

UA Local 516 Membership Update

Building Strength, Protecting Our Industry & Investing in the Future

Jason Amesbury, Business Manager/Financial Secretary-Treasurer, UA Local 516

The growth of UA Local 516 over the past 14 years has been unprecedented, reflected in significant gains in wages and benefits, steady membership increases, and a strong record of apprenticeship completions. Through progressive leadership and forward-thinking strategies, we have strengthened our position within BC's building trades and construction industry. This includes welcoming more than 30 new signatory contractors, establishing the most modern HVACR training facility in Western Canada, and consistently achieving above-industry-standard gains at the bargaining table. Over the past 13 years alone, our total package has increased by nearly \$23 per hour, an achievement we can all take pride in.

Since stepping into the role of Business Manager in 2013, I have witnessed growth that has exceeded all expectations. This success is the result of a collective effort of our volunteers, trustees, directors, executive board, finance committee, organizers, officers, administrative staff, RTI team, and, most importantly, our dedicated membership. Together, we have built an organization defined by professionalism, strength, and pride.

As we enter a busy season across the province, there is strong momentum throughout our Local and the broader HVAC-R industry.

With the May 3rd wage increase now in effect, we are well positioned for a productive period ahead. The following updates highlight the continued work being done across our Local to strengthen our industry, expand opportunities for members, invest in training and education, protect our jurisdiction, and continue building a stronger future for UA Local 516 throughout British Columbia.



Unionizing British Columbia's Residential HVAC Sector

Foreword from Ian McComish, Training Director, UA Local 516

“UA Local 516 embarked upon and continues a campaign to focus on organizing the residential HVAC sector in British Columbia. This remains a largely untapped and unregulated market that would benefit significantly from the structure and standards UA Local 516 can provide.

We are working toward the creation of a dedicated residential-only ticket, supported by a targeted JATC training curriculum. This model already exists successfully in Ontario and Manitoba.

A residential-only pathway would:

- Keep companies in their proper lane through residential collective agreements*
- Provide employees with access to union health and welfare benefits, retirement plans, and ongoing education*
- Deliver structured training that produces competent residential HVAC mechanics*

A residential ticket with a prescribed education component will allow us to organize this sector effectively, grow union membership, protect commercial work boundaries, and raise standards for consumers who deserve qualified technicians.

This initiative represents a significant opportunity to expand our union while bringing stability and professionalism to an unregulated portion of our industry.”

Robert Sitnik & Glenn Marchant, UA Local 516 Industry Development Team

Our Business Manager, Jason Amesbury, envisioned the Residential HVAC Program as a way to grow UA Local 516 while, more importantly, protecting our Industrial and Commercial contractors and technicians. By organizing and gaining structure within the non-union residential sector, we can help prevent unqualified operators from poaching work that falls within our hard-fought jurisdiction.

Because this is a brand-new initiative for our Local, there are no existing guidelines or agreements to follow. Building a program of this scale requires extensive research, networking, and industry collaboration to ensure it is successful and sustainable.

Our approach has been focused directly on residential company owners through top-down organizing. We are meeting with contractors across British Columbia, asking questions about the industry, what changes they would like to see, and how UA Local 516 can help

strengthen and protect legitimate businesses while helping eliminate the unqualified operators flooding the provincial market.

The feedback we continue to hear from contractors has been consistent:

- Mandatory proper training and safety standards
- Better access to skilled workers
- Clear working rules and jurisdictional protections through a UA Local 516 collective agreement

With the support of UA Local 516 Training Director Ian McComish and RTI, we have already brought several prominent non-union residential contractors through our training facility to discuss the future of residential HVAC training and what standards they believe are needed within the industry.

Our next steps are continuing discussions with legitimate residential contractors throughout the province as we work toward securing a dedicated two-year Residential Red Seal designation through the BC Government and SkilledTradesBC — a training program developed and guided by UA Local 516.

Our plan to organize, regulate, and protect this sector has been met with optimism and support. Our initiative has also already received strong encouragement from many of our established UA Local 516 signatory commercial contractors. Their concerns consistently align with what we are hearing across the industry: unsafe, unregulated work being performed by unqualified individuals continues to threaten both industry standards and our jurisdiction. This is why we must face this head on with strategy and teamwork; there's too much on the line.

We remain aware of certain risks, but to borrow a quote from singer-songwriter Chris Stapleton:

“No one wins afraid of losing.”

A Word From Our Training Director

Ian McComish, Training Director, UA Local 516

The past year has been marked by significant progress for the JATC, RTI and our 531 current apprentices. I am particularly proud of the momentum we continue to create across the industry when it comes to all things training-related. With many moving parts and parties involved, our focus continues to be on our membership first – equipping you with the skills you need and advocating for a well-qualified workforce.

