

A SPECIAL INTEREST SECTION BY MEDIAPLANET

# Careers in the Skilled Trades

## Q&A

### With Leading Voices in Canada's Skilled Trades



#### MANDY RENNEHAN

Mandy Rennehan discusses her early career in construction, the motivation behind her company, and the critical need for skilled trades in today's economy.

#### What are your thoughts on the current demand for skilled trades in Canada?

I wish the appropriate people had listened when I was sounding the alarm 20 years ago. We find ourselves in a very acute situation from an economic perspective, because of the shortage we are experiencing. With all the work that's been done in the last couple years in various levels of government and the private sector, I am hopeful with the data being provided currently, that the Gen Z generation will be the next "Tool belt generation" and they see the multitudes of opportunities. ■

**Mandy Rennehan**  
CEO and Founder of Freshco.ca, HGTV Host, Designer & Contractor

#### THE CONSTRUCTION LIFE

The Construction Life discusses the evolving culture in skilled trades, offering candid advice and highlighting the character-building nature of construction work.

#### What was your biggest challenge when entering the field and what helped you to overcome it?

Clients are both the worst and best part of the process. Every skilled tradesperson will experience being taken advantage of by a client at some point, whether it's a homeowner, an employer, the government, or anyone who holds your income hostage. The best way to avoid these situations is to minimize your financial risk and step away once you have completed the agreed-upon scope of work. Never fall into the trap of thinking that homeowners, employers, or the government will always have your best interests at heart — they rarely do. ■



**Manny Neves**  
Construction Expert & Host of The Construction Life



#### GARY MCCREADIE

Gary McCreadie's advice for aspiring HVAC technicians: stay curious, keep learning, and help others in the trade. His HVAC Know It All platform highlights the best parts of the industry.

#### The brand HVAC Know it All was created to spread some positivity in the online HVAC support community. What's been the most rewarding experience through your journey?

Running HVAC Know It All has had many rewards. Working alongside manufacturers to test new tools and create content about them keeps me on my toes as far as the industry's direction. It's also been a great platform to educate myself, as well as my audience, that is also interested in new, tools, methods and upcoming trends. It's great to get messages from younger folks in the trade telling me that my videos, articles, and podcasts have helped them. ■

**Gary McCreadie**  
Business Owner & Creator of HVAC Know It All

#### JESSICA BANNISTER

Jessica Bannister shares why HVAC is a great career: job security, good pay, and personal growth. She encourages women to embrace their skills and find supportive networks.

#### What are some benefits in working as an HVAC technician that could encourage someone to enter the trade?

I think there are many benefits with respect to having a career in HVAC. It's challenging (great for problem-solving), it's rewarding (you get a great sense of pride for your work), and it's lucrative (hard work pays off).

A career in HVAC offers a wide range of opportunities for personal and professional growth. From residential to commercial to industrial settings, HVAC technicians can choose to specialize in various areas (installation, maintenance, system design, etc.) With extra training and certifications, technicians can advance into supervisory roles, project management, or even start their own HVAC businesses. The industry rewards hard work, dedication, and a commitment to ongoing learning, there is a clear pathway for career advancement and fulfillment that can be achieved by any hard worker. ■



**Jessica Bannister**  
HVAC/R Apprentice

 Check out full interviews on [innovatingcanada.ca](https://innovatingcanada.ca).

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## Community Colleges Deserve More Support for Skilled Trades Training

Skilled tradespeople are the backbone of our economy, and Ontario should do more to support their training and development.

Karen Renkema, VP Ontario at the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA)



**T**he message is getting through, finally. More people are pursuing careers in the skilled trades. Now, we owe it to future generations of tradespeople to make sure their path to success is as smooth as possible.

Ontario is attracting aspiring skilled tradespeople in record numbers. Last year, apprenticeship registrations were up by 24 per cent. A record 27,000 students and job seekers signed on to begin their journey to lucrative, high-demand careers in the skilled trades.



**Colleges have become an integral part of our communities. They're providing over 80 per cent of in-class training for Ontario's apprentices at campuses in small towns and cities across the province.**

### Supporting community colleges

Community colleges offer a unique blend of academic learning and practical training for apprentices. Many of the member companies at the Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA) work in partnership with col-

leges. Employers give apprentices hands-on training and the opportunity to apply valuable classroom instruction that they've received through local community colleges.

