



THE PEOPLE DEFICIT

Industry insiders say the gap waiting to be filled by skilled trades workers is as big as ever.

By Greg McMillan

George Gritziotis, executive director of Construction Sector Council (CSC), has a lot on his plate. A year ago, he was facing an admittedly dire situation: shortages of skilled workers in the Canadian construction industry. And no quick fixes were evident.

The consensus among experts is that there is still a people deficit today. There are still no quick fixes. The supply of labour will be a continuing challenge, but Gritziotis, his fellow board members and other construction industry insiders are feeling much better about the worker situation, thanks to a mobilization of resources across the country.

“I am tremendously optimistic,” Gritziotis said.

Industry insiders have identified areas across the country that need bolstering to ensure that there will be a steady supply of skilled workers to keep up to the anticipated demand, and virtually all agree with the steps being taken now, as well as what steps need to be taken in the future.

Statistics in a collaborative report between the Canadian Construction Association and the CSC released last December show that construction employment is expected to level off in 2007 after years of significant growth. After growth rates of 7.1 per cent in 2005 and 2.7 per cent in 2006, growth in the construction labour force is expected to slow to 0.9 per cent in 2007 and 1.4 per cent

in 2008. Furthermore, during the next ten years, the industry will need to replace over 150,000 retiring workers, or 19 per cent of the current work force.

Potential problem solvers are a better immigration process, national standards for training and apprenticeship, as well as more youth, women and aboriginal recruitment.

“We will need to go outside the country to bring skilled workers here to satisfy the domestic demand for at least the next two years.”

—Paul Douglas

A recent forum hosted by the CSC addressed the construction industry’s human resources needs. They stressed the need for owners, contractors, labour groups, educators and governments to communicate and collaborate in a more efficient manner – a process that is underway right now. The CSC provides data through its forecast report entitled *Construction Looking Forward*, which looks at all facets of construction industry, including the labour force. Provincial labour market information committees are now gathering current information and will release the next report this spring for the period from 2007-2015.

KMPG International also conducted a Global Construction Survey in 2007, which concluded that the shortage of qualified contractors around the world is without a doubt the biggest challenge to construction projects in the future.

The KMPG study also found that with market demand expected to increase significantly over the next five years, this issue is set to intensify as the pool of qualified contractors is reduced and the wider shortage of skilled labour contractors impacts the ability of teams to deliver on projects.

As far as Canada is concerned, Gritziotis pointed out that the labour deficit issue is a regional phenomenon that needs to be addressed by understanding local labour market realities. He said some regions may have a plentiful supply of qualified labour while others attract workers from other parts of Canada and abroad.

Paul Douglas, president and Chief Operating Officer for PCL Constructors Inc., said “We will need to go outside the country to bring skilled workers here to satisfy the domestic demand for at least the next two years.”

Gritziotis said “Bringing in skilled workers from outside the country is part of the solution, not the only solution. We still need to utilize our existing workforce by attracting women, youth and aboriginal people.”

He said “One of the problems [with bringing in foreign-trained skilled workers] is that there is no national systematic approach to

assessing their credentials. This needs to be addressed.”

Douglas said “One thing needing to be changed or looked at is the ability to work across Canada. A tradesperson may be certified to work in the province they passed [an apprenticeship program] exam in, however they may not be able to work in another province with their current certificate.”

Douglas said another tack the construction industry is taking to offset the worker shortage is to minimize the labour content required. “Some examples of that are modularization, using prefab materials, and choosing low labour – but more expensive – products and systems.”

Grant Trump, president and CEO of ECO (Environmental Careers Organization) Canada, said “The number-one issue for a lot of companies is the worker supply situation.” But he points to an ECO partnership forged with Royal Roads University in Victoria that provides distance learning online as an example of how to fight the shortage. “Immigrants, for example, can get accreditation before they even come to Canada,” said Trump. “They can have the same credentials as a person in Canada. It’s all part of the solution.”

In Ontario, Mike Yorke, vice-president of the Carpenters Union, Central Ontario regional council, strongly believes that with appropriate investment in skills development and training, and worker mobility initiatives, the majority of Canada’s skills shortages can be addressed. He says extensive labour market surveys and projections have been made to determine and plan for training and work force needs. “There are various training partnerships, such as CHOICE (Career, Help, Opportunity, Incentive, Community Employment) and OYAP (Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program) and investment in training by unions. We address the issue of, and communicate with, the communities that represent undocumented skilled workers.”

“[The Carpenters Union] has implemented a variety of outreach programs and recruitment partnerships,” said Yorke. “For instance, we are addressing the industry’s crucial need for concrete formwork carpenters, as well as a program to enhance the skills of interior carpenters.”

Governments are addressing the shortage of training programs. Ontario’s Apprenticeship Training Tax Credit, designed to assist employers to hire apprentices, has been extended to 2012. British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell recently announced a provincial investment of \$2 million to create a second Cranbrook campus for the College of the Rockies, offering trades and technology training to support local industry.

