

A woman with curly hair, wearing a yellow hard hat and a blue and white striped shirt with a safety vest, is pointing her right index finger towards a piece of industrial machinery in a construction or manufacturing setting. The background is slightly blurred, showing various equipment and materials.

SPECIAL FEATURE

June 25, 2021

# WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

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**Daily Commercial News**

by ConstructConnect®



# ‘I was meant to be in the trades, to be hands-on,’ says Wells

GRANT CAMERON  
CORRESPONDENT

As a teen, Alexandra Wells felt drawn to the trades. In high school, shop classes were her favourite. She enjoyed working with her hands and learning to use the tools. Her passions were building and creating. “I was meant to be in the trades,” she says. “I was meant to be hands-on.”

“I really like being able to bring the ideas of the homeowners to life through my fingers,”

Alexandra Wells  
Tile Setter

While in high school, she enrolled in the Toronto District School Board’s STEP to Construction co-op program which lets students in grades 11 and 12 spend a semester on a jobsite trying their hand at the different trades Wells also helped her dad build his house and found that she really liked tile setting. “I like the artistic aspect of it,” she explains matter-of-factly. “I really like being able to bring the ideas of the home-

owners to life through my fingers. It’s just one of those things that I really enjoy. I like seeing the look on their faces when I accomplish their dreams and put it on their floor for them to see.” Wells was the first woman in the STEP program. “I opened quite a few doors. Now, there’s been quite a few women that have gone through that program.” After high school, she enrolled in Tridel’s BOLT program. She went to the Marble, Tile and Terrazzo trade school in Concord and later joined LiUNA Local 183 and worked in Toronto. She was the union’s first female tile setter. Now 27, she has been in the trade for nearly decade. She’s an inspiration to other women seeking to get into the trades and was one of 11 speakers at a recent Create the Future virtual conference that connected working professionals with Toronto high school students who are thinking about careers choices. At the trade school, Wells did a basic two-month tile setting course and then an advanced course of the same length. She has two certificates. On the job, she started at the bottom, grafting and learning the trade from the ground up. She progressed quickly. Before long, she was doing tile setting. She’s also been a labourer, grouter and tile foreman. Wells worked mostly on high-rise condos in Toronto. She became the company’s first female tile setter and its

first forewoman. While the work is creative, it is always different and there are always challenges. No two jobs are the same. “It very much depends on what the homeowner wants,” she says. When starting a project, Wells first squares off a room so the lines are running straight. Then she mixes the cement for the floor. The mix — whether it’s thicker or thinner — very much depends on the floor. “You can mix it harder if you have to build it up, and a little bit on the liquid side if you have to spread it out a little bit thinner. It’s pretty versatile.” The tiles are back-buttered, which entails spreading cement very thinly on the back side of the tile to clean away any dust or resin and anything that could prevent the tile from sticking to the cement on the floor. When the tiles are laid, the excess cement is cleaned off and they are wiped down. Twenty-four hours later, the tile setter can return and do the grouting. Grout is applied and pushed into the joints and the excess is cleaned off with a wash. “I take my time and rinse off my sponge often,” says Wells. “I’m not taking the grout out of the joints or anything like that, I’m just going over, not putting any pressure on, just to clean up the resin on the tiles.” Wells recently moved to Thorold, Ont., in the Niagara area where she is working for a company that does mostly low-rise custom homes in subdivisions. Her plan is to continue with her present company and become the firm’s first female tile manager.

## Economic Snapshot

# Quebec is firing on all cylinders approaching 2022



John Clinkard

It appears there’s now an answer to the question posed in Snapshot #12, dated June 24, 2020, “Is a V-Shaped Recovery in Quebec’s Future?” The response is a definite ‘Yes’. Further, the likelihood of the current recovery continuing is heightened by the fact that although COVID-19 and particularly the new Delta variant remain significant threats, the province has managed to cover a country-leading 73.8% of its population aged 12 and over with at least one vaccination ‘shot’.