Colleges have become an integral part of our communities. They're providing over 80 per cent of in-class training for Ontario's apprentices at campuses in small towns and cities across the province. This is where many young people live and work, and where there's a vested interest in ensuring the local workforce has the skills to build a range of infrastructure, from a new correctional complex in Thunder Bay to a new hospital in Kingston.

Despite the critical role that colleges play in training the next generation of skilled tradespeople, funding levels for college apprenticeship training are lagging.

This could be addressed by allowing colleges to access the Ontario Skills Development Fund (SDF). Since its inception in late 2020, the Ontario government has provided organizations with nearly \$1 billion for innovative programs to tackle challenges in hiring, training, and retaining workers, including apprentices.

### The importance of adequate funding

While industry associations, employers, and unions have welcomed additional resources through the SDF, Ontario's colleges are unable to access this crucial funding,

despite their leading role in training apprentices. Allowing Ontario colleges to tap into the SDF would help provide them with the needed resources to expand training to more regions where there's real demand.

For example, anyone outside of Toronto who wants to become a sprinkler fitter cannot take a community college course in their region. The only training available in all of Ontario for this trade is in Toronto, which forces apprentices to take on additional travel and housing costs.

Further consideration should be given to expanding the training network for skilled trades across the province. Community colleges are uniquely positioned to deliver this training.

The skilled trades are the backbone of our economy. Ontario should be doing all it can to encourage future skilled tradespeople to complete their apprenticeships. That includes making additional funding available to expand college apprenticeship training in every region where it's needed. ■



Allow community colleges to tap into Skills Development Funding. Learn more at [pcac.ca](https://pcac.ca).

This article was sponsored by **The Progressive Contractors Association of Canada (PCA)**.



## How a New Program Is Securing the Future of the Construction Industry

A skilled labour shortage threatens Canada's construction industry. A bold new program focused on apprentice retention is helping secure its future.

Veronica Stephenson

Service Program (ASP), concluded in 2024, which primarily focused on increasing apprenticeship opportunities and fostering diversity in the sector. The AID program focuses on retention and support by offering comprehensive support to new and existing apprentices, with a strong focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Between a standardized onboarding program, dedicated financial support for new apprentices, and a national mentorship initiative, the AID program is set to elevate apprenticeship training and support across the country. Addressing the immediate skilled labour shortage is one of its major goals, but fostering a more inclusive and overall skilled workforce is just as important.

Below, Jodie Lucas, AID's Executive Director, and Mulisius Joe, Regional Project Coordinator for AID, weigh in on how the AID program will help set a new standard for Canada's construction industry.

### How will the AID program help address retention and recruitment in this crucial sector?

**JL:** A new standardized onboarding process is one of the AID program's biggest contributions. Making onboarding consistent across the country will not only ensure that apprentices acquire all the necessary skills but will also provide peace of mind for employers who can trust the uniform quality of training.

The onboarding process includes power skills training covering areas such as cultural bias training, and the "Be More Than a Bystander" program, which supports a genuinely supportive and inclusive work environment. Also, the AID program inte-

grates a national mentorship initiative, pairing apprentices with experienced mentors to guide them through their exciting new careers.

### Many new apprentices face financial barriers when entering the trades. How will the AID program help?

**MJ:** Financial barriers have long been a significant challenge for apprentices, so making training and certification more accessible is crucial. The program offers \$300 for personal protective equipment, \$500 for dependent care subsidies, \$500 for transportation, and \$100 for union fees for members. This financial assistance ensures that economic constraints do not hinder apprentices from pursuing their training and advancing their careers, which is often especially important for equity-deserving groups.

### How does the AID program incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?

**JL:** DEI is at the heart of both the AID and ASP programs — the latter saw 80 per cent of apprentices hired from equity-deserving groups. The AID program aims to build on this success by continuing to break down barriers to entry and support apprentices from all backgrounds. ■



**Jodie Lucas**  
Executive Director, AID



**Mulisius Joe**  
Regional Project Coordinator, AID

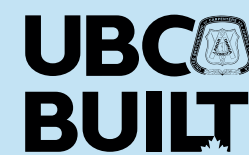
**C**anada's construction industry is facing a critical shortage of skilled labour. Projections indicate that by 2033, approximately 263,400 workers will retire, which accounts for 21 per cent of the current labour force. To maintain the crucial contributions to Canada's economy and infrastructure, bold new strategies for recruitment and retention are needed.

