

June 28, 2019

WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION

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by ConstructConnect®



Education & Training

Guiding future electricians delivers ‘genuine satisfaction’ for Boorman

GRANT CAMERON
CORRESPONDENT

Nearly 37 years have passed since Susan Boorman first stepped into the world of apprenticeship training. “I was 12 when I started,” she jokes. That’s not true, of course, but Boorman was young and green at the time. She also didn’t know a lot about apprenticeship training and had to learn — quickly. Boorman has always embraced what she calls the “sink or swim” method throughout her career, and it has worked. “I can tell you I do a very fast dog paddle,” she says. “I’ve naturally just learned the trade as I’ve gone along.” Today, Boorman is director of education and training at IBEW Local 353 which entails overseeing night school class training for members at four centres across the province. She’s also a prime example of how women can succeed in the construction industry — not just in the field, but on the administration side. Boorman had no formal training — just a high school education and her own abilities — when she was hired in the early 80s by the Toronto Joint Apprenticeship Council (JAC). “I seemed to have a natural aptitude for administration and that was what the director of apprenticeship for the JAC saw in me way back in 1983 so that’s how I got into

apprenticeship and training.” Her career has taken a few twists and turns since then. She was at the JAC for 22 years in a variety of roles. She was executive assistant, apprenticeship co-ordinator and assistant training director. It was a small office and she wore many hats. Eventually, she decided it was time for a change and in 2006 became manager of human resources at the Electrical Contractors Association of Ontario (ECAO). The role entailed dealing with apprenticeship on a national level. In 2013, she made the jump to IBEW Local 353 as apprenticeship co-ordinator. “It was another leap on my part and one of those things in your professional career where change is a good thing. I had an awesome experience at the ECAO but it was sort of like, ‘It was time to move on.’ I have many contacts in the industry so I was able to work with the business manager and the then director of training.” Boorman was only there five months when the director’s job became available. “I went into the business manager and said, ‘Okay, who’s going to take over this job?’ and he looked at me and said, ‘You’re going to do it.’” That was it. She became the new director of apprenticeship for the union. And, since then she’s never looked back.



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Susan Boorman is education and training director at IBEW Local 353. She joined IBEW Local 353 in 2013.

Economic Snapshot

Toronto update – expect higher house prices and a slowdown in office construction



John Clinkard

Based on its latest job numbers, Toronto’s economy is definitely in overdrive. Year-to-date (January to May) total employment in the Toronto Census Metro Area (CMA) is up by 72,000. Moreover, the +72,000 figure was the largest gain during the first five months of the year in more than 18 years, and resulted from a 77,000-rise in full time hiring that more than offset a 5,100 decline in part-time employment.

Surprisingly, almost a third (23,500) of the jobs added so far this year are in manufacturing. Significant staff increases also occurred in health care and social services (+25,500). Also, fuelled by an expanding tech sector, employment in the professional, scientific and technical services sector increased by +22,000 over the past five months. Despite the very strong year-to-date gain in total employment, Toronto’s unemployment rate edged up from 6.1% in January to 6.3% in May due to a 93,500 rise in the CMA’s labour force. This compares to a drop of 7,800 during the first five months of 2018. This exceptionally strong labour force growth is largely due to an estimated inflow of 100,000 to 125,000 (mostly international) migrants which more than offset a modest outflow of individuals to other parts of the province.

While there is strong evidence that the more restrictive mortgage regulations introduced by the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions at the beginning of last year contributed to a very sharp (-16%) drop in sales of existing homes in 2018, sales in the first five months of this year are up by 10.5%.

Driven by a stronger pattern of demand over the past several months, house prices in the GTA have started to move higher after remaining essentially flat during 2018. Factors contributing to this solid increase in demand include the above-noted strong growth of full-time employment and net migration together with persisting relatively low mortgage rates.

Against this background of strengthening demand, new residential construction remains severely depressed. Since the beginning of the year, the total volume of housing starts is down by 23% due to a 60% drop in starts of single and semi-detached units and a 20% fall in apartment starts, which have more than offset a 45% rise in starts of row dwelling units.