### Post-pandemic rebound in U.S. growth to drive Quebec’s exports

Year to date, Quebec’s total exports are up by +12.2% mainly thanks to strong growth in the U.S. A booming U.S. housing market and strong auto sales have combined to cause shipments of forest products and aluminum, combining for 30% of Quebec’s U.S. sales, to more than double year-to-date. Through the remainder of this year and well into 2022, sustained U.S. growth should provide Quebec with a strong tailwind. A recent proposal by the U.S. Commerce Department to double the tariff on Canadian lumber imports does pose a threat to Quebec’s exports. However, implementing this proposal will be difficult given its potential impact on already overheated U.S. house prices.

### Hiring boost in accommodation and food services and retail

Measures to limit the second and third waves of the coronavirus in Quebec have been much less restrictive than those implemented following the first wave. As a result, total employment in the province is just -3% below its pre-COVID-19 level. Sectors with significant hiring gains over the past 12 months include accommodation and food services, education services and construction which are collectively up by +25% y/y. Going forward, the sharp rise in full-time hiring plans reported by CFIB in their most recent (May) *Business Barometer* suggests employment will exhibit sustained growth throughout the remainder of this year and into early next year.

### Outlook for consumer spending brighter

Underpinned by the stronger pattern of hiring, the major contributor to the V-shaped recovery has been consumer spending, as reflected by retail sales. In the wake of the second wave of COVID-19, Quebec’s most recent retail sales have surged by +12%, well ahead of the roughly +2% gain they posted during the first quarter of 2020. This very strong rebound in spending has been due to a +25% increase in sales of motor vehicles and a +57% jump in sales of building materials.

There is a risk that the third wave of COVID-19 cooled consumer spending in April and possibly in May. However, the impact of a vaccine-induced surge in May’s consumer confidence, together with the very positive hiring climate, suggest spending will rebound in the final months of the second quarter and remain strong throughout the second half of 2020.

### Strong gains in residential building approvals

Despite the above-noted gains in hiring, near-record-low interest rates and strong consumer con-

fidence, the recent pattern of existing home sales suggests that housing demand in Quebec has cooled somewhat. After exhibiting an unsustainably large increase since mid-2020, they appear to have hit a cyclical peak of 11,580 units in January. Since then, there’s been a slight slowing through May. In response to the surge in existing home sales, housing starts year to date have risen by +64%. Going forward, the strong fundamentals noted above, together with the impact of a rebound in net migration, should underpin both new and existing home sales and cause residential construction to make a strong contribution to growth through the remainder of this year and well into 2022.

### A post-pandemic rebound in both private and public capital spending

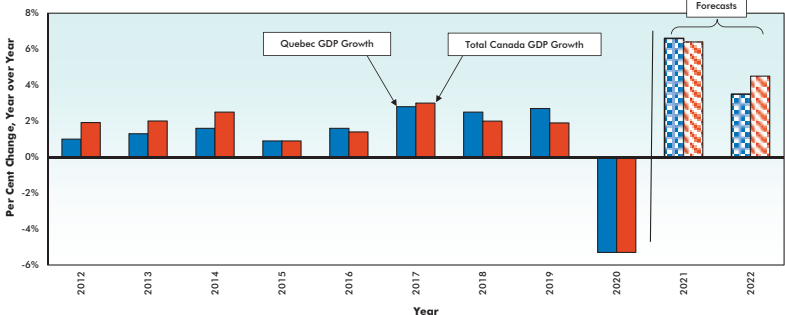
After retreating by an estimated -5% in 2020 due to COVID-19, there is little doubt that capital spending on major projects will rebound in 2021 and likely remain strong in 2022. The *Survey of Non-residential Capital and Repair Expenditures* reported that total (public sector plus private sector) capital spending will increase by +11% this year. Spending in 2022 will receive a significant boost from the recent spate of public sector spending projects announced in the recent federal and provincial budgets. Major projects which will contribute to this increase in spending include the extension of the Montreal Subway Blue Line, major repairs to the Ville-Marie and Viger Tunnels in Montreal and the Niobec Niobium Mine in St-Honoré.

