

## Tips of the Trade - Home Renovations

We're fixing up our residence; here's how you can fix up yours.

Home renovations can be akin to rocket science, a subject not taught at Lethbridge College. However, Cal Whitehead, chair of the college's construction trades, knows the frustrations and pitfalls of fixing up a home and how to avoid them. Here are his five elements of a comprehensive plan:

- 1) Bylaws and permits.** Building bylaws tell you what you're allowed to do (size, location, setbacks, architectural controls, etc.) Determine if your project requires permits.
- 2) Budget.** Determine what you can afford and what renovations will give you the best value for your dollar. Ensure the value you're putting into the renovation can be recovered if you sell; don't overvalue your property when it's compared to the neighbourhood. Proceed in stages you can afford. Get the quality you want, not just quantity.
- 3) Size and scope.** Determine what design is required for space and the type of finish you require before having a draftsman draw up a working plan. This will save time and money.
- 4) Contractors.** Determine what work, if any, you will attempt yourself. When hiring a contractor, find one who will work with you. When obtaining quotes, find a minimum of three contractors you think you could work with. Quotes will vary; ensure they are fair. The contractor must be approachable, reliable, communicative and professional to ensure your renovation will be a pleasant experience. Once you are satisfied, a contract can be drawn up. Remember to include a payment schedule listing how much, if any, will be paid upfront. Never be muscled into paying for something you are not satisfied with. A plan detailing styles and colours of every detail is important.
- 5) Timelines and safety.** Determine the best time for your renovation. Weather plays a role in exterior renovations. If you plan to live in the home during the renovation, ensure you have alternate cooking, bathroom and laundry facilities. If entrances will be closed off, ensure you have an escape route in an emergency. Set a start date and a tentative completion date and monitor your project to avoid unpleasant time overruns.

### Forging Alberta's Economy (continued)

As Eagan notes, roughly 45 per cent of the building's \$11.5-million price tag is for labour, involving those who shape, mould and fashion each aspect of the project. They are involved in every sector of society, getting things done through skill, knowledge and effort. Much of their work is done away from the spotlight, and without a lot of fanfare.

"We think differently in North America," says Eagan. "In Europe, if you work with your hands, you're considered an artisan and revered."

Eagan says the North American culture places more emphasis on achieving success through white-collar careers, but for every banker or lawyer, society needs 10 people who are skilled in making things with their hands.

While the residence is a showcase for the trades training and apprenticeships taught at Lethbridge College, it's also an indication of the need for such training, even in a recessionary period. Eagan admits those thinking about training will always have a decision to make: when the economy is booming, do they spend time and money on education when unskilled jobs are paying \$34 an hour in places such as Fort McMurray, or do they wait until times have flat-lined to return to school when they might not have the financial resources?

In Alberta, the choice is made somewhat easier by the desperate need for skilled labour.

"The correct answer is take the job in the hot times and save money for an education in the cold times," says Eagan. "But, in Alberta, there is a deficit of 30,000 trades people now and it's expected to grow to 55,000 in 10 years. Even in this recession, while there have been layoffs, those left on the job are going full steam ahead. My advice is there is never a bad time to get into the trades."

Through apprenticeships come accreditation and standards, the hallmarks of trades in Canada. A lack of education is one of society's main limitations to earning a decent wage in a viable career.

"Anyone can have a lifelong career in a trade, earning a reasonable, middle-class living and enjoying a comfortable lifestyle," says Eagan. "It's a career with instant gratification: you see the results of your work immediately."

The project, while certainly not the largest in the city's history, will ultimately have significant impact on the local economy. It was designed here, many of the trades people employed live here, and those who come from elsewhere provide a stimulus to local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, car rentals and gas bars. When it opens, the students who occupy its 109 rooms will spend money in the community, extending the value for years to come.

# RESIDENT designers



From left to right:  
Christopher Babits, Theresa  
Yauck, Art Ferrari, Dan Westwood

***Lethbridge College has been through some substantial changes in the last few months: a new look, a new name, new programs, always placing students at the forefront of these innovations. This fall, that motivation will continue when the campus opens its third student residence.***

Construction on the residence began last June after several months of planning by the college's senior leadership team. Most of the \$11.3-million price tag has been covered by college reserves, aided by a \$2-million contribution from the city. The college's Alumni Relations Council has taken on the job of raising the final \$1 million.

The five-storey facility includes 109 suites and a lounge on the top floor. Each room is designed for single occupancy (double if required), a feature that will appeal to those who want privacy rather than a roommate, something mature students will appreciate.

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## RESIDENT designers (continued)

Each will contain a washroom, bed, bedside table, desk, wardrobe and a small kitchen area. Rent for the units has not yet been determined.

Ferrari Westwood Babits Architects, a company with 80 years experience in Lethbridge, is prime consultant for the project. Dan Westwood, lead design architect, says the firm originally intended to build something solely to meet the overwhelming need for student accommodation, but soon realized sustainability would play a major role and be the foundation of the initiative.

