

CSC

# Dimensions

March 2009

## Consultations underway for 2009-2017 forecasts



Construction industry stakeholders are meeting over the coming weeks and months to develop the next round of *Construction Looking Forward* labour requirement forecasts for the industry.

“This round of consultations is the largest, and perhaps the most critical,” says CSC executive director George Gritzotis. “With the recent announcements on accelerated public infrastructure spending, more and more groups are asking questions about the capacity of the industry to respond to future investments,” he says, noting that this year, “given the anticipation for infrastructure spending, there is a window of opportunity for governments to play a key role.”

“The best way to ensure that infrastructure projects are staffed with the skilled workers they will need,” he explains,

“is for governments to work closely with industry on the development of the *Construction Looking Forward* reports.”

An increasingly popular planning tool for industry decision makers, this latest edition of the forecasts is expected to be released this spring, for the fifth consecutive year.

The reports allow for instant access to residential and non-residential construction investment data, as well as details on the supply and demand for more than 30 skilled trades over the next nine years – all broken down by province and region.

The latest economic data signal that the year-long U.S. recession is worsening and the Canadian recession is moving in with full force. Canadian residential and non-residential construction activity is slowing rapidly.

The good news is the federal government just introduced a budget that will help limit the extent and duration of the recession in Canada. In particular, the January budget added billions of dollars in new public infrastructure and social housing spending to rescue the ailing economy.

### Residential sector

With changes in the terms and availability of financing and some decline in confidence, housing investment is declining more rapidly than previously expected. This implies a larger decline in real residential activity over 2009 and 2010 than projected in our last CSC forecast reports.

On the brighter side, the last federal budget provided up to \$7.8 billion in tax relief and funding to help stimulate the housing sector and improve housing

across Canada over the next two years. The most high-profile budget measure is a new Home Renovation Tax Credit (HRTC), which lasts one year and is worth up to \$1,350 per household. The new 15% tax credit for home renovation outlays will apply on eligible spending between \$1,000 and \$10,000.

## Non-residential

Business investment is also expected to decrease through 2009 because of the slowdown in global GDP growth, the tighter credit conditions, and the high level of uncertainty following the intensification of the global financial crisis.

Oil companies are reviewing their investment plans in light of falling crude prices, restricted access to affordable credit and uncertainties over future crude oil demand.

Government investments in the repair and development of public infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, sewage and water treatment facilities, public transit networks and not-for-profit housing, will lessen the adverse effects of the global economic slowdown.

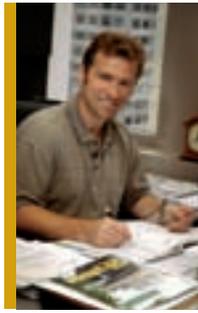
## Oil sands projects

While existing projects are still being developed, much of the expansion that had been planned now faces delays, cutbacks or restructuring as producers struggle to develop bitumen resources amid the credit crisis. It could mean the loss of billions of dollars in capital investment as projects are delayed or even cancelled.

The national, provincial and regional 2009 editions of *Construction Looking Forward* will be published in hard copy and at [www.constructionforecasts.ca](http://www.constructionforecasts.ca) this spring.

# A silver lining

by George Gritziotis



The current economic downturn has handed the construction industry the perfect opportunity to put workforce development on our agenda and keep it there.

Not that this hasn't always been a priority for the CSC. But despite industry efforts, and because of its cyclical nature, the tendency has been to put on a big recruitment push during peak periods – when demand for skilled labour is high. When downturns arrive, as they inevitably do, we often lose workers to other industries, attrition or retirement, only to come up short when the next building wave hits.

While recent announcements in Budget 2009 will provide a needed shot in the arm (it will still be a slow period for some parts of the industry), this is the time to put a plan into practice that sustains recruitment, training and safety programs over the long term, and ensures we're ready for that next big wave of construction activity in all sectors.

Our stakeholders (owners, contractors, labour groups) tell us that the CSC role here is more critical than ever. Why? Because there are more questions than answers at this point about building plans. With its Labour Market Information (LMI) Program, the CSC also is well positioned to get answers to those questions and deliver them to decision makers in the construction industry.

For example, the recession is not hitting all regions and sectors at the same time. While projects in some regions are shutting down, in others they are still going forward. Where and when is this happening?

In addition, the transition from one sector to another is certainly not seamless. What kind of training should be available, when and where? Governments are now planning to put a lot of projects out there – from water treatment facilities to bridges and roads to public transit. Again, where and when? What are their workforce requirements and what skills are needed?

