



IKEA Teamsters

Unity • Strength • Pride



Cart collection is not for the weak. That's why Kevin Wolanski and Prabjot Sidhu have been given the task. In the background is the solar-powered Ikea sign outfitted with rainwater harvesters.

The Richmond Ikea

A union shop for Teamster members

Article by Leslie Dyson, Photos by Michael Brophy

Everybody knows Ikea products. Valerie Pringle, host of CBC's *Antiques Road Show*, once remarked that one thing you can say for Canadian's taste in home furnishings is that just about every home has at least one piece of Ikea furniture.

But just as noteworthy is the fact that the Richmond Ikea store is a union shop. The 330 "co-workers" in receiving, cash, sales, housekeeping, operations, safety and security, carts, returns, service and the restaurant are members of Teamsters Local 213. You're supporting your union brothers and sisters when you shop at the Richmond store. The only other unionized Ikaes are in Montreal and Europe.

The relationship with the Teamsters began in May 1982, when the company was certified with Teamsters Local 351, said Local 213 President Ray Zigmont. Local 351 merged with Local 213 in the mid-1980s.

In April, a grand opening was held for the 30% larger store located just south of the old store. Tom Suter, deputy store manager, said the reaction from customers has been positive. "It's much more bright and inspirational and there are more products on display. They're quite happy from what we've heard and the restaurant has been well received."

Suter is a former Teamsters Local 213 member. He joined the union in 2001 when he was hired at the Richmond store. He then worked at the Coquitlam outlet before accepting the management post back in Richmond.

Ikea has a commitment to sustainability, he said, "protecting resources, the environment and people. The job is never done. One initiative involves using wood that would be rejected by other furniture manufacturers in the construction of slats for bed frames, Suter said.

Ikea relies on cotton material, however the traditional cotton industry has been the target of criticism because of the amount of water that's wasted. Ikea found a way to reduce the use of water by 50%, he said.

The company is also striving to be the best employers in the retail sector.

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Susan Fillo, 14 years experience, Market Hall



Arlene Marasigan 1.5 years, Showroom



Jaaron Minhas, 1 year, Returns/Handout



Tenzin Yangki, 6 months Food Service

When you shop at the Richmond IKEA you're supporting your union

Walter Cantu, Secretary-Treasurer



We're pleased to introduce readers to some of the Teamster Local 213 members working at the Richmond IKEA store. Accumulatively, our members represent hundreds of years of experience.

I'd like to congratulate everyone at the new Richmond location on the many positive changes that have come with the move to the new and expanded store. We are continuing to work closely with the company to ensure all transitions go smoothly.

I'd also like to thank all our shop stewards: Jody Adams (chief shop steward/Recovery Department), Bernie Boivin (Warehouse), Drew Regalado (Self Service), Wilson Syyyong (Showroom), Perry Tachauer (Warehouse), and Dorothy Tompkins (Cash).

We have a good working relationship with management and we're pleased that this company is prospering in these difficult economic times. The Teamsters have a long relationship with IKEA and our local union looks forward to many more years of working together.

The contract between the Teamsters and the Richmond IKEA expires in December and we're hopeful that negotiations between the company and the Teamsters bargaining committee together with Anita Dawson will be a positive experience for all.

So, if you're planning a trip to IKEA this summer, make the trek to Richmond. You'll be supporting your union sisters and brothers.

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Suter said that the need for work/life balance is recognized and encouraged for all staff, including managers. Work schedules are posted three weeks in advance and the company and union have negotiated a number of benefits and incentives including benefits for part-timers.

Jody Adams, the chief shop steward, said "They try to treat us well. The benefits are good."

At the Richmond store, there is a large bright staff lunchroom and patio with a view of the North Shore mountains. Lunches are reasonably priced and beverages are free.



IKEA's mission can be summed up in words that every staff member knows by heart: "A better everyday life for the many." A couple of years ago, the company also developed a "Never-Ending List" of social and environmental goals and they're mounted on posters on the walls in the areas frequented by staff.

There's also a relaxation area with a TV and a computer room where employees can check their emails while on their breaks. The company has a profit-sharing program that can rise to a month's worth of wages, Adams said.

Amanda Meyer said, "It's been really good for me working here while being a single mom raising kids." She's worked in several departments and now works in Smaland, the children's play area.

