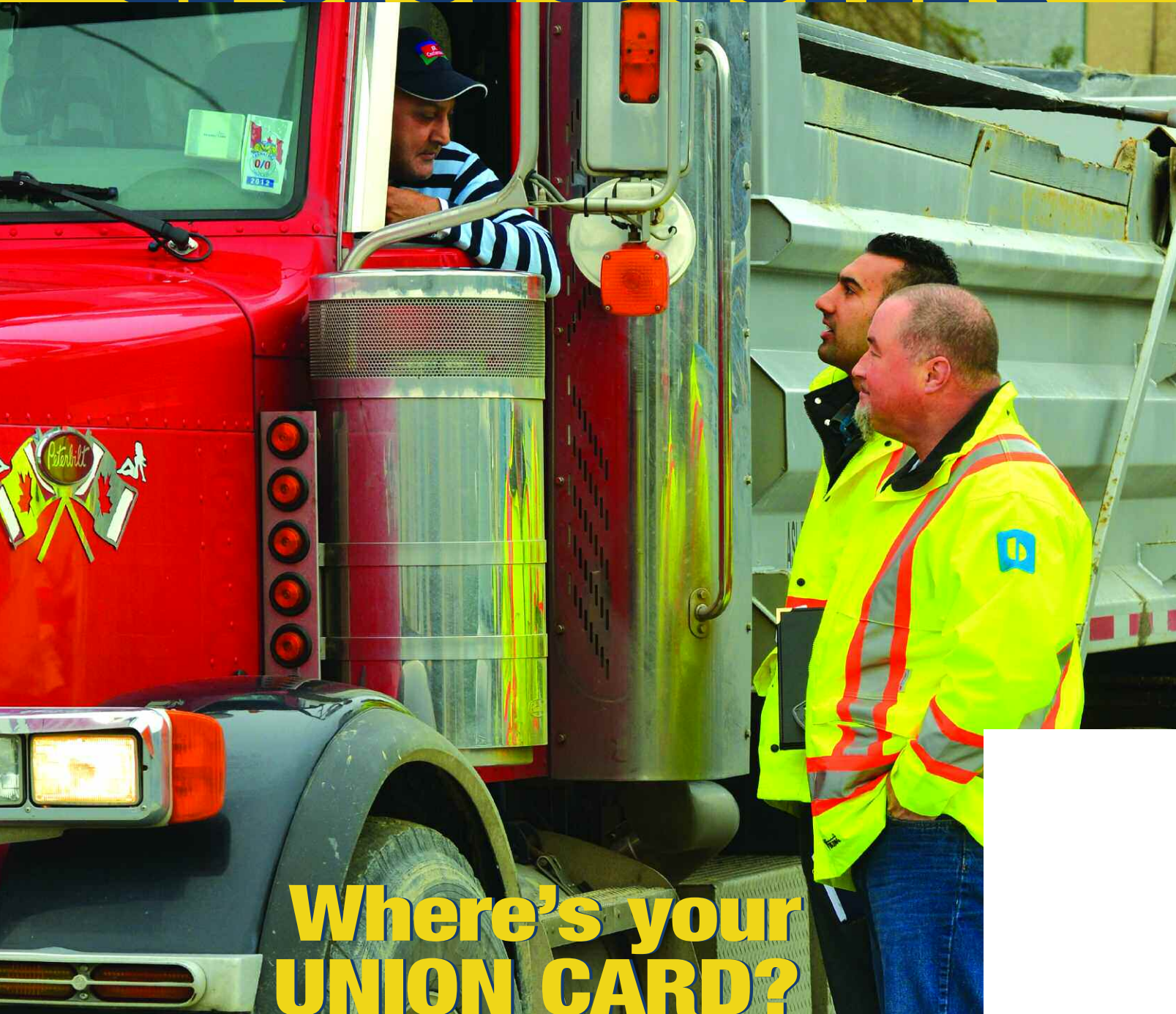


# WE BUILD BC™ tradetaalk

The magazine of the  
BC Building Trades

Summer  
2012  
Vol. 15  
No. 2



## Where's your UNION CARD?

- > Teamster owner-operators have had enough
- > Contractors setting drivers against one another
- > Non-union drivers accepting a pittance
- > Teamsters Local 213 takes it curbside

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# tradetalk

SUMMER 2012  
THE MAGAZINE OF THE B.C. AND YUKON TERRITORY BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION TRADES COUNCIL

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Cover: Greg Lacroix and  
Amneet Sekhon, business  
agents for Teamsters Local  
213, are helping to ensure  
that union owner-operators,  
like Amrik Liddar, are hold-  
ing onto the work on union  
construction sites.  
Photo: Joshua Berson



The plight of owner-operator truck  
drivers—Page 6

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# Starting Point

## For a healthy life beyond retirement



From Aug. 21 to 25, the City of Burnaby is proud to be hosting the 2012 BC Seniors Games. It is the largest multi-sport event in the province, providing an opportunity for all B.C. seniors aged 55 and over, to compete in an organized sport, recreation and cultural event that promotes individual achievement and community pride. This year celebrates the games' 25th year.

As director of sports for the 2012 games, I am responsible for organizing 26 events from archery, track & field, swimming, soccer and slo-pitch to darts, dragon boat, cycling and golf.

Burnaby will be hosting over 4,000 participants and 2,000 volunteers over the three days of competition.

### We welcome your comments...

The opinions expressed in Starting Point are not necessarily those of the BC Building Trades Council or its affiliates. Send letters (the shorter the better) to the editor at:

BCYT BCTC, #209 88 10th St.  
New Westminster, B.C. V3M 6H8 or  
bctybctc@bcbuildingtrades.org

Letters must include your name, address, phone number and, where relevant, union affiliation, trade or company.

Dear readers:

We are gratified that so many of you are on the alert for safety infractions. Our photographers understand the industry and always try to check with the authorities on site to ensure that photos reflect safe practices.

Even so, we receive letters from time to time concerned that a tradesperson is not wearing all the right safety gear. That was the case with the spring cover of Tradetalk. We checked, double checked and triple checked that the roofers were not required to wear safety goggles while applying the torch-on roofing.

So thanks, dear readers. As with anything to do with safety, never let your guard down. And keep writing.

The editor



I encourage you to check out [www.2012bcseniorgames.org](http://www.2012bcseniorgames.org) to view all 26 events and to register as a participant or volunteer. Attracting and training 2,000 volunteers is a daunting task. We welcome volunteers of all ages and abilities to help make these games the most memorable, inclusive and sustainable ever!

Whether or not you choose to participate at an event or as a volunteer, an active lifestyle is your ticket to living a productive and healthy life beyond retirement.

Wayne Peppard  
Representative, Allied Hydro Council of BC  
Labour Liaison, Pacific Blue Cross  
Director of Sports, 2012 BC Seniors Games

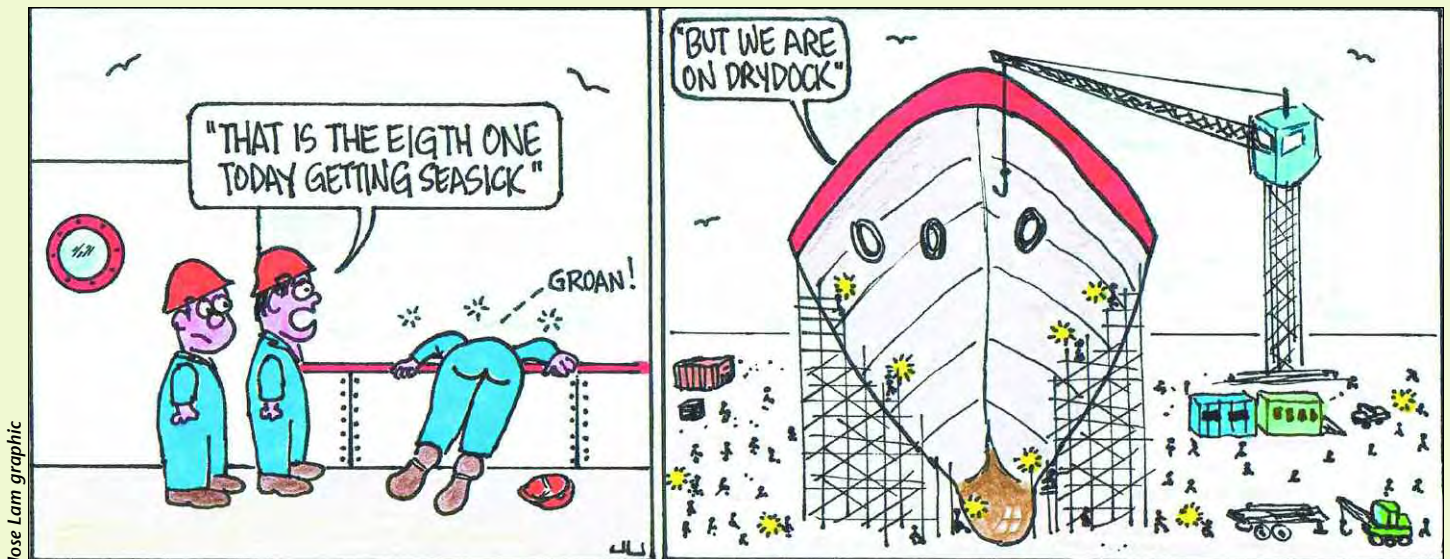
## WALK for TRUTH ASBESTOS KILLS

IN HONOUR OF ALL VICTIMS OF ASBESTOS

**Sunday, June 10, noon to 3 p.m.**  
**Powell River Recreation Centre**

This is the first walk organized by the Asbestos-related Research, Education & Advocacy (AREA) Fund. The event is family friendly and the route is easy. The goals are to make people aware that asbestos-related diseases are the number one occupational killer in B.C. and Canada and that victims of these diseases are not alone.

For more information go to [www.areafund.ca](http://www.areafund.ca) and click on 2012 Walk for Truth.



Jose Lam graphic



## Harper's latest affront: government-endorsed discrimination

HARDLY A WEEK GOES BY WHEN I don't hear someone say, "Trade unions had their place and time but we don't need them anymore." A lot of people believe that because we have a decent social safety net that we really don't need to band together to further promote the cause of social justice. A lot of people believe that because we have weekends and laws that restrict child labour (at a bare minimum in B.C.) and reasonable public services providing healthcare and education that we don't need to organize workers into unions. A lot of people are wrong.