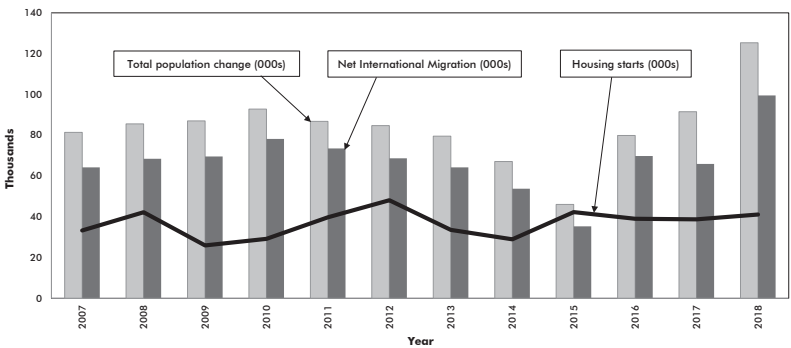
Given this weak beginning to 2019, we expect housing starts in the Toronto CMA to total in the range of 35,000 to 37,000 this year and 37,000 units to 39,000 in 2020, after posting a total of 41,100 in 2018.

Looking forward, net migration should continue to fuel population growth in the Toronto CMA over the near term. This prospect is reinforced by a potential increase in the number of Hongkongers leaving the island and coming to

Canada (mainly Toronto and Vancouver) in the wake of recent protests against proposed extradition legislation. However, in light of the weak pattern of new residential construction, we expect that average house prices in the CMA will trend steadily higher into 2020 due primarily to higher prices for low rise, single, semi-detached and row units. The impact should be partly offset by some moderation in prices of condo apartment units. The best way to describe the outlook for non-res capital spending (capex) in Toronto is “mixed”. Turning first to spending on infrastructure, construction spending in the Toronto CMA will definitely get a boost from an estimated one billion increase in spending on public sector projects including transit, roads, bridges, sewers and water mains. Major transit projects on the drawing boards or underway include the Ontario Line Transit Expansion, the Young Subway Extension, the Scarborough Subway Expansion and of course the Eglinton Crosstown which is scheduled to be completed by 2021. Excluding spending on infrastructure, the fact that non-res construction intentions are down by 5% year to date due to declines in planned spending on industrial (-25%) and institutional (-7%) projects suggests that non-res construction will not make a positive contribution to Toronto’s economic growth in the near term. This prospect is reinforced by the likelihood of a slowdown in office construction due an unprecedented volume of new office space under construction — the bulk of which is located in the Central Toronto area bounded by Bloor St. in the North, Don Valley in the East, Bathurst St in the West and Lake Ontario in the South.

John Clinkard has over 35 years’ experience as an economist in international, national and regional research and analysis with leading financial institutions and media outlets in Canada.

Toronto: Population Change, Net International Migration and Housing Starts



Data Source: Statistics Canada/Chart: ConstructConnect — CanaData.

“It’s challenging for me, personally, and that’s important,” says Boorman. “My roles have always been challenging and I really like the fact that in our industry, because it is so technical, there is diversity of work, a variety of work, and the pace in the change of technology really challenges our people to keep pace.” While challenging, Boorman says the electrical trades are a great career path for women because, not only are the wages and benefits good, there’s flexibility as different shifts are available to working women. The trade can also be used as a springboard into other careers, she says. “They don’t necessarily have to stay electricians throughout their career. They can take that licence and move into other areas like safety training, trades training, inspections, all of those things that are related to the trades.” Over the years, Boorman says the number of women entering the trade has increased, however, the percentage is still small in comparison to men. Only about two per cent of Local 353 members are women. Government has been pushing initiatives to get more women into the trades, but Boorman notes that women, or men for that matter, will only pursue training if it’s what they really want to do — and can’t be forced. “You can’t slot somebody into it because they’re either a target group or mom and dad says you have to do it. It’s a personal choice, so the women who apply, it’s because they want to do it.” Boorman says that women who enter the trade don’t consider themselves different from their male counterparts. “The women who are in the trade want to be identified, as their brothers are, as an electrician. That’s what they want to be identified as.” They’re not different, she says, as they do the same training, jump through the same hoops, perform the same jobs, and have the same certificates. Boorman says the IBEW has always been inclusive of women in the trades. She personally knows of one woman who went through her apprenticeship 20 years ago and is an electrician as well as cabling specialist. “So, the opportunity is there if somebody wants to grasp it. And, with respect to applying to the trades, everybody starts out with the same thing. You’ve got to have your Grade 12, your math, physics and English. So, for everybody coming in it’s a level playing field. I think that’s one of the things that’s attractive for women coming in because it doesn’t say that you have to be six foot six and be able to play basketball.” Boorman’s greatest reward is seeing a trainee — whether it be male or female — become a journeyperson. “They come in and say, ‘I just want to shake your hand and thank you for all the help that you’ve given me.’” “It’s genuine satisfaction to see the women that I’ve helped, and the men, go through the various careers and paths and know that I had a little bit of input into the decisions they’ve made. That’s where I get the personal satisfaction from.”