Many of the jobs are physically demanding. Kevin Walanski, 19 and responsible for the shopping carts, said, "You can feel beat up by the close of a super busy day, but you come in the next morning, have some good fresh



Dehyna Muni (7 months experience) said she loves working with the people at IKEA.



Jeff Sadkowski (13 years) and Heather Mattei (7 years) work in Loss Prevention

coffee and you're ready to do it all over again."

Wolanski added, "I like the fact that everyone gets along and people ask if they can help you out."

That sentiment was repeated by Dehyna Muni, who was hired seven months ago. "Everyone is so great here. No one is ever disrespectful or rude. I love the teams."

Bernie Boivin, with 25 years experience, said the camaraderie is good.

He said he has been waiting a long time for the new store. "It's a work in progress," he said, "but we're working together to get it done."

The company invested a lot of time and funding to train staff in how to use the new touch screen tills in the cash area, he said. And the larger space has reduced the long lines that were typical at the old location.

This store also features a box fabricator linked to a computer with templates for various box shapes. When items are returned, staff can make boxes of any size and shape within minutes to repackage and sell them. The equipment was a major investment. However, staff in the repack area say it paid for itself in just three months.

There are also several builders on staff.



A bright staff cafeteria with access to a sunny patio and shaded picnic tables are among several amenities available to store staff like Jordan Sangha.



Wilson Syyong and Katina Kosa engaged in a bit of problem-solving.

Of course, they're not using the allen keys that we are all familiar with. Their drills are equipped with allen key shaped bits. Hok Ming Lee is a recognized star on staff. He's able to put together a complicated bookcase in under three minutes.

Adams noted the company is "very safety oriented." There are periodic inspections to ensure that candle wicks are properly trimmed, steel-toed boots are being worn in designated areas, fork lifts are working properly and displays are properly secured.

The staff also appreciate that their employer invites everyone to anonymously participate in surveys of their working conditions and comment on whether they believe that their store is doing its best to meet the company's sustainability goals.

As chief shop steward, Adams said, "we strive to resolve issues before they become grievances. We ask people to talk to managers in a respectful way to get things resolved.

"The new management is trying to work with us. We tell them, 'We're not an adversary. The more you succeed the more we succeed. They know that a happy worker is a productive worker,'" he added, "and we know they have challenges too."

The company has ridden the waves of economic highs and lows. Teamster members are in the middle of the company's busy season. July and August easily eclipse Christmas as the busiest time of the year.

Suter said IKEA's mission, "a better everyday life for the many" informs all decisions. Low price and good quality, together with a business ethic that includes a "Never-Ending List" of social and environmental goals have led IKEA to being a household name in just about every Canadian home.



Jody Adams
14 years
experience
Chief shop
steward /
Recovery



Cory Mets
5 months
Self-serve



Amanda Meyer
25 years
Smaland



Wilson Syyong
16 years
Shop steward /
Showroom



Eric Chuang
5 years
Showroom



Bernie Boivin
25 years
Shop steward /
Warehouse

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IKEA facts



There are 330 Teamster Local 213 members working at the Richmond Ikea store.

Richmond was the site of the first Ikea store to open in North America. Now there are stores in 41 countries with sales around \$25 billion Euro. The company was started in 1943 in Agunnaryd, Sweden.

The new Richmond Ikea store opened in April and features geothermal heating, only energy efficient LED and compact fluorescent lighting, 76 skylights and automated heating and lighting systems for energy conservation. The sign tower is lit by solar power and has rain collectors built into the design. The parking lot is also lit by solar power and features several spaces for hybrid vehicles. The store recycles wood, mattresses, hard plastic, metal and organic material.

The new store is over 330,000 s.f. (30% larger than the old store) and includes a 60,000 s.f. showroom, 9,000 products on display, 51 room settings and 22,500 balls in the ballroom. It still features the "long, natural walk" model, but includes a few well-marked shortcuts as well.

Ikea's trademark flat-packing, build it yourself products are better for the environment because they use space more efficiently and cut down on fuel costs.

The restaurant seats 606 customers and is the largest restaurant in the Vancouver area. It features a panorama view of the North Shore mountains, several computer stations and Ikea's famous \$2 breakfasts.

Innovative room displays are familiar to Ikea shoppers. The company is taking them a step further by providing furnished apartments at the London Summer Olympics.



Sean Jit, 5 months
Food Services



Belinda Beauchamp
12 years
Food Services



Jessenia Rodriguez
1.5 years
Food Services