Trade unions have done a lot more than negotiate decent wages and benefits into collective agreements. We have led the battle against child labour. We have marched with civil rights leaders to promote equality. We were first to support not only equal pay for equal work but equal pay for work of equal value.

On behalf of workers everywhere, we have worked to end discrimination and fought for equality.

Now we have another battle. This time, against the most insidious form of prejudice: government-endorsed discrimination.

The Harper Conservative government recently announced changes to the already deeply flawed Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program. In a recent study in Alberta, the Ministry of Employment and Immigration found 74% of workplaces employing migrant workers were in violation of the Employment Standards Act. With that knowledge, the government announced that employer applications for TFWs will be fast tracked from three months to ten days. Here's the kicker: the employer can now pay these workers 15% less than the average rate of pay for workers in that occupation.

When the Canada Line was under construction in Vancouver, the BC Building Trades found Latin American

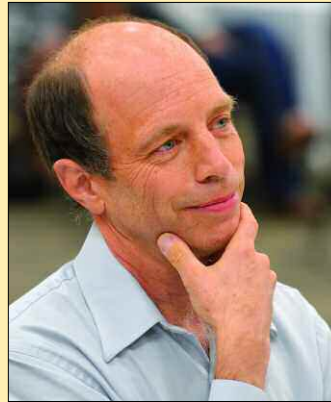
workers doing tunneling work for less than half of the B.C. minimum wage. Those workers joined the Labourers Local 1611 and, through the efforts of the Building Trades Council, took their claim of systemic discrimination to the BC Human Rights Tribunal. They won!

Now the government of Canada wants to make the practice of systemic discrimination acceptable.

I know full well there will be less than

scrupulous employers who will use the TFW program to save on labour costs. And I know those same employers will try to scam those workers for even more. Why wouldn't they? After all they have a government that is complicit in the act.

As a Canadian, I am disgusted. As a worker, I am enraged. As a trade unionist, I know the struggle for equality continues.



This *Tradetalk* marks the last edition with contributions from the BC Building Trades' researcher Joe Barrett. He is off to start on the next chapter of his life in Chile. Joe started at the council in the fall of 1997 and has been a tremendous asset to our campaigns and lobbying efforts.

Taking his place is Brynn Bourke. She is a writer with a background in political and community activism and experience with social media.

We wish Joe all the best and welcome Brynn to the always-interesting issues, struggles and triumphs of the BC Building Trades. —TS

## The Building Trades—Who we are

	Phone	Web address
B.C. Building and Construction Trades Council	778-397-2220	<a href="http://www.bcbuildingtrades.org">www.bcbuildingtrades.org</a>
<b>Affiliated Unions</b>		
Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local 2	604-584-2021	<a href="http://www.bac2bc.org">www.bac2bc.org</a>
Cement Masons & Plasterers Local 919	604-585-9198	<a href="http://www.opcmia919.org">www.opcmia919.org</a>
Construction & Specialized Workers Local 1611	604-432-9300	<a href="http://www.cswu1611.org">www.cswu1611.org</a>
Electrical Workers Local 213 (Vancouver)	604-571-6500	<a href="http://www.ibew213.org">www.ibew213.org</a>
Electrical Workers Local 230 (Victoria)	250-388-7374	<a href="http://www.ibew230.org">www.ibew230.org</a>
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Heat and Frost Insulators Local 118	604-877-0909	<a href="http://www.insulators118.org">www.insulators118.org</a>
Ironworkers Local 97	604-879-4191	<a href="http://www.ironworkerslocal97.com">www.ironworkerslocal97.com</a>
Operating Engineers Local 115	604-291-8831	<a href="http://www.iuoe115.org">www.iuoe115.org</a>
Sheet Metal, Roofers and Production Workers Local 280 (Vancouver)	604-430-3388	<a href="http://www.smw280.org">www.smw280.org</a>
Sheet Metal, Roofers and Production Workers Local 276 (Victoria)	250-727-3458	<a href="http://www.smwia276.ca">www.smwia276.ca</a>
Teamsters Local 213	604-876-5213	<a href="http://www.teamsters213.org">www.teamsters213.org</a>
UNITE HERE Local 40	604-291-8211	<a href="http://www.local40union.com">www.local40union.com</a>



We're on Facebook. Look for BCBuildingTrades to see up-to date activities, stories, photos and links to sites of interest to construction workers.

## Teamster owner-operators



# Bringing fairness to a cutthroat in

By Leslie Dyson

"LET'S SEE YOUR UNION CARD," SAYS AMNEET SEKHON as he steps on the running board of a gravel truck leaving South West Contracting's residential construction site in Coquitlam. Driver and Teamster member Sohinder Singh Kler is happy to show his Local 213 membership card and to see Sekhon and his fellow business agent Greg Lacroix patrolling union job sites.

Kler has been a driver for 22 years. Having the union's business agents checking for cards is "a good idea," he said. "I've been telling the union they should do this."

Glen Danchuk has been a trucker for 40 years. "I go out there until I get good and mad and then I go home. We used to have fun in this business and it was an honourable trade. But the backstabbing is unbelievable. Guys are working through their breaks. We fought for 30 years to get a coffee break. It's just disgusting."

Being an owner-operator truck driver is one of the most frustrating and nerve-racking jobs in the construction industry. Problems are decades old. That's because the drivers have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in their equipment and the

provincial government dropped its licencing program that protected drivers from the tumult of boom and bust cycles.

There are 1,000 gravel truck drivers competing against each other for work on the construction projects underway in Metro Vancouver. Big projects are in full swing, but there's already been a dramatic drop in housing starts. What will happen to hundreds of drivers once the Port Mann Bridge, South Perimeter Road and various other projects in the Lower Mainland are completed?

"It's a big worry," said Sekhon. "When there's a recession, some of these guys will be starving. They'll have all these expenses and no income. They should be getting their standard union rates at least when things are good. You have to have money to set aside to be strong when the work's not there."

Walter Canta, Local 213's secretary treasurer who was elected in December, said, "I understand the owner-operators' frustrations. I made a commitment to them to address the problem." One of his first tasks was to hire Lacroix and Sekhon, two Teamster owner-operators, to business agent positions and to start ensuring that only unionized truckers are

working on union sites.

Sekhon was in the trucking business for nine and a half years, beginning when he was 18. He bought his own gravel truck when he was 19 and hauled asphalt from Chilliwack to Squamish.

Greg Lacroix, a 20-year member of Local 213, drove a dump truck on residential construction sites in Maple Ridge and Coquitlam and in the road-building industry. He said his family, including two children, 11 and 5, are happy he took the union position. "It's a more normal life."

Sekhon and Lacroix are representing 580 unionized owner-operators and working hard to get the non-union drivers to sign up as well. Every week, the two show up in their high-viz vests at about 10 different unionized construction sites in the Lower Mainland to ensure that all drivers are members of Local 213.

"Most are happy to see us," said Lacroix. "We have had a couple of guys drive right past," he noted, "and there are some repeat offenders."

Sekhon said, "There are still quite a few out there playing games and they tip each other off. [But] we're more than willing to sign them up if they follow the proper rules and regulations."



*A truck costs upwards of \$180,000. Diesel can cost \$20 an hour—a fill about \$700. Even if your truck's not running, you still have to pay for insurance, which can run \$650 a month. An eight-hour day of driving requires an hour or two of maintenance each time. Tires, which last as little as two years, cost \$1,300 each.*

# Industry

Of the drivers Sekhon has spoken to, he said, “the majority of them are happy to see a younger Indo Canadian who’s familiar with the field. And some don’t like that,” he quickly added. “We’re just trying to make it fair. Every day we get calls and complaints about guys who are on [union] sites that shouldn’t be. We [go to the sites and] tell them, ‘You’re out of here.’ The union owner-operators are not working because of them. We have to fight for everything in this business.”

Until 1999, the provincial government required drivers to have motor carrier plates. A condition of this regulation was signed proof that they had contractors who wanted to hire them.

“When that ended, everybody and anybody started putting trucks out there,” said Lacroix. “There were huge jobs that could have been shared and everyone would have had food on the table.” Instead, drivers saw that they were busy with one truck so they decided to add another, and then another, he said. “Then they had nothing to pay the bills.”

Lacroix said many drivers get into the business lured by the dream and thrill of “doing what you want, owning your own truck, working around a lot of big stuff and belonging to a select group.”

Saab Sandhur, a Teamster member for nine years, was drawn to the trade by watching drivers working at his family’s sawmill in the Interior. “I wanted something with a bit more challenge. I thought it was going to pay more,” he said. “That’s what I was told.”

However, a truck costs upwards of \$180,000. Diesel can cost \$20 an hour—a fill about \$700. Even if your truck’s not running, you still have to pay for insurance, which can run \$650 a month. An eight-hour day of driving requires an hour or two of maintenance each time. Tires, which last as little as two years, cost \$1,300 each. Then there are the costs of parts to maintain the various systems.

Danchuk estimates that, after expenses, some drivers are making as little as \$15/hour.

Even belonging to the Teamsters union can’t provide enough protection. That’s because union construction companies are delegating their hiring requirements to private brokers and dispatch companies. Those companies have lists of names, but they don’t care whether a driver is with Local 213 or not.

Some of the stories that drivers tell hearken back to the late 1800s and the earliest years of the Teamster union when workers had to pay for their

own team of horses and wagons. There are stories about brokers and dispatchers luring in new drivers by offering to finance new trucks. This has left some drivers so deep in debt that they can’t work enough hours to pay for their living expenses.

Sandhur said, “New guys will come in and the dispatcher will say, ‘I’ll give you \$65 an hour.’ They have no clue what the industry rates are supposed to be.”

There are rumours that gifts and trips are being used to secure work, Sandhur added. “You can’t make it in this business without knowing someone.”

“Brokers totally disgust me,” said Danchuk. “To me, they’re parasites. They don’t care what the rate is as long as they get their cut. If you object to what they offer, they say, ‘Well you don’t have to work for us.’ So the drivers make it up with speed.”

