

The Employment Journey on PEI

MANY JOB OPTIONS ON PEI

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND • CANADA

Sea to Sky conference discusses significant skills shortages

by Gloria Welton

The Sea to Sky conference is an annual event on PEI that brings together stakeholders and industry leaders in the aerospace, defence, and marine sectors. “Access to skilled labour can often be a challenge,” says **Allan Campbell**, Provincial Director, **Atlantic Canada Aerospace and Defence Association**, who hosted the conference.



Allan Campbell, Provincial Director, Atlantic Canada Aerospace and Defence Association.



“CNC Programmers and Machinists are probably the two aerospace occupations that companies are having the most difficulty staffing. Other positions requiring highly specialized skills can also be difficult to fill. We have an aging workforce, and there are more people exiting the workforce than entering it, which is creating labour shortages nationally.”

For more about the **Atlantic Aerospace and Defence Association**, visit www.ac-ada.ca



Among the many speakers was **Shawn Casemore**, President of the **Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium (EMC)**. This organization has been present on PEI for many years supporting manufacturers across the region.

A survey of thousands of manufacturers across Canada right down to local members on the Island indicates that skilled labour shortages are the most important barrier to success facing manufacturing companies today.

“For the first time in years, skills shortage has replaced cost control as the number one significant plant management issue across Canada for 2019,” says Shawn.

“As a result of shortages, companies are more willing to hire the right personality, and then train for skills.”

Here are some of the causes of hard-to-fill vacancies:

- Applicants lack the skills and work experience required
- Low number of applicants
- Competition from other employers
- Not enough people trained/applicants lack the educational qualifications
- People with the skillsets needed are located in other regions

Source: www.emccanada.org/uploads/userfiles/files/GPS%20Report%202017_Eng.pdf

Francis McGuire, President of Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), spoke about the looming labour shortage. “If some issues such as labour are a challenge today, they will be a lot worse next year. For the next number of years, they will continue to worsen.”

Francis, who has worked in economic development in this region for 38 years, says he has never seen the amount of change and the scale and speed of that change occurring in this region today.

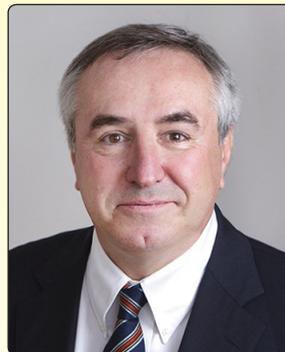
“Most people don’t like to admit this, but just about every manufacturer in Atlantic Canada had a simple business strategy. It was built on cheap, available labour. Cheap labour compared to central Canada and the US. That is absolutely not true anymore; labour force numbers are no longer there.

“This new reality is happening at every level of our society: the technical level, professional level, maids in hotels, workers in nursing homes, and the list goes on.”

“In fish plants, 30 percent of the workforce today is temporary workers from abroad. You cannot have a fisheries industry unless you have temporary workers: no foreign workers, no lobsters. That is how serious this issue is.

“J.D. Irving is looking for 10,000 people in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in the next two and a half years. They will be competing for everyone from welders, IT workers, accountants, and truck drivers, and they will be looking at employees on PEI. They will offer the wages. This is coming. The numbers are there and it is going to get a lot worse.

“TD Bank is bringing 1,000 jobs to Moncton. A lot of those are accounting jobs starting at \$70,000 a year. They will have to hire every single accounting graduate in the Maritimes for the next three years.”



Francis McGuire, President of Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA).

What are some solutions?

Francis talked about a New Brunswick farm that spent \$200,000 on a machine to stack potato sacks. “The farmer said this is the dirtiest, hardest job they have, and it’s where most accidents occur,” says Francis. “He felt he had to put a robotic system in his farm to do that job.

“We just did a review of the food industry. We were expecting issues like markets, trade, and regulations to be most important, but the number one issue in aquaculture, fishing, blueberries, apples, and potatoes is lack of labour. The number two issue: mechanization and automation.

“The dynamics of the labour market are not going away. Furniture manufacturers in Shediac need another 20 people and can’t find them. They bought a robot to do the sanding, which is the dirtiest, hardest job there. No jobs were lost. The six people who were doing that job were given better jobs.

“The type of employees you need will change. Somebody’s got to fix the robotics and do the programming. These kinds of jobs will be the good jobs that a lot of young people want.

“Companies are now starting to focus on how to recruit, what kind of training is needed, immigration, and robotics and automation. All these areas need attention.”

Career awareness

“Businesses need to get into grades 8, 9, and 10 school classrooms” says Francis. If you want to attract people to your industry, you have to talk to young people and show them what robotics is, and what your industry is all about. You need to tell young people that Aerospace and Defence careers are attractive, technically challenging, international, and well-paid.

“To stay in business, over the next five years, companies will have to connect to the secondary school system to recruit young people, attract immigrants, and adopt automation. That’s the hard reality.”

For more information about ACOA, visit www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca

