

# construction

## in Vancouver

### COMMUNITY: ORGANIZERS REFLECT ON VRCA'S HELP AS HONOUR HOUSE CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

More support needed as Honour Ranch expands

BY BRIGITTE PETERSEN

As Honour House celebrates its 10th anniversary, the non-profit society that runs it will soon be asking Vancouver Regional Construction Association (VRCA) members to pitch in to support a complementary project – Honour Ranch.

Known as a free, temporary refuge, Honour House has so far provided more than 10,000 overnight stays for Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, emergency services personnel and their families who have travelled to Metro Vancouver to receive medical care and treatment in Metro Vancouver.

After purchasing the 9,000-square-foot Georgian-style house in New Westminster 10 years ago, the society needed to renovate the building. More than 60 Vancouver-area construction companies and hundreds of individuals donated materials, funds and labour to create Honour House.

Canadian veteran, VRCA life member and past president Don Vandervoort spearheaded VRCA's involvement. Vandervoort, who worked in the construction industry for more than 50 years and held various industry board positions, said he was pleased with the success of the project at the time, and continues to be proud.

"I spent a lot of time at meetings with the various trade associations selling them on the value of the project for their trades and VRCA," recalled Vandervoort. "We received great support from all for the project."

Built in 1937 as a private

dwelling, the building had been a nursing home and a halfway house over the years. VRCA members helped renovate the building to modernize it while retaining many of its original features, including its ornate parquet floor, plasterwork and large open fireplaces. The four-storey, wheelchair-accessible heritage home features 11 private bedrooms, each with its own ensuite bathroom, a shared kitchen, living room, media room, sunrooms, landscaped grounds and other common spaces.

Scott Construction Group was chosen as general contractor and Houle Electric performed the electrical work. Vandervoort said crews ran into a few challenges in the beginning, such as a leaking underground oil tank in one corner of the building. The discovery of the tank meant that workers had to remove it and replace contaminated soil before work could continue. They were also challenged by tying in new lumber to the existing structure.

"We had to cut out a section of the rear wall to enable us to excavate for the walls and floor of the elevator," he said. "Also, the rear half of the existing roof structure had to be raised to match the front."

Other than a few other minor issues, everything was completed in time for Honour House's official opening on November 10, 2010.

Honour House Society founder and president Allan De Genova said the organization is seeing increased demand during the pandemic, as many first responders struggle with extra



The Vancouver Regional Construction Association and more than 60 construction companies donated labour and materials to transform a New Westminster building into a guest dwelling for Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, emergency services personnel and their families while they receive medical care in the Vancouver area | HONOUR HOUSE SOCIETY

pressures and anxiety that can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Honour House has also provided housing for first responders and armed forces members infected with COVID-19 who need to self-isolate from their families.

"We're there to help as much as we can, and to thank them for what they do every day," said De Genova.

The construction industry's fundraising efforts and in-kind donations of building materials, time and labour were critical in getting Honour House up and running, he said.

"If it wasn't for VRCA, we

would not be where we are today."

The society recently expanded its services by building Honour Ranch, located just south of Ashcroft, and will soon be asking for the construction industry's help again to enlarge the project. A grand opening was held last year at the ranch, which features a main lodge and 10 cottages, and De Genova said the society is planning to welcome guests this fall.

"While Honour House is a home away from home while you get treatment in the Greater Vancouver area, Honour Ranch will offer the treatment," he said.

"We'll have psychologists and psychiatrists running programs to help people who are struggling with PTSD.

"At Honour Ranch, just as at Honour House, we'll be helping to save hundreds and hundreds of lives by offering treatment to first responders, members of the military and veterans."

Due to high demand, De Genova hopes to add 10 more 175-square-foot cottages, and will be launching a campaign early in 2021 to again secure help from industry. The society will be looking for donations of building materials and labour to help build the 10 additional cottages. ■

FIND IT



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COVID-19 pandemic requires compassionate leadership



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## INNOVATION: CLIMATE CRISIS FUELS SECTOR CHANGE

Changes bring new opportunities for new workers

BY PETER MITHAM

Just as a global health crisis accelerated consumers' embrace of new ways of doing business, the global climate crisis is pushing the construction sector to transform its practices.

Years of learning about green building practices and embracing standards published by organizations such as the **American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers** (ASHRAE), the Energy Star program and the **Canada Green Building Council's** Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification system have prepared the construction industry for what may well be the most decisive step yet – the BC Energy Step Code, which mandates all new buildings be

net-zero energy ready by 2032.

