



Teamsters Local 213 Training Centre FROM PLAN TO REALIZATION

by Marco Procaccini

The goal of creating a Teamsters Local 213 comprehensive training school is one big step closer to reality after the recent purchase of a three-acre lot and building in Chilliwack, jointly with the LiUNA Construction and Specialized Workers Local 1611. The 7,800 square-foot (724.6 meter squared) building itself is a former warehouse. The local plans to add a 4,000 square-foot (371.6 meters squared) mezzanine that will be host to several classrooms and driving simulator machines for practice.

The rest of the property includes an outside parking and storage area—partially paved and partially gravel—for practical training. The paved portion is intended for commercial drivers' license training, and the gravel section will be used for training for off-road vehicles, like rock trucks and front-end loaders. By the time it is fully operational, it is expected to be the largest Teamster training school in Western Canada.

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Local 213 Secretary-Treasurer Tony Santavenere, Joint Training School (JTS) Administrator Konrad Sears, Owner-Operator Representative Ruvien Mahil, Business Representative Barry Capozzi and Organizer Alex Bruse were on hand to grant official sanction to the project on January 1.

“This is a really important project for us,” Santavenere said. “We’ve been working on this for a long time, and now we’re getting close to having it up and running.”

He says the new training school has been a five-year effort among much of the local’s leadership and members, along with the former training coordinator Rob Duff, who retired last year, to make it a reality. “We hope to have (the school) going by this summer, although it might be closer to the fall.”

Administrator Konrad Sears, who took over from Duff last fall, has had his work cut out for him as the point man for the project. Putting it all together, he says, is the real challenge. This is the first physical training school the local has operated since the 1980s. Sears wants to start off with basic driving courses that are in high demand, and expand the courses as the school acquires more equipment and vehicles.

“The first big thing we’ll be offering is Class 1, and 3 (training),” he said, adding that the school has already purchased a tractor and trailers. “Then we can go on to (Class) 2 and 4 as we get the appropriate vehicles, along with more safety training.”

Both Sears and Santavenere say part of the move to offer class license training is due to the worsening shortage of skilled commercial drivers—largely because commercial driver training, now almost entirely provided by private for-profit schools, has driven the cost of training out of reach for many people.

“On a lot of our major projects, we are finding it’s more and more difficult for us to find Class 1 drivers,” Santavenere said. “We were having to rely more on out-of-province drivers, that take jobs away from members.”



Local 213 Training Administrator Konrad Sears and Secretary-Treasurer Tony Santavenere at the entrance to the new training school.

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Training Administrator, Konrad Sears

For Sears, though, it’s more than just about providing training that people can’t easily get elsewhere. Rather, he says it’s about putting a “Teamsters stamp” on the quality, proficiency and diversity of the courses offered. “We don’t just want to meet the legal bar (set by government regulations). Government standards require 120 hours of training time in the courses schools offer. We want a standard of at least 160 hours (of training time).”

He adds that these higher standards will apply to all of the forms of training and courses the school will offer—from driving and warehousing, health and safety courses to diversity education and other OH&S on boarding type courses. “There are two training streams: commercial-industrial and warehousing; and material handling and transport.”

Sears also feels that offering such diverse and high-proficiency training requires the need for direct person-to-person contact in order to communicate and inspire students and members.

“The benefit of having the physical building is going back to face-to-face teaching,” he said, adding that the

current school’s on-line and site-location based mobile unit training courses will still be available. “It’s what the members want and how they learn best. We’ll still offer on-line courses (for members who can’t make it to the school). We sold the mobile unit, but we still have the simulators in the classrooms.”

He adds that mobile-unit training will likely again be made available in situations where members need immediate training on specialized vehicles at very remote locations around the province and can’t get to the school while on the job. “The option of taking a 53-foot van and converting it into a trailer with instructors taking the vehicle to communities, is definitely on the table.” Sears adds as the construction of the school develops, he will be looking to hire instructors, although he’s not sure right now how many the school will need.

An additional opportunity that Sears and Santavenere and other members see with having a physical school is the potential for organizing by making at least some room available to the public. While locals 213 and 1611 members will have tuition-free access to the school, people in the community will have the opportunity to take courses at a reasonable cost.

“Initially it’ll be for members only,” Sears said. “Shortly after, once we get our feet on the ground, we will look to bring new people into the Teamster family.” He said opening the school to the public will allow non-union workers

to learn about the realities of working and being involved in the union, and the proven freedoms and benefits it provides. “We could offer scholarships and get public funding for the training we offer to grow the school and build links to the local community,” Sears said. “We could bring in high school students to get an idea of what working union is. It’s also a bit like dangling a carrot in front of people that this training could result in a Teamster job for them. It’s obviously not a guarantee, but it’s a leg up.”

With good prospects and commitment for such a project, the questions arise as to why make it a joint venture with Local 1611 and why in Chilliwack. “Cost,” says Santavenere. “The LiUNA don’t have their own training school now, and they need one, just like we do. The (real estate) prices in Chilliwack were more favourable. The property cost about \$10 million. That’s a lot cheaper than Langley or Abbotsford.”

Meanwhile, Sears says, despite Chilliwack’s conservative reputation, he’s found the community and civic government, and in particular a neighbour of the facility, to be supportive. “I think at first some people were apprehensive because they didn’t know what we were about and what we were trying to accomplish,” he said. “We have been working on building relationships and educating the community on who we are.” 🌐



The next few months will see the 7,800 sq. ft. (724.6 meter squared) warehouse turned into a state-of-the-art training facility. The Local plans to add a 4,000 sq. ft. (371.6 meters squared) mezzanine that will be host to several classrooms, driving simulator machines and a media room.



The back of the property includes almost three acres (1.2 hectares) for commercial drivers’ license training and training for off-road vehicles, such as rock trucks and front-end loaders.