

UA Local 324 sets high standards for industry

By Goody Niosi Writer

UA Local 324 of the **United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada** stands out as an example of excellence.

For four years UA Local 324 has been in the top five in membership growth of all 300 plus UA Locals in North America.

Membership in the last 14 years has grown from about 300 to 800 today. Business manager and financial secretary **Dale Dhillon** predicts continued growth into the future. The union encompasses the plumbing, pipe fitting, sprinkler fitting and welding industry.

Membership consists of 150 apprentices and 650 ticketed journeymen. Members work in a diverse industry with some being stationed at the **Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt** where they do repairs and maintenance on the **Pacific Coast Navy Fleet**.

About 80 pipefitters also work at the **Victoria Shipyard** on the **Flex** program, which involves refitting five frigates over the next five years. Members are also working on the submarine, **HMCS Chicoutimi**.

Dhillon says, "The union is

very versatile. We work in the marine industry, in the industrial sector like **Crofton Pulp and Paper** but the majority of our members are working in residential/ institutional/commercial construction."

Membership in the union has decided benefits, Dhillon says. Members have a good medical plan that covers MSP, dental, vision care, chiropractor, physical therapy and more. Ill members have wage indemnity and are covered with disability credits. Group life insurance and long term disability is also part of the package. Those who retire also receive an excellent pension.

But beyond those benefits, members enjoy continuing training and education that keep them up to date with all the latest technology.

"Once we've completed our inter-provincial Red Seal ticket after four years, we have training that follows us," Dhillon says. "Some of our courses include medical gas installation and cross connection and solar awareness."

The foreman certification course is also important, Dhillon says.

"We don't just throw anybody on a job. We want to make sure the people have been through the foreman certifica-

tion course that teaches them how to work with the clients, read drawings, schedule labour plans and execute projects on time and on budget."

In 2002 the union celebrated its 100th anniversary – most of those years marking a strong working relationship with industry. Dhillon points out that in the 13 years that he has been the business manager, he has gone into collective bargaining four times. Every time, contracts were settled quickly. There has been no labour dispute on Vancouver Island since the 1960s.

"We play win/win all the time," Dhillon says. "We have a very good relationship with the Vancouver Island Mechanical Contractors. We're talking to our contractors on a daily basis about what they're doing and how our guys are doing and how we can help each other."

Jim Noon, marketing director, says UA Local 324 and the contractor are partners in a valuable business relationship. Representing the interests of contractors is the **Island Mechanical Industrial Relations Association (IMIRA)**.

Originally formed in 1965 as the **Victoria Mechanical Industrial Relations Association (VMIRA)**, the contractor as-

sociation represented Vancouver Island contractors working "south of the 49th parallel." Like many other employer organizations of the day, VMIRA was created with the express purpose of improving relations with its labour force.

Today IMIRA representatives, both union and employer, contribute their time as volunteers on the benefits and pension trust boards and the joint training committee. IMIRA continues to be an active, vital and prospering organization. Guided by a strategic plan that targets growth and improved services to contractor members, it also nurtures relationships with the UA Local 324 to promote mutual interests.

"Our workforce is the core of our business," says IMIRA President **Angus Macpherson**. "So it's incumbent on us to cultivate a healthy working relationship with our employees. It is our hope that this good relationship will grow and prosper. And 46 years without a work stoppage is a testament to our success."

Noon says that the union is proud of its Standard for Excellence that makes sure that all its members are working to the highest possible standard. Recently the union completed a

\$50 Million project at Victoria's **Royal Jubilee Hospital**.

Kevin Collier, construction manager for **Keith Plumbing and Heating Co Ltd.** wrote to the union after the completion of the job, "I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your members for the excellent work which was done on the above project... We were extremely grateful to the membership for the quality of installation, the approach and knowledge of the trades people, and the work ethic involved. Please pass on our thanks and congratulations."

Beyond excellence in training and work, the union is also a friend to its members. Dhillon notes that many people come into his office with problems that just need to be talked out – and he's there to listen. Local 324 is also a friend to the community, contributing to charities both in Victoria and Nanaimo.

The union is going strong, Dhillon says, with over 35 signatory contractors including industrial contractors.

"We have a good base of contractors," he says. "We're proud of the work we do on the job and in the community."

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Business Manager and Financial Secretary Dale Dhillon



UNITED ASSOCIATION OF JOURNEYMEN & APPRENTICES OF THE PLUMBING & PIPEFITTING INDUSTRY OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA, LOCAL 324 VANCOUVER ISLAND
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Promote World Class Skills

- Recruit and develop the best skilled trades people in the industry
- Develop world class leaders on all projects
- Provide learning opportunities and facilities to develop skills for members and officers
- Mentor and share our knowledge to further the abilities of other Members
- Promote life-long learning to ensure cutting edge capabilities for technological advances

Safety and Productivity at our worksites

- Provide economic benefit to the client
- Create accident free worksites – zero tolerance for working unsafely
- Develop worksites that can ensure everyone goes home safe and healthy every day
- Develop worksites and projects that are based on building tripartite partnerships

Professionalism and Accountability

- Adhere to collective agreements and the Standard For Excellence
- Be accountable for our actions and results
- Meet our agreed to expectations
- Take initiative and display a positive attitude
- Work with each other as one team
- Promote quality of workmanship on all job sites to broaden UA Member opportunities

Growth Opportunities by organizing and recruitment

- Promote the benefits of working with UA Members to increase market share
- Assess and expand into new and emerging markets and sectors
- Build profitable partnerships
- Proactively build positive relationships with industry and government
- Develop progressive and responsive collective agreements and PLA's

Dale Dhillon
Business Manager/Financial Secretary

Jim Noon
Marketing Director