

# tradetalk

THE MAGAZINE OF THE BC BUILDING TRADES

WE BUILD BC™

SPRING  
2020  
VOL. 23  
No. 1

## IBEW fighting for fairness

Members of local 213  
on strike against Ledcor

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AND HOPE**  
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# VICTORIA REPORT

The provincial NDP government has made several important announcements in just the last quarter affecting construction workers. Here are some highlights:



## Last bills mark end of MSP premiums in B.C.

People in B.C. received their last bill for Medical Services Plan (MSP) premiums in December 2019, putting more money back into the pockets of B.C. families. “The cost of health care should not be a burden on people, but for too long, unfair MSP premiums made it hard to get ahead,” said Premier John Horgan. “Our government is making different choices and we’re working to make life more affordable for people in B.C. This represents one of the largest middle-class tax cuts in B.C.’s history and will make a big difference in people’s lives.”



## Skills training, job supports for those who need them most

The B.C. government has created new programs that will support British Columbians who face multiple barriers to employment to build the skills they need to embark on new careers. “Skills training and employment supports for people who face multiple barriers to employment help build a more diverse workforce, accessing the untapped potential in people while making sure no one is left behind,” said Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training.



## B.C. launches fund to support cleaner industry, reduce emissions

The CleanBC Industry Fund will invest carbon tax revenues of \$12.5 million in 16 projects throughout the province, which will reduce emissions and support good jobs for people. “Our government is building a better future for people throughout B.C. by investing in new projects that will reduce emissions and support clean development opportunities for industry,” said Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman.



## Kicking Horse Canyon procurement moving forward

Three pre-qualified teams were selected to participate in the request for proposals (RFP) stage to design and construct Phase 4 of the Kicking Horse Canyon Project on Highway 1, which will improve safety and reliability east of Golden. The project is being built under a Community Benefits Agreement, which prioritizes hiring of apprentices, Indigenous workers, local residents, women and other underrepresented groups in the construction sector.



## Second hospital coming for people in Surrey

For far too long, health care needs in Surrey went by unaddressed. The provincial government is making different choices and putting people first by investing in better, faster health care that families can count on closer to home for generations to come. A second hospital in Surrey is part of work underway to deliver comprehensive health services for Surrey residents.



## Contract awarded for Pattullo replacement

Fraser Crossing Partners has been selected to build the new \$1.4 billion Pattullo Bridge replacement project. Like Kicking Horse, the Pattullo will also be delivered under a CBA, providing jobs for local people, increasing work experience opportunities for apprentices and helping mobilize a strong construction workforce. 

BC LEGISLATURE PHOTO RYAN BUSHBY, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



# IBEW fighting for fairness

## MEMBERS OF LOCAL 213 ON STRIKE AGAINST LEDCOR

By David Hogben



**ON THE COVER:** Mik Alfaro says it's not easy being on strike, but it's worth it to secure decent pay and benefits to support his family.

**TOP:** IBEW 213 business manager Jim Lofty (left), Eric Lavergne, Joel Schwab and retired assistant business manager Mirko Varga on the line showing support.

**FIGHTING FOR A FIRST CONTRACT** in a non-union-dominated industry takes determination — especially when federal labour law stacks the deck in favour of anti-union employers.

Striking members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 213 seeking a first contract with Leducor (LTS Solutions Ltd.) walking the line in freezing temperatures at the company's Port Coquitlam office, however, showed no signs of giving up the battle, despite a difficult federal labour code. Construction workers will be familiar with Leducor.

"It's all worth it," declared Mik Alfaro, walking the line with his co-workers. Alfaro and other picketers, who carried signs and huddled around a 45-gallon burning barrel for warmth, spoke about their commitment to getting that critical first contract with Leducor, which is one of the largest construction companies in

the country. (Leducor Technical Services is the company's communications arm.)

All the short-term obstacles facing them did not lower Alfaro's enthusiasm, nor that of other strikers looking for the long-term benefits of a contract.

"If we can change something here, we can change the industry," Alfaro said.

Local 213 officers know establishing a foothold, first contract for Local 213 members in the telecommunications industry is no easy job, but it is necessary for workers to obtain job security, decent working conditions, decent pay, and a little respect.

"We were told before the drive: 'Good luck organizing Leducor, it's not going to happen,'" said assistant business manager Robin Nedila. But Local 213's biggest strength is the commitment and determination of the striking members. "These workers want to be part of a real union," Nedila said.

Workers have endured an uncommonly wet, windy and snowy autumn and winter outside the Leducor offices since their strike began on Sept. 30. Their battle for a contract began more than two full years earlier on Aug. 31, 2017, when their bargaining unit of 238 technicians was certified. Already low piece-rate wages were cut, workers were fired, and working hours were extended.

**Alfaro**, 10 years an installation and repair technician, acknowledged the strike is not easy, but said it is worth fighting for a good job, with decent pay and benefits.

"I have three kids, and the youngest is four months old, the oldest is six years old," Alfaro said as one of many passing motorists honked support for the strikers. "I have a mortgage. I have a house in Cloverdale. It's not easy at all."

Alfaro's financial situation is not made any easier by the need for his wife to take a temporary maternity leave to look after their children.

"It's nice to fight for change even though many people say unions are not appropriate anymore. In our situation, it makes more sense to fight for the union," Alfaro said, adding that despite the personal sacrifices the picketers are making, they're worse off without a union.

"I have been here for 10 years. I have seen friends, I have seen mentors and trainees and they have disappeared en masse," Alfaro said. "I feel very strong that this is the only hope for the industry."

**Kode Thurairaja** has been installing television, Internet and telephone services for Ledcor for six years. He has never before been a union member. Now, he says, it is the only option, the only choice.

Thurairaja has a \$4,500-a-month mortgage, three children aged, two, four and eight years, and a wife who has taken time off to raise their family.

Thurairaja says he needs job security, and he needs to support workers who have been improperly fired, because of the fight for a first contract, he said, referring to 31 workers terminated on Sept. 25, shortly after the union achieved a strike mandate.

"People were laid off for no reason," he said. "I want a union so that when problems come up, the union can support us. We need to have those jobs back."

Thurairaja worries about his own job as well. He says getting a first contract would give workers the security that

comes with seniority and fair layoff rules.

"If the union was in there, then I would not get laid off," he said.

**Thomas Veneracion** has worked in Ledcor's installation and repair division for two years. He and his wife have a new townhouse, and they must start making mortgage payments on it within two years.

Veneracion is fighting for job security. "I am supporting my brothers and sisters who were terminated unjustly. We had 31 technicians who were fired."

Veneracion said he was disappointed with Ledcor's attitude toward its employees during their two-year battle for the benefits of negotiating a union contract.

"I am hoping that Ledcor would finally reach a collective bargaining agreement and not just play around with us, give us hope and prolong the process," he said. "They are not treating us fairly. They should cut the scare tactics."

Veneracion said the job security was worsened by Ledcor's unrealistic demands on workers.

"Some jobs are undoable with the time, the tools and the support they give us. They tell us just to complete it."

Unrealistic working conditions had led to even more job insecurity.

"There is the threat of termination if we do not do a good job or perform to their standards of work," Veneracion said.

**Abdul El-Najjar** has been through lots of "ups and downs" as a technician in the installation and repair division for the past four years.

"You can have mass recruitment, mass layoffs, and mass turnovers of staff," El-Najjar recalled. "That affects the company as a whole, it affects the technicians, and it affects the jobs that we do."

The rapid staff turnover erodes job security. "You can be disciplined or you can be terminated for ad hoc reasons that the company can come up with."

In addition to employment insecurity, workers have to deal individually with a company that changes the piece rate pay system and work schedules arbitrarily. "They disguise it under the 'increase your earning potential.'"

El-Najjar says it is too much to expect every union member to individually deal with arbitrary changes to pay and hours worked. "When you have a union on your side, they will fight for what is legal, they will fight for your rights, they will fight for what is owed," El-Najjar said.