Don McGill, former secretary treasurer of Local 213, said the Teamsters union doesn’t support brokers taking any cut at all.

The problem between brokers and drivers was at the heart of a strike in 1999. The problem was not resolved. In June of 2004 owner-operators shut down the construction industry for

*continued on next page*

Joshua Berson photo



Joshua Berson photos

# **“The more members there are, the more we can speak for them. We need unity. That’s why we’re here.”**

two weeks. In 2005, container truckers held a five-week strike. In every case, McGill was the spokesperson for the Teamster members as well as the non-union owner-operators.

In each of these disputes, drivers felt strongly that high costs were being passed along to customers but the people doing the work weren’t getting their fair share. Even when the rates and fuel surcharges were increased, they were ignored.

“There was no loyalty,” said Lacroix. “There are too many new people in the business. The rates are low because non-union [general contractor] companies are coming into town and dictating rates.”

The issue erupted again in November 2009. Nebraska-based Peter Kiewit Sons Co., building the 10-lane Port Mann Bridge and widening the Highway 1 corridor, reduced the gravel haulage rate to \$65/hour. The rate for a tandem gravel truck in the B.C. government’s Blue Book is \$93.45/hour.

Danchuk said the rate on that project was initially \$105/hour for a truck and pony. Now it’s just \$82 with no evening differential. “Pulling a pony at night for \$82!” Danchuk can barely control his outrage, “and most of that work is through brokers. It’s a really sad state of affairs.”

When companies are short of drivers, the rates go up. Where there’s a glut, the rates drop. “The local has tried lobbying but we need support from everyone,” Lacroix said.

Kler said the drivers who work for less “screw up the whole market.” He works up to 160 hours per month with his dump truck and trailer. He pays about \$5,000/month for fuel. “They should put a cap on the price of diesel. It’s gone up like crazy.” He said he should be receiving \$123/hour but he’s working for \$100/hour. He knows some who are working for \$85/hour. “I don’t know how they’re surviving,” he said.

“What we make is what we make,” explained Sandhur. “There’s no pension plan for us. [But] we were never meant to work 18-hours a day. It’s not healthy at all. Being dispatched by seniority is fair for everybody. It gives time off to spend with your family. It’s how to make a living and have a life.”

“The rates are there,” said Sekhon, “but they’re cutting each other’s throats. A lot of guys want change.”

Danchuk is alarmed by the willingness of some drivers to accept double shifts. “That’s why the rates went to sh-t,” he said. He, like many other drivers, is also concerned about the safety implications.

The method for paying drivers, “by a stop watch or the load,” has a noticeable difference in the way trucks are operated, Sandhur has observed.

Danchuk explained, “If it’s by the hour, you’ll see them going 10 to 15 km below the speed limit. If they’re going 20 km over it, they’re being paid by the load. It’s something

that should concern everyone on the road. There has already been a fatality a year and a half ago involving a gravel truck. I complain,” he said, “but I’m told it’s a sign of the times.”

One night, Sandhur was driving his gravel truck down Highway 1 following a row of trucks when one went into the ditch. He knew the driver had been working a double shift. He said drivers are working below the rate, they’re inexperienced and they’re working extra hours to cover their expenses. He said drivers have talked to the Ministry of Transport but nothing has been done.

These things are happening everywhere in the province,” added Lacroix, not just in the Lower Mainland.

Sandhur said the business agents’ work is making “a big difference. Things have gotten a lot better. They’re going out on job sites and they’re cracking down. Belonging to the union is the only way you stand together and work together. It’s unity and equality for everybody.”

Danchuk explained the economics at play. “I need companies to make money so I can make a dime. It’s just a delight to see the union checking cards.”

He added that the only thing keeping him in the business is “I want to see if we can get back to what it was.” He then added, “What else would I do?”

The Teamster business agents strongly believe in the age-old union adage that there is strength in numbers. “The numbers will come,” said Lacroix. “We have to get all the owner-operators on the same page.”

“The more members there are, the more we can speak for them,” said Sekhon. “We need unity. That’s why we’re here.”

***Business agents Greg Lacroix and Amneet Sekhon are former owner-operators and understand the plight of their fellow Teamster members.***



***The Teamster owner-operators are pleased to see the union visiting union construction sites to check for union cards.***

# BC Building Trades New logo, new name, new website

THE NEWLY RENAMED BC BUILDING TRADES unveiled its new logo at its convention in Victoria in April. The website was unveiled in early May. The rebranding was unanimously approved by the executive board with representation from all the affiliated unions.

"We still have the corporate identity of the BC and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council that we use with government agencies," said Executive Director Tom Sigurdson, "but we felt the old name and the logo (which simply featured a map of B.C. and the Yukon Territory) didn't define what we are.

"When I'd make a presentation I would introduce myself as 'Tom Sigurdson, the executive director for the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council—' Then I'd take a deep breath.

"BC Building Trades is so much easier to say and people understand that

we build B.C." The council copyrighted the slogan "We build BC" several years ago.

"The industry is changing and so are we," he said. The new logo in blue and grey features a hardhat because it is the one image that rep-

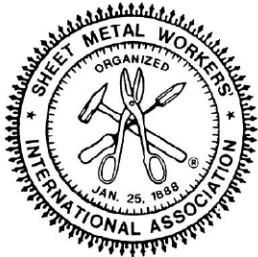


resents all building trades regardless of gender, ethnicity or designation as a journey person or apprentice. "The design is nice and clean. The blue speaks to the fact that we're blue collar, we read blue prints and the sky's the limit," he added.



Joe Barrett photo

President Lee Loftus, with the new BC Building Trades logo in the background, speaks to the delegates at this year's convention in April.



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The magazine of the BC Building Trades

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Tradetalk is the best way to reach 35,000 unionized construction workers in B.C. We're now in our 15th year of publication—eons in the publishing business.

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# Federal government encourages undercutting construction wages

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED in April that applications for temporary foreign workers would be fast tracked and that employers would be allowed to pay 15% below average wages.

"This is a complete sellout to employers who want access to cheap labour," said Tom Sigurdson, executive director of the BC Building Trades Council. "These are vulnerable workers. Many are unable to speak English and unwilling to complain about unsafe workplaces and abuses to workplace rights. Opening the floodgates to lower paid temporary foreign workers spells disaster for apprenticeship training, safe work sites and fairness for tender bidding," he said.

"We've seen this before. Employers complain that the skills shortage is hurting their ability to proceed with construction projects. In fact, there is an oversupply of trades-qualified workers in most trades in B.C."

Sigurdson pointed to the council's last dispatch survey that showed unemployment of 25% for building

trades unions. "In B.C. today we can supply workers for every single trade. There is no skills shortage, rather we have a wage shortage."

Apprenticeship training will be particularly affected by Human Resources Minister Diane Finley's announcement. "Where is the incentive to hire apprentices and invest in training when employers can get access to cheap foreign labour?" Sigurdson asked.

The building trades are also offended by Finley's flagrant disregard for maintaining wage rates. "Allowing employers to pay 15% less than the average is opening the door to abuses.

"Unionized construction workers will continue to work alongside migrant workers, as we have done in the past, to ensure that their basic rights are respected," Sigurdson added.

During the construction of the Canada Line, workers from Costa Rica, Colombia and Ecuador were being paid less than \$5 per hour to excavate the tunnels under False Creek. "Canadians have every right

to be disgusted when the government allows this type of abuse. We will not stand idly by," Sigurdson said.



*New regulations will allow construction employers to pay foreign workers 15% less than average construction worker wages.*



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# Beware the “limited scope” electrical licence



Claudia Ferris photos

*IBEW Local 213's apprentices undergo 40 weeks of classroom instruction and 9,000 hours of on-the-job training to earn their interprovincial Red Seal Certificate of Qualification but the BC Safety Authority has agreed to certification for just 480 hours of training.*

**By Claudia Ferris**

## LICENCES FOR LIMITED SCOPE

ELECTRICAL WORKERS are coming and they'll bring with them a host of problems. This initiative, supported by the BC Safety Authority, puts improperly trained workers and consumers at risk. "This means that now non-trade certified electrical work is permitted," said Harry Van Beest, assistant business manager for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 213. "The BCSA's decision could dangerously undermine Red Seal apprenticeship standards."

Van Beest emphasized that "Red Seal trades are regulated because if people don't do things right, people die.

"IBEW electrical apprentices get classroom and workplace-based training under experienced supervision and learn to recognize what is safe for workers and consumers. Anything less than full-scope training on critical electrical systems is unacceptable," he said. "Only certified Red Seal

electricians should be supervising work on live wiring."

The non-profit BC Safety Authority (BCSA) is a devolved government organization created in 2004 to administer the provincial Safety Standards Act. It charges fees for electrical permits, inspections and contractor licenses. The authority maintains a public database of journeyman electricians it has licensed for the residential, commercial and industrial sectors.

It approved the application for this limited scope certification following a submission from the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of BC.

The ASTTBC primarily represents fire alarm system companies and funds its operations through membership dues and registration fees. It created a self-regulated technician certification process and now these licence-restricted technicians are working on critical electrical systems with oversight provided by an internal board of examiners.

Van Beest chairs the BCSA's Electrical Technology Advisory Committee which has representation from the union, union and non-union employers and safety regulators. "There was no consultation with the IBEW, nor any of the electrical industry associations, prior to accepting a downgrading of electrical training standards," he said. "The joint committee still has not seen the curriculum the ASTTBC is proposing. We do know that their technicians will receive certification after only 480 hours of training, which is about 5% of the 9,000 hours required to be an IBEW Red Seal electrician.

"The last thing our industry needs is partially trained technicians creating liability for homeowners, governments

## Protect yourself

Ask for Red Seal certified contractors. When contractor qualifications, licensing and permits are regulated by licensing authorities who are accountable, liability is reduced. Trouble can occur when multiple inexperienced workers are supervised by a single licensed contractor. The IBEW does not allow pre-apprentices on industrial work sites and recommends an apprenticeship ratio of one journeyman to one apprentice.



*"Anytime you have inexperienced people working with systems that could catch on fire, public safety is endangered and huge liability issues are created."—Harry Van Beest*

Shawn Luke graphic



and businesses,” warned Van Beest. “Only Red Seal training is going to deliver critically needed experience with live electrical testing and troubleshooting. Anytime you have inexperienced people working with systems that could catch on fire, public safety is endangered and huge liability issues are created.”