With good LMI and strong participation from industry stakeholders, together we can provide the thoughtful, managed approach to workforce development that is needed now and in the future.

**“This is the time to put a plan into practice that sustains recruitment, training and safety programs over the long term...”**

As we gear up for another round of consultations for the 2009-2017 *Construction Looking Forward* reports, our private sector partners are eager to provide us with project information. However, we need major project information from all groups to plan effectively for the short and long term.

In such a large and diverse industry as construction, doing recruitment on an as-needed basis is short-sighted and it shortchanges the potential of our industry. Skilled workers are our common currency. We need to work together to keep them well trained, safe and always available to work.

*George Gritziotis is the CSC's executive director.*





## Connecting Aboriginals to construction work

The construction industry has a proven track record in engaging the Aboriginal workforce. The CSC Aboriginal Ironworkers Career Awareness Program, for example, resulted in an increase in Aboriginal ironworkers in B.C. In Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, there have also been marked increases in Aboriginal construction workers, thanks to the efforts of the industry.

The CSC's latest initiative, the Aboriginal Employment Construction Strategy (ACES), builds on previous efforts by working closely with Aboriginal human resources development agencies and industry right across the country. Through its ACES program, the CSC is working to bring all stakeholders to the table with the goal of connecting Aboriginal youth with construction work. Among the elements of

the program, the CSC is making a business case to industry leaders on the rationale for Aboriginal hiring, and helping Aboriginals to better describe their skills to potential employers with a portfolio assessment tool.

Watch the CSC website for updates on this important workforce development project.

## Relationship building key for mentors

The CSC will pilot its Mentor Training Program at construction worksites and training centres across the country over the next few months. Through focus groups and research on existing mentorship programs, the CSC has uncovered some of the challenges with on-the-job mentoring. The program addresses some of these challenges, with training that focuses on building strong relationships between tradespersons (mentors) and their apprentices/learners – in other words,

by improving the ability of mentors to pass on their skills, and of apprentices/learners to get the most out of the experience.

For mentors, a key component of the training will be about how to get ideas across and how to deal with problems. For apprentices/learners, it will be about making the most out of the relationship to create ideal learning conditions. Ideally, after three or four years, apprentices/learners would themselves become mentors.

The program package includes training and resource materials, such as a pocket manual for both mentors and apprentices/learners.

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## New at [careersinconstruction.ca](http://careersinconstruction.ca)

Our re-vamped “Careers in Construction” website is almost ready to go live. The site has a brighter, bolder look and is even more user-friendly. First launched in 2005, [www.careersinconstruction.ca](http://www.careersinconstruction.ca) addressed the industry’s need for a one-stop-shop with information on careers in construction. Students, parents and educators visit the site regularly, and

thanks to plenty of constructive feedback, the CSC has been working with industry partners to make it better than ever.

In addition to information on what the work is like, where the jobs are, how to choose a career path, how to enter an apprenticeship program and how to earn while you learn, the site will soon feature

more than 60 trade and occupation profiles, all with updated wage information. New profiles include those for home inspectors and home appraisers, safety officers, contract administrators, purchasing agents and more – all at the click of a mouse! Watch for the new version very soon. We’d love to hear what you think! E-mail us at [communications@csc-ca.org](mailto:communications@csc-ca.org).

# The changing face of operating engineers

What do 38-year-old Chitee Kilabuk from the Inuit hamlet of Pangnirtung in Nunavut, and 25-year-old Sarah Payne from Sarnia, Ontario, have in common?

For one thing, they are gainfully employed as graders after spending time last winter learning their trade at the Operating Engineers Training Institute of Ontario (OETIO) in Morrisburg.

More significantly, however, they are part of a new and growing demographic of construction workers.

“There are probably more youth, women and Aboriginals working in the construction industry now than ever before,” says Derm Cain, Canadian director of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE).

Moreover, thanks to efforts by groups like the IUOE, they are migrating to trades that would otherwise be faced with serious shortages because of Canada’s aging workforce.

**“There are probably more youth, women and Aboriginals working in the construction industry now than ever before.”**



Grader Sarah Payne learned her trade at the Operating Engineers Training Institute of Ontario.

“We are doing more promotion and marketing of our training centre programs to non-traditional labour sources than we have before,” says Cain. “Our efforts are enhanced by state-of-the-art training facilities right across the country.”

It’s a mutually beneficial initiative.

