

Home For Learning a hands-on classroom

SUMMERLAND – Carsten Nielsen was looking forward to retirement.

Then Nancy Darling called, to see if he'd be interesting in overseeing this year's construction of the Home For Learning project for Okanagan College. Like he did during his 32 years of running Carsten Construction, he's jumped in with both feet.

Retirement? That will have to wait. He's enjoying his new-found project, helping training students too much.

"I started Carsten Construction the day I finished my apprenticeship in 1976, and shut it down last fall," says Nielsen. "I'm semi-retired and I thought it was time for a break. But when Okanagan College called, I thought I wasn't doing anything, so..."

"Construction has been good to us, so I wanted to give a little bit back."

Nielsen has built numerous houses and buildings in the Central Okanagan – he says 98 per cent of his work has been in Summerland. His company built custom homes and townhouse projects as well as commercial buildings, including major projects for the local School District and City Hall. He also built the wildlife fences between Summerland and Peachland.

The Home For Learning proj-

ect gives Okanagan College trade students a hands-on opportunity to apply the knowledge they gain in the classroom.

This year the 1,660 square foot ranchers is on a hill on an acre on Katsurun Place, a lot which Nielsen owned that he allowed Okanagan College to purchase at a significantly discounted rate.

"The house has lots of features and a double garage," Nielsen explains. "It has concrete siding, laminated asphalt shingle roofing, stone facing, highly efficient windows, a hot pump, maple cabinets, and exposed aggregate concrete..."

Home For Learning projects thrive on the generosity of a large number of sponsors – suppliers and companies who donate products and services towards construction. There are over 40 sponsors this year.

This Home For Learning will be completed in September, and will be put on the market. Proceeds from the project go back into the Okanagan College program to fund trades education.

"The students have been involved in almost every aspect of this home," says Nielsen.



Victoria Bazchok

Nielsen loves working with the students.

"I've enjoyed it, and the class has been phenomenal," he says. "They've been the best students I could have ever hoped for. They've been involved in getting the house to lock-up stage, almost taking it all the way. It's worked out really good."

Victoria Bazchok is a pre-apprenticeship student in the residential construction program. A former high school teacher, she hopes to eventually build her own houses.

"We've done everything from the site survey to excavation to concrete pouring, framing, shingling, insulation, dry-wall," she says. "We've had trades people come in and teach us, which has been brilliant."

"The students did some of the dry-wall, they put in the truss system, and worked throughout the house. It has been my job to line up all the materials and sub-trades. It takes four for me to do this job properly."

This program includes something called Peerance Fridays, where students can obtain more practical experience in their chosen trade by working with local companies. Victoria has been working with Beaver Home Improvement.

"I love this program," Victoria notes. "It's been a big change for me. I was a high school teacher for 10 years, but decided I needed to do something different. I have a few years to go, but my first goal is to earn my Red Seal journeyman's carpentry ticket."

"I want to work in as many different places as possible so I can get experience. I want to focus on residential construction. Maybe I can get a mentor, or maybe even own my own construction company."

Nick Redding says, "This course is a great opportunity for us to learn a lot of new skills. Our teacher has been great, and he taught me a lot of the tricks of the trade."

"After the course, I hope to find a good company to work for that can help me for my whole apprenticeship."

Steve Tasse, 29, is a pre-apprentice electrician student at Okanagan College, working on the Home For Learning.

Previously, he had worked in helicopter logging, but injuries meant he needed to be re-

trained, and he started in the program last November.

"So far, so good," he says. "I'm glad I got out of logging. I was getting old fast."

"The hands-on training in the program is very good," Darling, the Okanagan College Trades Program Administrator states. "We are very proud of this class. They have been a fantastic group to work with and to watch them grow into skilled tradespeople is amazing!"

"I give credit to Carpenter instructor Steve Kamstra for mentoring and coaching these students and modeling a strong work ethic throughout the entire project. The students worked really well together which helped to keep the project slightly ahead of schedule."

Darling continues, "Carsten has spent so much time with these students – they are very fortunate to benefit from his many years of experience and also to watch and learn how he stays calm under pressure on the jobsite. Many students found employment opportunities through Carsten's extensive network of builders."

To learn more about how to become involved in the Residential Construction program contact Darling via email at NDarling@okanagan.bc.ca.



A HOME FOR LEARNING A COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED PROJECT FOR TRADES TRAINING

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the following businesses and organizations.

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