It is estimated that one million skilled trades workers will be needed across Canada by 2020 – yet less than 10% of skilled trades workers are women.

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On The Ground

Zahreddine begins to leave her mark on the industry

IAN HARVEY
CORRESPONDENT

On the job, Julia Zahreddine is just another professional working in the construction industry.

Off site, however, she still gets surprised looks from those outside the sector when they discover she's working in what they'd assumed as an all-male enclave.

"I think some people are surprised but not if they work in construction," says Zahreddine, 25, a site supervisor at Bridgecon Construction. "I think some people just assume when I say I work in construction that I'm an administrative assistant or something."

"I've had push back but it was more likely because of my young age or my experience,"

Julia Zahreddine
Bridgecon Construction

It's not necessarily the career path she was thinking of when pursuing a degree in environmental studies at York University which led to a joint Urban Sustainability program with Seneca College and a diploma in Civil Engineering Technology.

"There was a scholarship program and I applied and was accepted and it led to two internships as a site supervisor," she says. "I was the first female to get the scholarship and I went in not really knowing anything, other than what we study in civil engineering technologies. I spent the summer at two

heavy construction sites and learned about the industry and got some experience."

It led to her landing a job straight out of school in 2018 — a rarity in itself in this day and age — and she hasn't looked back.

Along the way she has upgraded her skills taking safety courses and WHMIS (Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System) training.

The industry is full of potential, she says, looking forward to gaining the experience which will allow her to rise through the ranks into more senior management positions.

It's also comforting to know that her skills will always be in demand since construction is a fairly stable and consistent industry.

As a site supervisor her key focus is on safety and ensuring the site and the crews are all working in compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Then, of course, there's a lot of paperwork and working with other stakeholders and the owner.

"We just want to get the project completed according to what the owner wants," she says. "But of course there are challenges every day."

The key skill, however, is communications, working to ensure the crews understand their tasks and working with the owner to resolve those day-to-day issues and keep the job humming along on track.

As for the misconception that women on a construction site will face a lot of gender bias, she doesn't believe it's a factor.

"I've had push back but it was more likely because of my young age or my experience," she says. "You're working with some very experienced people."



Julia Zahreddine is a site supervisor at Bridgecon Construction. She says that when some people learn she is in construction that they assume it is in an administrative capacity. Her key supervisor focus areas are safety and ensuring crews are in OSHA compliance on site.

They're more likely to push back because long-time construction workers have their own way of doing things sometimes but she's never felt it was a gender bias.

"I think this is a great sector for women to work in," she says. "It's stable and the pay is good. It's hard to get in and going the scholarship route is the way to do it if you don't have someone in your family or who

you know working in construction because it can be hard to get into."

Not only is the work steady and rewarding, it's also gratifying in other ways, she adds.

"You drive by and look at the skyline and you know you help create the structure that is in that space and you're putting your mark on the city," she says. "It's very cool."

PCL celebrates the exceptional work, accomplishments of Dobbs and Kurina

TORONTO

Two female PCL employees have been recognized for their exceptional work in the industry.

Lilianne Dobbs is the first female superintendent at PCL to celebrate 25 years with the company. Meanwhile, Lisa Kurina has been inducted into the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Women's Leadership Initiative Championship team.

LILIANNE DOBBS

"My dad was an ironworker and he'd always say to me, 'You should work in construction. You'd like it,'" says Dobbs. "He always knew I wasn't going to take a desk job."

Growing up in a family of construction workers, Dobbs remembers always being around construction. When she was four years old, her dad built their family home and she helped by cleaning up scraps in their yard.

After high school, Dobbs thought she wanted to be a hairdresser, until one day when her dad said, "I'm taking your brother to the labourer's union hall; are you coming?" The next thing she knew she was signing the papers and buying her first pair of steel-toed boots.

"While I was working my first labour job at PCL I discovered how much I loved construction," says Lilianne. "I joined the Carpenters' union, went to trade school, and started my apprenticeship here."

At 30, Lilianne was promoted to superintendent.

"I worked hard to prove myself and I always managed to make a good impression," she says. "My strength has always been my people skills; that's how I've grown my career over the years. I've built a good reputation and have earned the respect of my peers, managers and tradespeople."