"We have to change the way we do building," said **Helen Goodland**, a long-time advocate for green building systems and principal of **Sci-us Advisory**, which works with the **Vancouver Regional Construction Association** (VRCA) to address industry issues.

Goodland said there is no escape from the zero-energy targets set by the Step Code, which took effect in 2017. And the construction industry needs to modernize faster in order to achieve the targets the Step Code sets.

Despite years of innovation, the sector continues to wrestle with an aging workforce and a perception among youth and their parents that it's a largely physical, demanding profession. Many outside the sector, which employs

236,000 people, aren't aware that augmented reality, paperless documentation and real-time supply chain management are changing the nature of construction work and how buildings achieve energy efficiency.

"The drivers [of change] have not gone away," she said. "Now we are being forced to address them through the impetus of the Step Code."

A report Sci-us presented to the VRCA at the end of September, *Getting Ready for Net Zero: Defining and Developing the Construction Workforce of the Future*, aims to chart a path forward. The report comes at a time when employers need to attract the next generation of worker.

VRCA commissioned the report in partnership with **BC Hydro**, which provided \$50,000 in

funding for the project from its New Construction Market Transformation program.

The study solicited feedback from a broad array of trades, beginning with those whose work is critical for energy efficiency – the mechanical contractors who install HVAC systems, the electricians who make sure electricity powers building systems and the envelope trades.

The study revealed that the group most vulnerable to the changes required was not mechanical or electrical contractors but the envelope trades – the framers, cladders, roofers and glaziers.

Moreover, the sheer number of trades involved in ensuring a secure building envelope means there's often no one consultant with an understanding of how everything fits together.

"[It's] a big gap that's starting to emerge," she said. "The way [the codes] calculate energy efficiency is primarily driven by the efficiency of the envelope now. Doing a really basic window-wall system that you might have seen five or 10 years ago on a condo building, for example – you wouldn't be able to get away with that now. You need to have a much more technically savvy envelope team."

Highlighting the opportunities inherent in the shifts is one aspect of the new report. Those opportunities will help shape industry's outreach to new workers, and the training skilled trades receive.

"The career opportunities that are arising as a result of the changes to how we build buildings should be an ongoing discussion," Goodland said. ■



The greater challenge will be to maintain vigilance

## LEGAL SPECS: This is a critical moment for the construction

Economic toll from pandemic and success to date in thwarting outbreaks among workers

BY NORM STREU AND CHRISTOPHER HIRST

Declared an essential service, work on construction sites in British Columbia has continued throughout the pandemic.

The industry responded quickly, developing and implementing physical distancing measures,

mask requirements, and other precautions to ensure work could proceed safely.

While the industry should be congratulated for its response and success to date, we believe the greater challenge will be to maintain vigilance and enforcement as the months wear on.

First, the economic toll of the pandemic places increased

pressure to maintain construction schedules. There is undeniable pressure to take shortcuts on COVID-19 safety when those measures interfere with production.

Second, there are 236,000 men and women working in the construction industry in B.C., and it is no small task to get all of these individuals to adhere to the

measures with vigilance each and every day.

Finally, the industry's success to date makes it harder to maintain the same level of vigilance. It is natural for guards to be lowered.

We therefore believe it is critical that employers and employees renew their commitment to COVID-19 safety compliance.

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## COVID-19 requires compassionate leadership

Leaders must be attuned to the well-being of their most valuable resource



*While safe, the new operating environment has been stressful, and not just for those who work on site*

BY FIONA FAMULAK

**N**avigating the COVID-19 pandemic calls for compassionate leadership that skilfully balances the traditional measures of organizational performance with an understanding and concern for employees' health and wellness.

In the seven months since the pandemic was declared, the construction industry has done a remarkable job mitigating COVID-19 transmission, as demonstrated by the fact that only one of the 379 claims for COVID-19 exposure allowed by **WorkSafeBC** has come from the construction industry. This was possible because construction, as an essential service, pivoted quickly to implement enhanced safety protocols on site, in manufacturing facilities

and offices to keep its most valuable resource – the 236,000 men and women who work in construction – safe and healthy.

While safe, the new operating environment has been stressful, and not just for those who work on site. Others needed to adapt to working from home, often with spouses and children needing to share the space.