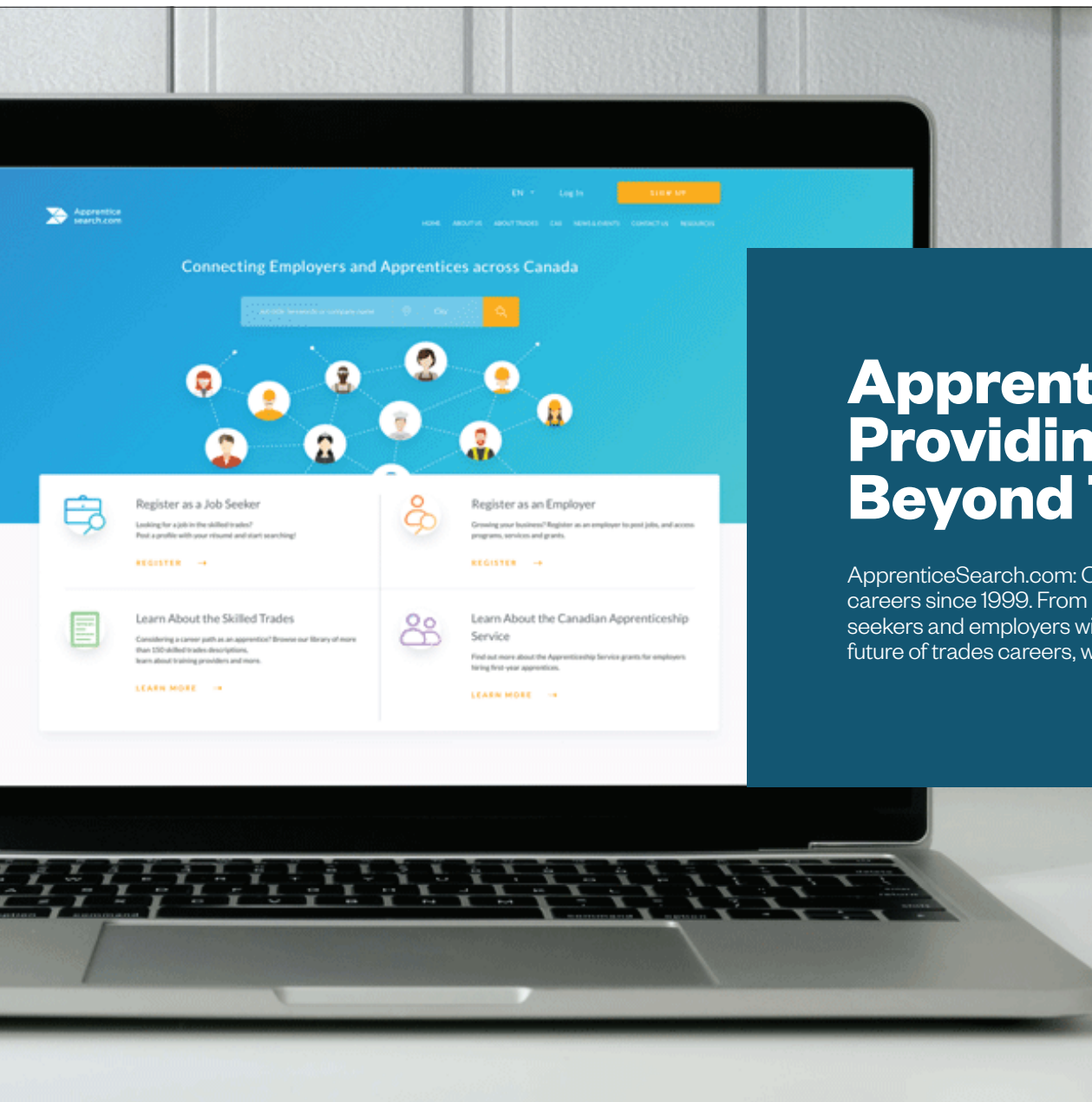
The UBC Canadian District has rolled out a robust new program designed to support apprentices throughout their journey, ensuring they have access to the resources and mentorship they need to thrive in their careers. The Apprenticeship Integration and Development (AID) program, funded in part by the Government of Canada's Canadian Apprenticeship Strategy, builds on the foundation of the previous Apprenticeship



Visit [ubccanadiandistrict.ca/s/AID-Postcard.pdf](https://ubccanadiandistrict.ca/s/AID-Postcard.pdf) to learn more about how the AID program will help secure the future of Canada's next generation of construction professionals.

