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Kamloops--If you are one of 5,000 of B.C.'s second-year apprentices who have been so smoking hot busy in the last few years that you couldn't get time off to continue your trades training—Now's the time.

Lindsay Langill, dean of the School of Trades and Technology at Thompson Rivers University, is among the educational leaders around the province who are endorsing an Industry Training Authority campaign called Now's The Time.

The campaign is encouraging apprentices and their employers to find a silver lining in the economic slowdown to Skill Up—upgrade their training, and move toward their Red Seal certification.

For some, the message and the opportunity have already been realized.

"We're starting to see some apprentices come back to take the in-class component of their training required for trades certification," said Langill. "But we still need to get the message out to apprentices and employers to that this is the best time to go back to school."

"These are people who couldn't get away from their jobs during the last couple of years, working for employers who where so busy they couldn't afford to lose their apprentices for the six to 10 weeks of training annually.

"The current economy has provided just enough of a breather for business and the trades, but we know it's not going to last forever," Langill said adding that in both Saskatchewan and Newfoundland tradespersons are again in demand as their economies have picked up.

"So, now's the time to continue that training, because when the economy kicks in again, it is the journeyman who are the first to find work."

The Industry Training Authority (ITA), is the Crown agency responsible for managing B.C.'s industry training system.

It launched the campaign recognizing that, economic downturn or not, the province must act to cope with what's shaping up as an inevitable skills shortage.

TRU's School of Trades and Technology staff has been delivering posters, making phone calls and touring the region to spread the word that "Now is The Time." Langill himself has been at the forefront of delivering the message by meeting with mayors, city councilors and union presidents. "The message must be clear," Langill emphasizes. "There is no better time to Skill Up."

According to Kevin Evans, CEO of the ITA the province lost nearly two-thirds of its trades apprentices to the recession of the early '80s.

"With labour shortages still on the horizon, the province cannot afford to let that happen again."

Evans is referring to studies that show with the predicted increase in retirements, British Columbia is on course to experience a shortfall of more than 110,000 skilled workers by 2016.

That will create enhanced demand and opportunities for Red Seal certified trades people.

Langill says its especially important for trades people to become fully qualified considering the province's demographics. It is estimated that by 2016, 30 per cent of B.C.'s population will be 55 years of age or older.

"We have one of the oldest populations in the country and the percentage of retirees is expected to increase faster here than in the province as a whole. If there are to be skills shortages across the province, they're only going to be more acute in the Thompson-Okanagan."

To learn more about schedules and training opportunities at Thompson Rivers University, call (250) 371-5659 or Toll-free at 1-866-371-5659.

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