### Bottom line

Although Quebec has been hit harder by COVID-19 in terms of deaths per 100K population than the rest of the country, it has exhibited a very robust recovery indicated by its strong pattern of employment growth over the past 12 months and the fact it has the country’s lowest unemployment rate. Given this robust turnaround in hiring and the positive outlook for both domestic and external demand, the province should outpace the rest of Canada in 2021 and exhibit sustained, albeit more moderate, growth in 2022.

John Clinkard has over 35 years’ experience as an economist in international, national and regional research and analysis with leading financial institutions and media outlets in Canada.

## Real\* Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth – Quebec vs Canada



\* “Real” is after adjustment for inflation.  
Data Sources: Actuals — Statistics Canada; Forecasts — CanaData.  
Chart: ConstructConnect — CanaData.

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# Educating others about the built environment drives Mancini

DAN O'REILLY  
CORRESPONDENT

The Ontario Association of Architects' (OAA) first vice-president of education probably couldn't have chosen a more challenging time to propose the creation of the position—and then to accept it when it was offered to her.

Founding principal of Hamilton-based Assembled Light Inc., a small architecture and design studio that focuses on sustainable single-family homes and multi-residential design, Agata Mancini took on the role in January of last year. Two months later the COVID-19 induced province-wide lockdown went into effect and, as a result, the OAA had to swiftly transfer its educational courses, seminars, conferences, and other programs to a virtual format.

"The position was definitely a heavy workload, but what actually made it exponentially more complicated was that, due to the pandemic, my children, who were only five and seven at the time were home from school for the entire year."

As a sole practitioner, Mancini had to immediately stop taking on any more commissions and teamed up on projects with friends who are licensed technologists operating a small practice in Thunder Bay.

"Working together with them is really what allowed me to be able to manage everything. Had the pandemic not happened, it would have still been busy. But it would have been much more manageable."

Still, she has no regrets and is more than happy she was instrumental in the creation of the position. After serving on the OAA council for about six months, Mancini says began noticing that "there seemed to be a gap" in the issues and initiatives the council was undertaking.

"I started discussing the idea of a vice-president of education and the other council members, and they shared my opinion that there was a missing piece in the current structure."

At its election in early 2020, the council voted to add that position to its executive, "and, luckily for me, they also voted for me to take it on."

Asked what exactly the vice-president of education does, she explains it's a diverse, multi-tasking job. One of the main responsibilities is chairing the OAA's comprehensive education committee and working with its manager of education and development, Ellen Savitsky, on various educational

initiatives on behalf of both its own members and the public.

For the past year the committee has been creating a document that will provide architectural lessons for the benefit of elementary and high school students. Once completed later this year, it will be shared with the Ministry of Education and Ontario's boards of education.

"Considering the critical role the built environment plays when it comes to our mental and physical well-being, and the impact it has on our lives, it baffles me architecture is not studied in school as part of the main curriculum," says Mancini, in underscoring the document's importance.

"It (the document) is not exhaustive, but we are hoping that it will be the start of a conversation about the importance of teaching about design and the built environment, not only to those who decide to pursue it as a career choice, but to everyone."

Touching on the education committee's other initiatives, she points to the introduction of a mandatory Equity, Diversity and Inclusion course.

"The history of the profession of architecture isn't exactly one of diversity and there is still a long way to go. But there have been significant changes even within the last 20 years and we are continuously making progress."

Some of the vice-president of education's other duties include providing input and guidance on the OAA's admission, fundamentals of running an architecture practice, and continuing education courses. With the province in lockdown for most of the last year, the association launched a bi-weekly seminar series to ensure members could acquire their required continuing courses, she points out.

In January of this year, Mancini was elected as senior vice president and treasurer, but is still actively involved with the comprehensive education committee.

"I haven't stopped learning since I joined the council. It's been such an experience to get to see the profession from a completely different perspective, and to really see everything that staff and councillor are working on."

Her successor as vice-president of education is Natasha Krickhan, principal at HaNK Architecture & Interiors Inc.

"I ran for the position because I wanted to educate clients (homeowners, developers, contractors, or government) and the general public that they have other options."

Selecting an architect for any project ensures that the

client will be hiring a trained professional with a high level of design knowledge, says Krichan, whose objectives include raising awareness and knowledge among the general public on the advantages of purchasing energy-efficient houses, just like they do with appliances.