Growth in the Apprenticeship Program

Through our collective efforts, RTI is now one of the largest Refrigeration Apprenticeship Training Schools in Western Canada, educating over 400 people each year.

Over the past year, enrolment in RTI's apprenticeship program has remained steady at a 1.5-year waitlist, which is not uncommon among trainers in BC. We are continually looking at ways to shrink this waitlist and to provide seating for UA Local 516 members. The growth of RTI reflects a strong confidence in our programs from Union & Non-Union contractors alike, and the entire team at RTI who bring a passion to producing the best mechanics we can. UA Local 516 fulfills a vital role in developing the next generation of skilled tradespeople for our industry in BC.

Continuing Education and Member Development

In addition to the core apprenticeship program:

- JATC successfully delivered 54 courses outside the apprenticeship framework last year.
- To further support member success, we have introduced a new Assessment Exam designed to evaluate readiness for technical training. This initiative helps identify areas for improvement early, enabling targeted support and increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes.
- We are in the final stages of completing an in-person B Gas Refresher course for members requiring that certification.
- We have had a substantial increase in the number of A Gas apprentices over the past year, now sitting at 44, with another 5 members completing the A Gas IPSE.
- The tutor program for UA Local 516 members has been a huge success, to date helping 76 members gain a deeper understanding of concepts while at technical training.

Certification Achievements

Steady progress continues in Red Seal certification completion. The number of union members who still require passage of the Refrigeration Red Seal examination has continued to decline since 2021. This positive trend highlights the effectiveness of our training strategies and the commitment of instructors, members, and contractors to achieving full certification for our apprentices.

Government Engagement and Advocacy

Through this past year, the JATC has maintained active engagement with both provincial and federal levels of government to advocate strongly on behalf of our trade. We are monitoring, influencing, and where necessary, opposing programs and policies that could adversely affect our industry standards, employment opportunities, or the long-term interests of our membership. We have lost some battles, won some battles, and will remain at the table regardless to ensure our industry voice is heard.

Supporting Apprentices Through Training

Lee Taylor, Assistant Business Manager, UA Local 516

Most of you know that we agreed to help establish a CLR-contractor funded Gas-A SUB Plan for employees of CLR contractors during the last round of negotiations. The Gas-A SUB Plan is designed to top up wages to 95% of a Journeyperson's regular earnings in combination with EI, while the Gas-A apprentice attends and completes two, ten-week in-school sessions.

We have been working diligently with the CLR contractor group to complete the registration of the SUB Plan with Service Canada and CRA. Both Service Canada and CRA have different initial setup and ongoing reporting requirements for the SUB Plan to be considered eligible.

We are now in the final stages of getting all the necessary paperwork and registrations completed for the setup. We have received approval from Service Canada and are now just waiting on the approval from CRA. Once given the greenlight, we can legally begin issuing payments to top up wages while apprentices attend their Gas-A schooling.

More details of the plan and its implementation, including registration procedures and qualification for the top up, will be available shortly.

Your Retirement, Your Future

Trustees of the Group Retirement Savings Plan, UA Local 516

The Trustees of the Savings Plan are grateful for the amount of positive feedback received on the recent changes made to the Group Retirement Savings Plan. We continue to work with our benefits advisors, HUB International, to investigate further enhancements and options that may benefit the membership, while fulfilling our fiduciary responsibilities in maintaining the purpose of the Plan — helping members save and prepare for retirement.

The added flexibility introduced in September 2025 which allows members age 55 and older to make one withdrawal per calendar year has given those members that may be working with outside financial advisors the opportunity to either transfer their funds out of the group plan in preparation of retirement, or possibly reduce their worked hours while supplementing their income via their RRSP.

Home Buyers Plan withdrawals no longer count against the lifetime maximum withdrawal limit for those under age 55. The lifetime maximum withdrawal for those under 55 was increased from \$25,000 to \$100,000 (from a minimum balance of \$150,000) allowing members some freedom to either invest outside the plan, or meet expenses such as upgrading their home.

March 2026 introduced a new option for UA Local 516 members with existing mortgages or student loans. Members may now opt-in (or out) at any time into the Marmot Benefit program which allows either 10% or 25% of your monthly RRSP earnings to go towards extra mortgage pre-payments or student loan debt.

You can now pay down your mortgage faster, and be debt-free sooner without any additional cost to you. Balancing the priorities of saving/investing and paying down debt, we've already seen a decent number of members opt into the program within the first few months.

Financial advice is available to all UA Local 516 members at no cost through HUB International. A dedicated phone number and email address are available to those seeking advice or assistance with withdrawals, retirement planning, budgeting, etc.