Looking back at her career, she says being a woman in construction never seemed unusual to her. "Compared to when I started, there are so many more women in construction now," says Lilianne,

who lends her time speaking to young women about careers in the trades. "When I speak to them about construction careers, my biggest advice is to go for it. It's a career with amazing opportunities."

LISA KURINA

Lisa Kurina induction as a member of the ULI's Women's Leadership Initiative Championship team confirm she is one of the most influential women in Toronto real estate and land use development.

"Lisa Kurina has been building her entire life. With a general contractor father, she had the fortune of growing up immersed in the construction industry, in her teenage years working on construction sites where she began to master estimates and drawings, permitting, and general labour, including formwork and roofing," reads the statement of support for her nomination.

Kurina has had leadership roles on some of PCL's most iconic projects in downtown Toronto, and has built a strong relationship with the Great Toronto Airports Authority, which has given PCL the opportunity to work on longstanding projects at Pearson Airport, including the recently announced GTAA Baggage 2025 Master Agreement project.

"Lisa has mentored some of the strongest project managers that I know at PCL," says Mike Love, a PCL superintendent with increasing responsibility on Kurina's projects. "I've watched several female and male colleagues grow in their career from coordinators to project managers under Lisa's leadership. They learn, and take it and run with it, so much so, it has become evident that Lisa has built a department that everyone wants to come to and work in."

Kurina has also been a role model to many women at PCL and in the construction industry because of her work ethic, leadership skills, how she handles herself in various situations, and her practical and tangible advice, states PCL.

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The construction industry needs more women in leadership - and the industry deserves it. People like the women above bring intelligence, ability, and work ethic to the workplace. The **Ontario Association of Demolition Contractors is an advocate for Women in Construction**, and we look forward to continuing to celebrate, hire, and train women in this field.

PICTURED ABOVE:

Standing Left - **Tracy Nelson**, Team Manager - Triple M Demolition Inc
Standing Centre - **Margaret Taylor**, Executive Director – Ontario Association of Demolition Contractors
Standing Right – **Ashley Woodhams** – Executive Assistant – JMX Contracting Inc.
Sitting Right – **Francesca Palleschi**, President – Curmann Contracting Ltd.
Sitting Left - **Robin Priestly**, Executive Vice President – Priestly Demolition Inc.



A New Path

Grant excels at the ballet of construction project management

DAN O'REILLY
CORRESPONDENT

At first glance, ballet and construction would seem to be worlds apart. But there are more than a few connecting threads including the fact both are “very creative and very technical,” says EllisDon project management director Cara Grant.

“Ballet dancers have to know how to use the space they’re given to work in and so do project managers.”

Similarly, the same qualities of dedication, focus, and determination necessary for becoming a ballet dancer are the same attributes for being a successful project manager, says Grant, who has the rather unique status of achieving both positions.

She is both a National Ballet School of Canada graduate and former member of the National Ballet of Canada whose entry into that demanding profession began at a very young age.

Grant started taking ballet lessons when she was only three years old and then, at age 10, left her home province of Alberta and enrolled in the National Ballet School, which is based in Toronto.

“You’re too young at that age to make a career decision. But I had an intuitive feeling about what I wanted to do with my life.”

The National Ballet School is a boarding school and, as Grant describes it, a student’s progression from one grade to the next in a competitive and physically demanding environment is not easy or guaranteed.

“At the end of each school year you are evaluated and invited back or not. Only three of the students I entered the school with in Grade 7 made it to Grade 12.”

Following her successful graduation, Grant was hired by National Ballet of Canada and danced with the group for four years. She then resigned and travelled to Europe for a year where she furthered her professional development by dancing with a number of different groups.

Shortly after her return to Canada, she slipped on the walkway at her home and broke her pelvis. “There were nerve issues and it took a long time to get over the pain.”

It also ended her career as a dancer. As she was only in

mid-twenties at the time, that termination wasn’t as devastating as might have been if the fall had occurred later in life and, as Grant points out, she was becoming curious about other careers even before the accident.



Cara Grant is a project management director at EllisDon. She studied design and architecture at Ryerson University.

“I was always interested in design and architecture and I remember walking along (Toronto’s) Wellington Street, looking up at the towers and wondering ‘How do they do that?’”

Similar to the motivation for enrolling in ballet school, it was an “intuitive process” which eventually led to studying design and architecture at Ryerson University where she obtained her Project Management certificate.

After graduating, she obtained a position with Genivar, now WSP, rising from project co-ordinator to project manager during her 10 years with that company.

