

# 'Safety is No. 1': College of Carpenters going extra mile to keep classes open during pandemic

*Protocols include screening each visitor and student for COVID each day in its 'Citizen Care Pod'*

Author of the article:

**Special to Financial Post & Jonathan Bradley**

Publishing date:

Sep 22, 2020 • Last Updated 1 day ago • 3 minute read



The College of Carpenters and Allied Trades is working hard to get students out into the workforce despite the pandemic's effect on its school.

A shortage of skilled trades workers has long been a drag on the Canadian economy, but at least one trade school is doing everything in its power to ensure students are able to continue to learn and prepare to enter the workforce despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The College of Carpenters and Allied Trades in Vaughan, Ont., has been following thorough safety protocols since reopening its doors in early July and last week deployed a screening "care pod," according to Mike Yorke, president of the Carpenters' District Council of Ontario.

"We've implemented a number of protocols, including screening each and every visitor, guest and student for COVID each and every day," said Yorke. "We also have social distancing protocols in place, which means we probably cut our student count by at least 50 per cent. We've cut the class sizes down to a maximum of six students."

Yorke said some of the training areas and the cafeteria have been converted into new classrooms to facilitate social distancing.

One of the biggest changes has been the installation of a Citizen Care Pod (CCP) — a renovated storage container converted into a screening facility — which has been placed at the entrance to the college.

Zenon Radewych, principal at WZMH Architects, was involved in creating the CCPs.

"The CCP was first discussed between myself and one of my clients, Carl Demarco of Camillion Corp.," said Radewych. "Just as the country went into lockdown in mid-March, we were brainstorming one very late night on an idea that could protect construction workers for a major development project he is bidding on in Ontario. We came up with the idea of having some sort of mini portable screening and testing centre at the entrance to the construction site to effectively create a safe zone for the workers."

WZMH Architects drafted a concept for the CCPs, Radewych said, and PCL Construction helped build them. WZMH reached out to Microsoft for advice to make the units user friendly and safe.

There are heating and cooling systems inside the unit, so it is able to operate year round.

*We have a responsibility to mentor them and to ensure safety*

MIKE YORKE, CARPENTERS' DISTRICT COUNCIL OF ONTARIO

The staff who conduct the screening and testing are physically separated from those people being tested, so less personal protective equipment is required. The pods are equipped with cameras that determine how many people are

standing in line and if they are wearing masks — they also have the ability to measure for fevers through infrared technology.

A member of the college will conduct screening and are considering having a nurse on site to perform COVID-19 testing if needed.

The college's efforts aim to address concerns of students and staff alike, which mainly revolve around social distancing. Both groups want to be confident that the school is as safe as possible.

Smaller classes sizes are part of the equation, but have a downside: fewer students means it will take longer to bring workers into the industry.

In order to provide skills relevant to the COVID era, the college has also been emphasizing a training program called Infection Control Risk Assessment (ICRA). ICRA is a three-day program for health-care workers and lab technicians, designed to teach them how to protect people from infections. Contractors have been asking the college to provide this training to them.

Yorke said the college is undertaking these safety protocols to be responsible to its members.

"When you think about a college, there's many young apprentices," he said. "These are young people with not a lot of experience in the industry and on the job site. We have a responsibility to mentor them and to ensure safety is No. 1 to protect them."