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■ ADVERTORIAL PROFILE

Klondike Contracting: Building with Integrity

by CATHY WATTERS

Everyone knows that renovations can be a major source of stress. After all, who hasn't heard of or witnessed a renovation gone wrong? It is for this very reason that contractors often get a bad reputation. This is where Klondike Contracting sets itself apart.

"Klondike delivers professionalism, value and integrity in an industry often associated with questionable business practices and frequently plagued with inefficiencies," says Eric Schapira, founder of Klondike Contracting Corporation (www.klondikecontracting.com).

Klondike, which specializes in commercial and residential renovations, new construction and property maintenance in Metro Vancouver, strives to take the stress out of the construction industry. When Schapira started the company in 1998 he wanted to create something of which he could be proud. Growing up in a family of accountants, he learned early that reputation and integrity are among the most important assets a person can possess. It's a lesson he took to heart and a principle on which he built his business.

"If you work hard and you are professional and ethical, people like to work with you and they refer you to their friends and family," he says. "At Klondike, we're focused on integrity and on building relationships with our clients, sub-trades, suppliers and staff."

In fact, building quality relationships is something he believes in so strongly that he changed his title to Chief Relationship Builder.

For clients, this means listening to their needs and helping them see their creative vision take shape within a set time frame and budget. To make it as stress-free as possible, Klondike provides a "go to" person for the client to work with from the initial visit through to project completion, and they keep the client



BACK ROW from left: Jaqueline Stewart, Sabrina Dalen, Lisa Calder, Susan Allison, Kelly Schmidt, Shan Powell. FRONT ROW from left: Kelly Nguyen, Eric Schapira, Burton Hartmann.

well-informed at every stage. This includes an open-book policy where clients have the option to review their project bills whenever they want.

"Throughout this process they are getting to learn how we work and that we have systems in place to ensure that things will run smoothly," says Schapira. "Creating a good relationship in the pre-construction phase – from design through to budgeting & scheduling—is essential to ensuring that the construction phase runs efficiently."

Quality relationships with sub-trades and suppliers are just as important and take years to develop. Klondike evaluates new sub-trades on small projects first, assessing the quality of their workmanship, follow-up, attention to detail, and how they interact with the client. If all that is in order, and they work well with Klondike's Project Managers (most of whom are women – which is somewhat unusual in this male-dominated industry), then Klondike gives them more business. In return, sub-trades can expect a clearly defined scope of work, reasonable advance notice for doing the work, good direction, excellent compensation and prompt payment. Because of the solid relationships they've

built with their subcontractors over the years, Klondike has a low turnover rate of its sub-trades/suppliers and enjoys preferential treatment, an important advantage in Vancouver's tight market.

While Klondike has been around for almost a decade, it has experienced its most dramatic growth in the past three years with over 80% increase in gross revenues per annum, culminating in a milestone achievement of \$5-million in 2007.

"We're a different company today than we were three years ago," Schapira says. Back then, the company was much smaller and he handled most of the administration and day-to-day operations himself. As a result, the company stagnated: there was little time to seek new opportunities and there was no infrastructure in place to handle the existing workload.

"It was a difficult stage in our development," he says. "We had to make some decisions: did we want to be smaller and do a good job, or focus on bringing in more people, working on the infrastructure, and enabling ourselves to handle the extra work that was coming in?"

Schapira chose the latter and brought in a partner, Burton Hartmann,

a long standing family friend from their Montreal days. Hartmann brings years of construction experience to the table along with his charismatic nature and ongoing commitment to delivering value and client satisfaction – all of which truly complement Schapira's skill set. Their first order of business was to recruit an "extremely talented, dedicated and detail-oriented administrative team with strong work ethics."

Hartmann and Schapira are proud of their staff, project managers and designers who make up Klondike's team, without whom they believe its growth could not have been achieved.

They both agree that "it's about finding good people who love what they do." They now have between 15 – 20 people who work full time with the company. "Three years ago we would not have been able to handle the volume of business that we handle today, but due to our people, our infrastructure and our systems, we can forge ahead with new opportunities."

Striving to provide their clients with the best service possible, Klondike will soon be implementing a 'green initiative.' Clients who choose to use environmentally friendly products for their projects will receive significant rebates.

"We want to encourage our clients to be socially responsible," says Schapira, noting Klondike's own office has been constructed with recycled building materials. Most clients who are concerned about their carbon footprint don't have time to research which products are green, so his company will bring that information and expertise to the table.

"It's a small initiative, but an important one, as it brings to the forefront both corporate and personal responsibility for improving the world we live in," Schapira explains. "If everybody makes a small effort, it creates a much bigger impact globally."

Now that's what we call building with integrity!

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FEATURED CLIENTS

- **7-Eleven:** Recently renovated 28 stores, working two 12-hour night shifts at each store so client could continue doing business in the day and have as little 'closed' time as possible. This was crucial because every hour of business operations represents significant revenues to the client.
- **North South Travel:** Transformed the old TD Bank building at 10th and Alma from an eyesore into a beautiful piece of architecture (included gutting the insides and structurally upgrading it).
- **Whole Foods:** Lead contractor for Whole Foods renovations in West Vancouver.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- **2007 Georgie Award Finalist**
(This was Klondike's first year entering the competition.)
- **2007 Business in Vancouver: Top forty under 40.**

AFFILIATIONS

- **Better Business Bureau of Mainland BC**
- **Entrepreneurs Organization**
- **Gay & Lesbian Business Association**
- **Greater Vancouver Home Builders' Association**



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