



Phil Hossack Photo

“I like concrete finishing. I like the design (element). I love it.”
 — Tewodrose Mengistu



MHCA Photo

“I love the independence that Munro gives me. They’re asking me what I want to do next, to grow with the company.”
 — Samantha Line



MHCA Photo

“A lot of people can make good money, knowing this industry. We’re in need for more skilled labour.”
 — Dave Choken

“I enjoy going to work. Every day there are new obstacles (to master).”
 — Mike Houle

An industry open, ready for all



“Everybody in this business has had mentors. New hires need a mentor from your crew.”
 — Colleen Munro

For those looking to break into good-paying jobs with lots of room for advancement, Dave Choken has a suggestion for you: come to heavy construction.

The supervisor with Bituminex Paving’s underground division is always looking for the next potential hire.

“A lot of people can make good money, knowing this industry,” Choken, 40, says. “We’re in need for more skilled labour.” Choken, originally from Lake Manitoba First Nation, says that when speaking to people who work in other industries, he lets them know the opportunities for careers in heavy construction. “We pay much better and typically work all year ‘round.”

Choken says there’s a general lack of awareness about what the industry offers for starting labourers and especially for those looking to learn and advance, in increasing levels of responsibility and salary.

The industry has to get better at selling itself, particularly to people in under-represented groups – newcomers, women, Indigenous and the likes, says Nicole Chabot, Vice-president of L. Chabot Enterprises and Board Chair of the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association.

“You can’t be what you can’t see,” Chabot says. “It’s a good career and I don’t think we (the industry) champion that enough.”

Chabot says her company has had success, almost organically – Indigenous and newcomer employees encouraged friends and family to apply.

Like many companies, Chabot Enterprises is working to attract more women to join the industry.

“I am not the first Indigenous woman to make this industry my home, but I



Phil Hossack Photo

“My crew is one of the best in the company right now.”
 — Abdul Navid Abdul Baqi

recognize there are too few of “me” and too few from diverse communities working in heavy construction.”

Choken’s example shows it is active, deliberate recruitment that pays off – approaching individuals with a pitch that is attractive and welcoming, showing people there is a place for them in the industry and specific worksites.

“We’re starting our labourers out at around \$20 an hour. We work all year, at job sites around the city.”

Pay was the draw for Mike Houle, an excavator operator on Choken’s crew.

But Houle, from Ebb and Flow First Nation, says he likes the camaraderie of the crew and the challenges of operating a piece of heavy equipment around worksites where there are ever-present hazards.

“I enjoy going to work. Every day there are new obstacles” to master, he says.

Retention is an issue industry-wide, largely because the work is demanding.

Colleen Munro, a past Chair of MHCA’s Board and owner of the Munro Group, says it pays when recruiting within a community to do pre-employment preparation work and to have community members, such as



“You can’t be what you can’t see. Heavy construction is a good career and I don’t think we champion that enough.”
 — Nicole Chabot

MHCA’s website now has a Diversity tab, to serve as a resource for employers, employees and those looking to get into heavy construction.

“We want everyone to see the doors to good work, well-paying jobs and benefits and prospective careers are open to all,”

says Jackie Jones, MHCA Education and Diversity Programs Advisor.

The Diversity tab of the website offers resources for education and training as well as showcasing employers and employees who work in the industry, with words of advice gained from experience.

“Our industry hasn’t done enough to publicize the opportunities, the history of welcoming newcomers and to open the doors to anyone looking for a solid career start,” says Nicole Chabot, MHCA Board Chair. “But we’re changing that.”

the First Nation chief and council, suggest who may be inclined to work on a project.

“Having the Manitoba Construction Sector Council go in and do preliminary job training, showing ‘this is what you need to expect’, really helps,” Munro says. Construction can involve 12-hour days, and support at home such as day care, is important, as is transportation to the work site.

The big thing, however, is mentorship.

“Everybody in this business has had mentors. New hires need a mentor from your crew.”

Samantha Line was hired earlier this year at Munro’s Lilyfield Quarry as a lab technician. She has worked with Manitoba Infrastructure in the water management division and with Manitoba Hydro, and at the remote Keeyask generating station.

Line, 25, wants women to know heavy construction offers great career paths, with many job options and room to advance.

“I love the independence that Munro gives me. They’re asking me what I want to do next, to grow with the company,” she says. “It’s not an industry that’s meant for men only. Women can do this just as well as men can.”

Abdul Navid Abdul Baqi, a concrete foreman with Bituminex Paving, agrees. Abdul Baqi says the industry is a real opportunity to break into the job market even if you have limited experience in a new country and rudimentary language skills.

“When I came here, my wife was translating for me to my first boss,” says Abdul Baqi, who came to Canada in 2010.

His concrete crew is a wide mix of nationalities – Philippines, Poland, Ukraine, China, Ethiopia and Jamaica. Abdul Baqi speaks six languages, reflecting the exposure in his childhood in Afghanistan and countries he lived in.

The key is to be willing to learn, and work hard. “My crew is one of the best in the company right now.”

The industry has always been a place where newcomers get to work, says MHCA President Chris Lorenc. For example, historically Portuguese workers were drawn to the concrete side of the industry.

Over the years, the MHCA’s WORKFORCE™ and WORKSAFELY™ programs have delivered heavy equipment operator training to Indigenous and northern communities, and tailored safety training and education to individual communities and worksites.

Dennis Cruise, President and General Manager at Bituminex Paving, says the company some years ago translated its training and safety documents into Portuguese. It’s that type of accommodation that makes space for and helps retain recruits, Cruise notes.

“English isn’t the first language of many of our employees,” he says. “Our industry lends itself to diversity. Newcomers are drawn to the work and they are more than welcome.”

AECOM

Leading the way towards a more sustainable future

Everything we do is designed to deliver a better world
 Uplifting communities, improving access, sustaining our planet. We partner with clients to turn ambition into action.

aecom.com/ca

Delivering a better world

Manitoba Women in Trades Conference

TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT

SPONSORSHIP & TRADE SHOW BOOTHS ARE NOW AVAILABLE

Registration starts on OCTOBER 4TH, 2021

www.mbcsc.com/mwit-conference