This article was sponsored by **Carpenters' Regional Council**.





## ApprenticeSearch.com: Providing Connections Beyond Technology

ApprenticeSearch.com: Ontario's original online hub for skilled trades careers since 1999. From local roots to national reach, we connect job seekers and employers with personalized support. Join us in navigating the future of trades careers, where technology and personal touch converge.



**Kelly Hoey**  
Executive Director,  
ApprenticesSearch.com

**B**efore job sites like Workopolis and Indeed, ApprenticesSearch.com, released in 1999, was Ontario's first online matching service for job seekers and employers in the skilled trades. Now offered nationally, ApprenticesSearch.com provides deeper connections than a job-matching service with over a thousand new users monthly.

Almost 25 years ago, Kelly Hoey, Executive Director of HIEC and ApprenticesSearch.com, was returning from a career development conference, thinking about the clear gap in support for the skilled trades sector.

"It was obvious that not enough was being done at the time to support people who wanted to pursue careers in the trades," said Hoey. "Beyond even the fact that trade jobs weren't well promoted — once people were even interested in the trades, they didn't know where to start."

People repeatedly brought up a critical barrier to Hoey: job seekers' difficulty connecting with employers. Many job seekers, especially young people, lacked the networks and connections to find jobs.

"You can't start an apprenticeship without an employer, so helping people make that connection seemed like the place to start. In 1998, technology was the way of the future," continued Hoey.

In that year, Hoey and her team began exploring and developing ApprenticesSearch.com, a free online platform to match job seekers with employers hiring in the skilled trades.

"I'll be honest, I don't think any of us working on the project knew the difference between a website and a database in 1998, but we all agreed the world was changing quickly, and we wanted to be at the forefront of that change — and to use it for something we felt passionate about."

ApprenticesSearch.com officially launched in 1999, offering a simple yet revolutionary solution: a centralized online hub where job seekers could showcase their skills and connect with employers seeking apprentices.

"The response was overwhelming," recalled Hoey. "We had people registering for the site before we officially launched it. It was evident that we had struck a chord with job seekers and employers struggling to find each other."

ApprenticesSearch.com quickly evolved from a local website serving the Halton Region in Ontario to a

province-wide leader in the skilled trades workforce development space as the platform gained traction. In the following years, Hoey and her team continued to innovate, adding features and refining the user experience.

"We're in the interesting position of being a non-profit with a mission to support the skilled trades sector - and also the owners of a technology that we need to keep evolving to meet the needs of our users," explained Hoey.

It turns out that one of the needs of ApprenticesSearch.com's users is human connection.



**We're in the interesting position of being a non-profit with a mission to support the skilled trades sector — and also the owners of a technology that we need to keep evolving to meet the needs of our users.**

"We see a high volume of users registering every day, and 90 per cent of the job seekers who register with us request individualized support — meaning they're looking for more than just a technology that matches them to an employer," Hoey noted. "To help create the conditions for success for our users, we offer personalized support and connections that go beyond the screen. Our dedicated team is here to guide job seekers and employers every step of the way."

The ApprenticesSearch.com team includes passionate career development and employment professionals who deliver programs and services that support job seekers and employers who register — as many as over 1,200 new users a month.

"Job seekers are hearing the message loud and clear — there are opportunities in the skilled trades," said Hoey. "However, it's a lot to ask of young people who lack networks, experience, and skills to advocate for themselves to skilled trades employers. Most people who come to us require more than just a simple employer match. They need someone to review their resume to ensure it will stand out to employers or to practice their interview skills

to secure a job they're qualified for. And some people need someone to sit down with them and talk them through what trades jobs are in demand and the steps they need to take to pursue those jobs."

According to Hoey, job seekers are not the only ones who want more personalized support.

