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VOLUME 17, ISSUE 2

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

MAKING OUR WAY TO "NORMAL"



BRYAN HOCKING
Chief Executive Officer

Thank you for opening the cover of our latest issue of ORBA's *ROADBuilder* magazine. We value this opportunity to update members on the industry's latest developments, successes and challenges, and hope this edition offers fresh insights and ideas for these unusual times.

It's been a challenging year for ORBA, as I'm sure it's been for every member. Yet despite working from our home offices and communicating through screens, I'm proud to say ORBA staff have remained successful in tackling many important issues and initiatives. Through countless virtual meetings and outreach efforts, we have ensured our industry's voice is being heard on key issues, including equipment rates, project pipelines, and pandemic contract language, among many others.

The team here is also working hard to regain a sense of normalcy. Our virtual events over the past year and

a half have certainly been successful, but we're all eager to get to meet in person. With this in mind, we are currently in the process of planning the 2022 ORBA Annual Convention and General Meeting, and I am pleased to say that it will return in 2022 as an in-person event on January 31st and February 1st at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. The event will, of course, be planned to ensure the safety of all of our registrants.

ORBA's Convention isn't the only event that we are planning to bring back as an in-person event in 2022. The annual Road Building Academy will be returning to the state-of-the-art BMO Institute of Learning as in-class learning from February 28th through to March 4th. Unfortunately, until COVID is behind us, we will continue with virtual events for the balance of 2021.

Things are beginning to show signs of positive change around our head

office with our full complement of staff returning to the office on September 7th, albeit with heightened health and safety protocols and resources. Like our members, we will constantly be monitoring the situation and adjusting our protocols as conditions change.

As a close to my column, I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that nominations are now open for the OAPC and ORBA awards, both of which will be presented at the 2022 ORBA Annual Convention. This is a great opportunity to shine a light on the industry's leaders and trailblazers over this past year and to add some good news to our headlines. There is certainly no shortage of worthy award nominees, and I encourage all readers to submit their recommendations through our website or head office.

It may be tempting fate to say we're turning a corner, but I'm very encouraged at this point. Only time will tell when it comes to COVID, but rest assured that we at ORBA are doing everything we can to help put ORBA, its members, and the road building industry back on a more favourable path going forward and on into a brand new 2022!

Thank you everyone and please stay safe out there. See you all soon.

Bryan Hocking
Chief Executive Officer



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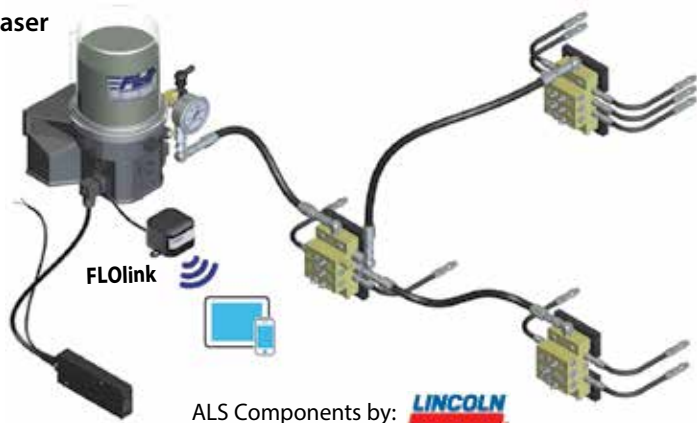
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By **ANDREW HURD**
Director, Policy and
Stakeholder Relations

AROUND QUEEN'S PARK

ORBA's advocacy efforts over the summer continue to generate momentum. While we have not seen as much progress on certain initiatives as we would like, such as the OPSS 127 rates and pandemic contract language, I feel that we are well positioned to push forward into what promises to be a busy fall. At the time of writing, there hasn't been a lot of infrastructure discussion on the federal election campaign trail. This is something that we are hoping to help change next year when the June 2022 provincial election campaign gets going in earnest. The items below are just some of the initiatives we've been working on.

PIPELINE

ORBA staff have compiled a five-year tender tracking document through the use of historical data on RAQS. All MTO capital and regional contracts awarded from 2016 to present are included. In addition to tender award, we're also tracking the tender advertisement date and maximum workload rating for 2021 to produce a more complete picture of what's out on the street in each region. This data will be updated regularly and should prove beneficial to our advocacy efforts. At present, the

data confirms a discrepancy between tender projections versus actuals in the Central Region. We continue to engage in sustained discussion with MTO regarding it.

