

Comox Valley Echo

Trades training centre right on schedule

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Page: 4

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Illustrations: Colour Photo: Comox Valley MLA Don McRae outside the front entrance to the new trades training building at the Comox Valley North Island College campus.; Colour Photo: Garry McLeod, North Island College manager of capital and infrastructure projects, fills Comox Valley MLA Don McRae in on some of the features of the new trades training centre as construction workers toil away in the background.; Photo: Comox Valley MLA Don McRae checks out the ongoing construction at the new trades building at the Comox Valley North Island College campus Friday morning. McRae and college officials are in the covered open work area, which will be used to train students in certain aspects of construction such as laying foundations. Pictured, from left to right, are NIC president Jan Lindsay, vice president of education Arlene Herman, board chair Judith Round, facilities services director Bob Orth, McRae and Garry McLeod, NIC manager of capital and infrastructure projects.; Photo: Comox Valley MLA Don McRae gets a birds eye view from the rafters of the new NIC trades training centre during a tour of the building on Friday.

The new \$8.2 million trades building at North Island College's Comox Valley campus is on schedule, on budget, and on track to start training their first new trades people early next year.

The 23,000 square foot building, funded through the joint federal-provincial Knowledge Infrastructure Program, will have the capacity to handle about 250 trade students each year.

That just so happens to be precisely the number of people who, due to lack of spaces, leave the Island for apprenticeship training opportunities elsewhere, according to NIC vice president of education Arlene Herman.

"Those are jobs that we can get for the Comox Valley and the North Island," said Comox Valley MLA Don McRae. "We're going to make sure that our young people, and some of our older ones, are taking the skill sets into the workforce that we lack.

"If we keep them here, they will hopefully stay here."

McRae toured the building, scheduled to be complete by the end of the year, with school officials on Friday.

A bulk of the building is made of wood. The building has been designed to meet the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) gold standard, the second highest level possible.

"We've got probably a cutting edge building ... in North America here," said McRae. "It's where we can show the private sector what they can do with wood they haven't done before."

The building uses a significant amount of recycled materials in the construction and has so far been able to divert as much as 95 per cent of waste away from landfills. It also uses locally sourced building materials as much as possible so as to cut down on environmental impacts from transportation.

Some of the environmental features include managing water from rainfall such that it feeds the trees surrounding the building, solar panels to supply a portion of the building's energy needs and a sophisticated system that minimizes energy use within the building.

Trades training will initially consist of carpentry, plumbing and electrical as well as a nautical program.

The new trades training capacity comes, however, a couple of years after the huge building boom that saw construction companies searching desperately for skilled workers.

McRae disagreed with the notion that the building was a bit late, noting that the construction industry is traditionally cyclical.

"Sure it's not as good as it was two years ago," said McRae. "But this place will continue to be an attractive place for residents.

"We're not digging holes in the ground to the degree that we would like, but we have Sage Hills, we have Kensington, we have Trilogy. Those are thousands of prospective homes. They're not going to happen over a week or a year or ten years, necessarily. But the Comox Valley is well positioned to actually have a really well maintained, controlled growth.

"I'm excited for it. This is a desirable place to live and I don't think it's going to change. After the summer that we've had, who's going anywhere?"

Additionally, according to the national Construction Sector Council, about 30,000 people will retire from the construction industry in British Columbia over the next eight years.

"The construction area is one of the ones that's going to get hit the hardest (by retirements)," said college president Jan Lindsay. "The timing of this kind of facility ... I think is just spot on."

The construction contract for the building, which was designed by Comox-based Thomas Dishlevoy Architecture Ltd., was awarded to Nanaimo's Westcoast Developments Ltd.