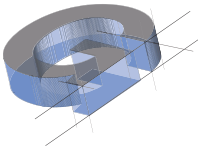


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Agata Mancini was the Ontario Association of Architects' first vice-president of education.



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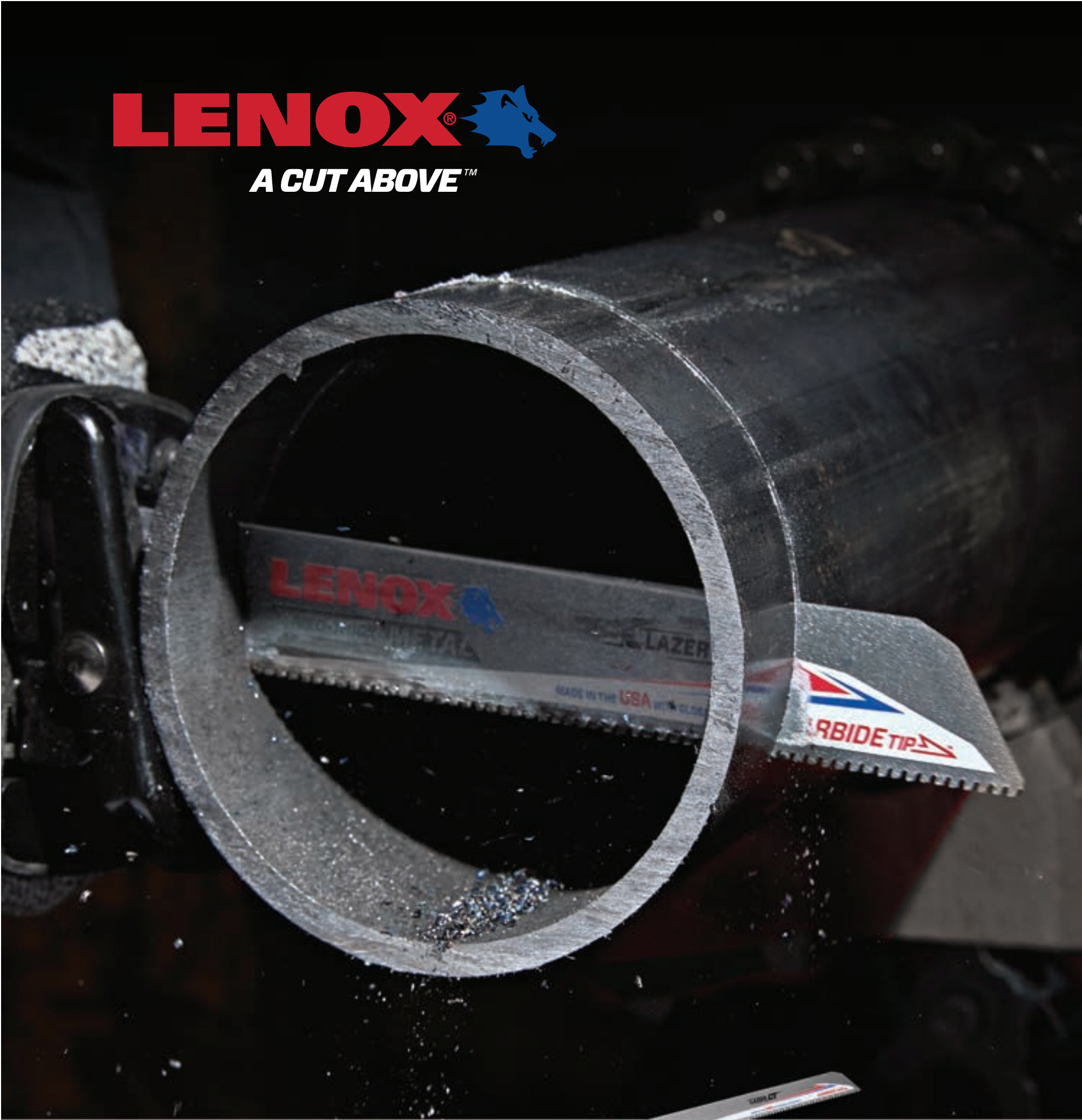
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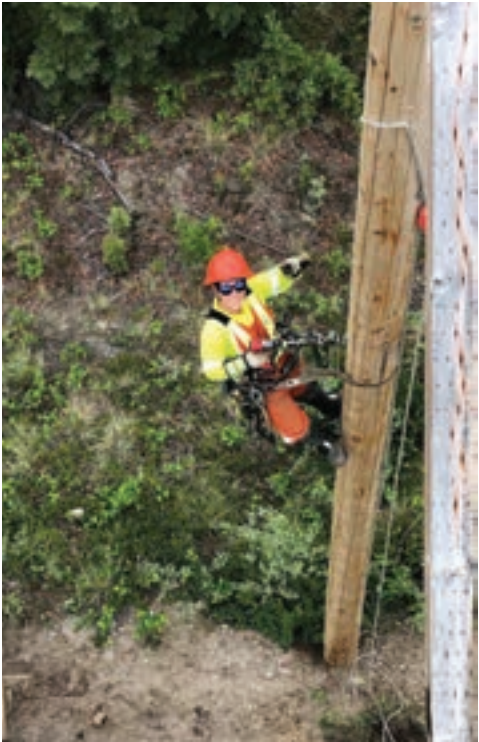
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# Hawco climbs powerline tech ladder to reach new heights