While the safety authority and the association raise revenues by charging for limited scope electrical licenses, thousands of IBEW members are investing \$840,000 per year for training. Union members help fund the joint training facility, which is operated through a partnership between Local 213 and the Electrical Contractors’ Association of BC.

The union and electrical contractors are primary stakeholders in the electrical industry and are determined not to allow limited scope tickets to undermine the Red Seal program. They are continuing to keep pressure on government regulators to maintain cur-

rent trade certification processes and protect the public.

Many of B.C.’s larger cities look after their own licensing and permitting, working directly with builders and homeowners on compliance with safety standards. They count on contractors to have adequate field experience and access to ongoing training and upgrading. Surrey, Kelowna and Vernon are putting IBEW Red Seal electricians to work on their hospital expansions.

Van Beest said he is “encouraged to know that managers are making sure critical hospital life saving and safety equipment is installed and maintained by the best trained electricians. Consumers, businesses and governments should not have to deal with buyer beware licensing for non-trade-certified work. Our customers know that when they call one of our signatories, they are getting expert journeypersons or qualified apprentices to handle all their electrical needs safely.”

## Construction industry continues to press for compulsory trades

The BC Building Trades Council and the BC Contractors’ Association are calling for the reinstatement of compulsory Red Seal certification for all construction trades. It would address many of the problems facing the industry.

Representatives from the two groups met with the Ministry of Labour in December to talk about ways to meet the looming skilled trades shortage and address problems with apprenticeship training.

“Participants left their partisan hats at the door, rolled up their sleeves and found common purpose and agreement on directions to move forward,” said Tom Sigurdson, executive director of the council.

“Mandatory trades certification is an essential element of workplace performance standards for employers and a fundamental component of the training system,” said Sigurdson in a letter to Pat Bell, minister of jobs, tourism and innovation.

“Without it, apprentices have less incentive to complete their training. Just imagine if certifications were not required for other occupations like nurses, teachers, childcare workers, lawyers and doctors.”

Alberta currently requires certification for 21 trades. Quebec has compulsory certification for all construction trades. Ontario is establishing a College of Trades to ensure certification and appropriate training.

The BC Building Trades Council has asked Bell to set up a similar college in this province.



Jose Lam graphic

# IBEW Minority Caucus Equal rights and giving back

By Michelle Boudreau

THE FIRST CANADIAN CHAPTER OF the Electrical Workers' Minority Caucus is here in B.C. The EWMC is a support and networking system dedicated to strengthening the role that members of minority groups play in the B.C. locals of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

"Ultimately, having a B.C. Chapter of the EWMC benefits our entire membership," said Local 213 Business Manager Mike Flynn. "We are proud that our members have stepped forward to establish the first Canadian chapter and we look forward to supporting their endeavours in any way that's needed."

Rav Ghuman and William Maarsman, Local 213 assistant business managers, and Ticha Albino, vice president of the caucus and a Local 213 member, spearheaded the initiative after Ghuman was approached by his former business manager, the late Rick Dowling.

"Brother Dowling got the ball rolling," said Ghuman. "His untimely passing last year kind of stalled us for a bit, but with the support and encouragement of Brother Laird Cronk, our international representative, and our business manager, Mike Flynn, we decided it was time to move forward. This was what we needed to do for our membership." Ghuman is also a member of the BC Federation of Labour's Human Rights Committee.

Albino came to the group from a different angle. "As a minority member of my union—being a female electrician and also being Queer—I approached the union to find out if we had an active women's committee or someplace

where members like me came together to discuss issues in the workplace from our perspective." Flynn and Assistant Business Manager Harry Van Beest suggested she get involved with the B.C. caucus.

"This has been a great opportunity to be involved from the start," she said. "We've attended some of the meetings in the States and got to have some great discussions on how to get our chapter going and what we needed to do as far as developing bylaws and defining our purpose. To see what so many EWMC chapters are doing is really encouraging. Human rights issues are the main focus, but a big component of the EWMC is working together to reach out and support charitable community initiatives. It's really exciting.

"Not only do we now have an opportunity to discuss issues in the workplace that may have a negative affect on us as workers—issues like bullying and harassment—we also have an opportunity to give back to the community by helping with charity work."

Ghuman added, "We've had such great support from our brothers and sister in Washington, Oregon and California and we're looking forward to working closely with them."

Local 258, representing members working in the electric utility, traffic control, utility arborist and light electrical manufacturing industries in the province, has also jumped on board. "We want our members to have a forum where they can discuss human rights issues and become involved in what they can do to improve their workplaces and communities," said Michelle Laurie, president of Local 258.



Michelle Boudreau photo

**Members of the B.C. Chapter of the IBEW's Electrical Workers Minority Caucus: Rav Ghuman, Assistant Business Manager Local 213; Aaron Mercredi, Local 258 IBEW member; and Ticha Albino, Local 213 member.**

"Right now, the B.C. chapter is in its infancy so we're reaching out to our members in the Lower Mainland. But our members work all over this province and we're letting them know that they too can participate. If we get enough feedback, we'll look at ways to bring our members in outlying areas together on this initiative." Local 258 has created a poster and brochure that's being distributed to all IBEW locals in the province.

The international union's first chapter was formed almost 40 years ago when African American and Hispanic delegates met at the union's convention in Kansas City. Since then, the number of chapters has grown, but they all advocate for equal rights and opportunities and greater minority representation in the IBEW.

The BC Chapter welcomes new members and all IBEW members are invited to attend. It's first charitable donation will be made at the end of the year from monies raised through its recycling program. Meetings take place the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Local 213 offices and training centre in Port Coquitlam. The next meeting is on June 26 at 7 p.m.

## Fred Randall Bursary



The BC Building Trades offers two \$500 bursaries in memory of Fred Randall, former MLA and business manager of Operating Engineers Local 115.

Criteria:

- A member in good standing
- Enrolled in a union-recognized trades training program
- A 250-word essay must be submitted by the applicants on the topic of "The Commitment to Trade Union Principles."

The committee will make its selections considering financial need, proficiency in the trade and the applicant's commitment to trade union principles. Joint training boards from each affiliated local union can submit a name from their membership for consideration. The two selections will be made from those applicants.

The deadline for submissions is the end of June.

Following the committee selection, the successful applicants will be awarded their bursary upon confirmation of their attendance in their training program.

For more information, contact BC Building Trades Phone: 778-397-2220 e-mail [bbourke@bcbuildingtrades.org](mailto:bbourke@bcbuildingtrades.org)



BCYT-BCTC President, Business Manager  
Insulators Local 118

## It's a myth that construction unions and environmentalists are working at cross-purposes

THE CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IS PUTTING OUR role as craftspeople and the delivery of quality services to the test. Green building systems and construction techniques are now a regular theme inside our unions and in our dealings with employers.

At our recent convention, I reported on the numerous opportunities we face with regard to climate change initiatives. The urgency of the issue is driving the development of new products, systems and curriculums for tradespeople. Every edition of *Tradetalk* includes articles and references to green technologies and trades training that put our workers at the forefront of the transition towards sustainable energies, better efficiencies and reductions in carbon emissions.

In spite of these advances we're still struggling with our image. Part of our problem is that we take it for granted or don't give ourselves credit for all the work we've been doing. Stereotypically, construction workers are seen as red necks who mow down trees and lay down asphalt and who could care less about the environment. The fact is that many of us, in our private lives, are involved in habitat restoration and sustainable wildlife conservation.

There is a whole new spectrum of regulations and societal changes to support carbon reduction. Too often we fall into the trap of seeing ourselves as contributors to the problem.

The Blue-Green Alliance between the labour and environmental movements, introduced in the U.S., has a growing following in Canada. It's a myth that unions and environmentalists are working at cross-purposes.

For most construction workers the emphasis on green isn't news. That's because for many years we've been building systems that conserve energy; produce cleaner, safer products; and reduce contaminating gases and effluent. It's a long list of achievements that includes glaziers installing energy efficient coated windows, plumbers fabricating new carbon reduction waste water treatment facilities, millwrights installing smoke stack scrubbers, electricians involved in the construction of new power sources, insulators crafting energy conservation systems, boilermakers' maintenance and efficiency upgrades in the pulp and paper industry, sheet metal workers and roofers' installations of heating and ventilation systems in buildings that save energy. Virtually every single trade is on the front line of delivering products that make a difference.

Curriculum development that supports climate change technologies is being incorporated into the training of the future generation of tradespeople. The money we've spent on new curriculums is an ongoing investment that will pay off for decades to come.

Many industrial, residential and transportation sectors have already mandated new standards and targets for emissions and carbon reduction. Our contractors are in the forefront of new designs and engineering challenges that address the needs of climate change. Apprentices and journey-level workers are learning new skills that will allow us to meet and beat the targets that have been set for 2020. On the broader front, our fight back against underground economy contractors who cut corners on environmental standards is another way that we are contributing to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Contrary to common belief, the construction industry may be one of the greenest industries in society. Our workers are the only ones with the full scope of training and broad variety of experiences that allow us to design, fabricate and install the systems that meet the goals of blueprints for carbon reduction. Our training, mentoring approach, problem-solving abilities and the application of our skills support our unionized employers and will help tackle the environmental problems facing the planet.

For us, we've always faced challenges head on. This time it's climate change.



SID GETS INK DONE IN PREPARATION TO THE SHIPYARD WORK

Jose Lam graphic

# Building tradespeople are the green job specialists



Joshua Berson photos

By Tom Sandborn

DESPITE INCESSANT ATTEMPTS IN the mainstream media to pit workers against environmentalists and to insist that Canada has to choose between full employment OR environmental sanity, members of the BC Building Trades are key activists in an organization that argues just the

opposite. Green Jobs BC ([greenjobs-bc.org](http://greenjobs-bc.org)), founded in 2010, insists that the province can reduce the volume of climate changing CO<sup>2</sup> it puts into the air while at the same time creating well-paying union jobs across the economy—"green jobs."

Just ask Lee Loftus, president of the Building Trades Council and business manager of the Insulators Local 118.

