

# Honourary Life Members

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## Lloyd MacLean

CANS Honourary Life Member 2005



The sincerity is evident in Lloyd MacLean's voice when he speaks of how much he enjoyed his years in the construction industry. At the same time though, he seems equally convinced his retirement in August 2004 was the right move given the changes in the industry since he first started in the mechanical sector back in 1964.

"Things are way, way different than years ago, particularly in the residential market. Now construction is a real 'business' – you have to have well-educated people running it in order to deal with all the red tape and government involvement. You need to have so much knowledge about everything, which is leading to more and more firms becoming so specialized."

The other major contributing factor to his decision to retire, MacLean says, is the changing nature of competition within the industry. The unionized versus non-unionized debate has dramatically shifted over the past 40 years.

"We were a union shop, but it's becoming harder to be competitive that way. It's more difficult to get projects now with the non-union shops becoming more aggressive in going after larger projects. It's a trend right across Canada and it's easy to see why union wages are up to \$37 per hour while you have some non-union shops working for \$20 per hour. If I was starting out today, I would probably go non-union."

When he first started out with McKay Heating and Plumbing Ltd. in New Glasgow – right after graduating from vocational school – MacLean says the emphasis was more on the trade, on knowing how to do the job. The business side was important, but came second to professional knowledge. The focus on quality work hasn't changed, he says, but it's now equaled by the importance of the business side of the equation.

Put that together with the advances in technology and education, and MacLean believes the opportunities for young people entering the construction industry today are better than ever.

"The trades are a good career choice today, much more so than in the past. It's much more of a professional business than when I started out."

For anyone starting out in the construction industry today, MacLean hopes they're lucky enough to find a mentor like the one he found in his first employer, George McKay. Fresh out of school, he admits he still had plenty to learn when he first signed up as an apprentice plumber. He credits McKay with much of his success in working his way up through the company.

"George McKay was certainly a big influence on the way things turned out for me. He was fair, smart and knew the business inside and out."

MacLean spent 15 years at McKay Heating and Plumbing Ltd. as a supervisor, moving into estimating and eventually becoming a part owner and vice president when the company split into two divisions, joining with partner Bill McKay Jr. – son of one of the company's original owners. During those years MacLean worked all across northeastern Nova Scotia, through Canso, Parrsboro, Amherst, Pictou, his hometown of New Glasgow and Antigonish. Projects covered both the residential and commercial markets and the company kept two service vans on the road all the time, working on projects that included many regional schools, the Michelin plant in Granton, Saint Francis Xavier University, the Aberdeen Hospital and – most recently – the Fox Harb'r golf development.

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However, MacLean's influence travelled far outside this region. He served for many years on the Board of Directors for the Mechanical Contractors Association of Canada (MCAC), acting as the Association's Vice Chair, Eastern before taking over as Chair in 1998-99. He also represented the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS) at the MCAC table, serving as Chair of CANS' Mechanical Section for 10 years.

During this time MacLean was significantly involved in working with the federal government to improve matters involving the construction industry, putting in a lot of time on the 'Paid When Paid' clause, which enshrines the principle of general contractors being obligated to pay their sub-contractors upon getting paid themselves.

In fact, MacLean's willingness to serve in whatever capacity he could prompted the MCAC to honour him with a unique 'Step Up to the Plate' award in recognition of his varied and many contributions to the organization.

"I first got involved with the associations to be part of trying to make changes for the betterment of the contractors. The more voices we had, the more our concerns would be heard and changes made," MacLean says. "It was also an opportunity, especially in CANS, for both union and non-union to work together.

"I also wanted to get involved to see what was happening throughout the industry; to meet other contractors and see what problems they were having. It was a way to give back to the industry some of my experience and insight over the years."

And it isn't only the construction industry that benefited from MacLean's willingness to get involved; he practiced what he preached close to home too. He served as town councillor in Westville, where he still lives with his wife Karen, for 17 years and also chaired the Pictou District Planning Commission Board. There were also terms as Chair of the Board of Directors for Nova Scotia's Community College-Pictou Campus, president of Westville Rotary Club (two terms) and assistant district governor for Rotary in Atlantic Canada.

Somewhere in there he also found time to help Karen raise three children (who have all gone on to professions in medicine), be active in minor hockey and ball when the children were young, and even appear in several local drama theatre productions.

After all that it isn't surprising MacLean decided last year it was time for a break. However, the decision to retire wasn't an easy one since it not only meant the end of his working career, but also the end of the company of which he was so much a part.

"We just closed up the business last August (2004)," MacLean says. "My partner (Bill) didn't want to continue by himself, so we closed it down. I believe he's now doing some project management work with Flagship Construction in Truro."

The original plan was to use retirement as an opportunity to enjoy more time with his three grandchildren and indulging his enjoyment of golf, curling and woodworking. However, health problems have intruded on those plans for now. Following a small heart attack, MacLean has undergone a triple bypass and last December had more surgery to treat colon cancer. The cancer has spread to his liver and he is currently undergoing chemotherapy to arrest the disease. But even retirement and health challenges combined have done nothing to diminish MacLean's urge to be involved and contribute to the industry he loves.

"I certainly enjoyed my association with CANS' Mechanical Section over the years. In fact, I hope to still be involved. I served on the strategic planning committee for a number of years and I'm still willing and able to do some volunteer work for them."