"We are not just fighting for me or the guy next to me. We are fighting for the technician in five years from today and the technician 15 years from today."

**IBEW 213 is calling on** the federal labour minister to order the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to impose a first contract.

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“Under the Canada Labour Code, there is no threat of binding arbitration like there is in provincial,” said IBEW Local 213 business representative Dustin Brecht. “Unless the minister steps in, they can just go on and on.”

Brecht said ministerial intervention is essential, because Ledcor is not negotiating in good faith. He said that Ledcor has unfairly fired workers in the installation and repair division recognized by the Canada Labour Board as a bargaining unit, and it has hired replacement workers in other divisions to do their work. “They only hired into the (multi-dwelling units) division with inflated wages. They have massive numbers of subcontractors right now.”

Nedila said Ledcor’s firing of workers and bargaining tactics were to be challenged in a Canada Labour Board hearing expected in February, after Tradetalk’s deadline. “The original certification was for 238 members, now it’s down to 115.”

In addition to terminating staff in the installation and repair division, the IBEW says Ledcor is contracting out bargaining unit work, and has laid off another division entirely.

The drive to unionize the Ledcor workers dramatically demonstrates the weakness of the federal labour code, compared with the B.C. provincial code.

“We feel it would make a huge difference, because for one they cannot use replacement workers (under provincial law),” Nedila said.

“And, there is the threat of binding arbitration so the company knows if it does not bargain in good faith, there is an agreement that is going to be forced on them. They have the authority under Section 80 of the Labour Code to impose a two-year agreement,” Nedila said.



**Father-of-three Kode Thurairaja is looking for job security in a first contract with Ledcor.**

Local 213 sent a letter to federal Labour Minister Filomena Tassi “to consider our urgent request” and impose a collective agreement.

Canadian labour law recognizes how difficult first contracts can be, and that intervention is sometimes necessary, especially when hearings about unfair labour practices take so long to be heard, the letter states.

“Some of these new union members believe that (unfair labour practices complaints) will never be heard at the Board, and there won’t ever be a collective agreement. This is Canada; we can do better than this,” says the letter.

“Two years is too long to wait for a first collective agreement.”

The installation and repair division bargaining unit workers have seen their piece rate pay system gutted. Their pay is based on a quota system that has seen wages fall drastically. And unreliable customer satisfaction surveys are being used to determine pay. “Their metrics are unobtainable,” Brecht said.

How customers respond to an automated customer survey can determine their pay. But Brecht said the automated survey does not take into account that the person answering the phone and taking the survey might be a child that answers the home phone.

But changes to customer needs and arbitrary changes by the company can damage employee pay.

“I am not earning as much money as before,” Alfaro said. “Before in a week you would have four good days and one bad day. And you would be fine. Now, most of us have four bad days and one good day so it doesn’t work for us anymore.”

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## TELUS CUSTOMERS CAN FIGHT UNION BUSTING

IBEW 213 members employed by Ledcor LTS are on a legal strike, but that hasn't stopped Ledcor from using scabs to do their work.

The picketers say that many of the non-union replacement workers have not received the same level of training as their picketing counterparts, and their working conditions do not allow them the time to do their work properly.

These conditions have led to reports of damages to Telus customers' property when poor installations damage hydro, gas or water lines.

So customers asking for Telus to install residential or business telephones, Internet, television, or alarms can insist that the services be provided by unionized Telus employees (United Steelworkers Local 1944). Customers might have to wait a bit longer for their service, but they will have less risk of damage to their homes or businesses, and support striking IBEW Local 213 workers at the same time.

Local 213 is using flying pickets to pressure Ledcor to bargain fairly, so supporters are also asked to text IBEW Local 213 at 604-786-0304 if they see scab workers doing union work.

For more information, read "Shame on Ledcor": [ibew213.org/shame-ledcor](http://ibew213.org/shame-ledcor)

## SOLIDARITY FOREVER WITH IBEW 213

There is nothing like support from fellow trade unions in a difficult labour dispute.

Local 213's two-year battle for a first contract with Ledcor has been bolstered by support from other unions.

Help comes in many forms: Cash, Christmas gift cards, wood, propane, inflatable rats and sometimes simply joining the picketers on the line on a cold, rainy day.

"We have gotten help from the United Association Local 170. They gave us \$7,000. They are our biggest contributors monetarily," said IBEW Local 213 business manager Jim Lofty.

Other financial contributions have come from the Canadian Union of Public

Employees, BC Teachers' Federation and others. The United Food and Commercial Workers and Community Savings Credit Union sent gift cards at Christmas time.

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 115 even stopped by with their huge inflatable rat, named Scabby, to draw attention to Ledcor's use of scab workers.

The United Steelworkers Local 1944 have also been big supporters, Lofty said. Local 1944 published an article on its union website advising its members how they can support strikers: "Ledcor Strike: Do you know who you are allowing into your home or business?"

Some of the biggest morale boosters have been the supporters who came by with food, wood, or propane to fuel, feed and warm picketers on a cold days.

In August 2019, IBEW members from across Canada joined the Local 213 picketers in a show of support.

"The people that do come by, that do show solidarity, that gives them to spirit to keep fighting," Lofty said. "When somebody shows up they are like: 'We are not alone.'" 🙌



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# EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

## CBA court challenge was much ado about nothing

By Andrew Mercier, Executive Director



**MEMBERS OF THE BC BUILDING TRADES** are in for a busy 2020. LNG Canada, the Coastal GasLink pipeline, Site C, the Trans Mountain pipeline and the ongoing upgrades at YVR all require a steady supply of skilled, unionized construction workers.

In addition, the Pattullo bridge, the Broadway SkyTrain corridor, and the stretch of the

TransCanada Highway between Kamloops and Alberta will all proceed under the provincial government's Community Benefits Agreement framework. All told, these projects will increase employment demand in the non-residential construction sector by 10,300 skilled workers in 2021.

The NDP's policy of building major infrastructure under Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) — opposed by Andrew Wilkinson and the BC Liberals — means that not only does the government have access to some of the safest, most skilled workers in the profession through our union dispatch provisions, but that there will be guaranteed opportunities for apprentices and underrepresented groups on these projects.

This is a time-tested model of delivering on procurement through partnerships with the Building Trades that has been used, in one form or another, by governments of all stripes from W.A.C. Bennett to Glen Clark, Gordon Campbell and everyone in between.

The Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC) and their friends in the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association (ICBA) and the Progressive Contractors Association (PCA) don't agree with Community Benefit Agreements, and have pursued a public relations strategy to frame Community Benefits Agreements as a bad policy and a handout to the Building Trades.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

CLAC recently brought a court case against the government claiming that Community Benefits Agreements violate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This case made numerous claims about Premier John Horgan and the Building Trades, and it received a lot of media attention.

It took the Supreme Court of British Columbia just four hours

to hear CLAC's criticisms of CBAs and dismiss them as not rising to the level of claims heard by the Court.


CLAC and their friends have lost this case in the BC Supreme Court twice — once in July, and again in February. The ICBA's sister organization, "Merit," brought this same case in Manitoba against Allied Hydro (with the same lawyer they are using in B.C.) several years ago and lost at every level of court, with the Supreme Court of Canada refusing to hear their appeal. And CLAC brought this same case against the NDP government in the 1990s to the Labour Relations Board and lost there as well.

The PCA — the organization of CLAC's signatory contractors — has indicated that it will appeal the recent decision. When you hear about it in the media, you should keep in mind their track record at court and remember that it is much ado about nothing.



**Under Community Benefits Agreements, the Pattullo Bridge, Broadway SkyTrain, and TransCanada projects will increase employment demand in the non-residential construction sector by 10,300 skilled workers in 2021.**

More concerning is Liberal party leader Andrew Wilkinson's endorsement of CLAC's position on CBAs. CLAC recently held a rally in Victoria against CBAs with Wilkinson in attendance. Wilkinson and the Liberals have also used Question Period to attack the government over CBAs.

