



Industry, Integrity Progress: Helmets to Hardhats and the CLRA



By: Greg Akeson



An Interview with Joe Fadyen from CLRA

CLRA History

For over 50 years, the Construction Labour Relations - An Alberta Association (CLRA) has led construction employers through labour negotiations. Representing over 200 contractors and the largest employer organization of its kind, CLRA works on behalf of contractors to administer all their collective bargaining and to bring forth legislative changes. It also provides training and support programs and helps to craft solutions that keep pace with ever-changing trends in the construction industry. Simply put, CLRA is the umbrella organization that acts as the collective voice of the contractors, while the various independent unions act as the voices of their respective employees. Most recently, the CLRA was involved with changes to the Alberta Industry Training Act, now called the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Training Act.



As the current president of CLRA, Joe McFadyen's role is to oversee the organization on a corporate level. He is a secretary of the Board and also participates as secretary of the Coordinating Committee, a group consisting of the heads of numerous registered employers' organizations (Boilermakers, Electrical Contractors, etc.), in order to discuss industry issues. As secretary of both the Committee and the Board, Joe's role is to carry out decisions and consult with contractors and to make recommendations on different paths forward. In addition, he oversees the entirety of the CLRA.

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Joe McFadyen's Work

Joe brings many years of experience to his current role as president of CLRA. He started in the airline industry, working as a station attendant providing ground support. While in this job, he became a shop steward in the union, representing ground support personnel and aircraft mechanics. Over the course of 20 years, he worked his way up to president of his local and represented them on national committees. He then went to work for the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, where he represented the instructors as labour relations officer, a role he held for nine years. In 2003, Joe transitioned to CLRA, where he began as a labour relations officer and finally transitioned into the role of president in 2019. Though Joe has spent his career working in different industries, he has always been involved in labour relations. He brings not only experience but education, both which he acquired over the course of his storied career.





Joe Discover H2H

When Joe transitioned into the role of president of CLRA, he became a member of the board of H2H, a role that came very natural to him having grown up in a family where his father was a career serviceman. Joe knew first-hand what Veterans have to offer the construction industry. While some Veterans leave the service having acquired skills applicable to the construction industry, they more often embody the sought-after qualities necessary in an always labour-hungry market. Veterans are mature, they have a sense of strong discipline, they know what hard work is and how to be engaged in work. As Joe says, “they know how to work, and that’s the important piece. They know how to get the job done, whatever that job is. I mean they seem to be very well skilled and very well suited to our industry.”

As in other parts of the country, the construction industry in Alberta is also experiencing an impending skilled labour shortage. H2H is a great resource to help mitigate this shortage. Even for those veterans who do not bring a particular skilled trade with them, the opportunity to become educated in a trade exists for those transitioning from military to civilian life. Both trade schools and union schools provide the necessary training to succeed in making the transition. Joe says about the trades, “I always say about the tradespeople, they are extremely creative. They always seem to have this creative mind, and they figure these things out, and they can put things together, and yes, a lot of it is a learned skill, but it’s a different kind of mindset and I think that has been, to some degree, misunderstood – (just) how creative and how talented and skilled these people are.”

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The Future of Construction Labour in Alberta

The challenge facing Alberta's construction labour market at the present time is that of building a homegrown workforce. In the past, Alberta's labour came mainly from different parts of the country as people from as far away as Newfoundland would move temporarily to Alberta for work, and then, when work ended, they would move back to Newfoundland. In cases like that, both money and labour leave the province, thereby having a negative effect on the local economy. As Joe says, "there was a lot of fly-in-fly-out in Alberta, so individuals, who would work in our province, lived in different provinces across the country. That's fine, but what you're really doing is you're stealing labour from a different part of the country, you're not really building that labour up. I think the challenge for Alberta is to build an Alberta workforce."

As Joe reflects on his career over several decades, he remembers the many periods of "boom and bust" within the various industries in which he worked. It is during the periods of "bust," when things are at their bleakest, that a leader shows his true mettle. For Joe, the most important thing is to find resolve and be part of the foundation that brings about stability as it serves to assist people through difficult times. "I want to do what's best for my contractors, but I also want to do what's best for the industry... if we can do what's best for industry, everybody benefits."

For more information on the CLRA, visit their website at <https://clra.org/>

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