DAN O'REILLY  
CORRESPONDENT

Former Newfoundland and Labrador resident Rae Lynn Hawco has been breaking new ground as a Red Seal certified powerline technician, a trade with a woefully low representation by women. She graduated from a nine-month powerline program in 2012 and since then “has been creating shockwaves” throughout her career.



RAE LYNN HAWCO

Hawco changing the crossarms on a powerline in Carmack Yukon in 2018. Periodically damaged from weather, age, and other conditions, crossarms hold the electrical wires on top of electric transmission and distribution poles.

In 2018 she became the first linewoman to participate in the Enmax Lineman Rodeo and Safety Exposition, a competition which attracts teams from across Canada and the United States, and then was named one of Canada’s Most Powerful Top 100 Women in 2020 in its first ever skills trades category. There were four other recipients in that division.

“Someone nominated me. I was chosen for this award because I worked hard to get where I am today and to be a successful and have accomplished a lot with being in a male dominated trade.”

By her self-coined “shockwave” depiction, Hawco is referring to her efforts to bring other women into the trade by mentoring, creating podcasts, writing articles, and volunteer work with the non-profit Women of Powerline Technicians.

There have been “some discouraging moments,” says Hawco of her experiences in the industry and that is why she is so committed to helping women enter it.

“Women are underrepresented in the skilled trades. I try to inspire others by being a positive role model in promoting women in the powerline career.”

Now conducting quality assurance/quality control inspection on the assembly and erection of steel transmission towers on the Watay Power project in North-western Ontario, her own gateway into the field was partly by chance.

Inspired by her grandfather, a heavy equipment mechanic, she applied for admission to several construction-related programs at the College of the North Atlantic in her native province and was then accepted into its powerline technician program when another student dropped out, creating a vacancy. “The course had already started.”

Following graduation she landed a short-term job building a power substation about three hours from home. Then she headed to Fort McMurray Alberta where she worked for two different construction firms erecting powerlines for a total of seven years.

Her next position was a transportation and distribution maintenance worker in the Yukon for about a year. In 2019, however, her career headed into a different direction when she began working at British Columbia’s Hydro’s Site C Clean Energy Project, which consists of building a third dam in a massive hydroelectric generating project in that province’s Peace River district.

“I started out on a framing crew from H frame transmission structures and after three months I was offered a quality assurance position. I’ve been in the trade for nine years and wanted to try something new and take on a position with responsibility.”

Basically, the position entailed doing final inspections after the framing crew completed their work and performing small repairs the crew might have missed. “That saved them (B.C. Hydro), the expense of calling back the crew.”

In her new position with Valard Construction, she will be inspecting assembled towers and, once erected, will have to climb up to up them to complete the final inspection. The 21-day on, seven-day off job requires her to commute — via airplane — from her new home in Manitoba.

