

Small Skilled Trades Businesses Recognizing Talent

Les Armoires Séguin was built as a business from the ground up, beginning as a team of three people designing furniture out of a basement in 2002. Since then, owners Claude and Linda Séguin have successfully grown and expanded their business, which designs, manufactures and installs custom-built kitchens, wall units, furniture, closet organizers and bathroom vanities. Les Armoires Séguin now has more than a dozen employees working out of a new 14,000-square-foot workshop and showroom in Alfred, Ontario, a rural community east of Ottawa.

Lived experience has shaped the company's designs

Claude and Linda employ designers, carpenters, painters, woodworkers, plumbers, electricians and other skilled trades to design, build and install their range of kitchen and home renovation projects. Being in a small rural community, the Séguins face many unique challenges in finding, hiring and keeping the highly skilled talent they need to support and grow their business. They've had to think a little differently and expand their search for talent to support their business.

Having lived with a disability herself, Linda understands the importance of designing for accessibility — both for workplaces and homes. As a result, Les Armoires Séguin has specialized expertise in designing and building accessible kitchens. The business offers a wide range of solutions to improve kitchen accessibility, including interior cabinet and drawer lighting, cabinets that raise and lower with the touch of a button, sliding storage drawers and relocated faucets.

Meet star employee Fred

Fred first came to Les Armoires Séguin in 2010 as part of a student work experience placement. As a young person with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Fred had faced many challenges along the way, but he showed a strong work ethic and was willing to learn. After almost 10 years with Les Armoires Séguin, Fred is now one of the company's valued full-time skilled trades workers.

To help Fred learn and succeed on the job, management at Les Armoires Séguin made minor changes to their training processes and provided additional training to other staff on working with a person with ADHD. The company's management recognized Fred's potential, and he was given opportunities to work in and learn about different parts of the company. Fred's performance in his student role was so impressive that Les Armoires Séguin kept him on and soon made him a full-time permanent employee.

Fred continued to grow on the job. He has developed skills in painting and a unique talent for matching colours, woods and other materials. These are specialized and rare skills that have helped the business gain a competitive edge. In fact, Fred's skills have developed so well that he now teaches these skills to students on work experience placements. His leadership abilities may one day make him the owner!

Myth: workplace modifications are always expensive

Many employers still believe that it is costly to make changes in a workplace to support employees with disabilities. In fact, however, research shows that over one-third of the

adjustments only cost a one-time average of \$500. And 30 percent of people with disabilities don't require any workplace modifications at all.

For most of the people who do, it's simply minor changes. The most common adjustments are modified work hours and job redesign, where duties are revised to improve productivity and job satisfaction. Many workplaces have already started to apply these practices.

The company's willingness to make modifications for Fred and its focus on accessibility for both customers and employees has shown the rest of the staff that Les Armoires Séguin is a place where everyone belongs.

Numbers you need to know: skilled trades sector

In Canada, there are more than 150 designated skilled trades. They fall into four broad categories: construction, industrial, transport and service. What do these categories all have in common? According to Government of Ontario labour market and information statistics, there will continue to be a significant skilled trades labour shortage for the foreseeable future.

The government is expecting more than 20,000 job openings for transport truck drivers, and up to 15,000 openings for construction trades helpers and labourers, as well as up to 8,000 job openings for electricians (excluding industrial systems).