A provincial election is likely to occur before the end of the year. It is clear that Premier John Horgan understands the importance of the unionized construction industry. A Wilkinson government would not have the interests of our 35,000 members at heart. 

*BC Building Trades executive director Andrew Mercier is a former commercial driver and more recently labour lawyer for Teamsters Local 213.*



# On the pathway to hope

Province making progress on the opioid crisis

By Megan Terepocki

## EFFORTS BY THE B.C. GOVERNMENT

to stop the escalation in opioid overdose deaths seem to be working. This is good news for the construction industry, which has seen its workforce disproportionately affected by the crisis.

Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Judy Darcy said the government has escalated its response to the crisis and is working on many fronts to reduce and ultimately prevent people from dying.

The BC Coroners Service projects there were 1,000 opioid-related deaths in 2019, down from 1,500 deaths in 2018.

“One thousand people dying is a thousand people too many,” said Darcy, “but it does say that several of the tools we’re using are working.”

In June 2019, the government laid out its priorities for improving mental health and addictions care across the province in a 10-year plan titled *A Pathway to Hope*. Darcy said that prevention is a priority in moving forward. “Prevention is an aspect of care that has been neglected for the past 16 years in this province,” she said. “Our mental health and addictions system was not in a condition to support the regular needs in our province, much less a crisis of this proportion.”

Harm reduction is a major pillar in *A Pathway to Hope*. It underlies the creation of safe consumption and supervised injection sites, which are proven safe alternatives to using substances alone. It also underlies the distribution of Naloxone, which is

used to reverse overdoses and prevent death. The majority of opioid-related deaths occur when people use alone, and having these options is making a difference.

Resources are also being put into treatment and recovery at all levels.

“One of the things I’ve learned both from people living with addiction and from health professionals on the front lines is that it’s not ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to treatment and recovery,” said Darcy. “For some people, it begins with

reach those most affected by the crisis. The stigma associated with mental health and addiction in this generation is very high, said Darcy. Many in this age group are less inclined to seek help or they think they can take care of themselves, she said.

“These men are dying because there’s no one there to administer Naloxone, there’s no one there to call for help. So bringing down the walls of silence, combatting the shame and the stigma that’s associated with addiction is a really,

really critical piece of getting people the support that they need.”

The government has also partnered with construction organizations, including the BC Building Trades, health, and related organizations to address the higher degree of opioid use in this sector. Construction industry roundtable discussions held in 2018 were described as a “powerful conversation” by Darcy, and have resulted in several points of action for the industry.

The minister acknowledged that it has taken effort from all parts of the community to address the crisis.

“While the government’s investment is significant, it’s important to recognize the efforts of people working on the front lines,” she said. “I am blown away every single day by the courage, the determination, and the dedication of people who are working on this crisis. It’s about all of us. We are making a difference.”

“One of the things I’ve learned both from people living with addiction and from health professionals on the front lines is that it’s not ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to treatment and recovery.” — Judy Darcy, Minister of Mental Health

harm reduction. They go to an overdose prevention site or safe consumption site, and there are caring, supportive staff there who can in turn, refer them to treatment. For some it’s abstinence-based recovery. For other people, it’s medically-assisted treatment.”

With the majority of deaths occurring in males between the ages of 19 and 59, the government has partnered with high-profile groups like the BC Lions to



# Four pillars of Hope

## PREVENTION

Prevention is considered a cornerstone of the work the B.C. government is doing to address the opioid crisis. The government has opened eight Foundry centres for youth across the province to make it easier for young people to find mental health and addiction supports. Foundry is a provincewide network of integrated health and social service centres that provide a one-stop-shop for young people to access mental health care, substance use services, primary care, social services and youth and family peer supports. There are three more in the works, and eight more to come, said Darcy. "We are beginning to build child and youth mental health teams in schools, too," she said.

"We have allocated significant money — \$10 million — for no cost, or low cost counselling in community agencies. Because very often mental health care and addictions counselling depends on the size of your bank account," said Darcy, "and we think that's wrong."

## ENFORCEMENT

The provincial government is working with the RCMP and the federal government to crack down on organized crime to stop fentanyl and carfentanil from being smuggled into B.C. "There are new dedicated anti-trafficking teams," said Darcy. "We've banned illegal pill presses. We're going after money laundering to try and cut off the dirty money that fuels the crisis," she said.

## HARM REDUCTION

There have been over one million visits to overdose prevention sites and safe consumption sites across the province. "There have literally been thousands of overdoses reversed, and not a single death," said Darcy. "We've dramatically increased the availability of Naloxone, which is used to reverse an overdose. Over 185,000 kits have been distributed for free, and roughly 55,000 of those have been used to reverse overdoses. Naloxone kits are available at some 1,700 locations across the province."

## TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

Darcy said that mental health and addictions professionals are being added to the primary health care teams and it will become easier for people to find support for mental health and addictions when they go to the doctor.

"We've introduced tough new regulations to improve the standards of care in private recovery homes," she said. She described the past situation with many private care facilities as the "wild, wild west" with very little regulation.

There's now more support for individuals who need medically assisted treatment to withdraw safely from opioids. "When you're dealing with this dangerous toxic drug supply on the street, which is killing people, it's critical to have safe prescription alternatives to the toxic drug supply," said Darcy. More professionals can prescribe these treatments, and more people are able to access medically assisted treatment, she said.

There are two new, and six renovated and rebuilt Indigenous treatment centres in the province. Darcy said the \$40-million-investment is one of the most significant investments the government has made to address the crisis. A trial Therapeutic Recovery community was launched in 2018 on Vancouver Island, with a new treatment facility for youth opening in Chilliwack in 2020. These are longer-term solutions to the opioid crisis in B.C.

**Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Judy Darcy said that there is no magic bullet or single fix to the opioid crisis, and that the approach the B.C. government is taking, seems to be working.**

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The BC Coroners Service reported 500 fewer overdose deaths in 2019 than the previous year.
- Having conversations can help prevent an overdose. How we talk about substance use is important and there's help available for having compassionate and courageous conversations about substance use. For more information, go to [stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca](http://stopoverdose.gov.bc.ca).
- The B.C. construction industry roundtable held in 2018 started conversations about the high impact of the opioid crisis on the construction industry.
- "Toolbox talks" are being developed to help reduce the stigma of substance use, and ensure construction workers and employers know where to go for help and how to talk about the issues.
- Those who participated in Naloxone training at their work sites reported being more comfortable having conversations about substance use and feel more confident about responding to an overdose.
- The B.C. construction industry is looking at how people with substance-use challenges are treated and how to support people in returning to work in a healthful manner.
- The B.C. government has launched a class action lawsuit to hold opioid manufacturers accountable for deceptively marketing their products even though these were known to be highly addictive. Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan have now joined the lawsuit, a first of its kind in Canada.
- Canada's Building Trades Unions has partnered with Health Canada to create awareness and educate the membership and public about the dangers of opioids and the importance of effective conversations about this.
- The majority of opioid overdose deaths are men between 19 and 59 years of age. A quarter of those dying work in the trades and transport industries.
- A culture of work hard/play hard, transient work, work-related injuries, and stigma are all seen as factors that may contribute to higher rates of death from overdose in the construction industry. 🌐

# INDUSTRY

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# PRESIDENT'S VIEW

## We should be building vessels for BC Ferries

By Phil Venoit, President



**CANADA HAS THE WORLD'S** longest national oceanic border, which continues down the Saint Lawrence seaway with the longest inland fresh waterway and border we share with the United States, our greatest trading partner.

British Columbians are highly dependent on marine transportation to ship the goods we buy and sell, protect our border, learn about


our ocean and its inhabitants, and for many coastal community citizens, commute to work and school.