The local union's website proclaims "Green Jobs, Great Jobs—Insulators Local 118, Energy Conservation Specialists."

"Building tradespeople are the green jobs specialists," Loftus said. "Green jobs aren't a fad. They're here to stay. Some of our members don't realize they are already doing green jobs. We need to be the guardians of



[www.ibewhourpower.com](http://www.ibewhourpower.com)



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## INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS

### Our Objectives

We in the IBEW want a world where a worker can go to a safe workplace, earn a fair wage and use their skills to do a good day's work... where workers can retire with dignity, with the security of knowing their health care is affordable and available... where children are treated like the precious treasures they are – nurtured, educated and loved so they can carry the torch into the future... and where workers can organize and bargain collectively to achieve all these things in fairness and in justice.

Local 213, Vancouver  
(604) 571-6500  
[www.ibew213.org](http://www.ibew213.org)

Local 230, Victoria  
(250) 388-7374  
[www.ibew230.org](http://www.ibew230.org)

Local 258, Burnaby  
(604) 520-3305  
[www.ibew258.bc.ca](http://www.ibew258.bc.ca)

Local 993, Kamloops  
(250) 376-8755  
[www.ibew993.org](http://www.ibew993.org)

Local 1003, Nelson  
(250) 354-4177  
[www.ibew1003.org](http://www.ibew1003.org)

those jobs and protect them. Building trades workers should feel proud of our significant role in sustainability.”

One of Loftus’s partners in building bridges between labour and environmental groups is Darryl Walker, president of the BC Government and Service Employees Union. Walker said that his union has been concerned about addressing the environmental crisis for at least 20 years.

“In 1999, our new president George Heyman asked me to take a role in this work. We were part of the Labour Environmental Alliance Society when May Burrows organized it. Our whole approach was ‘Let’s not fight with each other. Let’s do something about global warming together.’ We wanted to find ways to push the envelope on warming and create new green jobs.”

The 2010 founding conference of Green Jobs BC created “lots of positive energy,” he said, and arranged for some ongoing funding. The 2012 conference, held in February, examined energy issues, transportation and retrofitting of older buildings to make them more sustainable.

Green jobs have to genuinely contribute to climate change solutions to deserve the name, Loftus said. “As long as everything is done to the lowest bid, what you get can be a piece of crap,” he told *Tradetalk*. “It kills us as tradespeople to see Platinum LEEDS [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] designation on buildings that don’t have proper mechanical engineering. We need complete systems, not just optics.”

The Insulators went to the media to force contractors at the Olympic Village to go back and re-open walls that had been closed in before proper insulation work could be done on

hot and cold water pipes.

Loftus is optimistic that B.C. cities are gradually implementing better standards that will insure that building trades workers will be allowed to do their best “green” work in new construction and in retrofits. His union had already met with over 30 municipal administrations in the province to discuss green jobs and sustainable construction regulations.

Loftus and Walker credited BC Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair for his role in promoting Green Jobs BC.

Sinclair said that organization, with funding for the next three years, is now in a position to build trust and vision. “We have to reject the false paradigm that divides environmentalists and workers,” he said. “Sometimes we’ll disagree, of course, but we have lots of common ground and room for shared work.

“We all have to be winners in our own right. That means making sure there are decent jobs [and] there are transitions. And when we make the tough choices, all interests will be considered,” Sinclair told the *Tyee* in 2007.

“We’re creating the big tent necessary to solve this big problem,” Sinclair said. “Green Jobs BC is involving youth and business groups as well as labour and environmentalists. This is a long-term project, but it is built on the vision that a better world is not only possible but absolutely necessary.”

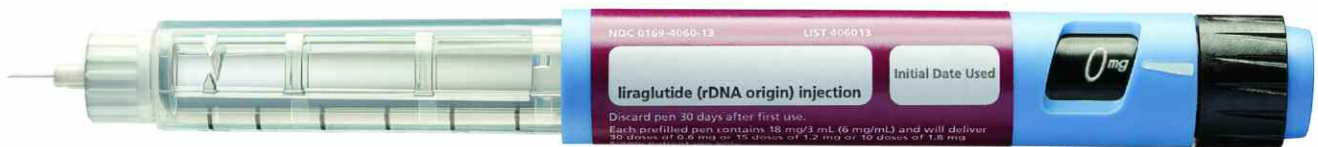
Building trades workers in BC and Yukon can be assured that their council and member unions are playing an important role in creating that big tent.

Tom Sandborn welcomes your feedback and story tips at [tos@infinet.net](mailto:tos@infinet.net)



## Green Jobs BC Founding members

BC Building Trades Council  
 Canada Green Building Council  
 Cascadia Green Building Council  
 Canadian Auto Workers  
 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives  
 Communications Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada  
 Columbia Institute  
 Canadian Office & Professional Employees Union 378  
 Canadian Union of Public Employees  
 Eco Justice  
 Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC  
 Hospital Employees Union  
 Health Sciences Association BC  
 International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees 891  
 International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 230  
 Insulators and Allied Workers Union Local 118  
 T. Buck Suzuki Foundation  
 Union of Environment Workers—PSAC  
 United Steelworkers of Canada  
 Western Canada Wilderness Committee

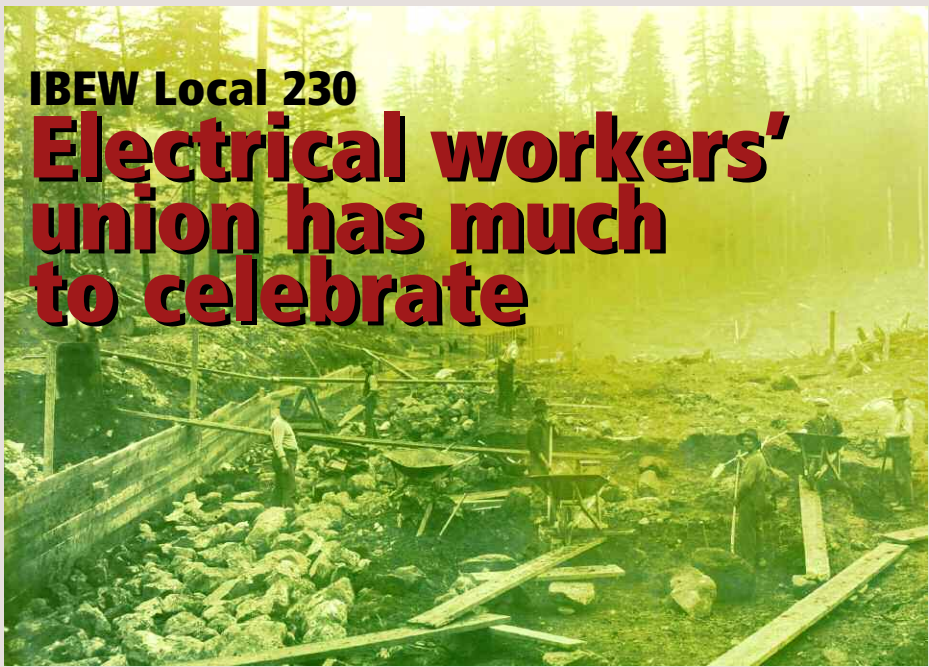


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# IBEW Local 230 Electrical workers' union has much to celebrate

*Local 230 members working on the Jordan River Dam.*

**By Phil Venoit  
Business Manager Local 230**

ELEVEN DECADES IS A LONG TIME for a local union that has come from the cobblestone streets of Victoria's early years to today's world dominated by the information super-highway. The charter for Local 230 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers on Vancouver Island preceded the Wright Brothers' first powered 17-second flight at Kitty Hawk, Henry Ford's first Model A car in Detroit and the first electric movie theatre that opened in Los Angeles. The local recognized its 110th anniversary on March 16 at the Grand Pacific Hotel on Victoria's Inner Harbour.

Local 230 started with 20 electrical workers. Linemen from the B.C. Electric Company came together one evening and approved the following resolution:

"Be it resolved that we the electrical workers of the City of Victoria, here assembled decriing it an object worthy of our efforts to place labour and its rewards on an equal basis with capital and conscientiously believing that organizing action is the just and right means thereto, do hereby form ourselves into a united body for that purpose and subscribe our names hereto."

Later, telephone workers and bus drivers (the city buses were electric and the workers were employees of B.C. Electric) also joined.

The local also represented construction electricians and was active in the Vancouver Island Building Trades, which predates the provincial council, and the Victoria Labour Council.

At one of the earliest meetings, the

members voted to give "a hardy support to the Suspender Makers Union." At a meeting in 1904, it moved to donate a "portable light to the Royal Provincial Jubilee Hospital." This is the same hospital that employed over 230 members just last year with the Nursing Tower project, and where Local 230 members continue to perform the maintenance and construction work.

During the prohibition years, Local 230's Press Secretary Frank Shapland, who was a regular colourful contributor to the International Union's publication *Electrical Worker*, wrote:

"Some of our floating brothers blew in and being successful in getting a job, immediately bought a houseboat located on the shore of the inner harbour and proceeded to keep "batch." However, they found out at times, when taking Scott's Emulsion for toothache or on the day after payday when it was their duty to take a copious quantity of antidote for snake

bites down in Mexico, that they ran in great danger of drowning, so they all bought cork life belts and donned them on such occasions which lightened the labours of the salvage men."

The years around the Second World War brought a huge demand for naval vessel construction and a huge need for men and women in the workforce. By 1942 there were 42 women in the electrical department at Yarrows Shipyard alone.

At the end of the decade, the Local 230 marine members saw five more statutory holidays recognized in the collective agreement for a new total of eight! By 1954 the shipyard workers received an additional stat and double time for work on Saturdays.

Members of Local 230 have been involved in major infrastructure and construction projects in B.C. from the beginning. From the late Forties through the late Fifties, our inside wiremen helped construct several pulp and paper mills on the Island.

In the late Sixties, Local 230, along with other metal trades affiliates, gave up their individual union bargaining rights to create the Dockyard Trades and Labour Council. Prior to the creation of the council, several of the unions had certifications on individual buildings. So if painters came into a building certified by IBEW, they would become IBEW painters.