The biannual update of MTO's Online Highway Tool was released in July which included a number of enhancements that we had advocated for in the interest of increased transparency.

LABOUR

Labour shortages across the industry continue to be a hot topic. According to Buildforce Canada, 100,000 construction workers are expected to exit the wider industry over the next decade. In June, the provincial government passed Bill 288: *Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021*, which replaced the old Ontario College of Trades with a new body, Skilled Trades Ontario. We were pleased to see that the apprenticeship ratio remains 1:1, the new body will have a more streamlined and easier to navigate intake process, and the government will devote renewed emphasis to the promotion of the skilled trades.

The Act largely follows the recommendations of the government's Skilled Trades Panel, which ORBA met with in July to discuss specific challenges within our industry. We emphasized to the panel that our industry prizes flexibility, and accordingly asked that any potential new trade classifications not become overly prescriptive and involve consultations with industry prior to implementation. We also strongly advocated for more government partnership in the promotion of the "non-apprenticeship" skilled trades. The panel is currently working on their second phase report with the comments of ORBA and other stakeholders in mind.

127 RATES

The ORBA Executive and OPSS 127 Rates Subcommittee remain deeply involved in reviewing the second group of equipment rental rates with MTO. These thorough discussions are continuing and we remain hopeful that this next group of rates will be published soon.



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ROAD SAFETY UPDATES

The government's latest road safety bill, the *Moving Ontarians More Safely Act, 2021 (MOMS Act)*, received Royal Assent in June. The Act included more severe penalties for stunt driving and lowered the threshold for stunt driving to 40km/h over the limit where the posted limit is 80 km/h. Automated Flagging Assistance Devices are now recognized as Traffic Control Signals under the *Highway Traffic Act (HTA)*, and an exemption was added for permit construction vehicles to reverse on highways. Relying on the expertise of our Occupational Health and Safety Committee, ORBA provided a robust submission and appeared before a standing committee of the legislature in support of these welcome changes. We continue to work with MTO on the possibility of inserting a provision regulating the safe passing of operating snow plows into the HTA.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks posted two draft guidelines for comment in July. In response, ORBA provided two detailed submissions highlighting areas of concern. Sections of the draft Land Use Compatibility Guidelines (LUCG) are inconsistent with other established regulations, and the draft Odour Guidelines may not be compatible with current technical issues faced in materials production. We also highlighted inconsistencies with the Asphalt Mix Industry Standard (AMIS) and the new draft guidelines. As these draft documents largely came out of the blue, we are currently advocating for direct and thorough consultation with industry.

INTEGRATED TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

This summer, ORBA participated in stakeholder consultations on MTO's Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) Transportation Plan led by the Parliamentary Assistant. The latest in a series of regional multi-modal plans, the GGH Plan is intended to identify linear infrastructure priorities until 2051. One of the major challenges with plans like

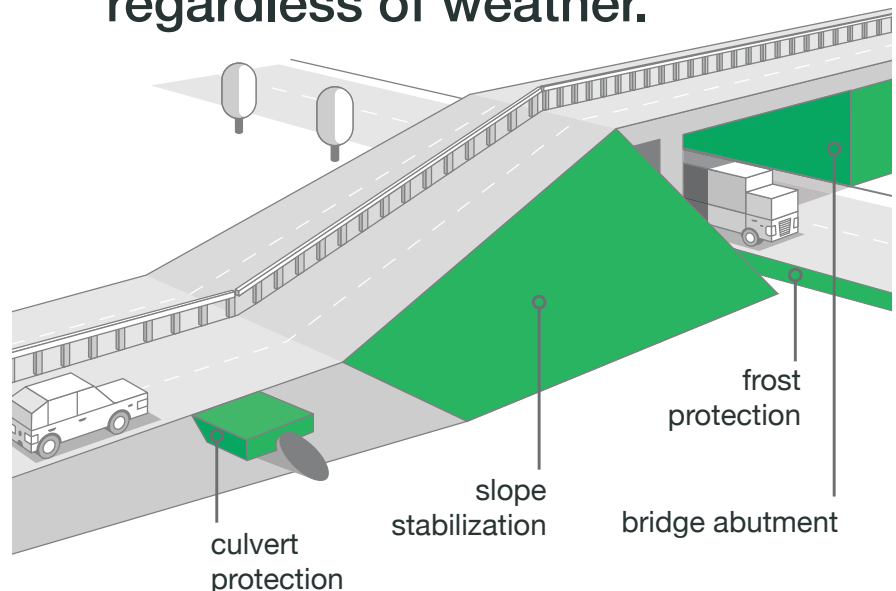
these is that they often have timeline ambitions far in excess of their actual shelf lives. While it's a tall order to take the politics out of transportation planning, we advocated for sustained public advertising to help transcend election cycles.