In the boom province of Alberta, Neil Tidsbury, President of Construction Labour Relations (CLR) in Alberta, said there has been a sustained push on starting and training apprentices. “There are currently record numbers of apprentices,” he said. “With only 10 per cent of Canada’s population, we routinely graduate more than 20 per cent of the journeypersons. There is also considerable effort being directed toward mentoring the apprentices and the tradespeople engaged in training them on our major sites, with staff dedicated to that role.”

He said that worker shortages are particularly noticeable in supervision and site management. “We at CLR, along with the Alberta Building Trades Council, have developed and recently reviewed and upgraded a leading-edge program for foremen and general foremen called Better SuperVision,” he said. “This program is now delivered under license everywhere but Ontario and Quebec. We have a companion program for the next tier of supervision/management called Leaders Building Leaders. Both are well subscribed. We are still building the capacity to deliver more of these courses in Alberta, recruiting and training instructors.”

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“While it seems clear that both replacement demand and construction activity will drive the need for more tradespeople in Alberta for many years to come, building an Alberta work force to meet our peaks is not responsible or sustainable,” Tidsbury said. “Mobility is the sometimes forgotten piece of the work force development and delivery puzzle. “Accordingly, we are working with our government, the federal government, and with CSC and others to enhance worker mobility from one province to another.”

Allison Rougeau, Executive Director of Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, a not-for-profit organization that promotes and supports apprenticeship training and education systems, said it is important that employers involved in apprenticeship programs see a positive return on their investments.

“At my office, there are a lot of people with gray hair, a lot of people just out of school and not a lot in between – it’s a demographic gap. There’s a big gap in planning in the electricity industry and across industries. Lack of skilled trade workers is a pinch point in terms of going forward with a project. It’s madness in terms of getting any job finished in Western Canada.”

—**Dr. Jan Carr**, CEO of the Ontario Power Authority (OPA), addressing the Economic Club of Toronto.

“There is an opportunity here,” she said. “As of June 2007, the federal government will be implementing apprentice tax incentives, and grants for apprenticeships.”

“We need employers to see that there is a definite upside to getting involved in an apprenticeship program. A study shows that only 17 per cent of potential employers were engaged in training apprenticeships. So there is a huge opportunity here to do more.”

“One of things we have instituted since December, 2006, is a significant skilled trades advertising campaign aimed at youth with spots on places such as MuchMusic.” But, she added, it is important that employers buy into the message as well.

All across the country, similar steps are being taken, all chipping away at the problem at hand.

Griziotis said “At our board meeting, we are touching on all areas. Whatever we do has to be a national response to meet the regional needs.” ♣

Greg McMillan is a journalist with extensive experience in domestic and foreign markets and has published a book on the history of relations between Canada and the Dominican Republic. He is an Associate and Senior Writing/Communications Strategist with C2E Consulting in Toronto.

DEFINE “QUALIFIED”

The role of qualified professionals needs to be narrowed for more efficient assessing and restoration of brownfields.

By *David DuBois*

The Ontario Ministry of Environment (MOE) recently introduced a new regulation to control the assessment and restoration of contaminated sites. Some believe it was designed to regulate procedure rather than to confirm the environmental quality of the restored property. Gone are the days when a team would work with the MOE to confirm that a restored property was suitable for the intended land use and that the MOE would then sign off.

Restoration of a contaminated site can be an inexact and costly endeavor involving multi-disciplinary teams – all of which are accountable to the one entity with the overall responsibility.

In Ontario, most of the responsibility for assessment and restoration appears to have been allocated to the qualified professional (QP). However, it can be argued that the clarity of the QP’s role has been diluted, possibly even confused, by the inclusion of a broad spectrum of practitioners who can contribute only to portions of the assessment and restoration process.

One viewpoint sees merit in limiting the definition of the QP to the Professional Engineers of Ontario and the Association of Professional Geologists of Ontario. Other types of practitioners could then fill the gap – a new term, “contributing practitioners” (CPs), could be introduced. These CPs would be accountable to the QPs, who would be ultimately responsible for the competence of the finished product. Phase 1 and phase 2 site assessments and risk assessments could be conducted by CPs and the QP would then take the lead role and the discretion to exercise professional judgment. The QP would provide reliance with the associated mandatory insurance.

Narrowing the definition of the QP to a licensing body may make the MOE uneasy. But it would have the advantage of keeping a clearer definition, administered under an established control body within existing legislation. This designation framework would follow marketplace trends that indicate the majority of the work is currently completed by members of these licensing groups. Currently, lawyers, bankers, investors and some municipalities prefer to have reliance on a Record of Site Condition signed, sealed and delivered by a professional engineer or geologist, since their contracted terms request a current license.

These professionals are accustomed to being responsible for the protection of the public – a role that’s essential in the assessment and restoration of Brownfields. They have the skills to lead multi-disciplinary teams. They can also be relentless perfectionists, exercising their professional judgment for optimization of contra-posing issues.

Through discussion with many practitioners in this local Brownfield arena, this is one point of view that’s developed. If you have something to add, don’t hesitate – these issues need to be discussed. ♣



David DuBois, Ph.D., C.Eng., P.Eng., is Director of Brownfield Redevelopment and Vice President at CH2M HILL. He specializes in the assessment, restoration and management of contaminated sites /Brownfields intended for redevelopment. David is a Qualified Person as defined under O.Reg 153/04.