"Supporting small employers is a key focus of ApprenticesSearch.com. Almost all of our employer users are small businesses that lack HR departments and the time to recruit effectively. We fill a crucial gap in the hiring process by connecting these employers with eager job seekers."

The ApprenticesSearch.com model clearly works. In September 2022, the service went national, bringing its proven model of success to the rest of the country. Since then, the organization has helped thousands connect with employment in the skilled trades.

"The skilled trades are a hot topic right now, so we take pride in the fact that we've been in this space for 25 years, not just following trends but shaping the conversation and making a tangible impact on the lives of countless individuals seeking fulfilling careers in this vital sector," said Hoey.

"All of our future investments count on skilled trades professionals, so as we look ahead, we're excited to continue to expand on our model of leveraging technology, combined with personalized support, to support the skilled trades workforce." ■



Learn more at [ApprenticesSearch.com](https://www.apprenticesearch.com).

This article was sponsored by [ApprenticesSearch.com](https://www.apprenticesearch.com).





## Fighting Climate Change Doesn't Pay The Bills? In HVACR It Sure Does

Canada's climate goals can only be met by a huge new crop of highly skilled (and highly paid) HVACR technicians.

D.F. McCourt



**Andrew Ferguson**  
Workforce Development Manager, HRAI

**H**ow we heat and cool our homes in Canada is changing. If we manage this transition well, we stand to secure a huge, and much-needed, climate win. But there's one big challenge standing in our way. Canada's HVACR (Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration) workforce is aging and retiring. And even those still early in their careers remain primarily skilled for fossil fuel solutions like traditional gas heaters. Transitioning to the high-efficiency heat pump technology that will dramatically reduce our carbon footprint requires both a massive influx of new HVACR talent, and a concerted upskilling campaign for existing tradespeople.



**Close to 20 per cent of global warming gas emissions in our country are the result of how we choose to heat homes and buildings. We know we can cut those emissions from what they are today to close to zero just by replacing existing fuel burning appliances with heat pumps.**

"For the last 100 years or more, the preferred way of heating in Canada has been fossil fuels," explains Martin Luymes, Vice President of Government and Stakeholder Relations for the Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada (HRAI), Canada's national HVACR trade association. "As a consequence of that, close to 20 per cent of global warming gas emissions in our country are the result of how we choose to heat homes and buildings. We know we can cut those emissions from what they are today to close to zero just by replacing existing fuel burning appliances with heat pumps."

### Reinventing our heating and cooling infrastructure is a big job

Heat pump technology has been around for many years. Recent developments, however, have seen huge advancements in the efficiency, capability, and affordability of these systems. Modern heat pumps can provide both heating and cooling, moving heat from inside to out, or extracting heat from the outdoor environment even during the deep freeze of the Canadian winter. All at a far lower energy cost than other electrical solutions.

In concert with the greening and expansion of the electricity grid, Canada has set a goal of converting every home

and building in the country to a non-fossil fuel heating solution by 2050. That is a whole lot of highly skilled (and well-paid) work that will need to be done by HVACR technicians in the coming decades.

### New skills for existing talent, and unlimited work for new talent

An independent report from Buildforce Canada estimates that the increase in demand for HVACR technicians will range from 200 per cent to 1000 per cent over the coming years, depending on province. The report also highlights the need for many existing technicians to reskill for heat pump installation and maintenance.

"Upskilling existing technicians will protect the longevity of their jobs over time as the demand for gas fitting decreases," says Andrew Ferguson, Workforce Development Manager at HRAI. "Unfortunately, there's still a knowledge gap around heat pumps among many companies and contractors out there. We're working on identifying the extent of that gap and we've recently started a program called Heat Pump Champions, which encourages contractors who have all the required licensing and training to get verified and vetted through HRAI. Consumers need to know who they can trust to do this work."

### High skill, high pay, and high impact

With a great many existing HVAC technicians retiring or reaching the end of their careers, however — especially given that the industry tends towards early retirement due to strong earning — the need for young blood is also paramount. To this end, HRAI gives many dedicated Career Ambassadors an opportunity to promote and encourage young Canadians to consider careers in HVACR.