We also spoke to the continuous need to better harmonize the support of partner ministries. This is a common refrain, but it's simply

counterproductive to operationalize a plan like this if red tape constrains materials and labour supply. As a case in point, we referenced the draft environmental guidelines noted previously. The GGH Plan also aspires to increase piloting for automated vehicle technology, and we continued to emphasize that the pilots should take roadside work zones into consideration. ■



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ONTARIO'S ROAD BUILDING INDUSTRY NEEDS TO STAY THE COURSE WHEN IT COMES TO ATTRACTING MORE TALENT

By **MATTHEW BRADFORD**



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ALBERTA

It is a decades-old challenge with a pandemic twist. After years of struggling to attract and retain skilled workers to the road building industry, employers now face even more obstacles in their bid to bridge the labour gap in the post-pandemic period.

"I would imagine if you asked every owner of a road building company, at least in Ontario, they would say that finding talent is their number one role," says Geoff Stephens, president and CEO of Capital Paving, and chair of ORBA's Education Committee.

Road builders aren't alone in their plight. According to Buildforce Canada's latest nationwide report, *2020-2029 Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward*,

the construction industry at large will need to recruit more than 307,000 workers over the decade to keep pace with demand and offset the impact of nearly 250,000 retirees within the same timeframe.

The issue varies in severity from one jurisdiction to the next. According to the report, Ontario alone is slated to lose upwards of 21 per cent of its labour force to retirement. "We're facing a bit of a cliff right now," notes Andrew Hurd, ORBA's director of policy and stakeholder relations. "We have 100,000 construction workers retiring by the end of the decade, and the challenge for road builders is that our industry is often an afterthought for potential recruits."

Road builders have contended with labour shortages long before the pandemic. While jobsite restrictions and shutdowns reduced workforce requirements over the past year, industry watchers predict that a "return to normal" will renew demand.

"The disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic moderated the anticipated rapid rise in Ontario's labour market demand over the near term, but they are not expected to change the anticipated labour market challenges beyond that," says Bill Ferreira, executive director with BuildForce Canada. "Commercial building construction was most affected by COVID restrictions, but as the economy reopens, those projects will get back on schedule. This will add to an already-strong inventory of project requirements and could lead to a re-emergence of broad recruiting challenges between 2021 and 2023."

CASTING A WIDER NET

According to BuildForce Canada, women and Indigenous workers account for only five per cent of the nearly 1.1 million tradespeople employed in the construction industry. While the industry has made meaningful efforts to engage and support these underrepresented demographics, a recent BuildForce report – 2020–2029 *Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward* – makes an argument for stepping up efforts.

"Building a sustainable and diverse labour force will require the construction and maintenance industry to increase recruitment from groups traditionally underrepresented in the current construction labour force, including women, Indigenous people and new Canadians," states the report.

The need to support pathways for women and underrepresented Canadians is not lost on the industry. Organizations like the Canadian Association of Women in Construction (CAWIC) are doing their part to increase participation, while initiatives like Rosie the Riveter, supported by both ORBA and OCCA's (Ontario Construction Careers Alliance) member associations, are also mentoring and supporting women interested in building careers in construction.

Nevertheless, says Geoff Stephens, chair of ORBA's Education Committee, "We're getting better at bringing women into the industry, but we're not where we need to be. If companies aren't looking at female employees, then they are missing out on half of the population."

There is also a need to create stronger pathways for foreign workers. To that end, ORBA and its partners hope to see more immigration pathways that help connect people who want to work with those employers who need their help. "We need to push the government to bring in people that we can train and who have a desire and want to do some of this work," says Stephens. "That can either be people who already have the skillsets we need and want to move here for a better life, or people who are willing to work and have a desire to train."



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Project backlogs and an upsurge in activity are set to make recruiting labour an even bigger challenge than it was just two years ago. While there are many workers itching to get back into the field, the pandemic made it tough for new entrants to get their foot in the door. “The crisis made it tougher to get into construction, especially those who were doing their apprenticeships and found it difficult to get consistent work due to the lockdowns, shutdowns and a general unpredictability,” says Nicole Stoikos, career coordinator with the Ontario Construction Careers Alliance (OCCA).

