

Industries reach out to youth at skilled trades fair



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A high school girl cuts a metal pipe with a hacksaw at the International Brotherhood Electrical Workers booth on Wednesday at the International Centre.

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With over 140 professions classified as skilled trades in Canada — and high demand for most — professional companies, unions and organizations are educating youth and immigrants in the search for talented workers.

Shalini Da Cunha, executive director of the Peel-Halton Workforce Development Group, said many professionals have discussed the demand for the skilled trade industry as something that will make its presence felt in the next couple of years, however the need is already here.

“The impression is that there is a shortage within the industry. We keep talking about it as if it’s coming down the roads, but it’s already here for many different companies in the industry. There’s a shortage already. That’s why this is so important,” Da Cunha told YourMississaugaBiz.com.

Da Cunha was the head organizer at Wednesday’s Apprenticeship Career Connections Job Fair at the International Centre in Brampton.

Thousands of people, approximately 80 per cent of them students, gathered at the convention centre to get a first-hand look at skilled trades and learn the specifics about working in the field.

The impression is that most students will go to post-secondary school, get a diploma/degree and land a successful career. However, that perception is becoming less of a reality for most, especially immigrants and students who struggle with high schools.

With trades, most employers, unions and other organizations were looking for people who want to work, have a Grade 12 education, a good attitude and punctuality.

What's more, a number of these industry professionals are partnering with schools and other companies to fill job shortages, educate individuals and attract people to careers.

One of those people is **Bowen LaFave**, a representative for the Sheet Metal Workers and Roofers Local Union #30, as he talked to people about working with sheet metal, establishing a career and being a professional.

"Most people don't know what it is to be a sheet metal worker and it's a compulsory trade. We do intakes twice a year to recruit all kinds of people. This is a career here. It's not a job and we want professionals," LaFave said.

"We want people who are interested in this. Some people are shy and they don't know what to say, which is cool, it's normal. We want people with a Grade 12 education because there's a lot math involved — angles, measurements etc.," he added.

LaFave has worked in the industry since 1990 after testing the waters with other trades such as being a machinist, a carpenter and working in other industries.

He said that he understands the struggle of finding a second career and added that the apprenticeship is like a brotherhood, inclusive for a diverse range of people.

Women are also finding themselves beginning to be accepted as viable contributors to the construction industry.

Charmaine Peters, a representative with the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWC), said that more and more women are entering the field because the barriers that used to stifle their involvement are diminishing by the day.

"We are finding that construction companies appreciate having women because they are detail-orientated, dedicated and because they have better inter-personal skills," she said.

"I think there are less barriers — emotional, psychological — women are finally understanding that you don't need to be a big, burly man to lift something or to be a pipefitter or electrician.

"These are detail-oriented jobs that merely take some intelligence and hard-work ethic. There are tools to assist you and women are also finding out how well these jobs pay," she added.

The trucking industry is another trade that has faced some staffing shortages over the last few years.

Caroline Blais, recruiting manager from **Kriska Transportation**, said the company is partnered with Humber College to meet their job shortage demands.

“We partner with them and go to the school every month to hire people who come out of their trucking program.

“People are retiring and leave the workforce faster than we find people to replace them so we have the same challenges that face many other industries. There’s a great demand and that demand is projected to increase over time.

“We’ve had some requests from schools to come in and talk to students. Even though we can’t hire them at that age, it’s about setting the scene and creating some awareness,” she added.