A two-part question posed to Hawco was how she has coped with the several relocations since her graduation and the physical demands of a job which requires heaving lifting and working at heights. “I love the outdoors. I love my job and I’m good at what I do.”



RAE LYNN HAWCO

In 2018 Rae Lynn Hawco became the first linewoman to participate in the Enmax Lineman Rodeo and Safety Exposition, a competition which attracts teams from across Canada and the United States.



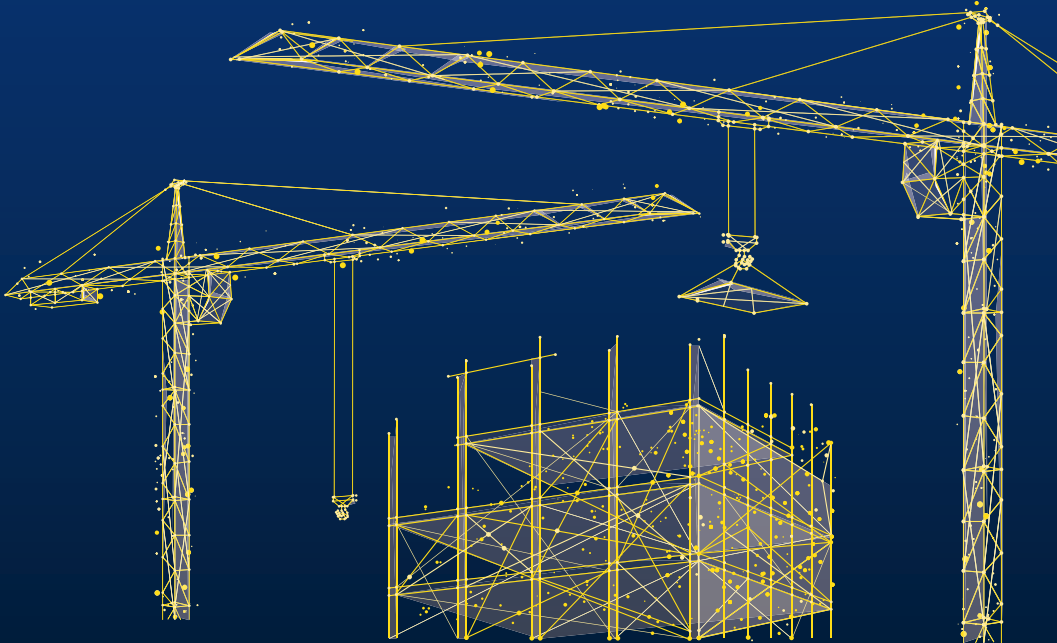
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# Women can make a difference in construction: PCA

DANNA O'BRIEN  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

Canada's construction industry wants and needs women.

Right now, as many as 1.4 million Canadians make a living in construction. But that's not nearly enough. The industry requires about 300,000 new workers this decade to counter baby boom retirements. While skilled tradespeople are in high demand, so are many other professionals, from project managers to superintendents and estimators. That leaves the field wide open, with more opportunities than ever for women to succeed and lead in construction.

If you think construction is confined to operating heavy equipment, driving nails or erecting scaffolding, you'd be wrong. While construction is hard work, it doesn't have to be physically demanding. In fact, an increasing number of women at construction companies with the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) are rising to the top of their professions, and they're doing it, without ever lifting a hammer.

"Construction isn't flashy or glamorous, but it is exciting." That's how Claire Smith, a Bird Construction project manager, describes her chosen field. "It's such a backbone of our economy, and I'm proud to be a part of it."

Smith was hired by Bird Construction, after graduating from the University of Alberta with a degree in civil engineering. A problem solver, who is super organized and loves math, she began as a coordinator, working her way into management within five years.

Smith oversees multi-discipline industrial projects, figuring out project costs, deciding which subcontractors to hire and ensuring there's enough labour so that all parts of the project run smoothly.

Smith works with large teams of people,

including clients, contractors and superintendents, most of whom are men. In 2014, during construction of the Suncor Fort Hills Non-Process Buildings, it struck her that women are making their mark in this industry.

