

The Canadian Renovators' Council

BY DON JOHNSTON

Looking out for renovators... and homeowners

Before he became the Chair of the CHBA's Canadian Renovators' Council in February, **LOU FRUSTAGLIO** was known as the Council's designated tough questioner. Why couldn't the Canada Revenue Agency expand the definition of substantial renovation? Why wasn't the government doing more to fight the underground economy? Why not raise the threshold for the GST rebate?

Now as the CRC Chair, Frustaglio wants all CHBA renovator members to know more about what the CRC does and to let their provincial reps know how the Council can better represent their interests.



Lou Frustaglio

Frustaglio is president of **DreamBuilders**, a successful and highly respected renovation company in Toronto. He joined the Council eight years ago as the provincial representative from Ontario and quickly found that it provided a good way for him to give back to the industry that has provided his living.

During his time on CRC, he has been part of some important initiatives. CHBA's "Get it in Writing!" campaign leveraged hundreds of thousands of dollars from the federal government and other partners to make consumers aware of the dangers of dealing with underground operators. "The tools created by CHBA for this campaign were first rate," says Frustaglio, "and CHBA members and partner organizations such as **Home Hardware** have been able to use these tools to carry the message to checkout counters across the country. It has

had a tremendous impact, but more needs to be done."

The mention of Home Hardware makes Frustaglio smile. "They've been great supporters of the Council and CHBA's Renovation Month Initiative," he says, pointing out the messaging in Home Hardware's brochures and flyers in support of the professional renovator. "Partnerships like this come about because of the forum that the Council provides."

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Another great partner on the Canadian Renovators' Council is Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. "CMHC produces great reports on the renovation market and consumer intentions," says Frustaglio, "and the CRC has helped to identify the need for this information and to shape its format and content." CMHC has some excellent consumer information for renovators and their customers on its Web site, and Frustaglio points out that much of this was prepared with advice from CRC

members. The business training courses for renovators, which were developed by CMHC with the CRC more than 10 years ago, are still widely used across the country.

The Canada Revenue Agency has been in the CRC "hot seat" more than a few times regarding the GST, Mandatory Contractor Payment Reporting and the underground economy. While many things still need to be changed, there have been some successes. When unacceptable delays in processing GST rebate claims for substantial renovations were brought to CRA's attention by the Council, they took prompt action to set performance targets and reporting systems to improve service. Several years ago, the Revenue Agency invited the Council to help improve the guidelines for substantial renovations and the outcome is a vast improvement.

"We want the GST policy changed," says Frustaglio, "and the CHBA continues to take this message to the government at every opportunity. But at the same time we want to make the most of what is currently available."

The CRC's latest project is to produce a compilation of special contract clauses. **JOHN FRISWELL** of **CCI Renovations** in Vancouver is the Council's vice chair and one of the contributors to this project. "CMHC's sample renovation contract is a good basic document which the CRC helped to develop," says Friswell, "but many of us have learned lessons the hard way that, for some jobs, it is sometimes wise to have additional clauses in the contract. No one benefits from a lack of clarity about what to do when unforeseen things happen on a job. Our new collections of special clauses will help both renovators and their customers."

What's next for the Canadian Renovators' Council? According to **BOB SCHULZ** of **The Renovation Corporation** in Edmonton and the Alberta rep on the CRC, RenoMark will be high on the agenda. "The decision taken by CHBA to endorse Toronto's RenoMark Initiative is very welcome," says Schulz. "We want homeowners to know where to find professional renovators and that place is the CHBA. The Council will continue to provide an important forum for identifying and removing obstacles to making this a reality across the country."

The members of the Canadian Renovators' Council are passionate about their businesses and about helping to professionalize their industry. "Like our predecessors," says Frustaglio, "we want to help CHBA renovators be more successful. That's what we're here for." ■