**TOP: Charter members of the IBEW Local 230 on Vancouver Island. BOTTOM: The Local 230 electrical crew that wired the Esquimalt Graving Dock from 1927 to 1928, the largest construction project in Canada at the time.**

At the same time, the BC Hydro and Power Authority workers in Local 230 and other B.C. locals joined the newly chartered IBEW Local 258 representing all public power authority workers.

Throughout the Sixties and Seventies, the Local 230 membership saw good growth in all its branches on the Island.

The marine section had newly formed BC Ferries work, the inside section saw good commercial and industrial construction growth and the cablevision section flourished with increased interest in home entertainment and '70s sitcoms.

The Eighties brought the infamous three Bills (19, 20 and Vanderzalm), hell bent on diminishing the union's rights, and followed by a long and difficult recession which pushed many of our members out to Ontario where tradespeople could name their jobs and the hours they worked.

Just before the end of the decade, members were called to the Empress Hotel renovation in Victoria, the new Eaton's Centre, the Gold River Mill expansion and upgrades at the Crofton and Port Alberni mills. Then came more work in the marine section, with the build out of the super ferries.

All the while, our commercial contractors etched out more market share for their companies and the IBEW hands working for them.

The balance of the line section moved over to Local 258. Then employer changes in the cablevision sector brought anti-union notions and, after a lengthy strike and a drawn out legal battle, we lost the vast bulk of the cable sector. That was quickly followed by another downturn in the economy.

By the end of the century, work was booming in North Island with a cog plant in Campbell River. The amount of construction work has continued to climb ever since, although most years it would be difficult to point to a job with over 15 members working on it.

Our membership over the past decade has risen from 833 to close to 1,300 and our market share on the Island is close to 100% in the marine section, 73% in construction and between 60% and 70% in the industrial, commercial, institutional and high/low-rise residential sectors. This push back into these construction markets has been difficult to copy in most trade unions in North America, and for that Local 230 members of the IBEW can feel proud heading in to work each day.



# Taxpayers are not tapped out

By Matthew Claxton  
Langley Advance  
[www.langleyadvance.com](http://www.langleyadvance.com)

I'M OFFICIALLY BANNING ANY Canadian from claiming that taxpayers are "tapped out," that we're "taxed to death," or that we're "overtaxed."

Because we're not.

We read and hear that B.C. is fretting about the escalating costs of its education system when the economy is sluggish, the budget is in deficit and taxpayers are feeling tapped out.

Using the term taxpayers implies that it's all the government's fault.

In 2000, the federal government, then headed by the Chretien Liberals and still a few years away from crumbling, started cutting personal income tax rates. They'd been letting "bracket creep" slowly push more people onto the tax rolls, but they hadn't actually increased personal income taxes directly. In their desperation to stay in power, they cut taxes a couple of times. Then the Tories took over, and they cut taxes, too, also increasing the basic personal exemption, knocking a couple of per cent off the GST, and cutting corporate taxes. Here in B.C., the Liberals have also been slashing personal income tax rates for a decade and then some, handing out more tax breaks to families and seniors and, like the federal government, hacking away at business taxes.

And how about those corporate tax cuts? In the early 1980s, corporations paid 50% of their profits in taxes to the federal and provincial governments. Now the average is closer to 29.5%. B.C. and Ontario are engaged in a race to the bottom to see who can cut the rates the fastest. Much of the debate in last year's federal elec-

tion was over whether tax rates were being cut too much, but no one was suggesting raising them by more than a fraction.

Yes, some taxes have gone up, most notably property taxes. But the money you give to the province has been slashed, the money you give to the feds has been slashed and everything you buy and every service you purchase should be cheaper due to lower business taxes.

You know, 30 years ago, it was easier for a single-income family to raise kids. And taxes were higher then. So maybe taxes aren't the only thing squeezing people. Hmm?

If we're squeezed, maybe it has more to do with stagnant or dropping real wages, or the idiots whose greed engineered our current economic troubles, or the wild speculation in land that has doubled property values in the Lower Mainland. Maybe living in a highly technology-dependent world that requires increasing amounts of education just to stay at the same economic bracket coupled with a rapidly urbanized society engaged in globalized trade that's in direct competition with everyone from the U.S. to China is kind of expensive.

So here's the new rule: You are no longer allowed to say people are overtaxed without specifying by how much. If you think that the optimal tax rate is 10% or a flat tax or no sales tax, say that. If you think government is immoral and taxes should be reduced to zero, fine, let your anarcho-capitalist flag fly. But stop with the vague, "we're all overtaxed" rhetoric. We're not. Taxes are down. Shut up.

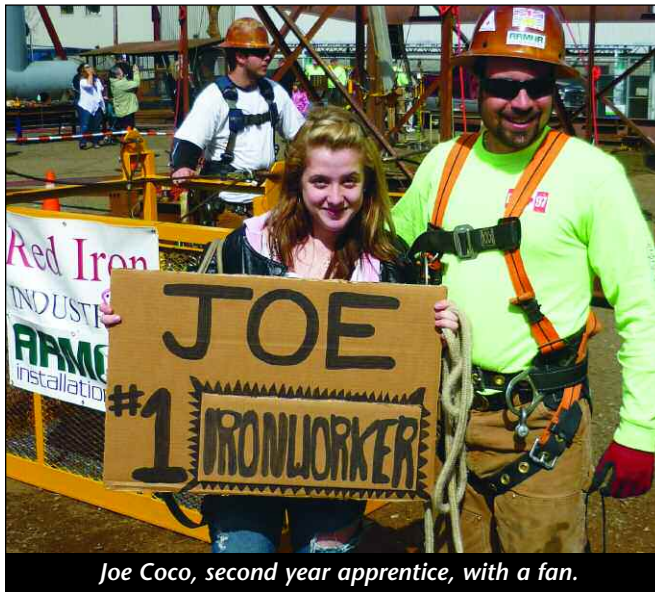
Joshua Berson photo

# IRONWORKERS COMPETITION

Twelve members of Ironworkers Local 97 participated in this year's skills competition at BCIT in April. Events included a two-hour written test and welding, burning, cutting and fitting, rebar tying, ornamentation, instrumentation, a column climb, walk the beam and man basket. Photos are courtesy of Ironworkers Local 97



Long-time members demonstrating their riveting technique.



Joe Coco, second year apprentice, with a fan.



Patty Murdoch, second year apprentice, on the column climb.



Dillon Forester, now a journeyman, won the competition and a big prize package of equipment. He and union brothers Devin Skorepa and JP Fogarty are off to the Western competition in Regina in July.



The award ceremony was dedicated to member Gavin Gould who died of a heart attack in May on the BC Place stadium project.

Director of Canadian Affairs, Canadian Office,  
Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO

## So what does Bill C-377 mean to me anyway?

A PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILL WAS INTRODUCED INTO THE House of Commons recently that could materially change what your union can do for you in the workplace. This bill represents the most significant attack on working people yet launched by a member of a federal governing party. Ostensibly, the bill talks about disclosure and the right for a member to know how union dues money is spent. Just like the misinformation that the Fraser Institute and the merit shop contractors spout, this bill seems to be based on the premise that your union dues are extorted from you and spent on a wide variety of things that you don't support or wouldn't support if you knew what the union was doing with your hard-earned dough.

The issues of transparency and disclosure are just tripe! Unions are singled out to be organizations that can't be trusted. This legislation won't affect the ICBA, Merit Canada and every union hating organization. Unions will be forced to record and submit back-up documents to the Government of Canada for every penny spent.

Even worse, every trust fund that the collective agreements set up must also be treated in this fashion, so there will be less money in the pension for retirement and less money to fix your kid's teeth. Think this is an exaggeration? Imagine what it costs now to simply get a financial statement produced for one of the plans and then catalogue every dime spent, multiply it by the number of funds, the building society and the local itself!

To add insult to injury, the submissions will NOT be privacy protected and will be searchable by anyone who wishes. So, every organizing campaign and attempt to influence public decisions and participate as a union in the democratic discourse will be laid bare.

Unions are democratic organizations that are accountable to their memberships. Who has asked for this "reform?" In



the Bush Administration a person who was more truthful than ironic said words to the effect, "It is better to keep them [unions] doing paperwork than it is to have them out doing what they were supposed to do."

Bill C-377 was introduced by Russ Heibert from the Lower Mainland. We may safely consign him to our enemies pile!

This bill will require a lot of faceless bureaucrats to make it work. They will be required to enter voluminous data to make sure that we aren't spending your dues on dancing girls. It makes the Long Gun Registry look positively productive!

This bill is important enough to the cause of unions and their members in Canada that I urge you all, in the strongest possible terms, to write, call or visit your MPs to say, in no uncertain terms, that you will be watching to see if they support Bill C-377. If they do, they can no longer count on your support or the support of anyone you can influence.

All we ask is to be treated rationally and not singled out as an "evil" that must be made to account because we cannot be trusted otherwise!



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Canadian Labour Congress  
Congrès du travail du Canada

# Local 1611 seeing great organizing gains

By Marco Procaccini

THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA OFTEN PRESENTS STORIES that the labour movement in B.C. is in retreat. However, as many affiliated unions of the BC Building Trades Council know, that is just not true.

Local 1611 of the Construction and Specialized Workers Union has a five-year plan to boost membership. Already it has brought in 800 new members and reached one of its goals almost a year ahead of schedule, according to Manuel Alvernaz, chief organizer and assistant business manager for the local union.

"We've been doing both top-down and bottom-up organizing," he said. "With bottom-up, we are out talking to workers about the benefits of organizing and signing them up. With top-down, we go to contractors who need workers, promote the union to them and get them to sign on to our standard agreements. It's got us 75 new contractors and 800 new members."

The organizing department and strategy were developed in conjunction with the local union's 75th anniversary in 2008. Alvernaz said that 1611 has always done organizing to varying degrees, but this was the first time members voted to create a full-time organizing department for steady multi-faceted organizing efforts. "We began with the goal of signing up at least 75 new companies over five years. We are 10 months ahead of schedule."

The majority of sign-ups have been achieved through the top-down method and signing of project labour agreements. Alvernaz said all agreements are based on previously and democratically ratified contracts agreed to by the union members. If contractors are starting up new enterprises, there may be minimal enabling clauses.