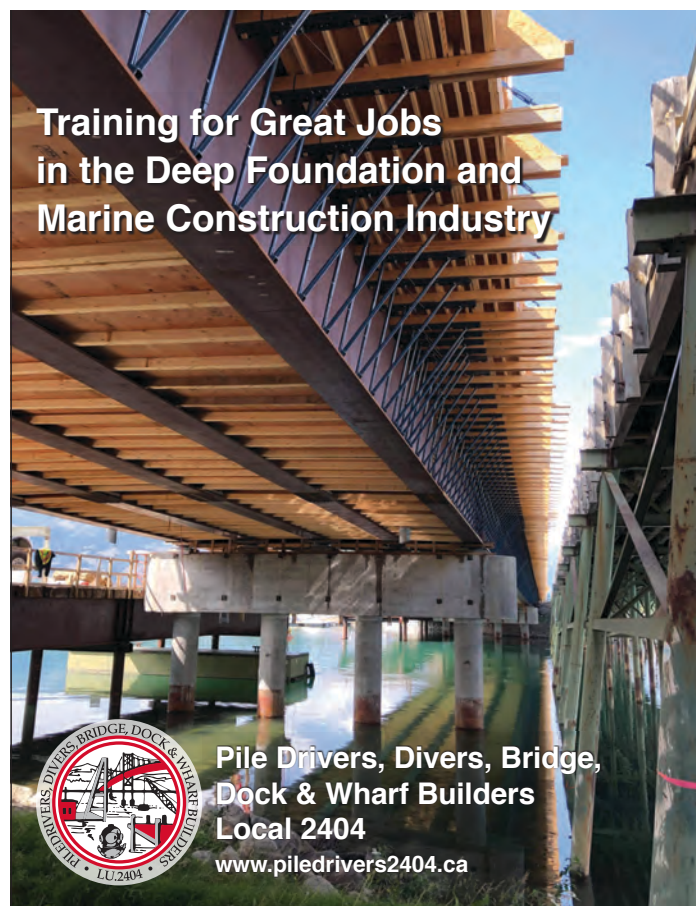
From an environmental standpoint, marine transportation is the cleanest form of transportation by far, based on fuel consumption and freight weight. Changing vessel fuels away from diesel to LNG, like the work currently being performed by Building Trades affiliate members in Esquimalt, can move us closer to meeting environmental goals or standards outlined in the Paris Accord, addressing the ever-growing and real concerns associated with global climate change, while establishing B.C. as a client destination for these marine fuel conversions.

I know the skilled tradesmen and tradeswomen of the BC Building Trades' affiliates on the West Coast are up to the challenges in innovation and competition. Today, many of them continue to sharpen the cutting edge of new technologies to the envy of other countries. The attraction and retention of this highly specialized and highly skilled workforce is paramount to the safety and security of our nation. Our military, coast guard, and exploration and research community, all depend on the availability of the skills our marine members bring, and it's the importance of that strategic alliance to the work itself that our federal government understands today. However, that hasn't always been the case. In the mid-'80s when the Mulroney Conservatives moved to stop the subsidy of Canadian-made steel, it shuttered the Canadian shipbuilding industry. It took the market the next decade of downsizing, right-sizing and almost capsizing the Canadian shipbuilding industry to the brink of losing the infrastructure and skilled workforce, while the work went to nations around the world, like Korea and Germany, which continued to subsidize their steel industry.


Our own government's policies through the '90s and 2000s, in terms of a lack of investment in the Canadian navy and maritime industry in general, have weakened us as a nation, and continued to have a detrimental impact on the shipbuilding industry. Provincially, the BC Liberals' 2002 campaign on the "fast ferry fiasco" only exacerbated the federal policy decisions. To make matters even worse, they irresponsibly bruised the industry

and treated the workers within it as collateral damage, for the sole purpose of a political win.

It's our connection to the ocean and our marine waterways that provides us with sound reasoning to have an established shipbuilding and repair industry relative to our connection and dependence to the water, and there are three natural clients: the federal government with the Canadian Navy, coast guard, ocean sciences and research vessels; the BC government with BC Ferries; and the private sector with cruise ships, fishing/canning vessels, and deep sea freighters. While we've seen a tremendous interest from the federal government in doing their part in ensuring the West Coast has a vibrant shipbuilding industry, our own BC Ferries continues to send new build construction overseas to countries that pay a little over \$9 per hour once converted to Canadian currency. That's less than what a McJob in B.C. pays. With another decade slated for BC Ferry fleet replacement vessels, it's time for our own BC government to recognize the failure of the past two decades in the practice of building BC Ferries off-shore, and bring that work home so we become stronger as an ocean-dependent nation and province. 



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# a real-life IRONMAN

By Corry Anderson-Fennell  
BCBT Director of Communications

Christopher Henry was planning to end his life.

"I was going to commit suicide," said Henry\* matter-of-factly.

A journeyman reinforcing ironworker with some 30 years' experience, Henry had arrived at what felt like the lowest point in his life. Three years earlier, in October 2016, he was seriously injured in a workplace accident at the John Hart generating station. Henry was working alongside an apprentice building a ramp when the apprentice, whose job was holding back a thick piece of rebar, unintentionally let go of the rod. Effectively spring-loaded, the rod slammed into Henry's forehead and knocked him off his feet.

Shaken, Henry got up and continued to work for another 90 minutes before his foreman instructed him to visit the site first aid tent. There, the two registered nurses staffing the tent ran some tests and told Henry to report to a medical clinic in nearby Campbell River right away. His supervisor drove Henry to the clinic, where a doctor diagnosed him with a concussion. He was instructed to take a couple of days off work and get as much sleep as possible. (Both Henry and his employer filed a claim with the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) as required by law, and it was accepted soon afterward.)

The next day, the supervisor for the company Henry was working for stopped by and invited him to attend a special luncheon at the John Hart work site; the general contractor was celebrating a safety milestone and there would be speeches and a luncheon for the workers. Henry agreed, but realized what a grave mistake it was soon after arriving.

"The rain poured down on the tent and it was so loud," Henry recalls "I couldn't understand what people were saying, and I started to panic. I ran out – I just had to get out of there."

At that point, Henry and the on-site first aid staff suspected his injury was much more substantial than a concussion. He was taken to North Island Hospital for a CT scan, and that's when doctors told him he had a traumatic brain injury. For Henry, it was the start of a three-year ordeal fraught with fear, depression, uncertainty and sometimes, anger.

## One step forward, two steps back

When Henry tells his story of survival, he describes two people: the person who went to work that fateful day, and the person who came home.

"I wasn't always the way I am now," said Henry.

Before the accident, Henry was frequently name-requested by company owners, all of them attracted by his experience, strong work ethic, and reputation for fabricating new tools and introducing innovative construction techniques.

He was on track to comfortably retire at 62 with a full pension and enough cash to completely renovate his home on mid-Vancouver Island.

He ran two successful businesses, including a pressure-washing company contracted to clean the United States Pavilion at Expo '86 in Vancouver. His pressure washer was so noisy that then BCTV personality Jack Webster, who was filming on site, asked him to stop because it was interfering with the audio. Henry agreed, but only if he got two minutes of free airtime for his business. Webster agreed, and that's how Henry's company came to be endorsed by Vancouver's "king of the airwaves."

He survived a colon cancer scare.

Henry listed all these things in a detailed letter to his vocational rehabilitation consultant at the Workers' Compensation Board. He wanted her to understand the difference between who he was and who he could no longer be.

"I wasn't just a claim number. I was an honest, contributing member of society who paid his taxes. I didn't want to get hurt – I wanted to work."

In the days immediately after the accident, Henry declined quickly. He developed a severe startle response that made even a sharp knock at his front door completely debilitating. He experienced massive headaches, extreme anxiety, and dizzy spells. He lost the ability to speak.

Throughout his WCB claim, Henry met with two kinesiologists, a sports pathologist, a psychologist, a speech-language pathologist, occupational and physical therapists, and numerous counsellors. He was put through an intensive rehabilitation program in Vancouver. Eventually, he was placed on a gradual return to work plan, with disastrous results. It was the first of three return-to-work placements.

