



WHAT'S NEXT IS WHAT'S HERE.

MEDIA RELEASE

June 22, 2009

Time's right for employers and apprentices to invest in skills training

John Haller has the answer.

"Now's the time."

And the question you have to ask to prompt him to provide that answer?

"When should apprentices come back to school to continue their training?"

Haller, Dean of Trades and Apprenticeship at British Columbia's second-largest trades training institution, 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 upgrade their training, and move toward their Red Seal certification. Close to 5,000 of B.C.'s second-year apprentices have yet to take any in-class components of their training required for trades certification.

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

"We're seeing a lot more apprentices come back now," said Haller. "These are people who couldn't get away from their jobs during the last couple of years, working for employers who couldn't afford to lose their apprentices for the six to 10 weeks of training annually.

"The economy has provided a breather for business and the trades, but we know it's not going to last forever. So, now's the time to continue that training."

Some apprentices are returning to Okanagan College and taking back-to-back training sessions, taking advantage of the hours of practical experience they've amassed on the job site to move them further toward their national certification, Haller observed.

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.

“B.C. lost nearly two-thirds of its trades apprentices to the recession of the early ‘80s,” said Kevin Evans, CEO of the ITA. “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. The ITA, various industry organizations, the B.C. Chamber of Commerce and British Columbia’s colleges have teamed up to get the message across: “now’s the time.”

Haller and Okanagan College President Jim Hamilton, who heads B.C.’s Trades Training Consortium, see it as especially important here.

“We all know about the demographics in the Okanagan,” said Hamilton. “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 Okanagan.”

The ITA has created a website: www.nowsthetime.ca where employers and apprentices can find out more.

For employers and apprentices who want to learn more about schedules and training opportunities at the College, they can call 250 862-5457.

-30-

For more information:
Allan Coyle, Director Public Affairs
Okanagan College
250-862-5413
acoyle@okanagan.bc.ca