The pandemic hasn’t so much placed new barriers between road building employers and prospective talent as it has made existing obstacles more pronounced. “If anything, the pandemic has highlighted the issues we’ve always been facing, and these are getting worse as our industry faces challenges on several fronts,” says Stephens.

ADDRESSING TRENDS

Getting the job done in road building often means working late hours and erratic shifts. That’s not the fault of road builders per se, but a result of restrictive schedules and bylaws put in place by project owners (e.g., municipalities) to mitigate the impact of road projects on the public.

“We’re in a low bid environment where employers are taking jobs to keep their people busy, but those jobs come with restrictions which require staff to work weekends, flip between day and night shifts, and work atypical hours,” says Ivan Levac, general manager for Tomlinson Infrastructure. “It’s difficult to have any kind of work-life balance with those hours, and that makes our industry less attractive to the people we’re trying to recruit.”

While there will always be people willing to work unusual and unpredictable work schedules, given the rise of dual-income families, it is getting harder to find people who can actually make those hours work. “With the cost of housing and everything becoming more expensive, we’re seeing dual income families become the norm. And when

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"We need people like high school guidance teachers helping us promote the fact that working in the trades can be a great lifestyle. We've got lots of interesting roles, innovations and technologies for people to try, and there's good money to be made"

— Geoff Stephens, ORBA Education Committee

you consider a lot of our people have families, you can understand why it's harder to have one parent out of the home at odd hours or for long hours," says Levac.

Truth be told, there is good money and plenty of opportunity for those who enter the industry. The key is working with owners to make conditions more favourable, and for employers to take the work-life goals of their workers to heart. "A lot more people are opting out of this working lifestyle, so if we can't find a way to bring in more of the work-life balance, we won't have people coming into it," says Stephens.

Stereotypes about working in the trades have also long plagued construction industry recruiters. The industry has done well to counter these misconceptions over the years through outreach campaigns and promotions, but getting up-and-coming talent (and their parents) to consider work in the field remains an uphill climb.

"Every parent wants their kid to go to university and get a master's degree, and we still have work to do when it comes to changing that conversation," says Stephens. "We need people like high school guidance teachers helping us promote the fact that working in the trades can be a great lifestyle. We've got lots of interesting roles, innovations and technologies for people to try, and there's good money to be made."

TACKLING THE PROBLEM

The road building community remains committed to bridging the labour gap. For its part, ORBA

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continues to work with public and private partners to address both the real and perceived barriers to entry. A top focus is streamlining access to careers in the field, and with this in mind ORBA has been liaising with the recently established Skilled Trades Ontario to ensure faster and easier access to construction jobs.

“The work that Skilled Trades Ontario is doing to streamline those pathways is good, but we have also said that what we really prize is flexibility,” says Hurd. “Let’s not get too prescriptive in classifying the trades because we need people now. What we’re asking is for the government [to] put more of an emphasis on the non-apprenticeship skilled trades. Fortunately, the Skilled Trades Panel has indicated that they agree more flexibility is needed.”

Another strategy involves raising the profile of the industry with the next generation. ORBA continues to find ways of engaging high school graduates through awareness campaigns and scholarships and works actively with allies to get in front of potential recruits.

The OCCA has been a key ally in this regard. The organization crisscrosses the province, getting in front of high school students to dispel old stereotypes and to drum up interest in the trades.

“Everybody knows about the advantages of becoming an electrician or plumber, but there’s a general lack of knowledge when it comes to the other trades that are out there in construction and how cool and lucrative they can be,” says Stoikos. “That’s why our goal is to get out there and show graduating students that there are multiple pathways they may not have even considered, whether that’s in road building or in other parts of the construction industry.”

Social media has been especially useful in that regard, adds Stoikos, particularly during the pandemic when OCCA was unable to promote the trades in person. “For the past while, we’ve focused a lot on online presentations and really getting out there on social media with facts about the industry and promotional

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A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

The cause and scope of Canada's labour shortage varies from one sector to the next. Speaking on behalf of the heavy construction sector, for instance, Kathy Sutherland, executive director of the National Capital Heavy Construction Association (NCHCA), says the loss of nearly 20 per cent of the current construction workforce to retirement poses a significant hurdle.