*\*Name changed to protect the member's identity.*



### Three strikes with return to work

Return-to-work programs are supposed to contribute to a more rapid and complete recovery. In Henry's case, it laid bare the devastating truth that he would never again work in the trade he loved.

Henry was sent out three times to different job sites, and three times he was overcome by headaches, anxiety and terror. Sometimes, the commute alone was crippling for Henry. He remembers driving down Highway 1 on his way to Chilliwack. It was raining and Henry was driving the speed limit in the centre lane, trying to avoid both the faster cars in the left lane, and the cars that were just entering the highway and merging into the right lane. At some point, he became boxed in by a semi-trailer on both sides, and a pile of debris in his path ahead.

"I fell apart right on the highway. I became completely undone. I got to the job site shaking and stuttering. I was literally coming apart."

Nevertheless, Henry put in his time and worked a partial day. But his performance was so poor that before the end of his shift, the foreperson told him to go home. At another jobsite, another foreperson advised, "I don't want him back." It was the first time in Henry's long and distinguished career that he'd been told such a thing.

On the final day of his third work placement, the company's sympathetic regional manager took him aside before leaving the jobsite and apologized for not seeing him sooner. The manager was one of only a few people on the job who knew what had happened to him.

"The last thing he said to me was, 'Tell your story.' And you know, I never understood what he meant until I started talking to Merrill."

Henry was referring to Merrill O'Donnell, the BC Building Trades' tenacious workers' advocate, who represents members who need assistance with their injury claims.

### New beginnings

By early 2018, Henry wasn't doing well.

He had gone through three return-to-work placements and was unable to function effectively in any of them. Despite his struggles, a WCB case manager officially terminated his wage loss benefits in February. Henry wondered whether he would lose his house and what sort of future he might have being unable to work.

He was consumed by anxiety and some nights he couldn't even sleep in his own bedroom, opting instead for the smaller

guest room in his home because it felt more like a cocoon where he could shut out the rest of the world.

But even in the guest room, Henry experienced horrific nightmares. These were so intense that he chewed through the dental guard he normally wore to prevent grinding his teeth. He ended up cracking two back molars and damaging fillings; he subsequently lost both teeth.

"I thought about killing myself many times," he admits.

At that point, Henry contacted Ironworkers Local 97 and explained to business manager Doug Parton everything that had happened. Parton couldn't believe it.

"We've worked together, so I know him well," said Parton. "He would work if he could – he obviously couldn't. You know, my heart went out to him and we were prepared to do everything in our power to ensure he was treated fairly."

Parton contacted O'Donnell, briefly explained Henry's issues, and asked for his help. Immediately, O'Donnell contacted Henry and after speaking with him for almost two hours, he sought disclosure of the WCB claim. As soon as the disclosure was approved, a few days later, O'Donnell set to reviewing key documents and found the disturbing revelation that Henry was suicidal. Leveraging this evidence, O'Donnell pressed the case manager to reopen the claim immediately. Five days later, the claim was officially reopened, wage loss benefits were reinstated,

and the arduous process of revisiting Henry's claim began.

"Once the adjudication of the claim was reignited, WCB undertook further medical analysis and then made several pivotal decisions," said O'Donnell.

By spring 2018, WCB had accepted that some of Henry's symptoms were permanent. For his psychological impairment, Henry was granted 25 per cent of total disability by WCB's Disability Awards Department. This translated to 25 per cent of 90 per cent of his annual net

income, paid out monthly. At this point, Henry's file was also conveyed to vocational rehabilitation in an attempt to return him to work, other than his pre-injury work.

Along the way, there were additional bumps in the road. For example, Henry's claim had four different vocational rehabilitation consultants, for various reasons. His second vocational rehabilitation consultant, with whom he had an excellent rapport, went on leave and was expected to return, necessitating a waiting period. Ultimately, however, the consultant did not return, and Henry was assigned a new representative. From Henry and O'Donnell's perspective, this new representative was inappropriate, which led O'Donnell to meet with the



Workers' advocate Merrill O'Donnell

## O'Donnell has represented hundreds of injured construction workers during his eight-and-a-half years as the workers' advocate for the BC Building Trades.

vice-president of claims to request a new consultant for Henry.

"He was extremely fragile as a result of the accident," explained O'Donnell. "The claims process needed to respect and accommodate that."

Fortunately, the VP was sympathetic and agreed to assign a new consultant to Henry's claim.

"Oftentimes WCB does the right thing," O'Donnell said. "This was one of those times. The VP's thoughtful decision resulted in Henry getting an outstanding vocational consultant who meticulously reviewed the evidence and moved things forward."

Other things started to turn around, too.

O'Donnell successfully appealed the initial 25 per cent psychological award and had it increased to 40 per cent by the Review Division. At the same time, he kept pushing for a 100 per cent loss of earnings award — an award that is only granted to injured workers who are deemed "completely unemployable" by WCB.

On Nov. 27, 2019, more than three years after the original workplace accident and after almost two years of pushing WCB to make the right decisions on a wide range of issues, O'Donnell and Henry got the result they were looking for: a 100 per cent loss of earnings award, retroactive to May 2018 and paid until Henry turns 65 years of age. That means Henry will receive 90 per cent of his net earnings until he is eligible for his federal pensions.

"It was our position from the get-go that he was completely unemployable — no ifs, ands, or buts about it," said O'Donnell. "This disability award is validation of that."

O'Donnell has represented hundreds of injured construction workers during his eight-and-a-half years as the workers' advocate for the BC Building Trades. He has achieved a 100 per cent loss of earnings award on four or five occasions — something that isn't lost on Henry.

"He's my champion," Henry says of O'Donnell. "He made me promise I wouldn't take my life. He gave me his home number and he said he'd never lost anyone on his watch, and he wasn't about to start now."

For O'Donnell, as difficult and emotionally draining as his work is, the rewards far outweigh the challenges. Henry's case is but one example.

"I try to represent every member to the best of my ability. It was Tom Sigurdson, our former executive director who will officially retire in March 2020, who had the vision to propose the creation of the workers' advocate office to our executive board. Thanks to him, hundreds of our members have been represented when they got snarled up in the grinding grizzly bear jaws of the WCB system. And thanks to him, our future injured workers will get the support they need and deserve. As for me, I simply have the best job in the world. I fight for the underdog." >>

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# What is a workers' advocate?



The workers' advocate for the BC Building Trades has several **key responsibilities**:

- Representing the injured members of affiliated unions in relation to their claims with the Workers' Compensation Board, the Review Division, and the Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal (WCAT);
- Negotiating appropriate vocational rehabilitation and retraining for injured members;
- Countering return to work/light duty regimes, when necessary, with case managers and employers prior to formal appeals; and
- Researching, analyzing and drafting legislative and policy submissions in response to WCB proposals.

The workers' advocate is also an active member of the following committees:

- BC Federation of Labour's Occupational Health and Safety Standing Committee;
- WCB Policy and Practice Consultative Committee; and
- BC Federation of Labour's Equity and Human Rights Standing Committee. 



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*Roy Bizzutto, Business Manager & Secretary-Treasurer*



"It's hard to comprehend the inner strength of those living in developing countries and the perseverance of those working in male-defined jobs in that context."



# A bridge not too far

By Megan Terepocki

PHOTOS BY ANTONIETTE YAP

Figuratively speaking, there is now a bridge from India to British Columbia, thanks to two passionate tradeswomen from BC Building Trades affiliates.

Millwright Antoniette Yap (Millwrights Machine Erectors and Maintenance Union Local 2736) and electrician Katy Rhodes (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 213) were members of the 2019 Tradeswomen Building Bridges delegation to Kerala, India. The two-week trip was part of a commitment to build a global network of women working in the construction trades.