Beyond the Jobsite and Looking Ahead

Jason Amesbury, Business Manager, UA Local 516

We are always looking for ideas from the membership to increase our sense of community. So many of us are often out on worksites either working alone or in small groups, that it's easy to forget that our Local is a growing brotherhood and sisterhood of close to 1600 individuals, many with families, each with a million things going on in our lives.

The more support and understanding we have for each other will only make us stronger and tighter as a positive force for working families going forward. Because of the size of our province and jurisdiction, it sometimes is a struggle time-wise and financially to really develop that sense of community, but we continue to look for ways to invest back into the membership.

Over the last few years, we have managed to increase membership meetings outside of the Lower Mainland. We have been able to incorporate Nanaimo, Prince George, and most recently, Vernon between our regular Surrey meetings and have had some good discussions and engagement with members across the province.

There is significant cost to hold these meetings, so we will continue to monitor and review the balance between cost and effectiveness of our regional meetings. Member participation is key. If you see a regional meeting coming to your area, please try your best to come out.

It's where we can be candid with each other and bring our concerns in a positive manner that sometimes is lost when using electronic means (emails, texts, chats). It's also often a great source of information from the mouths of those directly involved in what's happening at the Local level.

I am proud of the ongoing popularity of our annual Icebreaker tournaments, and especially proud of the union staff that take on the task of organizing such great events for the members, contractors, and industry partners.

We all know how the Surrey tournament fills up so fast, registration was full in about 10 minutes this year. Next year, we may have to even implement a lottery system because of demand.

I am also proud to say that both our Victoria and Kelowna tournaments reached full registration this year as well; a huge accomplishment especially being still in their relatively infant stages!

We look forward to seeing all the participants come out this year, and hope that the time on the links and breaking bread together afterwards really continues to foster the support and understanding we have for each other...while we have fun of course.

I am also proud of the sheer amount of sponsorships we have been able to provide to the sports teams of members' children and grandchildren. With the increasing amount of requests each year, we continue to review what is sustainable and encourage everyone to submit their requests to the union office. The Executive Board continuously receives, reviews, and does their best to ensure fairness when considering all of the requests.

Continuing to sponsor food banks across the province at the end of the year remains one of the Local's priorities. It's quite often the time of year when the less-fortunate need it the most, and I am so thankful that the membership has always been supportive. It's amazing to have such unanimous support for a cause that helps many of our friends and neighbours in our communities across BC.

In addition to these year-end organizational sponsorships, we also as a membership have continued to recognize the hardship that brothers and sisters may be experiencing during a period of disability or on long-term disability, and year after year, we continue to hear how much the year-end monetary gift from their union brothers and sisters means to them.

It's times like these that really remind us of how good we have it, help us put aside our individual differences and animosities, and really come together to extend a communal hand to those that are struggling more than us.

Our holiday dinners (Lower Mainland, Nanaimo, Victoria, Kelowna) and our annual Children's Breakfast with Santa still continue to be well-attended events, and I am proud to say that over the past few years, we have been able to implement — and financially sustain — a small way to include the children of members who live outside the Lower Mainland by mailing them a holiday gift from the Local.

As the membership grows and demographics change, we will continue to review what makes the most sense and where we can improve.

Obviously, increasing the frequency of membership meetings, the annual events, the sponsorships, the donations, the union apparel, etc. all come with financial costs that we must manage, but I am extremely proud of the fact that we continue to have the lowest union dues among the trades in BC.

We have been able to regularly review our property service providers to maintain competitive rates, review our insurance policies to ensure we aren't overpaying for our coverages, and work with accountants to keep up with best practices and remain compliant with all legal reporting requirements.

We also have what I believe are the best lawyers for WorkSafe claim appeals. While some lawyers will take on any appeal, our lawyers are very conscientious of the cost to the membership while seeking the best possible outcome for our members going through the WorkSafe appeal process.

Managing the finances of the Local is no easy task, and I know that we may not all agree every time on what our focuses may be, but I am proud to say that we have been able to sustain and grow what we have, while continuing to invest in the future of the Local, our industry, and our communities across the province.

**While maintaining what we have worked hard to establish,
we will be ready for the future.**

Thank you to every member, contractor, instructor, volunteer, and family who continues to support and strengthen UA Local 516.

The progress we continue to make across British Columbia is only possible because of the professionalism, dedication, and solidarity of our membership. From the jobsite to the classroom, from organizing efforts to community involvement, our Local continues to grow stronger because of the people who stand behind it every day.

As we move through another busy season, let's continue to support one another, protect our industry, and take pride in the work we do across the province.

Have a safe and productive summer.

In Solidarity,

Jason Amesbury, Business Manager/Financial Secretary-Treasurer, UA Local 516