Recent events, she adds, have only made things worse. "The COVID-19 pandemic has further impacted the heavy construction industry from a labour perspective," notes Sutherland. "Reduced productivity due to absenteeism, crew exposure and subsequent isolation has exacerbated the problem as our industry was already operating in a labour deficit scenario."



videos," explains Stoikos. "Our goal is to get students interested and put these opportunities in the back of their minds, so they'll be more open to the trades when it comes time to find a career."

Individual companies have also taken it upon themselves to connect with local schools. Capital Paving, for example, offers financial support for employees seeking their AZ training. It also runs an operators course on its yard in association with Conestoga College, which allows students to train on equipment in a real environment. "That close relationship is a huge advantage because it gives us a direct line to students who are going to be looking for work," says Stephens. "That works a lot better than waiting for everyone to finish school and hiring the cold turkey [way]."

Elsewhere, the Tomlinson Group has found success in initiatives like its foreman training program, which offers new recruits the support and opportunities they need to build their career. Additionally, the company offers referral bonuses, trade-related scholarships and other supports to entice talent.

VITAL CONVERSATIONS

These and other outreach efforts have proven vital in changing the conversation around the trades. According to Andrew Pariser, vice president of the Residential Construction Council of Ontario, the more the construction industry can do to show the real side of the business, the better. "Research shows that providing youth with accurate career information directly leads to

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"Once someone gets their feet wet in a road building organization, there are multiple opportunities for them to explore and a lot of supports along the way. I don't think that's well recognized, so it's a question of convincing people to give our industry a shot"

— Andrew Hurd, ORBA



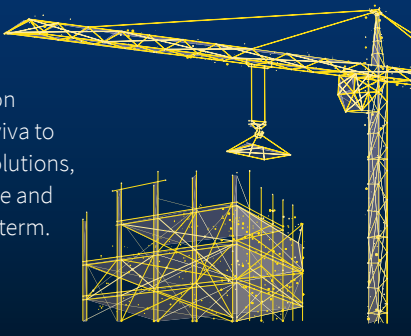
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improved employment, retention and job satisfaction," he says. "Research also shows that skilled trades workers are more satisfied with their careers than the average Canadian, and therefore promoting the skilled trades is win-win for all involved."

Mentorship programs have proven equally effective, whether within a classroom or on the jobsite itself. "Once someone gets their feet wet in a road building organization, there are multiple opportunities for them to explore and a lot of supports along the way," says Hurd. "I don't think that's well recognized, so it's a question of convincing people to give our industry a shot."

While the road building community is making strides to replenish its ranks, and that momentum is likely to build, now is not the time to rest on our laurels. Factors beyond the industry's control are increasing demand for talent even further, and it will take ongoing advocacy, education and awareness efforts from ORBA, its members and allies to bridge the gap. ■

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Thank you to all the #ONGreatRoads photo contest participants who showed us their favourite Ontario roads!

And congratulations to our five draw winners! Their images provide a wonderful snapshot of the roads in this province. We share their award-winning photos with you on these pages.



WEEK ONE: LEAH HOVEY

Road photographed in Collingwood, Ontario



WEEK TWO: LYNNE MEILLEUR

Road photographed in Niagara Falls, Ontario



WEEK THREE: ANN DEMILL

Road photographed in Greater Napanee, Ontario



WEEK FOUR: ED MARTH

Road photographed in Middlesex County, Ontario



WEEK FIVE: JAMIE WEST

Road photographed in Wainfleet, Ontario

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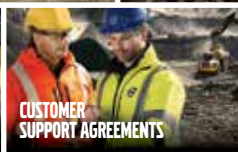
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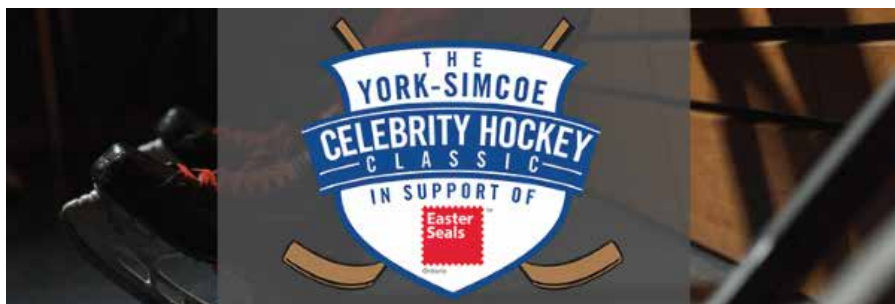
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