The delegation met with the largest construction workers' union in the region, the Kerala Kettida Nirmana Thozhilali Congress (KKNTC). The trip was co-hosted by the Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI), which represents unions in the building, materials, wood, forestry and allied sectors.





PHOTO: LYCHEN'S GROVE PHOTOGRAPHY

Millwright Antoniette Yap (left) and electrician Katy Rhodes (right).

A visit to the Archana Women's Centre in Kottayam, on the southwest coast of India, was a highlight of the trip. Rhodes described the centre as a "one-stop-shop" to support women in unconventional trades with training to job placement. The women are trained in-house to build water filtration systems and make bricks. "They even make twine for plumbing," said Rhodes.

Rhodes was surprised by the similarities faced by women in construction across the two cultures. "Women want to be independent to support their families," she said. "They want a living wage. There aren't as many opportunities to advance and not as many opportunities for employment." The women talked about sexism and discrimination on the job site.


Nearly half of construction industry workers in India are women, compared with less than five per cent in Canada. Most work as construction labourers. Half of the KKNTC membership are women, with 40 per cent in leadership roles.

There was a noticeable difference in workplace safety, said Rhodes. "There were people walking around barefoot in the carpentry shop. There were people wearing sandals doing masonry with 50-pound bricks." She said that the next delegation will look at safety information and equipment that could be made available to the women.

An unexpected moment occurred near the end of the trip. "A woman I met there came up to us and said, 'I can drive a taxi, I'm a

plumber, I'm an electrician, I teach, and I'm single by choice,'" said Rhodes. "She said that we taught her how to feel proud of that."

Yap described the trip as eye-opening and educational. The women are working in conditions that come out of a country having to deal with the "push and pull" of modern advances as well as more traditional systems, she noted.

"It's hard to comprehend the inner strength of those living in developing countries and the perseverance of those working in male-defined jobs in that context." 

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# You've come a long way, baby

## Parental benefits for UA Canada members

By Tatiana Tomljanovic

Being a parent is tough.

It's even tougher for parents on a reduced or single income while on medical leave and/or caring for their baby during that first developmentally crucial year.

Recognizing the financial burden families face with a baby, the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of Canada (UA Canada) launched a national parental wellness program for their members last year.

"This plan is the first of its kind in the construction industry in Canada," said Alanna Marklund, UA Canada's national manager for youth, diversity and Indigenous relations. "We believe in the health and safety of our pregnant members as well as the first formative year of child development in which either or both parents can take time to focus on their child's needs."

The parental wellness program offers three distinct benefits to its members. The first is a pregnancy benefit providing the equivalent of employment insurance (EI) benefits to expectant mothers before their baby is born for up to 24 weeks if the job site is deemed unsafe for mother or baby and lighter duties cannot be provided by the employer. The second is a maternity benefit top-up of \$100 per week for any members receiving the maternity EI benefits for up to 15 weeks. The third is a parental benefit, which can go to either the mother or father receiving parental EI benefits and is a top up of \$100 per week for up to 35 weeks.

While it's still too early to tell how many members have utilized the program, since becoming available to members on Sept. 1, 2019, there has been a great deal of interest and inquiries into the program from both women and men.

"It's pretty neat to hear," said Jim Noon, business manager of UA Local 324. "It sparked the interest of our

male members. They now have the opportunity to allow their spouse to go back to work so dad can take some time off."

A father himself, Noon sees the benefit to both parents.

"Definitely for myself as the dad of three daughters, if that benefit had been there, I may have taken advantage," said Noon. "The top-up allows people to leave the trades even for a short time and still pay the mortgage, pay for groceries."

UA Canada chose to offer this groundbreaking and progressive program to its members after consulting with their youngest member demographic on methods to recruit and retain skilled workers. A meeting with 28 apprentices and 32 past competitors from the UA skills competitions across Canada resulted in the national parental wellness benefits program.

"UA Canada has been looking at new ways to remain at the forefront of our industry. In order to keep current, it was decided to hold a meeting with our young members to see what areas needed fine tuning," said Jill Timushka, interim national manager of youth, diversity and Indigenous relations.



Jill Timushka

"With the information from our meeting as well as additional research, it was decided that supporting our members and their families was key to attract new members and retain the current ones."

The benefits were introduced in conjunction with a new member assistance program (MAP) to support members and their families with mental health and other issues, such as

addiction, dietary concerns and financial advice.

"It is imperative that we take care of our membership," said Marklund, who herself is currently on maternity leave. "We must show we support our members throughout their entire career." 🌐

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# ASBESTOS: KNOW THE RISKS

**By Megan Martin**

**Manager, Industry & Labour Services, WorkSafeBC**

Asbestos exposure is the No. 1 killer of construction workers in B.C. and, according to WorkSafeBC reports, was the contributing factor in 45 work-related deaths in 2018.

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous material that was used in more than 3,000 building materials predominantly from the 1950s to 1990s. Common sources include:

- Vinyl and linoleum flooring;
- Stucco;
- Loose-blown insulation;
- Roof felt shingles;
- Gypsum board filling compound;
- Textured ceilings and finishes; and
- Pipe insulation.

When asbestos-containing materials are disturbed, intentionally or unintentionally, asbestos fibres can be released into the air. Once airborne, inhalation to asbestos poses a serious risk. Long-term exposures to harmful airborne asbestos fibres can cause serious health problems such as lung cancers like malignant pleural mesothelioma and other non-malignant lung diseases.

## Be aware

Employers are responsible for the health and safety of their workers, and that includes protecting them from asbestos exposure. As a worker, never assume a building material is free of asbestos. If you suspect asbestos is present, stop work immediately and ask your employer if a qualified asbestos professional has completed an asbestos survey before disturbing that building material.

As a worker, you are responsible for understanding key safety requirements that include:

- Knowing and following health and safety requirements that apply to your job;
- Asking the supervisor for training to perform work tasks and use equipment safely;
- Participating in all required health and safety education and training;
- Using all required PPE and clothing; and
- Correcting any unsafe conditions or immediately reporting them to a supervisor.



As a worker, never assume a building material is free of asbestos. If you suspect asbestos is present, stop work immediately and ask your employer if a qualified asbestos professional has completed an asbestos survey before disturbing that building material.

## Ask the right questions

Before working with asbestos, ask your employer about what protocols are in place and ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and related training are available.

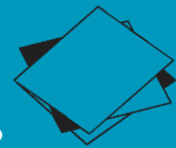
Typical protocols to be aware of when addressing asbestos issues include:

- Having an up-to-date inventory of all asbestos-containing materials in the worksite;
- Clearly labelling all asbestos-containing materials;
- Ensuring written safe-work procedures specific to the worksite are readily available; and
- Providing all involved personnel with worksite-specific education and training in safe-work procedures.

**For more information and resources, visit [worksafebc.com/asbestos](https://www.worksafebc.com/asbestos)**



# Why ask your union for help when your claim is conveyed to WorkSafeBC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services?



**By Merrill O'Donnell**

BCBT Workers' Advocate

**THE TITLE OF THIS COLUMN** is in the form of a question. What's the answer? Simply this: *Without a representative to assist you with vocational rehabilitation, you stand a good chance of getting your butt kicked!*

The first thing I tell the workers I represent who have been conveyed to WorkSafeBC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) is that they can have a significant positive impact on their VR planning if they participate fully, research aggressively, express themselves to the VR consultant (VRC) unequivocally, and last but not least, follow my instructions.

Usually, VR planning is greatly facilitated by the injured worker's partner. Over the years, I have witnessed how the worker's partner poses the most important questions, keeps track of the most important information, and ensures their partner — the injured worker — arrives to the meetings on time. Perhaps this is due to the partner bringing the perspective of caring deeply for their loved one and wanting to ensure the best care for them. This, then, is the second thing I tell workers I represent: When you have a face-to-face meeting with your VRC, bring your partner. You'll be glad you did. So will the VRC. And so, will I.