"There were four engineers on a conference call and all four were women," Smith recalled. "We were all laughing because that never happens."

Judy Spear, North America Construction's head of human resources, agrees that such a strong female presence is still rare in construction. "While there has definitely been progress in terms of hiring more women, there are pockets where there's a lot more to do."

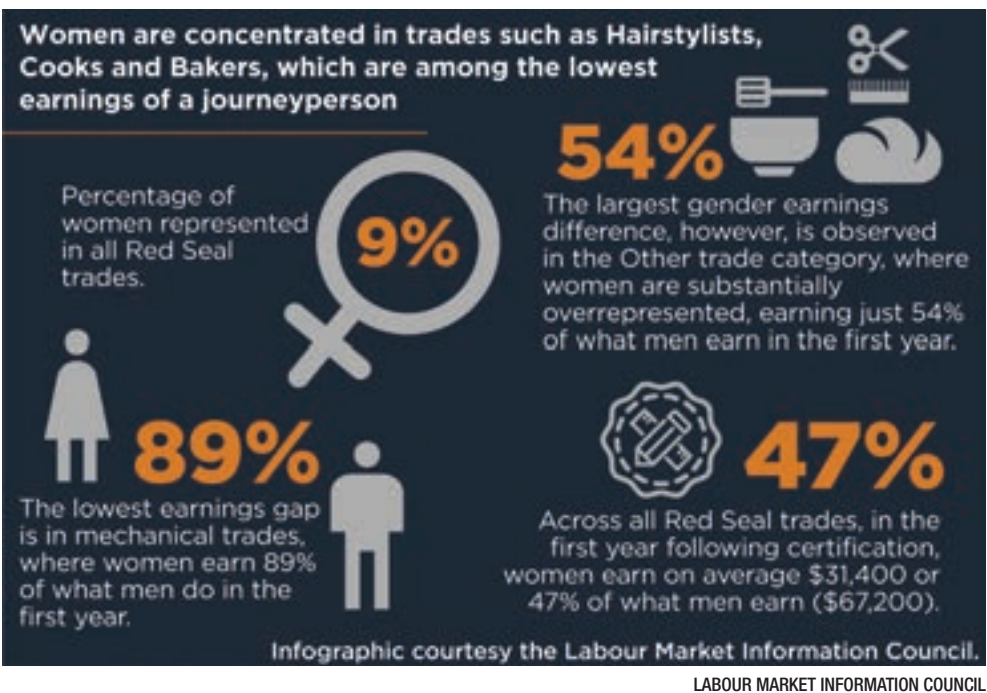
Spear sees construction is an industry where women who apply themselves can advance quickly and make a real difference. The added challenge now she says is countering the mindset of a new workforce, of both women and men. "After working from home for months during COVID-19, many may be less inclined to travel for their careers."

Lorrie Horne doesn't mind the travel. The mother of two, head coach of Canada's National Ringette team and workforce manager at Jasper Constructors, travels for work between Alberta, B.C. and Ontario. Horne, whose diverse responsibilities range from yearly planning and budgeting, to negotiating collective agreements, wouldn't hesitate to recommend construction.

"Construction is a great career for women. You learn something every day. People are really 'judgy' about it from the outside. But once you get in, you realize how cool it is. I've never picked up a hammer, but I'm part of building something meaningful."

However, a career in construction wasn't something Horne planned.

In 2006, she was coaching the national team, teaching anatomy and exercise



physiology with plans to do a PhD, when her academic career took a major turn. Horne was introduced to the "head guy" at Jasper Constructors one day at the rink. They had coffee, and she was soon hired as a field advisor, in charge of day to day hiring and recruiting. He turned out to be her mentor, or "work dad" as she describes him. "That guy who tells you when you've done a good job, and makes you think and figure it out."

Leah Powell's mentor was her dad. She grew up in a small town outside Williams Lake, B.C, where her dad, an auto mechanic, taught her how to fix up her first "beater of a car." Powell, liked math, working with her hands, and the thought of graduating without school debt.