“I managed projects from design to construction. But I wanted to get more involved in the actual construction side of things and two and half years ago, I started making a few phone calls to EllisDon.”

Initially hired as a project manager, she was promoted to her present position as director of project management a year ago.

In that role she manages a number of different project teams. Some of her projects have included new construction/renovations at Toronto’s Eaton Centre, St. Michael’s Hospital, and the Egale Centre, a residential/counselling support service facility for LGBTIQ2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, questioning and Two Spirit) youth.

Her portfolio also includes managing the recently completed Stackt Market, a modular retail/hospitality complex constructed from shipping containers close to the city’s waterfront.

Asked if she has been subject to any slights as a female in what, is still, a primarily-male dominated industry, Grant says the goal throughout her career has always been to “keep professional and focused on the job”.

Although her ballet dancing days are long behind her, Grant still keeps connected with that side of her life by keeping in touch with former colleagues and sitting on the board of directors of Fall for Dance North Festival, a non-profit organization which stages low-cost festivals at number of venues including Toronto’s Union Station.

“Most people have one career. I have been fortunate to have had two.”

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Making Her Way

Buikema’s passion for carpentry and construction rooted in family

DAN O'REILLY
CORRESPONDENT

While apprentice carpenter Andrea Buikema carves her way to a satisfying carpentry and design career she still finds time to inspire potential future tradeswomen through the TRCA's Girls Can Too summer program.

As a child Buikema often accompanied her homebuilder father on site visits to his projects and she credits that experience for her interest and eventual entry into the construction industry.

"I always loved going to visit my dad on job sites as a kid. You can learn so much just from always being exposed to it."

But that career door didn't open right away. After graduating from high school, she enrolled in the two-year interior deco-

Andrea Buikema has been a carpenters' apprentice for the last three years.



rating program at Algonquin College. She took that training one step further by completing the one-year National Kitchen and Bath Association's kitchen and bath course which the college offers to post-graduate students.

She then set out on her own and started a design firm, A. Buikema Design Co., where she worked with homeowners to create kitchens and bathrooms which suited their lifestyles.

"After working as a designer for a few years, I began to realize that I really wanted to know more about the installation side of things. All too often I was reaching out to my dad, who is a carpenter, wanting to know more about renovations and how houses are put together."

So she made the "big leap" and has been working as a carpenters' apprentice for the past three years for her father's construction company, Otto Buikema Carpentry, where she trains under him and a supervisor. She has one more academic session to complete before writing her Red Seal in general carpentry exam.

In addition to her full-time job, Buikema, 27, still finds the time and energy to operate her design company on a part-time basis and last year also started a small side project to teach women basic carpentry skills. Called the "Country Build Club" it consists of workshops and videos which she send outs weekly to help clients with their own home projects.

And in 2017 she also accepted an invitation by the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority to be one of the instructors at its summer Girls Can Too program. Conducted at the Bolton Camp just outside of Bolton, its purpose is to teach basic



KRISTIEN BUIKEMA

As part of her Country Build club workshops, apprentice carpenter Andrea Buikema taught a group of women in the Napanee, Ont. area how to build blanket trunks. Pictured are students Dawn Gannon, Roberta Sutherland, Denise Degrandpre and Buikema.

construction skills to high-school female students. Buikema, who was a return instructor in 2018, will also be conducting two-day sessions a week over the four-week-long program this summer, as well as participating in a mother-daughter build day.

"We have a few different building projects this year," she says.

"One will be a unique trail kiosk, a copy of the one we built last year. There is also a garden project, which I have not yet seen the plans for. Regardless of the projects, we always cover tool safety, how to use the various tools properly, and skillfully."

"By having the girls build the projects themselves, they are able to see how we break down the project into simple steps, which is something they can use time and time again, when they work on future projects. Often during lunch or downtime, I

share with the girls what my job is like, and they're able to ask questions about carpentry, and schooling."

As she lives in Prince Edward County, which requires staying at least one night in hotel, Buikema was asked to explain her motivation to drive all the way to Bolton. Her answer was that she "really loves" the message behind the Girls Can Too program.

"I love that they (the TRCA and program sponsors) are giving girls an opportunity to try something that is typically only marketed to boys," she says.

"We definitely have an opportunity to make an impact, and influence these girls to step outside that traditional role, and take on a job, or career or even just a hobby that women weren't always a part of."

Buikema is currently exploring ways in which a similar program can be established in Prince Edward County.

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