"Top-down organizing has worked well for us over the last few years because of the huge shortage of skilled tradespeople in B.C., especially in the North where a lot of work has been going on," he said. "Non-union contractors com-

ing to B.C. bid on jobs but they don't have the manpower. So they sign our standard agreements. If there wasn't so much work going on and such a trades shortage, they wouldn't be so eager to sign with us."

In fact, according to Statistics Canada, 30-year high international base commodity prices, accompanied by almost 60-year low interest rates, have been fuelling the construction and to a lesser extent mining and resource sectors. This is in sharp contrast to many other economic sectors, some of which are on an unprecedented decline. While creating prosperous conditions for construction tradespeople, years of government under funding for trades training and apprenticeships, has created the chronic skills shortage that now plagues the industry.

A key reason why the more traditional bottom-up organizing method has not kept up is due to the B.C. Liberals'



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anti-worker labour legislation and the problems at the Labour Relations Board. He pointed to the problems that have come from requiring workers to sign union cards and then demonstrate their union commitment a second time in a vote a minimum of 10 days later. This gap has enabled employers to use a number of dirty tricks including intimidation and coercion or the temporary hiring of new employees to vote against union certification.

"What we are also doing is lobbying politicians to change these laws," he said. "We need to bring back certification based on at least 55% of the workers signing union cards. We see all the time how bosses will hire new people on the day of the vote to vote against the union and then lay them all off."

Alvernaz said it's also frustrating to see labour board officials take the employers' side for how many employees they have, instead of auditing the payroll like they used to do.

A major focus of the organizing campaign is to also target employer-friendly labour organizations. There have been several successful raids.

"We've raided CLAC [the Christian Labour Association of Canada] a couple times, and we will be doing more," he said. Employer intimidation was behind two recent failed attempts. "The bosses were telling people they might close the doors if they voted to change unions. It's the usual threat against employees. 'We'll close if you don't do what we want.'"

The union organizers are undaunted. "We'll be out to get more PLAs because it's still so busy, especially up North, but we'll be after CLAC as well."

# Unions always on my mind



By John Lynn

When you focus too tightly on a particular area of life you can gain an obsessive amount of knowledge of the details. A construction worker automatically sees the structure of a house as he enters it; a doctor unconsciously diagnoses conditions she observes in other

people as she joins the checkout line at the local supermarket.

In my case it's unions. More specifically, union-made goods and services. You see, I just launched a new website called ShopUnion.ca, and part of that challenge is listing as many union jobs as possible.

I was reminded of this the other day when my wife (CEP) and I (CEP) left our condo (Building Trades) to go out and do a bit of shopping. She had slipped into her Naturalizers (UFCW) and I donned my Wolverine loafers (UFCW), jumped into our Ford Ranger (CAW) and headed out. At the corner I had to wait for a HandiDART bus because the driver (ATU) had to wait while a cement truck driver (Teamsters) was threading his rig backwards, up a grade and around a wee bend into a local construction site (Building Trades) near our local school (BCTF).

We eventually got to the local Safeway (UFCW) and bought some canned goods, (CAW), bread (BCTGM), meat from the butcher (UFCW), some local vegetables (CFU) and other items. My wife also picked up a copy of The Sun (CEP) while I nipped next door and purchased a couple of bottles of wine (USW) from the government liquor store (BCGEU). I also dropped in to the credit union (COPE) and got some cash for the weekend (Union Movement).

Getting home was a bit hairy because a fire truck (IAAF) followed closely by an ambulance (CUPE) came roaring down our street sirens blazing, which caused a heavily burdened letter carrier (CUPW) to have to hustle to the curb to avoid being run over. We got back to our home (Building Trades) just in time to catch the 6 o'clock TV news (CEP).

To hell with it, I figured. I can get back to that union stuff tomorrow.

—John Lynn is the publisher of ShopUnion.ca, a website which helps people identify union goods and services.

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# Hear for good

By Don Schouten,  
WorkSafeBC Manager of Industry and  
Labour Services—Construction

IT'S SAID THAT SILENCE IS GOLD-EN, but not when it's all you hear.

As someone whose spent a number of years on construction sites, I know that it can get loud—really loud. Most of you are probably used to it and simply tune it out, but what you may not realize is that you could be causing permanent damage to your hearing.

Prolonged exposure to noise can cause a permanent, untreatable disease known as noise-induced hearing loss. Around 300,000 B.C. workers are exposed to loud enough noise in their jobs to cause this condition.

When you're around circular saws, generators, jackhammers and power tools, exposure to noise doesn't seem like a particularly worrisome hazard, but that's what makes it so dangerous. This is especially true of young workers who may be more concerned about doing the job right rather than protecting their hearing.

In fact, a 2010 report showed that 28% of construction workers younger than the age of 20 weren't using hearing protection. In 2009, it was only 20%. In both years, young workers in the construction industry reported higher rates of non-use for hearing protection than any other industry.

The good news is that the use of hearing protection overall in the

industry has increased from 58% in 1978 to 88% in 2010. Plus, over the past 30 years, there's been a decrease in the average hearing loss of construction workers who have had 16 to 25 years of exposure.

Remember, hearing protection must be worn at all times when noise levels are above 85 dBA, which is the sound level of the average lawn mower. With all the trades using different types of tools and equipment, there is so much unpredictable ambient noise on a worksite that it's not effective to only use hearing protection when you're actually creating noise.

Did you know that your employer is required to develop a hearing conservation program for those of you whose noise exposure is greater than the limits set out in the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation? Or that if you're exposed to noise, you're supposed to have hearing tests at least once every year? For more information about hearing loss prevention, FAQs, and useful resources, check out WorkSafeBC.com. There is a section under the "Safety at Work" tab devoted entirely to Hearing Loss Prevention.

I remember what it was like working on a job: of all the different things I needed to think about and focus on, protecting my hearing didn't register very high on my list. But now, as I listen to the game on the radio or hear my kids laugh, I

**DON SCHOUTEN**  
**JOB SAFETY**

am deeply grateful that I made that effort to wear hearing protection. It didn't seem like a big deal then but it makes all the difference now.

Please let me know what you think of this topic or any construction safety issue. Call me at 604-214-6989 from the Lower Mainland or toll-free elsewhere at 1-888-621-7233. Or email don.schouten@work-safebc.com. I'd like to hear from you.

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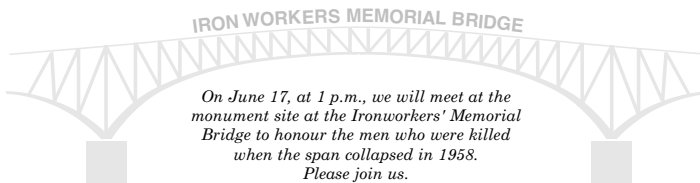


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Michael Brophy photos

**LEFT:** This year's Day of Mourning was held at centres across Canada and throughout B.C. These photos were taken at the Vancouver Convention Centre on Friday, April 27, the day before the official anniversary. **INSET:** Shelley Kuris, wife of millwright Samuel Kuris who was killed in a tragic forklift incident at a Burnaby Safeway warehouse, and her son Silver at this year's commemoration.

# Sawmill tragedies add poignancy to this year's Day of Mourning

By Michael Brophy

ON APRIL 27TH AND 28TH, DAY OF MOURNING ceremonies were held around the province, across Canada and internationally to honour workers who have lost their lives due to workplace injuries and illnesses. This tradition has taken place annually since its inception in 1984.

At the Friday ceremony in the Jack Poole Plaza at the Vancouver Convention Centre, families of the victims, workers, union members and organization representatives gathered to pay their respects. At 10 a.m., the Olympic cauldron was lit and nearby flags were lowered to half mast. "Even if you didn't know one of the fallen workers, when someone dies, we all feel the loss, because each of us loses in our workplace, our communities and our society," said George Morfitt from WorkSafeBC. "What's worse is that all this could have been prevented. [We need to] understand what happened and figure out how to prevent similar occasions...One illness is too many and one serious injury is too many. The only acceptable number is zero."

The significance of this commemoration was even more pronounced because of the two recent B.C.

sawmill explosions, taking place within months of each other and which killed four workers and injured forty-one others.

Former sawmill worker Michael Lovett, one of the guest speakers, was 18 years when he lost his lower leg in a sawmill incident. "I was very scared," he said, "thinking that I'd have to watch myself die and that I'd still be alive when the roller went over my head." What came to save his life was his steel safety boot which got caught in the machinery that was dragging him in. He now recounts that experience in close to 700 presentations about young worker safety that he makes annually to high school students across Canada.

Harry Van Beest, from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 213, said it is crucial to observe the Day of Mourning and pay tribute to those who have lost their lives performing vital jobs for our society. He has had to attend memorial services for workers who've been killed on the job. "All you have to do is attend a funeral for a person who died as a result of a job function [and then] watch that worker's eight-year-old son hang off the coffin to understand."

Among those in attendance was Shelley Kuris, a mother of three children and widow of Samuel Kuris Jr., a millwright who was killed in a tragic forklift incident at a Burnaby Safeway warehouse. "We are doing as well as can be expected," she said. Kuris and her children walked in the noon procession along with other mourners who have lost friends and family.

Statistics released by WorkSafeBC show that there were 142 fatalities in B.C. in 2011, and roughly half were related to diseases such as asbestosis. The board accepted approximately 104,000 claims for short- and long-term disabilities and fatalities. On average, every week 2,715 work injuries are documented, almost 3 workers die and 17 workers are unable to continue in their chosen professions.

Many speakers at the Day Of Mourning event called for better promotion of safety and health in the work environment and legislation with tougher penalties to deter negligent employers.

"Workers who have a union are not guaranteed safety," said Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Federation of Labour, "but they are given an opportunity to demand it. They're more

conscious of safety on the job and employers are less likely to get away with putting them at risk.