She completed an apprenticeship and worked as a journeyman electrician for about a year before landing a position in estimating. It's an environment she thrives

in: "fast paced and stressful, where you work with good people; there's always a deadline and never a dull moment." Powell is now an Assistant Estimating Manager at PTW Energy Services Ltd., where she reviews the scope of work along with equipment, labour and material costs for large scale projects. Powell says there's no downside to a career in construction.

As she sees it, women who are good with tools will always be able to fix a flat tire or things around the house. "A woman in construction will never be a damsel in distress."

The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada launched the "Opportunity Knocks Campaign" to encourage more women to consider a career in construction. To learn more, go to [opportunity-knocks.ca](https://opportunity-knocks.ca)

**Danna O'Brien is the principal at O'Brien Communications and wrote this op-ed on behalf of the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada.**

# All-women construction company makes for a winning idea

DON PROCTER  
CORRESPONDENT

When Sudbury, Ont. college student Kate Keaney conducted a social media survey to weigh interest in the idea of a construction start-up company solely operated and employed by women, the positive responses were overwhelming.

"Everybody loved the idea and how it could promote equality and a lot of them wanted to see it franchised," says Keaney, a 22-year-old second-year business administration student at Cambrian College.

The survey was part of her pitch for a business idea in a competition at Cambrian called the RBC Future Launch. Keaney took the \$3,000 top prize over 14 other entrants for her proposal, a company she named Rosie Construction and Renovations.

To win the competition, Keaney had to present a business platform that showed startup costs, annual revenue projections and break-even points. She built a case for why the business was needed and what her reasons were for choosing it.

While that venture might be years away from reality, Keaney plans to use her winnings for market research to develop a business plan.



KATE KEANEY

**Kate Keaney, a 22-year-old second-year business administration student at Cambrian College, recently won the college's RBC Future Launch competition, taking home the \$3,000 top prize over 14 other entrants for her proposal, a company she named Rosie Construction and Renovations. The concept is a start-up company solely operated and employed by women.**

With plenty of ideas on where to take the venture, she says it is important to her that it addresses a community need. In this case it helps give women a leg up to gainful employment while addressing the growing shortage of skilled trades.

Keaney's initiative looks at recruitment of women in different scenarios, single mothers, for example, who often face big obstacles to pursuing a career. She identified partnering arrange-

ments with daycare centres as a possible means of support to open doors for single mothers to work in the field.

"The trade is such a great industry to work in and is quite a nice paycheck that could really help mothers."

The business student is no stranger to construction. She has worked as a labourer and has built residential decks and framed buildings.

"Being on jobsites, it has been disheartening to see the lack of women. That is something I want to change."

After completing the three-year business administration program at Cambrian College, Keaney plans on taking a commerce degree at university before forming a company focusing possibly on renovations, property management and single family residential.

Kim Donaldson, who as faculty coach helped Keaney prepare her submission for the competition, says she saw few holes in the student's business proposal from the outset.

"She had thought through the concept quite well."

A full-time professor at Cambrian College's school of business, Donaldson helped the student prepare market research and solidify the business's purpose to meet a community need.

The 22-year-old's research put numbers to the growing skilled labour shortage while addressing how women could help fill that growing void, not only through her own business but others like it, possibly through franchise arrangements.

"It is a bona-fide idea and it definitely fills a gap in the marketplace right now," says Donaldson.

Keaney chose business admin-

istration to round out her education, after taking a program at Cambrian College in entertainment technical production, learning skillsets in a number of trades on film productions, including set construction.

"I wanted to learn it first...be a 'Jill-of-all trades'...before going into business so I would know both sides to the jobsite."

Keaney comes by her passion for construction and entrepreneurship naturally. Her parents are in business for themselves and both are adept at fixing things around the house.

At 10, Keaney got her first construction toolkit and as a teen in high school she was part of a winning team in a Sudbury-wide skills carpentry competition which led to a placement in a national trades contest in Toronto.

Not your typical teenaged girl, Keaney was inspired at 15 by the real-life person behind the Rosie the Riveter campaign to recruit women workers for the U.S. defense industry during the Second World War.

"I loved what she represented and found it so important, but because she is from the Second World War there are so many young generations that are missing out on her message."