The third thing I tell workers who are entering into VR planning is that they should familiarize themselves with the five phases of the vocational rehabilitation process. All this information is available to workers on the WorkSafeBC website at [worksafebc.com](http://worksafebc.com).

WorkSafeBC's vocational process involves five sequential phases. This means that your vocational consultant

commences the process at phase one and will only go on to phase two and beyond if the former phase or phases are unsuccessful. In the first phase, efforts are made to return the injured worker to their pre-injury employer in the same job with, if required, support in physical conditioning, work assessment or skill upgrading. If the worker is unable to perform their old job, the VRC will move on to the second phase and encourage the employer to make job modifications or provide an alternate in-service placement. Acting as the liaison between the injured worker's union and WorkSafeBC, a workers' advocate can help

**Acting as the liaison between the injured worker's union and WorkSafeBC, a workers' advocate can help hammer out a durable position to the benefit of the worker and employer.**

hammer out a durable position to the benefit of the worker and employer.

The problem, however, is that many of our injured workers cannot return to their pre-injury employers for several reasons. To begin with, many of our injured workers can no longer perform

any kind of construction-related tasks due to the seriousness of their impairment. Secondly, most of our contractors are small operations with limited capacity to modify or provide alternate positions. Finally, WorkSafeBC lacks the legislative authority to compel employers to accommodate workers. The employer's duty to accommodate is stipulated in the *BC Human Rights Code* and, as a result, must be adjudicated under that statute, not the *Workers' Compensation Act*. (see *Tradetalk*, Summer 2019, *Duty*



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[energyconservationspecialists.org](http://energyconservationspecialists.org)

to Accommodate a Human Right, for further details). As a result, our injured workers oftentimes find themselves being conveyed to phase three.

When workers find themselves in this third phase of the VR process, things tend to get very complicated, thorny, and downright nasty in a nanosecond. A cascading number of highly obscure issues — both spoken and unspoken — will immediately arise and are placed firmly in the suffocating grip of the VR consultant. What new vocation is viable for the worker? How will the worker's financial status be impacted? What can the worker do to minimize the monetary loss and maximize the vocational gain? If the accepted physical and/or mental limitations and restrictions on the worker's claim fail to reflect the reality, what can they do about it? How does a potential loss of earnings disability award factor into vocational planning? And what can be done to maximize the chances of obtaining this special award? These are all critically important questions and injured workers need answers.

Now you know why it's so damn important to seek assistance from your union when your claim is conveyed to WorkSafeBC's Vocational Rehabilitation Services. An advocate who understands the system can provide answers you need, when you need them, thereby increasing your chances of maximizing the vocational as well as disability award benefits that you deserve. 🧠

ON A LIGHT NOTE by Sean Luke



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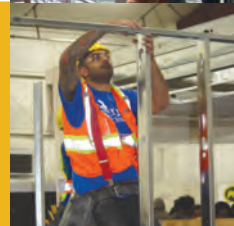
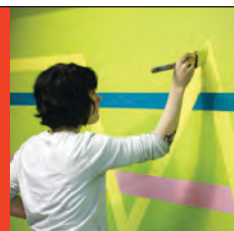
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# Women



## CONFERENCE APRIL 24-25

### BC CENTRE FOR WOMEN IN THE TRADES

**HEY, BUILDING TRADES AFFILIATES** – do you want to learn how to attract and retain more women? Hey, tradeswomen – do you want to be inspired?

Hosted by the BC Centre for Women in the Trades, the Women Build BC 2020 conference is happening April 24 and 25 at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel in Richmond.

Women in BC still only represent about four per cent of the skilled trades. Despite the impending labour shortage and a construction boom, that number has barely moved in decades. BCCWITT is bringing industry leaders together with tradeswomen to build a path forward that significantly increases the number of women finding success in the trades.

**THE FIRST DAY** of the conference is open to women from the skilled trades, industry, training providers and labour interested in networking and learning about strategies to reduce barriers to attract, retain and advance women in the trades, including best practices for building a diverse, inclusive and equitable workplace.

“For tradeswomen and those who want to see more tradeswomen in our sector, this is definitely the conference to attend,” said BCCWITT executive director Nina Hansen. “It will leave you energized and excited about the future in the skilled trades, with the ideas and the connections to get there.”

**THE SECOND DAY** of the conference is exclusively for women from the trades. This day will provide an important opportunity for women to network with other women in the trades from across the province, fostering stronger regional and provincial networks of tradeswomen. The women will also hear about supports available to women in the trades and be able to participate in skills building workshops.

“Too often, women find themselves the ‘first’ or ‘only’ tradeswoman on a job site or, in the case of an apprentice, in the classroom. We wanted flip that on its head and offer a space exclusively for tradeswomen to share their stories and support one another,” said Lindsay Kearns, BCCWITT coordinator.

Women attending the conference from remote areas of the province may be eligible for financial assistance. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

Contact [outreach@womenbuildbc.ca](mailto:outreach@womenbuildbc.ca) for details.

The BC Centre for Women in the Trades is funded through the Canada-B.C. Labour Market Development Agreement and the Canada-BC Workforce Development Agreement with partners the BC Building Trades, Build TogetHER, BC Federation of Labour, BC Tradeswomen Society, Construction Labour Relations and the BC LNG Alliance and contributions from IBEW 213, IBEW Provincial Council, UA Local 170, UA Local 516, Vancity and Community Savings.





# A thermos should not be a legacy

## BENTALL MEMORIAL

By Tatiana  
Tomljanovic



A FAMILIAR GREEN STAINLESS STEEL STANLEY THERMOS sits on a podium between a dozen memorial wreaths.

The thermos belonged to 21-year-old Brian Stevenson, who plunged 36 floors to his death from Vancouver's Bentall Centre Tower in 1981 along with fellow carpenters Yrjo Mitrunen, Donald Davis and Gunther Couvreur when the fly form they were standing on collapsed.

Thirty-nine years is a long time for a coffee thermos to hold up, but it's not nearly long enough to forget the man who held it.

"Every day he filled it with coffee and brought it to the job site," said Dianne Stevenson, standing next to her husband Bruce, Brian's brother. "So every time we take this monster along out camping, out in the boat we can't help but think about him and all that we have missed being with him."

On Jan. 7, 2020, a crowd gathered in the pouring rain for the annual Bentall memorial ceremony to remember the four men who tragically lost their lives and to recognize that construction workers continue to die as a result of workplace trauma and exposure.

BC Building Trades Council executive director Andrew Mercier drove the point home when he related that one out of every five work-related deaths in B.C. is of a construction worker, despite the fact that construction workers make up less than 10 per cent of the workforce.

"The construction industry in B.C. is still one of the most dangerous industries in the province. Last year, 27 workers in the industry died from work-related causes," said Mercier. "We've asked policy makers and our elected officials to join us today so that we may remember that both the decisions we make, and the decisions we fail to make, have real consequences. Everyone who leaves for work in the morning deserves to come home at the end of the day."

Labour and government leaders including Minister of Health Adrian Dix, East Vancouver MP Jenny Kwan, Deputy Vancouver

Mayor Christine Boyle, BC Federation of Labour president Laird Cronk, and WorkSafeBC VP of prevention services Al Johnson spoke at the ceremony of their renewed commitment to workplace safety and the need for vigilance despite regulatory improvements in recent years.

The import, sale and use of asbestos, and the manufacture, import, sale and use of products containing asbestos were banned in Canada on Dec. 30, 2018, but there is still a devastating number of asbestos-related deaths caused by previous exposure and the ongoing cleanup of asbestos-containing materials.

Dix noted that more than 200 people working construction and more than 600 workers in B.C. died from asbestos-related injuries in the last decade.

"What happened here 39 years ago resonates with us today. And it does so, I think, because of the family members," said Dix. "They bring us here because they tell us of the human cost, the family cost."

Johnson spoke about honouring the legacy of the four men who died at Bentall by holding

one another accountable to ensure health and safety is a priority at all levels.