Coupled with general anxiety around job security, ability to pay rent or put food on the table, the pandemic has catalyzed increased mental health issues and, with that, the risk of substance use and misuse across all industries, including construction. Recent national statistics demonstrate that reality.

This is particularly troubling in British Columbia which, prior to the pandemic, was in the throes of

an opioid crisis that has seen record-numbers of overdose deaths every month since the emergence of COVID-19, and with an inordinate number occurring in construction. The article on B4 helps us to understand the reasons more clearly.

Our employees are our most valuable resource. Many companies in the industry have established robust processes to identify and support the mental health and wellness of their employees. And there is more to do.

A recent article from **McKinsey & Co.** entitled *Tuning in, turning outward: Cultivating compassionate leadership in crisis*, is a compelling read and sets out the four qualities – awareness, vulnerability, empathy and compassion – that are critical for business leaders to care for people in crisis

and set the stage for business recovery. I invite you to read the article and join me in asking: how do I show up every day?

As B.C.'s COVID cases continue to rise, our industry must continue to lead by example and double down on pandemic safety protocols. It must also build capacity for compassionate leadership that will allow it to support employees' mental health and wellness both during and after the pandemic. ■

Fiona Famulak is president of the Vancouver Regional Construction Association, which represents the general and trade contractors, manufacturers, suppliers and professional service providers that operate as both union and open-shop employers in the industrial, commercial, institutional and high-rise residential construction industry.

## industry to renew its commitment to COVID-19 safety

are among challenges to maintaining daily vigilance in the industry

Specifically, we recommend that employers:

- dramatically step up COVID-19 reminders to crews, site leaders and safety staff;
- increase senior manager site compliance audits;
- communicate to all employees their responsibility for disclosure of confirmed cases and quarantine obligations;

- issue separate communications to all trades regarding their corporate responsibility for disclosure of confirmed cases and quarantine obligations;
- incorporate penalties for trades that do not disclose confirmed cases or fail to comply with quarantine requirements;
- encourage trades to limit the movement of crews between

sites; and, ■ remind site superintendents and project managers that COVID-19 protocol still trumps site schedules.

There are at least two other reasons to renew vigilance. First, outbreaks will impact sites, schedules, and profits, and may lead to government shutdowns of all or portions of

the industry. Second, essential service providers are protected pursuant to the COVID-19 Related Measures Act from liability arising from COVID-19 exposure on sites, but only if the essential service provider is operating in accordance with all applicable emergency and public health guidance.

Accordingly, employers and

employees have all the motivation necessary to renew their commitment to COVID-19 safety compliance. ■

Norm Streu is president and chief operating officer of the LMS Reinforcing Steel Group. Christopher Hirst is managing partner and leader of the construction and engineering group at Alexander Holburn Beaudin + Lang LLP.

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## HEALTH: CONSTRUCTION SECTOR FIGHTS OPIOID CRISIS

With pandemic causing spike in overdose deaths, industry and government offer life-saving services

BY PETER CAULFIELD

There's an opioid crisis in B.C. and it's taking place at the same time as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The crisis – the widespread overuse or misuse of addictive opioid drugs – has brought significant medical, social and economic consequences, including overdose deaths across many industries. The effects of the crisis have been felt particularly in the construction industry, which has experienced a disproportionate number of overdose deaths.

“Until February of this year, we had started to see a small but noticeable decline in the number of overdose deaths [across all population segments in B.C.],” said **Vicky Waldron**, executive director of the **Construction Industry Rehabilitation Plan (CIRP)**. “But after COVID-19 hit, the numbers began to shoot up again.”

The COVID-19 pandemic led governments at different levels across Canada to close

international and provincial borders, which restricted the supply of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid pain reliever that is sometimes mixed with cocaine and heroin by manufacturers of illicit drugs.

Because of the absence of fentanyl, cocaine and heroin are now sometimes cut with contaminants that are potent and dangerous.

Users of drugs that are cut with substances other than fentanyl are also far less responsive to treatment by the medication Naloxone, often sold under the Narcan brand name. Naloxone blocks the effects of opioids and is commonly used to counter decreased breathing in an opioid overdose. However, it may not block the effects of other substances being used to cut drugs.

The result is more overdoses and more deaths.

The opioid crisis in B.C. is not restricted to the construction industry, nor is it brand-new.