Fortunately, the young generation has already woken up to the opportunity the trades represent for quick entry into a stable, high-earning career. And they're already wary of spending years accumulating debt at university only to face uncertain career prospects upon graduation. New HVACR technicians frequently earn \$50k or more while still in training or apprenticeship, and considerably more once apprenticeship is completed. And in a dynamic trade like HVACR, positioned to grow and evolve with Canada's changing infrastructure needs, young technicians will always have work, and that work will always be interesting.

"HVACR involves a wide variety of skillsets, including plumbing, electrical, sheetmetal, gas fitting, air conditioning, and refrigeration," says Ferguson. "It's highly

skilled and that's why it's such a lucrative trade, why it pays so well. You put in the work and you get the reward."

### Saving the world is a trade

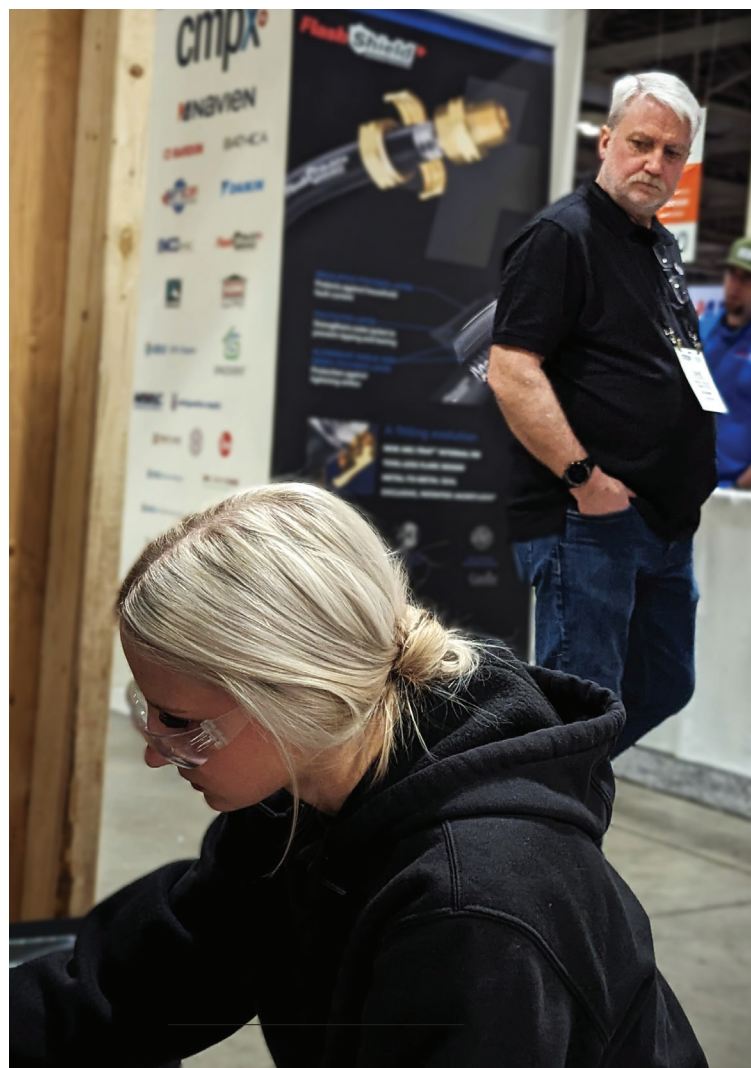
A career in HVACR is undeniably a solid path to job security and financial independence, but the biggest motivator for Canadian youth may be something else altogether. Though industries like energy, transportation, and agriculture draw a lot of attention as places where an influx of driven young talent can have a huge impact on the planet's climate future, the truth is that the reinvention of our heating and cooling infrastructure is one of the biggest untapped reservoirs of positive climate change.

"A lot of young people, especially teenagers, are facing an existential question, asking themselves what they can do with their lives that will make a climate difference," says Luymes. "This is a strong career option for them."

Canada has committed to building a sustainable future, and that future will be built in large part by tradespeople. It will be built by the HVACR technicians of today, and by those of tomorrow. ■



**Martin Luymes**  
Vice President, Government & Stakeholder Relations, HRAI



Visit [hvaccareers.ca](https://www.hvaccareers.ca) to learn more.

This article was sponsored by Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Institute of Canada (HRAI).





## BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD: Get Ready for an In-Demand and Essential Career with Skilled Trades Education at George Brown College

Shawne McKeown

**F**inding fulfilling, well-paying employment with job security can provide stability in what feels like a world of constant uncertainty. Many excellent career opportunities exist in the skilled trades, and as a leader in skilled trades education, George Brown College (GBC) stands ready to prepare the next generation of professionals in the field.

As an accredited polytechnic institution, George Brown provides the perfect blend of theoretical knowledge, practical training, and real-world experience to ensure students develop the skills needed now in the industry. For nearly 60 years, GBC has been building partnerships with respected industry leaders — partners who work with us to develop program content and provide work-integrated learning experiences.

### Apprenticeships that lead to exciting careers

GBC offers skilled trades training and apprenticeships in many areas, including construction, culinary arts, electrical, early childhood education, information technology, plumbing, welding, and more.

"This is the time to take the leap and pursue skilled trades education and training," said Dev Baichan, Associate Dean of the School of Apprenticeships and Skilled Trades at GBC. "Careers in the trades offer excellent earning potential and opportunities for advancement and growth. There are amazing opportunities right now for young people who want to launch a rewarding career and for people looking to make a career shift — the average age of an apprentice in Ontario is 30."



**Careers in the trades offer excellent earning potential and opportunities for advancement and growth. There are amazing opportunities right now for young people who want to launch a rewarding career and for people looking to make a career shift.**

GBC is a Training Delivery Agent for Ontario's Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development and offers apprenticeships in the construction, manufacturing, and culinary sectors.

Rodian Wilson completed the Industrial Millwright Mechanic Pre-Apprenticeship program. He landed a job with the company where he completed his field placement and is working toward his second level of apprenticeship.

"The program changed my life more than I had expected," he said. "A millwright is one of the most in-demand trades in Canada."

Students can complete apprenticeship levels I, II, and III at GBC in the heart of Toronto.

And our students make their mark in the industry before graduating. At Skills Ontario, Team GBC medalled in several categories, including baking and pastry arts, culinary arts, electrical installations, restaurant service, and sheet metal. Two Chef School students went on to Skills Canada. Negus King won gold in cooking, and Sabina Lee won silver in baking.

### Education that benefits learners and the country

Skilled trades training at GBC leads to bright futures for our graduates and the country. Governments are investing in the future of the sector, and the demand for skilled tradespeople is high.

Ensuring everyone feels welcome in the skilled trades is integral to addressing the labour shortage. It also fosters a more innovative and dynamic workforce. GBC continues providing pathways into the construction trades specifically for women with the Women Transitioning to Trades and Employment program. We also offer scholarships, bursaries, and awards to support underrepresented people in the trades, including Black and Indigenous students and learners from other equity-deserving groups.

"Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw more individuals exit Canada's labour market than enter it, and this trend is only intensifying as our population ages. For the first time in Canada's history, there are more individuals over 65 than children under 15. As more people retire and fewer youth enter the labour market, these demographic shifts will have significant consequences for our economy. In addition to declining economic output and workforce participation rates, we can expect to see skills shortages in key areas — all of which could hamper Canada's economic growth and competitiveness," said GBC President Dr. Gervan Fearon.

"To counteract these challenges, we will need all hands on deck. Increasing the workforce participation of all working-age Canadians — particularly those from underrepresented groups — will be critical for Canada to achieve its full economic and social prosperity potential. An inclusive Canada requires an inclusive labour market on both the supply and demand sides of the equation." ■

### Learn to Operate Buildings Efficiently and Sustainably

GBC offers training in an emerging and increasingly important field — building automation. Our three-semester Electromechanical Engineering Technology (Building Automation) program prepares graduates in the operation of safe, efficient, and cost-effective residential, public, and commercial building developments.

"Building automation students develop a diverse set of skills that are increasingly in demand as building developments place greater focus on energy efficiency and sustainability," said James McIntyre, Associate Dean of the School of Mechanical Engineering Technologies. "They learn to install, program, and adjust complex building control systems including lighting, telephony, security, programmable logic controllers, HVAC, air quality, energy consumption, and fire and safety."

Learn more at [georgebrown.ca/trades](https://www.georgebrown.ca/trades).



Get details on GBC's skilled trades training at [georgebrown.ca/trades](https://www.georgebrown.ca/trades).

This article was sponsored by **George Brown College**.

