

# Residential Construction on PEI continues strong in 2020

by Heidi Riley

“The years 2018-19 was really hard because everyone was so busy,” says **Andrew Garth**, President of **Canadian Home Builders Association-PEI (CHBA-PEI)**. Andrew is also owner of **Ravenwood Stairways** in Alberton.

“PEI Residential construction companies are working as hard as they can,” says **Allan Manley**, Executive Officer of CHBA-PEI.

“With the increased demand for construction, there is an increased need for more workers and getting them up to speed with the skills needed. Attracting people becomes more difficult as the population ages.”

“Construction has turned into year-round work, the work doesn’t stop in December like it used to,” says Andrew. “The industry is cyclical, and I expect at some point that demand will slow down when more housing sale comes on the market.”

“There was a big drop in builds in 2015 when HST on new housing was implemented. We lost a lot of tradespeople at that point because there was no work. The cycle is now at a high point, and there is a worry about when something could affect the market again.”

CHBA-PEI has approximately 35 members, including new home builders and renovators, land developers, trade contractors, product and material manufacturers, building product suppliers, lending institutions, insurance providers, service professionals and those specializing in plumbing & heating, windows, siding, electrical, and many more.

It is a national lobby group that communicates with municipal, provincial and federal governments. It provides services to its members such as helping to promote the trades as a viable career choice, and facilitates training with Workers Compensation Board, Fall Arrest, and other essential training.

## Job titles in residential construction

- Estimator
- Home Inspector
- Surveyor
- General Labourer
- Framing Carpenter
- Painter
- Drywall/Seam Filler
- Siding Installer
- Foundation Installer
- Building supplies retail
- Tiling and Flooring Installer
- Architectural Technologist
- Project Manager
- Architect
- General Contractor
- Electrician
- Fine Carpenter
- Plumber
- Landscape Designer
- Bricklayer
- Roofer
- Interior Designer

“Residential Construction is more than carpentry or electrical or plumbing,” says Andrew.

“For instance, seam filling is a job in very high demand right now. The job is dependent on weather and drying times. If a job is projected to take a week but things are not drying properly because it is raining a lot, the seam fillers can’t finish on time, which means the next job is pushed back and the project is delayed.”

The National Building Code is now coming into force for residential construction in rural areas across PEI. “Members of CHBA-PEI always did build to code, so the change will not affect them,” says Allan.

“In 2020, single family and semi-detached housing is being inspected but the code will not be strictly enforced until January 2021.”

“Inspectors will work with contractors to make sure things are built to requirements. Reputable contractors are comfortable with following the code, but it may eliminate some of the fly-by-night people who work under the table. The homeowner should get a better structure if it is built according to the rules.”

Andrew and Allan say that the influx of newcomers to PEI has helped drive the demand for residential construction, and if immigration numbers decrease, it could adversely affect demand.

“We are such a small population that it takes so little change to affect the market,” says Andrew.

## The future looks bright

“As long as the province maintains its current policies and encourages immigration of skilled individuals, it will benefit all facets of the PEI economy, including residential construction,” says Allan.

“We benefit from the much higher housing prices in Ontario, Alberta, and BC. Many baby boomers are selling their homes there and buying or building homes on PEI for much less money.”

“If the Canadian dollar stays low, we will continue to benefit from people moving here from New England as well. If people are building houses, then furniture, and appliances and other retail sectors will also benefit.”

## Advice to anyone interested in Residential Construction

“No matter what trade people chooses, they need to continue to educate themselves,” says Allan.

“They must learn the basics first, and they have to expect to put in the groundwork and start from the bottom so that they can achieve the next level.”

“There needs to be an aspect of pride in your work too,” says Andrew. “In my business, people are proud of their good workmanship.”

“There are a lot of incentives to help people join the trades,” says Allan. “Apprentices receive a grant of \$4,000, and an additional \$6,000 is given to women to encourage them to earn their Red Seal.”