Sarah Payne, who has now been working in construction for five years, says, “I never thought construction would be something that I would enjoy until I actually started doing it. Then I realized that I love the job... The union offered me full-time hours, great pay rate, pension and benefits. My goal as an operator is to master as many pieces of equipment as I can. I enjoy the challenge and it also makes me more employable to whichever company I am working for. I am willing to work anywhere and will go where the work is. The great thing about construction is that it’s everywhere....”

That appeals to Chitee Kilabuk as well, who has found employment at the Pangnirtung airport. He enjoys working in his hometown, where he is happily married with two kids. “I’m not planning to change my career because I like what I’m doing,” he says.

“We are building relationships with these groups,” says Derm Cain. “Our role is to refer well-trained and qualified people to our contractors and owners. That’s our responsibility to them.”

The Construction Sector Council’s 2008 provincial labour market forecasts, *Construction Looking Forward*, all stress the importance of building up the construction labour force with new sources of labour.

Clearly, it’s an idea whose time has come, and one that benefits many industry stakeholders – employers and contractors, unions, training institutions, and not least of all, the workers themselves.

# Congratulations to our labour co-chair

The labour co-chair of CSC’s Board of Directors, Robert Blakely, has recently received an honorary law degree from Memorial University in Newfoundland.

A letter from Memorial University acting president Eddy Campbell says, “The degree is being awarded for your contribution to the development of the Naval Reserve and for your involvement in labour relations.”

Blakely is also the director of Canadian Affairs for the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO. He assumed this national leadership role in 2000.

Among his most notable accomplishments is his role with the Canadian Forces. Blakely joined the Canadian Forces (Naval Reserve) in 1969 and has risen through the ranks to command various HMC ships at sea and ashore. In 2004, he was promoted to commodore and appointed commander of Canada’s Naval Reserve serving in this post until December 2007. Oh yes, he also earned a law degree from the University of Alberta and was admitted to the Alberta Bar in 1978.

CSC board member Derm Cain said the HMCS Cabot Naval Reserve in St. John’s put Mr. Blakely’s name forward to receive the degree because of all the support and volunteer work he has contributed over many years to the Naval Reserve in Newfoundland and across Canada.

“With all the demands Bob has on his time, he somehow finds a way to help these young men and women who we depend on to defend our



Robert Blakely, director, Canadian Affairs, Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO

The CSC would like to acknowledge the support of the Government of Canada’s Sector Council Program.

Canada



country,” said Cain, who is also the Canadian director of the IUOE and a native of Newfoundland. “Bob’s contribution is way beyond what the average person realizes or expects. He goes above and beyond and is very deserving of this honour.”

## Award-winning board member credits others

Alliance Energy, the company run by CSC board member Paul McLellan, has recently been named one of Canada’s 50 Best Managed Companies. McLellan received national news coverage for garnering the prestigious award, though he gives much of the credit to others.

“Awards like Best Managed Companies may appear to be recognition for good management,” he says, “but they’re really awards for having good employees.”

McLellan also credits his work with the CSC.

“Being a well-managed company is due to our direct relationship and partnerships with the people at the Construction Sector Council... Not just with members of the board, but through the various CSC projects and committees. Networking and connecting – two really big words that add up to learning a lot about best practices and the good work being done by others.”

“I wish I was brilliant enough to think of all this stuff myself,” he adds, “but I’m not.”

Canada’s 50 Best Managed Companies awards program continues to be the mark of excellence for Canadian-owned and managed companies with revenues over \$10 million. Deloitte, CIBC Commercial Banking, National Post and Queen’s School of Business sponsor the program.

An employee-owned and operated electrical contracting company, Alliance employs 250 workers and generates \$45-\$50 million in annual revenues, ranking 75<sup>th</sup> out of the top 100 Saskatchewan companies in 2008.

Paul McLellan is no stranger to awards. He has also won the Artisan Award for 2008 for working with the apprenticeship program in Saskatchewan and at the national level, and the Canadian Construction Association’s Person of the Year Award for leadership and excellence in construction.



*Bryan Leverick, president (left), and Paul McLellan, CEO, Alliance Energy Ltd.*

## School opens doors as industry opens arms to co-op students

A student who wouldn’t give up on his dream, a teacher who wouldn’t give up, and a developer with an eye to the future sparked a co-op program that now gives hundreds of high school students a real taste of work in the construction industry.

Elvy Moro, a teacher at Northview Heights Secondary School in Toronto, created the Construction Trades Exploration Program by making connections between his students and construction company managers. He has also drawn on Construction Sector Council resources and contacts thanks to

a recent partnership between the Toronto District School Board and the Alliance of Sector Councils.

Three-and-a-half years after spending countless hours trying to get that first keen student a construction placement – a boy named Matthew who travelled an hour and a half each way to get to work – Moro now works with about eight developers and as many high schools in the Greater Toronto Area. Today, about 20 students spend 14 weeks each semester on a construction site.

And they aren’t the only ones on a learning curve. “It was a challenge to get the program up and running,” says Moro. “Students may be interested in the construction field, but they have no idea what specifically they want to do. Construction companies are reluctant to take on students for many reasons, not the least of which are safety and timing.”

Added to that mix is the short window that exists to make the most of a student’s interest in construction. “If you don’t catch them when they are 16 or 17, they move on to other areas, such as high tech,



## You have new mail

Did you know you can receive Dimensions newsletter electronically? Just log on to the CSC website to subscribe ([www.csc-ca.org](http://www.csc-ca.org)). Each time a new issue is ready, you’ll receive an e-mail with a link to the latest news and information on Canada’s construction workforce.

for example, where it's relatively much easier to find your niche," he says. Or to areas where they may be underemployed.

Emilio Tesolin sees many potential construction workers going to work at Home Depot or Home Hardware "because they're good with their hands." Tesolin is senior vice-president of high-rise development at Monarch Corporation, the first construction company to, as Moro puts it, "open their arms to us."

"They could be much more productive on a construction site," says Tesolin. "They just don't get the chance. And let's face it – the industry needs them too."

"But even when they do get their foot in the door," adds Elvy, "there are so many trades, so many career paths and so many ways to get started."

Tesolin couldn't agree more: "When they come on the site, they really have no idea what they want to do," he says. "They have preconceived ideas. They may think they want to be a Plumber or whatever. That's why we allow them to spend time with assistant supervisors. We let them walk around and give them exposure to two, three, four different trades."

And what happens next is the real clincher: The students become inspired.

"It was a real eye-opener," says 19-year-old Korbin Kozlowski, a recent graduate of Toronto's Western Technical Commercial School, who earned credits through the Construction Trades Exploration Program and is now ready to become an apprentice Pipefitter.

"The opportunity to be on a site and talk to people who are living the life I will soon be living was the greatest part of the course for me. I learned a lot of things from many different tradespeople."

"My responsibilities ranged from sweeping stairwells, hanging doors, running

conduit and wire, and installing pretty well every plumbing-related fixture in a modern condo.

"But the best advice I got was, 'do what's best for the long haul.' In other words, get an apprenticeship and stick with a real career choice. As one guy told me, 'When you're 64 years old you don't want to be doing a lot of back-breaking work.'"

As the program has unfolded, the CSC has facilitated partnerships between the school, construction companies and labour groups. Some unions such as the Labourers International Union of North America, Local 183 and the International Association of Sheet Metal Workers, Local 285 have partnered with the school to provide students with a week of training on each of a variety of trades, as well as the safety training they often need before working on a site.

Northview Heights Secondary School principal Sandra Tondat says the Construction Sector Council's literacy and numeracy materials, as well as its "Careers in Construction" website, have been very useful. And she describes the CSC's online labour market forecasts as "phenomenal." The forecasts allow educators to pinpoint which trades will be demand and where over the next several years.

The CSC is planning to produce a brochure to market the Construction Trades Exploration Program as a blueprint for other educational organizations.

As part of the program, George Brown College offers courses to students, allowing them to see the relationship between school and work. The courses also give the students some post-secondary experience and the feeling for a career path in an industry where a combination of on-the-job experience and education can lead to many advancement opportunities.

"The program is a taste of construction at many levels – from labourer to one of the

specific trades to management," says Elvy Moro. "You get experience with unions, with college, with the worksites. We try to let them hit every pathway. There's not much more that I can do."

From the industry's point of view, he is really on to something.

As Emilio Tesolin says: "We're giving exposure to students and creating a future workforce for ourselves. This is a win-win situation."



*Emilio Tesolin, Monarch Corporation, addresses the audience at Northview Heights Secondary School.*

**About us** The Construction Sector Council (CSC) is a national organization committed to the development of a highly-skilled workforce – one that will support the needs of the construction industry in Canada now and well into the future. Created in April 2001, it is a partnership between labour and business. At the heart of the CSC's mandate is the need to address human resource issues through partnerships within the construction industry.

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