



THE SOLDIER & THE CARPENTER



**AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE
HUMPHRIES FROM THE
CARPENTERS' REGIONAL COUNCIL**

HELMETS TO HARDHATS

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By : Greg Akeson



The Soldier & The Carpenter: An Interview with Mike Humphries from The Carpenters' Regional Council

Mike Humphries is the Veteran Liaison Representative for the Carpenters' Regional Council. His role is to assist Veterans, who are transitioning into the trade, anywhere from Ontario to British Columbia. Formerly called the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario, it was renamed just recently when the Ontario council merged with several other councils located throughout Canada's western provinces to form the Carpenters' Regional Council.

Mike is himself a Veteran and served with the 3rd Battalion Royal Canadian Regiment. He was posted from Winnipeg to Germany and served in Bosnia with the U.N. during the early 90s. He decided to make the transition to civilian life in 1995 and started an apprenticeship in Toronto with Carpenters Local 27 where he worked for a variety of companies and contractors. He was always active as a job steward as well as an on-site Joint Health and Safety Committee member. It was his responsibility to make sure that every job site was safe. When the time was right, he became an Organizer, a position he held for seven years. As an Organizer, his job was to recruit and to promote the Carpenters' Union to companies not already signatory to the Union. He then became a Business Representative, where he looked after memberships, on-site issues, jurisdictional issues, and dealt with lawyers and contractors. He has been in his current role as a Veteran Liaison Representative for the past two and a half years. As Mike describes it: "the role was created to assist Veterans, who are transitioning from the military, or who are still actively serving in reserve units. We've now extended this to our Afghan interpreters or anyone who had an enduring relationship with Canada during the Afghan conflict and who have now come to Canada. We are going to help them as best we can."



Helmets to Hardhats

Mike heard about Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) and how it was running in the U.S. roughly 15 years ago. A few years later, Joe Maloney announced H2H would be starting up in Canada. The Carpenters' Union jumped at the chance to work with H2H and Mike has been a supporter ever since and helps to promote the use of Veteran hires to other Locals. Mike is a trailblazer in his work as a Veteran Liaison Representative in that his position is unique in the trades. His role is the first of its kind within a union organization in Canada. He feels H2H can play a significant role in aiding with the growing demand for labour in the construction industry. He states: "It's going to be a huge task but I believe this is the number one avenue for meeting the demand."

While there are currently over 60 Veterans, who have come through the H2H program working in the province of Ontario, there are a few who stand out to Mike: Max Stalbaum, whose story can be found in this very issue of the Canadian Construction Journal, and Curtis McNeil. Curtis made a successful transition from military to civilian life and is now working for the scaffold and work platform company, Summit Access Solutions Inc. Summit has hired about eight H2H Veterans and Curtis has been mentoring the new recruits to success. Summit has been a great supporter of the H2H program and is always happy to work with Veteran hires.

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Veterans in Construction

Veterans are becoming sought after in the construction industry as they have unique and much needed skill sets. To Mike, they bring a sense of timing and punctuality to the job. Time restraints are an ever-present reality in the trades, and this is an area in which Veterans are particularly proficient. Everybody wins on a job site where tasks are completed on time so that other trades can also finish their jobs on time. As Mike explains “whether you were deployed or not, you were always put in stressful situations and worked as a team. It’s the same on a construction site; everyone has to work together as a team to complete a build. It’s not one person who can complete the task.”

Another initiative, which is close to both Mike and the Carpenters’ Union is Camp Maple Leaf. Camp Maple Leaf is a special camp set up to help the children of military families, who are dealing with the inherent challenges that come with military life, such as constant relocation, family members on lengthy deployments, and dealing with grief and loss. Counselors are there to help children navigate through these challenges. Mike got involved with the camp through Team Rubicon. Team Rubicon is a group of Veterans and first responders who do volunteering in communities with a focus on disaster relief. They work right across Canada and into other parts of the world and boast hundreds of volunteers amongst their ranks, including some H2H members. They assist at Camp Maple Leaf by cleaning up the camp and getting it ready for summer. Last year, they installed accessibility ramps around the camp to make the camp wheelchair accessible.



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Mentorship Program

Currently, Mike is involved with launching a mentorship program through the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. The program aims to pair mentors with mentees in the trades for a year-long commitment. Mentors are provided with training in order to prepare them for the role of mentor. Mentees are not required to be trained prior to signing up for the program. Candidates are paired up based on their application forms and how well they fit with each other.

Mike Humphries is proud of the work he has done in forging strong ties between H2H and the Carpenters' Regional Council. Whether it is through placing more Veterans into unionized jobs, or through hosting future H2H galas at their event space in Vaughan, ON, the Council will be there to support Veterans entering the construction industry.

For more information on the Carpenters' Regional Council visit: <https://thecarpentersunion.ca/>

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