That will appeal to a new type of learner, one who is environmentally savvy.

“As we proceeded through the project, the whole sustainability concept came to the forefront,” says Westwood. “We were able to show the advantages of going to a concrete structure, and also reducing the footprint by going with five storeys so that it would take up less land on the campus. It will be a higher quality building that will last much longer.”

The residence has been situated to be highly efficient, using prevailing winds for ventilation, rainwater collection for irrigation, and the area’s high rate of sunshine for natural lighting and solar power for hot water. Construction will also incorporate building materials with low emissions.

Westwood says non-carcinogenic building products were chosen for optimum student health.

“We want to incorporate materials found regionally,” says Westwood. “We want to use materials that are renewable, recyclable.”

To cap the project, the surrounding grounds will be xeriscaped, in keeping with the drive for sustainability.

Art Ferrari, managing partner in the project, as well as a 1968 graduate of the college’s merchandising administration program, says although sustainability can be expensive to incorporate, it’s becoming increasingly important, and the long-term benefits outweigh the costs. And with the economic downturn, building costs are lower than in boom times.

“The market in construction right now is very advantageous,” says Ferrari. “But I think there’s more of an overriding thing with the college in its rebranding; it wants to become a sustainable campus. It’s based on a philosophy that says it’s the right and proper thing to do.”

*“I think for our residents coming in now and certainly in the future, sustainability will be no different than indoor plumbing or high-speed Internet; it’s just going to have to be.”*

**Kim Sullivan**  
Residence Life Manager

Christopher Babits, third partner in the firm, served as design development architect following completion of the initial concept. The firm is also involved with Lethbridge College’s Campus Development Plan, a vision for the school for the next 30 years.

Kim Sullivan, Lethbridge College’s Residence Life manager, agrees with Ferrari.

“I think for our residents coming in now and certainly in the future, sustainability will be no different than indoor plumbing or high-speed Internet; it’s just going to have to be, or we’re not going to be in the market.”

Sullivan says with some 440 students living on campus, more options are necessary.

“There’s no doubt that there’s a need for residences; it’s difficult to find accommodation,” he says. “We always cut our wait lists off once we have a hundred guys and a hundred girls. This year alone we cut off a full month sooner than the previous year.”

The design team is finding new and innovative ideas to maximize efficiency.

“We’ve orientated the building so that it can capture wind and provide natural ventilation through the building,” says

Westwood. “This is the first time we’ve ever done that.”

Theresa Yauck, interior designer for the Ferrari Westwood Babits team, says she was thrilled to take on the challenge.

“I think it’s a great honour to be able to say I had a hand in designing the new learners residence,” says Yauck, a graduate of the original class (2001) of Lethbridge College’s Interior Design program.

Yauck says Lethbridge College gave her the necessary skills and confidence to be successful. She says because of the sustainability factor in this project, she was conscious of the materials chosen for each unit, but she also says she wanted to create a comfortable space for students.



Artist rendering of student lounge in the new student residence.

“We wanted to make it an exciting space for these students to live with a warm atmosphere as well,” says Yauck. “It’s more than commercial because these students are going to be living in here; we wanted it to feel very home-like.”

Each room will be adorned with earthy colours like mauves and blues to create a warm vibe. Ferrari adds the rooms are also extremely versatile.

“The flexibility of the rooms could be a choice depending on what the students can afford to pay. They are built to share, so if a student can’t afford to live on their own, they can share that space with a friend or a colleague to reduce the cost.”

Fifteen of the units will be wheelchair accessible and barrier free, dispersed throughout the five floors to provide a feeling of inclusiveness for people with mobility issues.

We actually met with someone from the residence and looked at a unit for disabled students, evaluated their failures, determined what could be done better,” says Westwood.

For instance, none of the 30th Avenue residences, the most recently built, are accessible from the sidewalk.

Some of the features in an accessible unit include wider doorways, lowered shelving, an open sink to accommodate a wheelchair, lower windows, and larger bathrooms containing grab bars.

Ferrari was Lethbridge College’s Distinguished Alumni recipient in 2008, chosen for his contributions to the college and community. He says he feels lucky to be able to give back to the institution with his skills and knowledge.

“I felt really honoured and thrilled (to be recognized),” he says. “But it was nice to connect with the college in a different way and it also helped to re-establish serving the college; that’s an important thing to us.”

Christina Boese (Communication Arts 2008)

### Lethbridge College’s residence project by the numbers:

- Trades involved: 19
- Workers visiting site on one day: 15 to 75
- Square metres on one floor: 870
- Days crane was on site: more than 210
- Cost of crane: about \$400,000
- Man-hours of employment created: 130,000 or 65 years
- Financial benefit to community: about \$8.75 million