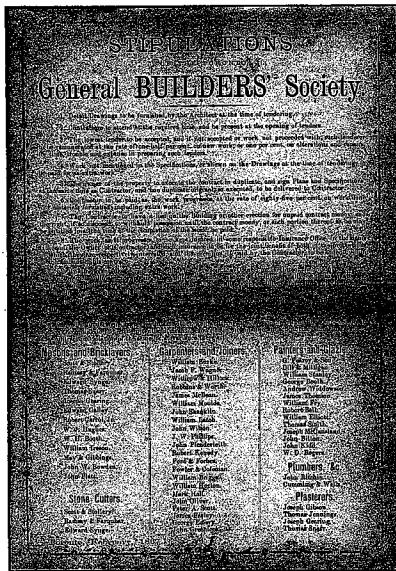


# Building on Tradition

The Toronto Construction Association has successfully served the interests of the city's construction industry for more than a century

BY ROMA IHNATOWYCZ



The Toronto Construction Association was established in 1867 as the Toronto General Builders' Society

**THE TORONTO CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION (TCA)** has made a mark for itself as a modern, forward-thinking organization. But its roots are very much steeped in history. Established in the late 19th century as the Toronto General Builders' Society, the TCA is the original mixed trade association in Canada. In fact, it even predates the country itself, by about six months.

"It was founded in February 1867, so it's older than Canada," says John Mollenhauer, the TCA's president and CEO. "It is (also) older and bigger than any other association in our industry."

The forerunner of the TCA was set up by 58 initial members to further the interests of the city's construction industry. While much has changed since then—including the name—the mandate has remained steady over the decades. Then, as now, the association aims to serve as a focal point for the construction industry in what has become the Greater Metropolitan Toronto Area (GTA).

This was evident from the get go, starting with the decision to form the association. It was also evident 25 years later when it was incorporated as the Builders Exchange of the City of Toronto, a move aimed in part to gain recognition in dealing with the government on construction issues.

The 36 companies that formed the nucleus of the newly renamed and incorporated association paved the way forward in a city that saw some impressive construction projects in the twilight years of the 19th century. This included the Gooderham Building at Front and Wellington streets, the Temple Building at Bay and Richmond streets and Toronto City Hall.

## GROWING BIGGER AND BETTER

In 1925, with membership tallied at 170 companies, the association moved into new offices at 1104 Bay Street, where it braved the challenges of the Great Depression. Nonetheless, notable construction projects like Maple Leaf Gardens and the T. Eaton's store still managed to get completed.

By the end of the Second World War, membership had risen to 300, and Norm Fraser, just out of the RCAE, took the reins as secretary-manager, later

known as general manager, a position he held for more than two decades. Following him, TCA general manager Cliff Bulmer, who also held his post for approximately 20 years, oversaw a major and important move by the association: the creation of the Toronto Construction Industry Government Affairs Committee, tasked with lobbying the government. Since renamed, the TCA's lobbying committee nevertheless continues to advance and address construction interests before the government to this day.

Following Bulmer, Tim (Temple) Harris took the reigns at TCA, and keeping to tradition retained his position as president for a lengthy 18 years. His right-hand man, executive vice president Bill Gohn, remained in his position even longer — for a full quarter century. "When I started (in 2006), the Association had only had three leaders in the last 60 years," notes current TCA president John Mollenhauer. These long tenures helped strengthen the Association and they also reflected the strong commitment that industry leaders had to its ongoing development.

In the '60s and '70s, TCA membership grew quickly, reaching 1,351 by 1988 thanks largely to changes allowing Affiliate Association membership. By 1979, members gained representation on the federal level as the Canadian Construction Association agreed to allow TCA to integrate its members. In 1990, TCA opened a second office, the Mississauga Construction Association, which attracted more than 85 construction companies in its first year. Not long after, TCA launched the annual Construct Canada Conference and Exposition.

Today, TCA membership is in excess of 2,200 corporations, and the association continues to grow, expand and seek new ways to serve the increasingly complicated interests of its members. In truth, the role it plays has never been more vital, says Mollenhauer. "It has never been more important than it is now... (because) our industry is becoming infinitely more complex—it is getting very litigious, buyers of construction are getting into new and different forms of procurement and the size of projects (is expanding)."

Fortunately for the city's construction industry, the TCA has more than a century of experience to build on as it continues moving forward in the 21st century. | **BD**