In 2018, a **Fraser Health Authority** report showed that while both

men and women of all ages were experiencing fatal and non-fatal overdoses, most overdoses were experienced by men.

The report also showed that most (70%) overdose fatalities took place in private residences, and affected men between 19 and 59 years of age.

The opioid use crisis by construction workers is also not restricted to British Columbia, according to Waldron.

“It’s a problem in construction everywhere,” she said. “In this industry, there is a stigma associated with mental health and substance use, and there is often an unwillingness to talk about it or look for help.”

Until recently, construction companies did not have extensive mental health support, but that’s changing as more companies offer employee assistance plans.

For example, **Scott Construction Group** has a mental health committee that promotes monthly initiatives on a broad variety of mental health topics.

“We recognize that mental illness is a key factor in opioid addiction as well as suicide rates,” said **Donna Grant**, Scott’s marketing and project pursuit manager. “We know that addressing underlying causes will significantly impact the conditions that often lead to drug use.”

The **BC Construction Safety Alliance (BCCSA)** has five regional safety advisors across the province who meet regularly with employers to discuss opioid use and other occupational health and safety matters.

“They have lots of experience in opioid addiction,” said BCCSA executive director **Mike McKenna**. They are well positioned to train employers and their employees, for example, on how to administer Naloxone and where to get help when it’s needed, he said.

**Vancouver Regional Construction Association** president **Fiona Famulak** said the association is “extremely troubled” by the prevalence of opioid use in the construction industry.

“We can’t be a passive bystander as statistics paint a worsening reality,” said Famulak. “Our association is committed to working with its industry partners and other stakeholders to ensure that employers and their employees have the support they need to recognize and address both mental health issues and opioid use so that our workforce is healthy and productive.”

For those who wish to take advantage of it, help is available:

The **Construction Industry Rehabilitation Plan ([www.constructionrehabplan.com](http://www.constructionrehabplan.com))** provides mental health and addiction services.

**Lifeguard App ([lifeguarddh.com](http://lifeguarddh.com))** is a smartphone app that assists emergency responders in the event of an overdose.

And the B.C. government has overdose prevention sites and supervised consumption and drug checking services ([www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/overdose/what-you-need-to-know/overdose-prevention](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/overdose/what-you-need-to-know/overdose-prevention)). ■

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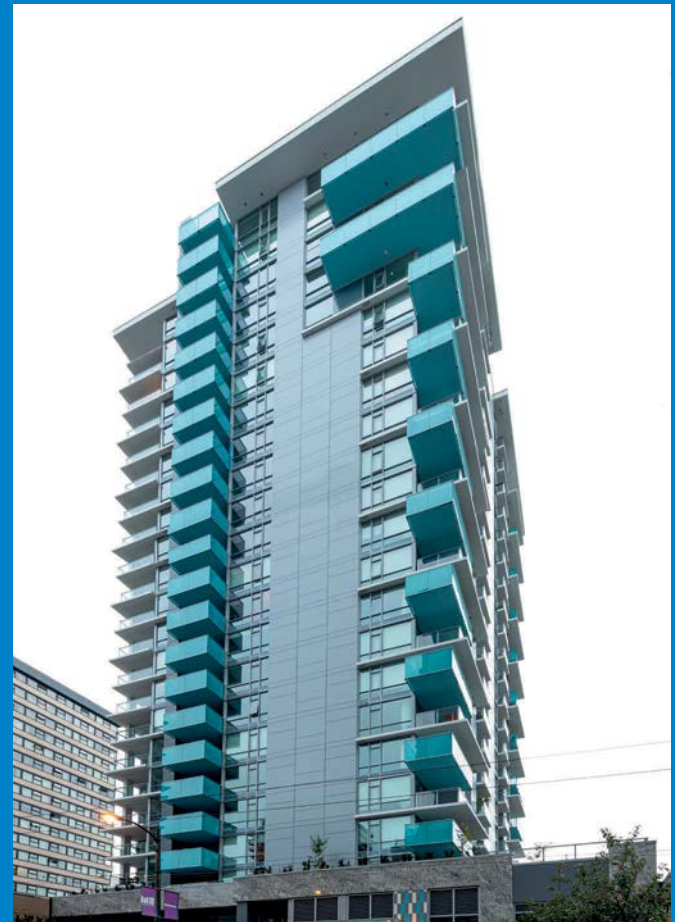
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