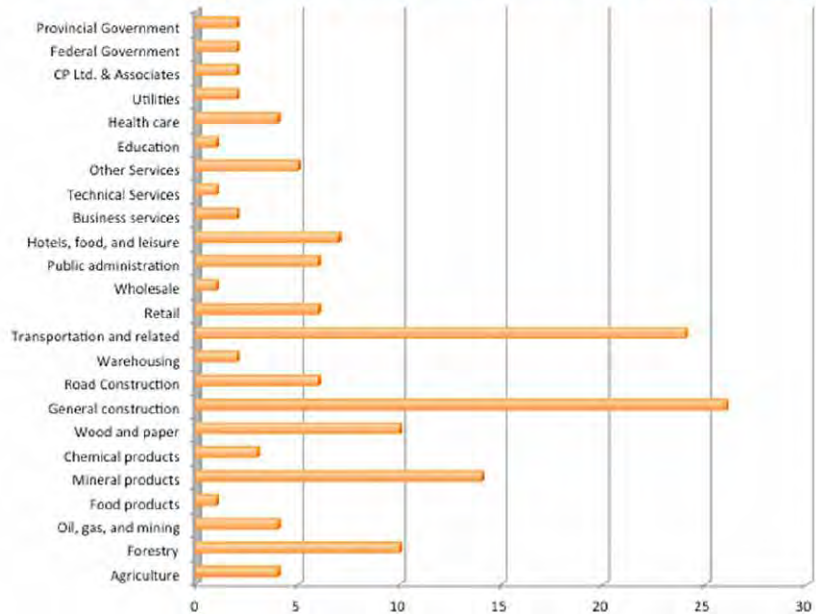
“Everyone has a right to be an employer [and] employers have a right to make money,” he added. “What they don’t have is a right to neglect their fundamental obligations in providing a safe workplace for their employees.” Sinclair also called on the government and Crown counsel to pursue charges against employers who put their workers’ lives at risk.



The Olympic cauldron was lit to honour the workers who have lost their lives due to workplace injuries and illnesses. Workers from many trades and professions were in attendance. Foremost on everyone’s minds were the two pulpmill explosions (in Burns Lake in January and in Prince George in April) which led to four deaths, many injuries and devastated families and communities.

## BRITISH COLUMBIA FACTS

### WORK-RELATED DEATHS BY INDUSTRY IN 2011



### FATAL CLAIMS ACCEPTED FROM 2007-2011



In B.C., an average of **2.7** workers die each week



Source: [http://www.worksafebc.com/news\\_room/campaigns/day\\_of\\_mourning/assets/pdf/2012DOMFactsheet.pdf](http://www.worksafebc.com/news_room/campaigns/day_of_mourning/assets/pdf/2012DOMFactsheet.pdf)

Michael Brophy graphic





Photos: Joe Barrett

# Building trades lobby at the legislature

By Joe Barrett

PROVINCIAL POLITICIANS GOT AN EARFUL FROM delegates at the B.C. Building Trades Council's 42nd annual convention in Victoria at the end of March. This year's visit to the legislature by convention delegates coincided with a decline in popularity of the Christy Clark government. Opinion polls indicate that by this time next year the province will see the formation of a new NDP government.

The regular convention business was put on hold on March 27 so that 60 building trades representatives including business managers, business representatives, pension and benefits administrators, apprenticeship co-ordinators and union executive members could attend 13 separate meetings inside the B.C. legislature. In all, 14 Liberal government MLAs, 6 cabinet ministers and 20 opposition NDP MLAs made time to listen and interact with delegates to gain an understanding of construction worker issues.

The opinion polls seemed to have a sobering effect on some government MLAs and cabinet ministers. There was surprising interest in the council's position on several issues.

Construction union leaders have been excluded from stakeholder participation ever since the Liberals were elected 11 years ago. Policy failures have festered for years while construction union leaders were sidelined. During this time, the Independent Contractors and Business Association has exerted a strong influence on government politicians.

The lobby was different from past efforts in that it introduced several young union leaders to the political scene. Younger delegates' voices were heard. Jeremy Carlson, 29, is the youth representative on the Heat and Frost Insulators Local 118 executive. Carlson had some advice for delegates attending the next convention. "I'd encourage other first-time delegates to 'think outside of the box.'" He recommended that delegates be prepared and find examples that resonate with the politicians. Regarding his own activism in the union, Carlson said, "It's like a cyclone, you get sucked in once you've been to a union meeting."

Jordan Witham-Carroll, 26, represented the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 993 in the Interior and the North. Rubbing shoulders with politicians isn't new to him; his father was a candidate for the NDP in the 2004 federal election in Kamloops North Thompson.

The young electrician was surprised by the reaction of Liberal MLAs. "The specific issues of pipelines and apprentice-

*The meeting between the Building Trades Council and the minister of labour included Lee Loftus, James Leyland, Kyle Downie, Jim Paquette (standing), Jim Pearson, Minister of Labour Margaret MacDiarmid, Walter Canta, Brian Cochrane and Allan Bruce.*

ships caught their interest. Still they didn't know about the ITA [Industry Training Authority] and its problems," he said. He saw that there was no resistance to investing union pension funds in infrastructure developments. "It's our money. What could be wrong with that?"

Witham-Carroll left the convention believing that the council and construction workers should spend more time educating politicians. "It's worthwhile for them," he said.

Reflecting on the lack of interest and low participation rates among young people in election issues, he said, "It seems the less it affects you, the less you care. When people don't vote it means they're satisfied with the way things are."

Curtis Harold, a 37-year-old crane operator and millwright mechanic with the Operating Engineers on Vancouver Island, said, "When you're watching politics you think your voice isn't being heard. When you see it in person there's a connection. I felt I was heard." Lobbying "is a must," he



Shawn Luke graphic



Members of IBEW Local 230 learn more about the issues facing the building trades before setting off to talk to provincial politicians.

added. "We can feel like we're part of something. We're not alone." With the guidance of other delegates, he said he didn't feel intimidated. "These politicians are just people, not just someone on TV. We need to engage them to let them know about our issues."

Overall, delegates found that the Liberal MLAs and cabinet ministers appreciated the council's ongoing efforts to build relationships with the government. Liberal politicians were also intrigued by the support from construction unions for private-public partnerships, a policy that the NDP opposes. Although apprenticeship training was a hot topic, the government showed little interest in adopting project labour agreements (PLAs) which advocate training to address skilled trades shortfalls.

Also no surprise was the NDP Opposition's openness to most of the BC Building Trades' positions. NDP leader Adrian Dix's support for PLAs on government infrastructure projects is already on record. At the convention, Dix did not make specific commitments to Labour Code changes or amendments to the Industry Training Authority. B.C. construction unions will have to wait until closer to the election for those details.

Other convention highlights included an address from Sean McGarvey, secretary-treasurer from the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department based in Washington, D.C. McGarvey summarized the struggle to defend union construction and decent labour laws in the U.S.

The convention ended with the passage of nine resolutions. Included were calls for compulsory trades, a provincial ministry of construction, Labour Code amendments for sectoral bargaining and promotion of the five-decade long record of the building trades involvement in the construction of pipelines to transport liquid commodities at the highest safety standards.

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# One of the great characters in the building trades

## Bob Colvin

THE BANQUET ROOM AT NEWLANDS Golf Course in Langley was packed with friends and fellow union members who came together to say goodbye to Bob Colvin, former business manager of the Sheet Metal Workers Local 280. Colvin passed away from cancer on April 14.

All the speakers, and just about everyone in the room, had stories about Colvin, but agreed that all the anecdotes were “highly inappropriate for a memorial service,” said MC Tom Sigurdson, executive director of the BC Building Trades Council. “But that was Bobby.”

Sigurdson, a 15-year friend and golfing buddy, said Colvin took his work seriously, but never took himself too seriously.

There were stories about Colvin putting politicians in their place, inviting animals onto golf course fairways, ribald holiday antics and Wilbur, his pet potbelly pig.

Wayne Peppard, former executive director of the council and also a golfing friend, said, “He always had a twinkle in his eye. He was a joy to be with and he had a wicked sense of humour...He was working class

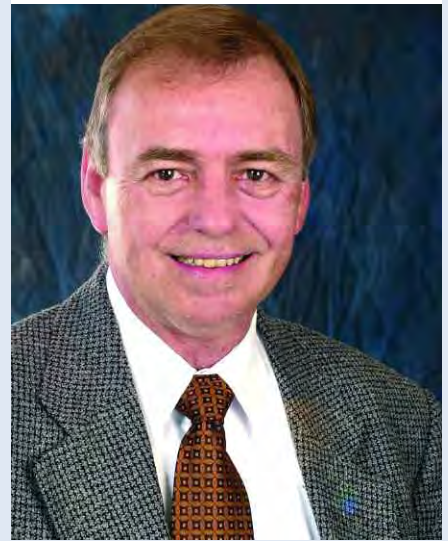
through and through.”

Lee Loftus, president of the council, said he met Colvin on a construction site when he was just starting out in construction. “He was a short little sh-t yelling and screaming at everyone. But we bonded on that job.” Loftus, who is also slight of stature, said the two of them were “ornery little buggers” who often hurled short jokes at one other.

Loftus also talked about the pride that Colvin felt when he was able to help injured union members who weren’t able to get compensation. In one case, the injured worker “couldn’t come back to work, but he won [the case] and had something to bring back to his family,” Loftus recalled.

“He always put the members first,” said Jim Paquette, business manager of Local 280. “He took it upon himself to be an advocate for those with compensation troubles. That was his legacy.” The union continues to strongly advocate for injured members who are caught in the bureaucracy of trying to receive workers’ compensation.

Colvin was born in Belfast in 1946 and moved with his family to Canada in 1957. He left school in Grade 10 to



Joshua Berson photo

take up the sheet metal trade at West Coast Heating and convinced several family members to enter the trade as well.

He was a business agent for the sheet metal workers’ union and served as the business manager from 1997 until 2003. He received a Master Mason Degree in 1987 and gave countless volunteer hours to many charitable causes. After he retired, golf became his new passion.

Sigurdson recalled his last visit with Colvin a few hours before he died. “He said, ‘You’re born, you live, you die and there’s nothing you can do about the end.’”

“He didn’t have any regrets,” Sigurdson said, “but, with a twinkle in his eye, he said he’d like to live a bit longer to see if he could develop a few.”



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*The HVAC crew, proud members of Sheet Metal Workers Local 280, working for Lancaster Sheet Metal on the Endako mine expansion at Fraser Lake B.C. were on the job for 10 months. The project wrapped up in February. Thanks to John Macandrew for sending this in.*





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