For more about the **Canadian Home Builders Association-PEI**, contact **Allan Manley**, Executive Officer at **902-218-6425** or email [allan@chba-pei.ca](mailto:allan@chba-pei.ca)

Visit [www.chba-pei.ca](http://www.chba-pei.ca)

From left, Andrew Garth, President of the Canadian Home Builders Association-PEI (CHBA-PEI) and owner of Ravenwood Stairways, and Allan Manley, Executive Officer, CHBA-PEI.



## From employee to owner of a stairway construction company

by Heidi Riley

**Andrew Garth** is owner of **Ravenwood Stairways** in Alberton. He started at the company as a Salesperson and Estimator, and purchased the company six years ago.

Andrew, who is an Islander, was working in Ontario, came home and was hired by the company to help reinvigorate sales and develop the Maritime market. After four years, the owner Ralph Clark decided to retire, and developed a succession plan to sell the company to Andrew.

Since then, Andrew has brought on two partners, and has expanded the business significantly. “The boom on PEI has helped get our name out to a lot more contractors, and now we can prove the benefits of saving time and money with a subcontracted staircase.”

The company has been a member and has been involved with the Canadian Homebuilders Association-PEI for a number of years.

## Ravenwood has five employees, including:

- Shop Manager
- Stair Designer and Installation Expert who has been with the company since the late 1980s
- Two Installers
- A part-time worker in the summer

“It is hard to find qualified labourers that are ready to jump into the business. We need a specific set of skills and we pride ourselves in our workmanship. If I lost one of my more experienced workers, it would be very hard to find someone to come into the position and pay him what he is worth while they are being trained. Even though a person may be very knowledgeable in the construction trade, it could take at least three months working with an experienced stair maker to get up to speed.”

“Bringing in younger students isn’t always easy either. An entry-level position involves a lot of moving and sanding, and it takes someone who is interested and motivated to build their skills starting from the bottom and working their way up.”

“The work can be slow, mundane, and tedious. Our people started at an entry-level position and built their skills. Some have been with us for more than 20 years, and some have started businesses of their own.”

“Often people who leave and start their own businesses become customers of ours or we will work together on a big job. It seems to be a constant struggle with all contractors to help build up the skills of their employees, only to have them leave and start their own businesses. That is not necessarily a bad thing. There is so much work right now, there is enough for everyone.”

“In September, we took on a Holland College Transitions program student who is working out really well. He has been with us for six months, and he is still learning and working hard. He is a success story, and we hired him after the program finished. At the moment, he can do the sanding, identify mistakes, fill holes, and do touch-ups.”

“We will be moving him into a role where he is more independent as he learns to install stairs himself. It can be a long training process. The last person we hired took five years of training before he was comfortable building and installing a staircase on his own.”

Andrew says he expects his employees to be very self-sufficient and have great attention to detail. “We need staff to be able to work independently and make their own decisions so that the job gets done on time. The work is very much project-based, and if we get the project done on time, we can take off personal time when needed.”

“Our work hours are 7 am to 5 pm, with Friday afternoons off, and our employees like that arrangement.”

## Women in construction

“A diversified labour force will benefit all sections of the industry,” says Andrew. “One woman was with us for seven years, doing finishing work and drafting work on the computer, and she moved on to become a Drafter. We had an Administrator in the business as well, who has moved on to another administration job. I am seeing more and more women doing labour work on construction sites.”

Andrew believes there will be a big increase in women in the trades in the future, especially in business management. “There are many husband and wife teams where husband still does the traditional hammer and nail role and the wife handles the books, schedules the tradespeople on a job and makes sure things are running on time and on budget.”

“I think women can still be intimidated working with men, and it is not something business owners always consider. It is a learning curve for everyone. Women need to be confident in their abilities, keeping in mind that starting out, no one is confident in their abilities. Women bring a different perspective to the workplace, and it is important to include them.”

For more information about **Ravenwood Stairways**, call **902-853-3037**.

Search **Ravenwood Stairways** on Facebook.

