

Busy builder booked into 2007

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Chris Erb's SupErb Construction is booking right into 2007.

It's a sign of optimism in the construction sector that only promises to grow through the coming year.

Erb's company builds houses and it has trouble lining up the tradespeople it needs to meet the demands of customers.

"We have projects booked into 2007 because of the trade situation," said Erb, who is second vice-president of the Canadian Homebuilders' Association of British Columbia. "Most stuff is already booked for 2006."

Building houses is taking more time as building systems become more complex, and qualified tradespeople are in short supply.

"There is no such thing as building a

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house in three months anymore," said Erb. "Most take six to eight months because of the degree of difficulty, the detail and the demand on trades."

The 2005 provincial election is lurking in the back of the mind of the industry but no one seems to think a change in government is in the offing — a change the industry sees as one that could be disastrous for the booming construction economy.

"We are anticipating if we can keep the investment climate the same or improve it as it has been set by Liberal government, we are very optimistic this is not a one-year blip but the beginning of long-term sustained growth in the construction industry," said Manley McLachlan, president of the B.C. Construction Association. "You have to look at the record of the government.

"From the industry's perspective this has been a pretty darn good four years."

Keith Sashaw, president of the Vancouver Regional Construction Association sees a bright future for his industry in the coming year.

"We have seen a resurgence in construction, especially in the non-residential component of construction," he said. "We have seen all sorts of activity in commercial and industrial development, not only in the Lower Mainland but throughout the province of B.C.

"The construction industry contractors are feeling a lot more confident. They are beginning to look in terms of employment at taking on new people

Looking to 2005 and beyond, Sashaw said concerns will continue about the availability of skilled labour but increasingly attention will be turning to recruiting estimators, project managers and site superintendents.

"We are already experiencing a real shortage in those areas," said Sashaw. "That is going to be a factor the industry is going to have to be coping with and addressing in 2005 and 2006."

There are expectations the newly formed Industry Training Authority will see its early changes starting to have a positive impact on the construction industry.

"They have planted seeds and done some work in the last year that hopefully will start seeing some payoff in next year and in the future," said labour analyst Kerry Jothen.

M.J. Whitemarsh, chief executive officer of the CHABC has already seen changes through the ITA that are helping the homebuilding sector. She expects that will only improve through 2005.

"The ITA was a very positive move on behalf of the Campbell government," she said. "We are going to see next year that the ITA is really going to move forward.

"They have had a lot of growing pains, but you will see them soar and they will make a huge difference to what's happening in the province."

The coming year is also a critical one for the Olympic building projects.

"We are only five years out from the Games and it is a requirement to hold at least one world-class event in each of the facilities, so we are not that far away from a three-year time frame," said McLachlan.