

Serving up Safety



PHOTOS BY LAUGHING DOG

Leduc Overhead Door is cooking up a positive safety culture—one breakfast at a time

By: Jamie Hall

Ned Stanojevic has the perfect *recipe* for a successful safety meeting—and it starts with food.

Once a month, Ned sets the table in Leduc Overhead Door's upstairs meeting room. Then he busies himself in the kitchen, preparing a hearty breakfast for the 20 or so people who work there. Selection varies from month to month: eggs benedict, hash browns, toast, bacon, sausages, breakfast casseroles, assorted pastries and heaping platters of fresh fruit have all been on the menu.

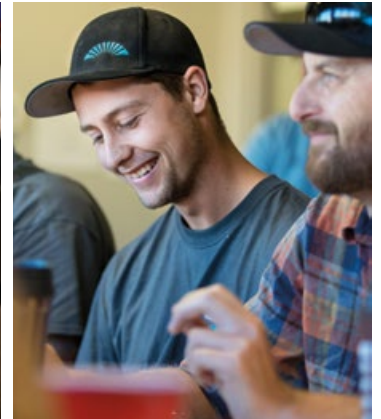
"I have a restaurant background," explains Ned, the company's owner and president, "and there's something about the act of preparing, eating and sharing a meal that puts people at ease and makes them more comfortable."

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Nothing brings people together like food, and owner and president Ned Stanojevic (pictured serving top right) uses it as an opportunity to educate about staying safe.

Doing things safely is food for thought

Breakfast is always served with a side of safety, which is to say diners are required to write down their recent near-misses on a piece of paper before they dig in. Those incidents are later read aloud, dissected and discussed.

On a recent morning this fall, Rob Vey was among those who talked about his own near-miss, involving an extension ladder.

“I started to climb the ladder,” he says, “but I noticed it was wobbly, so I went back down and moved it to an adjacent wall to give me better footing and stability.”

Mutual respect fosters honest conversations

It probably would’ve been OK if he hadn’t moved the ladder, he goes on to say. But, then again, maybe it wouldn’t have. Bottom line? It just wasn’t safe.

Rob, 36, has been with the company for six years. He has worked his way up, going from shop helper to lead hand to door technician.

Later, after the meeting, he talks about the “unique environment” of the place that allows employees to talk so openly about things that could have gone wrong on the job.

“Ned has created a great work environment,” says Rob. “Everyone has

a lot of respect for each other, from the front-office people to the technicians. We know each other pretty well.

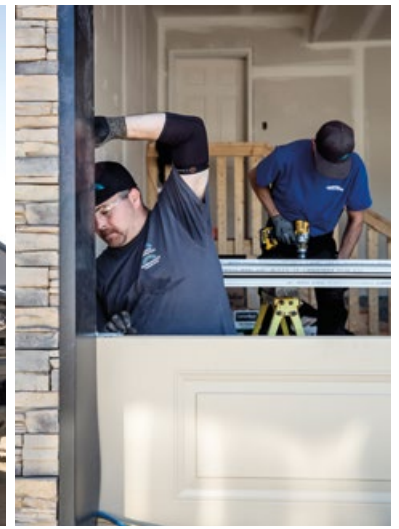
“Don’t get me wrong,” he laughs. “If you do something ridiculous, you get ribbed pretty good for it, but it’s good-natured.”

A dangerous business

Ned has worked hard to create a culture of such trust and transparency.

“Incidents are easier to report because they’re incidents—something happened,” he says, “whereas with a near-miss, nothing happened.

“But, really, something kind of did.” >>



Ned knows not all new workers are aware of the risks that come with the job, which is why it's so important to have open discussions to draw attention to potential hazards.

And, he says, there are a lot of things that can go wrong when you're in the business of repairing and installing overhead doors and door openers for residential and commercial clients.

"In our world, we're winding springs on commercial door systems that have a lot of stored energy in them, which is a very dangerous activity," says Ned. "Plus, we use man-lifts all the time, we're operating trucks, we're using hand tools, we're handling inexpensive galvanized steel all day, which is like working with razor blades.

Discussing near-misses offers an instant education

"When new people come in, they might not realize they're being exposed to those risks. But if they sit at a table and hear seasoned employees talk about 10 near-misses, they're instantly educated."

When Ned bought the company in 2008, the safety culture was hanging by a thread. It was a reflection of Alberta's then red-hot economy, when jobs were

plentiful and easy to come by. Back then, it was sometimes a struggle just to get people to show up for work every day, never mind comply with basic safety regulations.

"There was a lot of resistance," he says. "People would say, 'I don't have to wear safety glasses. I'll just quit and go across the street and make a dollar more an hour.' And they would."

'It's like moving an elephant'

Ned, however, remained undeterred, committed to establishing a safety culture the company could be proud of.

He knew if he was going to move this thing called a safety culture, he would have to steer it in a different direction.

"It's like moving an elephant; you have to put your shoulder into it and continue to push it another way. And you can't let up."

He was relentless. Safety meetings were mandatory and etched in stone. Expectations were laid out and enforced. With the building practically falling down around them, he invested

in a brand-new facility—making sure architects included full kitchen facilities when they drew up the plans.

By then, employees had grown accustomed to discussing safety concerns over breakfast and were more willing to share.

"The first time we talked about near-misses, nobody got in trouble," says Ned. "It was never meant to be a blame game. It was about being transparent and talking about what that person would do differently next time.

"It was about sharing information that would make people safer."

