

# ROOFING BC

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Melvin, Oscar and Howard Schlamb

## Member profile: 50 years in the fight

### Chilliwack Roofing celebrates a milestone with a "bring it on" attitude

By Frank O'Brien

Chilliwack Roofing Ltd. celebrates 50 years of service to the Fraser Valley roofing industry in 2011, and president Howard Schlamb doubts the next half-century will be any easier than the last.

"It's a dog fight out there," Schlamb said, "The roofing market is super competitive right now."

But if you bet on a fight, the smart money would be on the contender with experience and backed by a top crew of veterans who have overcome tougher challenges in the past.

Howard Schlamb knows roofing. He started work with his father and company founder Oscar Schlamb

back in 1979 after a brief stint in the oil fields. In 1992 Howard and his brother (company vice-president Melvin) bought the company from their father.

From their Chilliwack location, Chilliwack Roofing has grown into one of the leading roofing contractors in the Fraser Valley, running trucks and up to five crews as far east as Hope and working all across the Valley.

"We go anywhere the work is," Howard Schlamb said.

Oscar, now 75, still lends a hand, an indication of the commitment that has driven Chilliwack Roofing from the beginning.

When Roofing BC caught up with Howard, his crews were finishing a 100,000 square foot torch-on roof for the new Rosedale Elementary School in Chilliwack. Other recent

*CHILLIWACK continued on page 6*



### Women in roofing

Gender bias is becoming a thing of the past as more women enter the trades. See page 14



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*CHILLIWACK* continued from page 1  
 projects include a new Toyota dealership, the GW Graham Secondary School, and scores of both single-family and multi-family residential roofs.

Chilliwack Roofing handles torch-on systems, fiberglass shingles, EDPM roofing, TPO single-ply systems and metal flashings, trim and cladding. The company has a metal shop as part of its 2,300-square-foot Chilliwack headquarters.

***[The crews] have adapted well to the new safety regulations... They have learned to step back, and take five or 10 minutes to make sure everything is being done right.***

Like the president, many of Chilliwack Roofing's 30-person staff have been with the company for years, some for two decades or more. The ability to provide steady work has helped Chilliwack retain top tradespeople, many of whom have received training through the RCABC campus in Langley.

Chilliwack Roofing drew on its own staff to implement the COR safety program. Company



**Three generations of Schlombs – L-R: Nathan, Melvin, Oscar, Howard, Cody, Curtis**

Melvin's son Nathan, 23, who works for the company full time, has completed his first year of apprenticeship. Howard's son Cody, 24, whose goal is to be a teacher, has completed two years of his apprenticeship, and works summers in Chilliwack Roofing's estimating department. Meanwhile his brother Curtis, 19, is on the rooftops, paying his way through his Engineering degree.



Fifty-two modular homes from the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Whistler are being reconfigured into Timber Grove Apartments, permanent affordable subsidized rental homes in Surrey for seniors and people with disabilities who are at risk of homelessness. The building envelope and other associated work is being done on-site by Heatherbrae Builders Co. Ltd., which sub-contracted the roofing to Chilliwack Roofers. The structure was completely tarped overhead to keep everything dry while the roof was being worked on.



SBS vapour retarder being applied to the steel Q-deck at a new Shoppers Drug Mart being built in Abbotsford



Health & Safety Officer Phyllis Nachtigal with Chilliwack Roofing's safety manual, which is "over 1,000 pages, and constantly undergoing changes and updates." Nachtigal adds that with institutional and government contracts where the RGC guarantee is specified, their customers are now asking to see the company's health and safety program before work commences. The entire document has been put on disk to easily and economically satisfy those requests.



Laying of acoustic insulation at the new Rosedale Elementary/Middle School in Chilliwack

accountant Phyllis Nachtigal took on the COR audit training and the role of Health & Safety Officer. "We felt that having an in-house health and safety officer would allow more direct control," Nachtigal said, adding that the crews have adapted well to the new safety regulations. "They have learned to step back, and take five or 10 minutes to make sure everything is being done right," she said. The company has never had a serious accident.

**Slowdown seen**

Schlamb always keeps a close eye on infrastructure work as a harbinger of construction, and he sees a slowdown coming.

"Crews have to be putting pipes in the ground before there is any building," he said, "and there is less pipe going into the ground."

Schlamb says the recession that rocked most of Canada in 2009 is just now being felt in the Fraser Valley.

For example, Chilliwack has seen the largest decline in housing starts of any urban centre in British Columbia this year. For the first four months, there has been a total of 86 home starts, down 69 percent from 2010. Multi-family starts are down 75 percent.

This represents a challenge to Chilliwack Roofing, which runs three residential crews.

The answer: go after jobs further afield and compete for government contracts, such as the \$77.5-million prison expansions planned for the Fraser Valley over the next three years. This includes expansions at both the Kent and Matsqui institutions.



The Rosedale project continues with acoustic insulation, vapour retarder, Polyisocyanurate insulation and tapered EPS crickets



A multi-family strata complex in Surrey undergoes a cedar shake conversion

"We will have to wait for the private sector to start up again," Schlamb said. Meanwhile, Chilliwack Roofing will do what it does best: offer competitive pricing and a sterling reputation for quality service.

Rated A+ by the Better Business Bureau and a long-time member of the RCABC, Chilliwack has an edge against many in the construction arena.

Schlamb is a director of the RCABC and he is proud that his company was one of the first to sign on for insurance coverage with RCA Indemnity Corp, one of many advantages he sees in RCABC membership.

"Being a member of RCABC puts you into the top echelon of the industry," Schlamb said, "and without the RCABC guarantee you can't really compete on the bigger projects."

When Schlamb is not working his typical 12 hour days, he likes to help friends with construction projects, fishing on the Fraser River, and sharing time with Alison – his wife of 28 years – his two sons and one daughter, all three of whom are in university.

Succession planning? The 50-year old may think about it later – but whoever succeeds him will have a very strong foundation to build on another fifty years of successful business. Meantime, he has another fight to win. ■

A single family residential project underway in Chilliwack