"Whether you're an employer, worker, union rep or part of an industry association, we all share that responsibility and have a part to play," said Johnson.

To close the ceremony, nine red roses were placed on the memorial plaque for the workers who died from trauma and 18 white roses for the workers who died from disease and exposure in 2019.

"Life is unpredictable, but in the end workplace safety should not be," said Dianne Stevenson. "A thermos should not be a legacy." 🌹







TOP FROM LEFT: **BC Building Trades** executive director **Andrew Mercier**; **BC Federation of Labour** president **Laird Cronk**.



BOTTOM FROM LEFT: **Sara Mitrunen**, daughter-in-law of **Yrjo Mitrunen**; **Health Minister Adrian Dix**; **East Vancouver MP Jenny Kwan**.

PHOTOS BY **TATIANA TOMLIJANOVIC**



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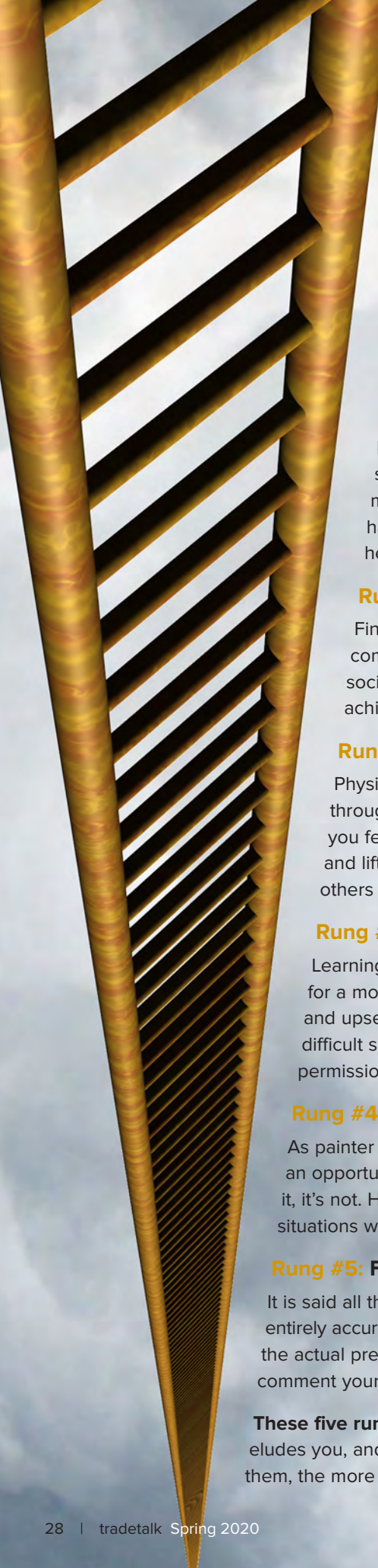
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# Climbing the rungs to a more positive life

by Nicole Che

Program assistant,  
Construction Industry  
Rehabilitation Plan

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Positivity sometimes sounds like New Age voodoo. If you're deep in the pits of despair, someone telling you to be more positive often makes you want to positively tell them to mind their own business, or something to that effect. *Obviously*, you want good things to happen, positive things even, but being told to *be more positive* is not exactly a ladder helping you climb out of the pit. So... what is this metaphorical ladder?

## Rung #1: Finding support

Finding social supports helps in countless ways on your way up the ladder. Joining community clubs that coincide with hobbies and interests is a great way to start making social connections. Surround yourself with people who share your goals and support you in achieving your aspirations. Remember: building supportive relationships takes time.

## Rung #2: Physical activity

Physical activity is another great way to build community and get some dopamine flowing through your system. It may feel foreign and uncomfortable, but the more you move, the better you feel. No step into this unfamiliar territory is too small to make a difference. Going to the gym and lifting weights is great for some people, others prefer to take advantage of the outdoors, others still would rather take a leisurely stroll after dinner, and none are wrong.

## Rung #3: Humour

Learning to laugh in the face of adversity is an important undervalued skill. Cracking a smile for a moment does not mean that your troubles are easy. Nothing is lost by letting the serious and upsetting sit on the sidelines for a few moments. Sharing a joke can relieve the tension of a difficult situation or divert attention away from an uncomfortable moment. Consider giving yourself permission to lighten up. Take time later to look back and reflect.

## Rung #4: Turning 'failures' into knowledge

As painter Bob Ross used to say, "there are no mistakes, just happy accidents." Every mistake is an opportunity for personal introspection. I'm not saying every mistake is good, because let's face it, it's not. However, the more we learn about ourselves, the more we understand how to deal with situations we find challenging in more suitable and beneficial ways.

## Rung #5: Focus on now

It is said all the time, "focus on the present, don't think about the past." Easier said than done, and not entirely accurate — it is important to embrace our past (a topic for another time). However, if we focus on the actual present, this span of 10 seconds, most things are not as bad as they seem. Forget the unkind comment your co-worker made 30 seconds ago, right now, these 10 seconds, you are walking away.

**These five rungs of the ladder** are not a cure-all. There will be some days in which positivity simply eludes you, and you feel destined to spend your days in the pits. However, the more you try and climb them, the more you will realize that you've made your life more, dare I say it, positive. 🌍





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# Increased funding for the skilled trades is key to rewarding careers

## A message from Canada's Building Trades Unions

Workforce development has and should continue to be at the forefront for many organizations, including Canada's Building Trades Unions. Identifying ways in which we can attract, train and retain workers in the skilled trades is vital to meeting industry demands and ensuring we equip members to continue to meet changes to our industry.

There are many reasons to consider a job in the unionized skilled trades — from wages and benefits, to lifelong learning and growth opportunities. We need to continue to identify and communicate the positive attributes of the trades while being honest about the changes needed and challenges that exist. But the fact of the matter is, the demand for skilled trades continues to increase as more Baby Boomers retire from our ranks. Aging infrastructure and upcoming projects — like pipelines — will continue to create a need for more apprentices to be trained.

We need to discuss it in dollars and cents. According to a 2018 StatsCan

report, the median employment income at the time of certification in 18 different trades was \$50,000. At a time of increased cost-of-living, when the gig economy is on the rise, jobs that offer a paycheque to support a family, benefits to ensure you get the health care you need and a pension that offers a future with a secure retirement are few and far between.

An apprenticeship — unlike many careers — won't leave you saddled with student debt. You earn while you learn, combining theoretical education in school, with on-the-job training to obtain certification. And the learning doesn't stop upon completion of your apprenticeship; the Building Trades operate and fund, with our employer partners, over 175 state-of-the-art training centres across the country. As technology changes, industry advances, so do our training methods and opportunities to learn something new at any point during your career.

Over the past several years, we have had cooperation from our government partners, through the

Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP). Through this government support, local unions across the country have been able to improve their training centres through expansion, installation of new equipment, and increases in program offerings, including unique programs and services that may not have been possible without their partnership.

With a new minority government in Ottawa, we need to build on the relationships established with various ministers and forge new relationships with those with whom we haven't yet had a chance to work closely. There is an opportunity, in relationship building, to educate and push forward things like Community Benefits Agreements that benefit communities where infrastructure dollars are being spent and create opportunities for real apprenticeships. Increased funding for the skilled trades is key to bringing an opportunity for a rewarding career to more Canadians.

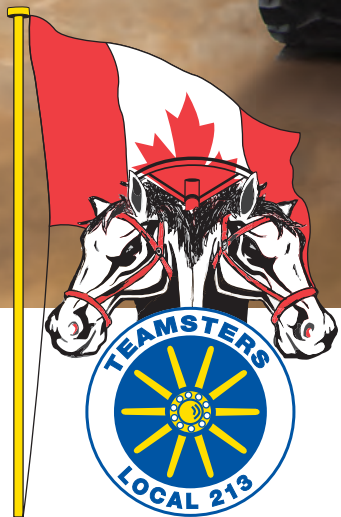
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