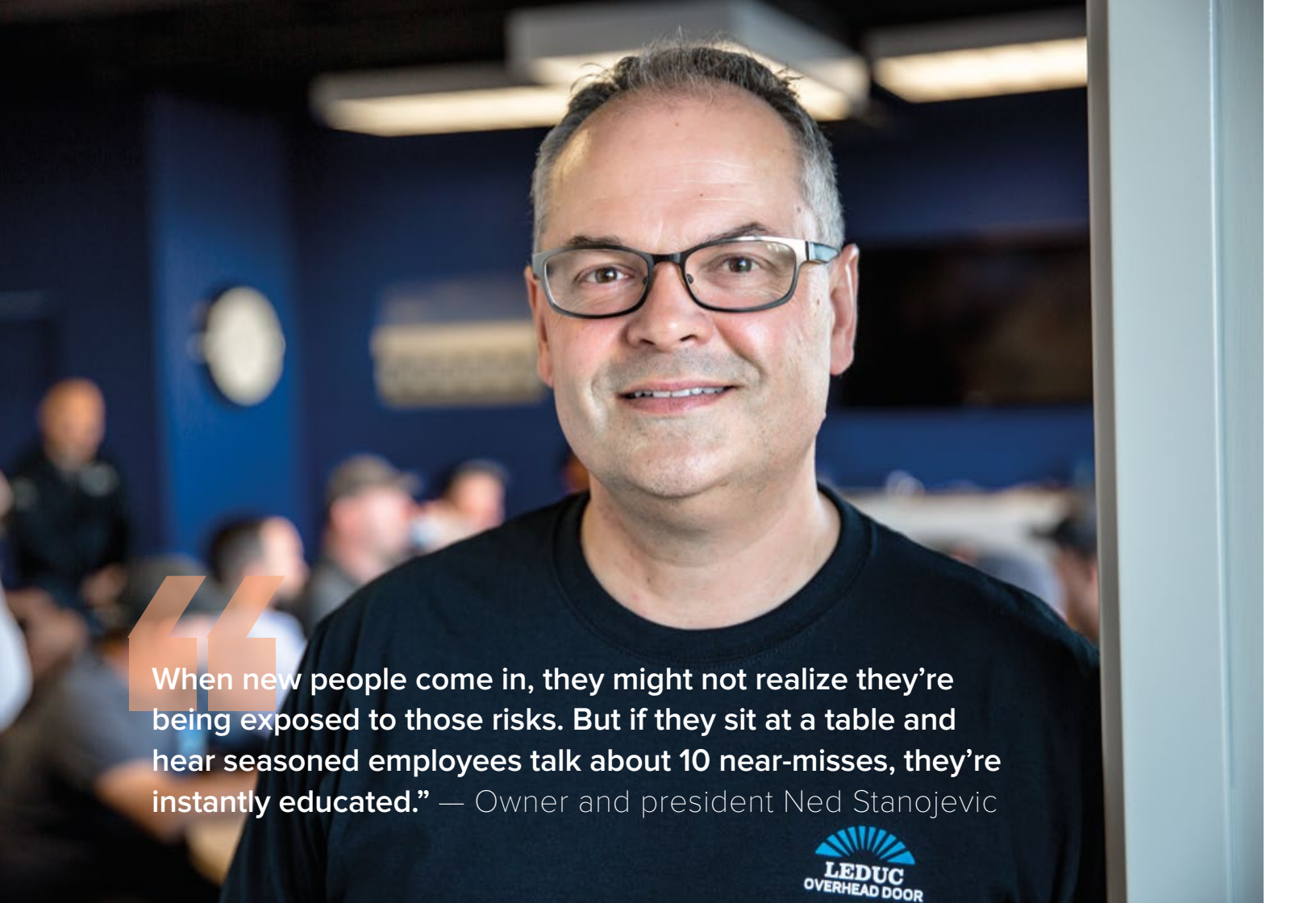
Rob agrees.

"Sharing our near misses absolutely helps us all to learn," he says, "and it makes us safer. We're encouraged to talk about potential incidents in a calm, respectful way. We can brainstorm ideas together to help avoid minor injuries—or worse."

Sharing insider knowledge

Ned devoted one safety meeting to what he called "WCB 101", posing, and then answering, a series of questions. Does anyone understand

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how rates work? Does anyone understand what happens in the event of an incident? Does anyone understand how we get charged? Does anyone even understand what WCB is? Does anyone understand if we had an incident and our rate increased by one per cent, how much money that would be?

"Once I explained everything, they understood how their actions could directly impact the company significantly and how one incident could cause a ripple in the water that would affect our ability to bid on other jobs, our incident reporting, our rate itself and how that follows us for X number of years.

"After that, I noticed our staff had a dramatically increased sense of personal responsibility when it came to safety. There was this realization that, 'Hey, if I'm the cause of something, it's a big deal.'"

Alberta the first to offer certification

Ned says until recently, theirs was a ragtag industry, where new hires were handed a tool belt and instructed to "follow that guy" when it came to learning how to safely navigate the ropes. Now, under Alberta's *Apprenticeship and Industry Training Act*, the job of overhead door technician is a certified occupation in Alberta, the

first province in the country to create such a designation.

"It has really elevated the status of the position," says Ned, who sat on the Alberta Apprenticeship committee responsible for spearheading the move. "And it makes our industry safer."

He doesn't intend the pun when he talks about the company's "open-door" policy toward safety. Leduc Overhead Door is a proud holder of the Certificate of Recognition (COR), awarded to employers who develop health and safety programs that meet established standards.

"We believe in the COR program, not only because it reduces our WCB costs," says Ned. "But more importantly, it has created a culture of transparency." 