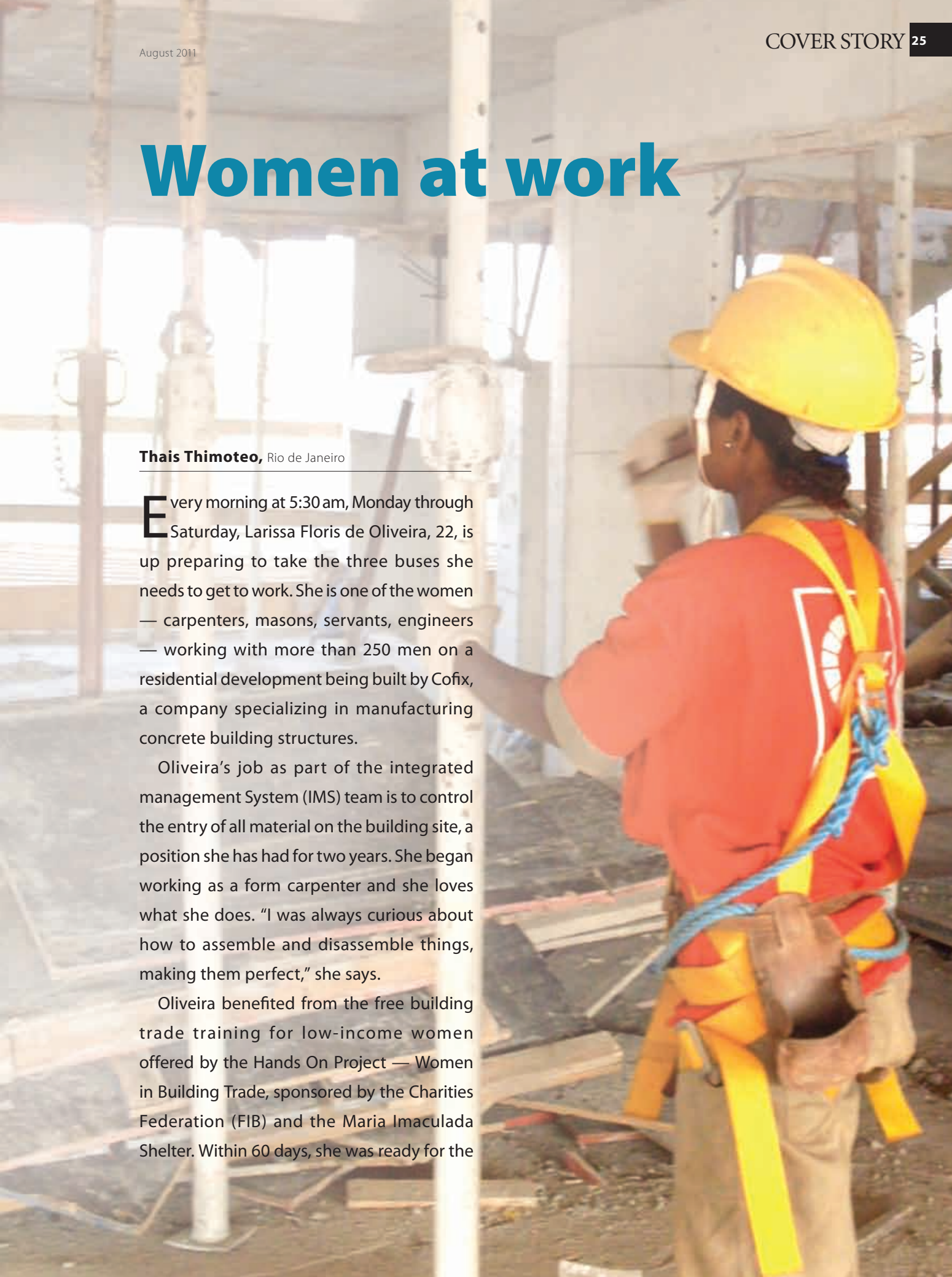
Women at work



Thais Thimoteo, Rio de Janeiro

Every morning at 5:30 am, Monday through Saturday, Larissa Floris de Oliveira, 22, is up preparing to take the three buses she needs to get to work. She is one of the women — carpenters, masons, servants, engineers — working with more than 250 men on a residential development being built by Cofix, a company specializing in manufacturing concrete building structures.

Oliveira's job as part of the integrated management System (IMS) team is to control the entry of all material on the building site, a position she has had for two years. She began working as a form carpenter and she loves what she does. "I was always curious about how to assemble and disassemble things, making them perfect," she says.

Oliveira benefited from the free building trade training for low-income women offered by the Hands On Project — Women in Building Trade, sponsored by the Charities Federation (FIB) and the Maria Imaculada Shelter. Within 60 days, she was ready for the

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labor market, and within six months, she was manufacturing beams and columns for large wooden structures. The project is sponsored by the state-oil company, Petrobras, and the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) in partnership with the National Service of Industrial Learning (SENAI), which does the training.

Many other women have also turned to hands-on work on building sites. The Annual Social Information Report of the Ministry of Labor and Employment shows that from January 2010 to February 2011 the building industry hired 2,540,091 workers, of which 197,209 were women — almost 100% more than in 2006.

Antonio Carlos Gomes, executive director of Sinduscon-Rio, points out that "The sector's bottleneck is labor. Before people in the North East were attracted to work in big cities; today they can find work in their own region. The shortage of workers led businesses to see that the other half of the economically active population, women, could help resolve the labor shortage."

Separation

Daniel de Camargo, for 10 years a building technician of Cofix Technical, sees no problem in sharing the work space with women but says, "There is still some resistance, especially among older male workers. They just do not like working with women. But most accept them."

"15 years ago, when I started working in the sector as an engineer, male workers were ruder," explains Luciana Parente, commercial manager, Carioca Engenharia, but "I have got used to them, and they to me. Now, we are one big team. When I don't come to work, they miss me," she jokes.

The work environment has changed. There is more interaction generally. Nevertheless, the comparison between the genders is inevitable. "Many employers say that men are more productive, while women are more careful handling materials and more concerned with avoiding waste and working safety," says Norma Sá, Hands On Project coordinator.

Also, the building sector is now more mechanized. "For an outsider, it is hard to imagine a woman working as a bricklayer or carpenter. One thinks, how will she be



Women are already present in most jobs, such as carpentry, in building sites.

able to load a sack of cement on the back? But today, physical strength is less and less necessary," says Camargo. Roberto Cunha, technical supervisor of building training of Senai Rio, agrees, but adds: "Building work still is less attractive to women, because they're generally more educated than men. It is necessary to modernize further and improve wages. "

If the stereotype is that a woman's place is taking care of household chores and children, that was overcome decades ago, and today with the great changes in the labor market, it sounds more anachronistic than ever. But "Many women seeking work in the building sector come from the lower classes. Where to leave their children has become a problem," says Gomes. He thinks the increasing participation of women can bring about legislative change as well: "It is appropriate to be thinking about issues such as changes in day-care assistance, maternity leave, working hours etc., as women's participation in the sector increases."