

Construction strikes turn sites into 'ghost towns'

MIKE ADLER
Staff Reporter

A second strike by construction trades has shut down work on new homes in York Region. Area builders had done their best to work around a five-week-old strike by 2,000 drywallers, who rejected a new contract offer Wednesday.

But when laborers involved in earlier stages of home construction walked off the job this week, that became impossible, said a spokesperson from the Greater Toronto Homebuilders' Association.

"Since Monday morning, I'm hearing the sites are like ghost towns," Stephen Dupuis, the group's executive vice-president.

"I don't think people realize just how much effect this can have."

The unions are on strike against separate associations of contractors, not against the builders, but builders started to lash out at the strikers this week, saying they and the home-buying consumers are caught in the middle.

"They want their house. And who can blame them?" Dupuis said, adding the builders were willing to "sit back" until now. "We know that we have legal rights" to use replacement workers, he said.

The United Brotherhood of Carpenters-Drywall Acoustic Local 675, voted 82.5 per cent against a three-year deal offered by the Interior Systems Contractors Association.

Workers in the second strike belong to the

Labourers' International Union of North America Local 183.

A drywallers' spokesperson said the contractors offered too little in the first year. "Our members want more money now" because no one knows what the economy will be like in two years, John Lewis, the union's business manager.

The union also wants minimum bonuses for "extras," like high ceilings and skylights, that workers now negotiate on their own, he said.

"In good times, when it's busy, the individual has a lot of leverage. In bad times, nothing is paid."

Lewis said he regrets the inconvenience to homebuyers but added his members haven't gotten a pay cheque for five weeks. "They're fearing losing their houses and everything else," he said.

"No one benefits from a strike."

But the builders association, noting only about a third of Local 675 voted on the offer, charged that drywallers have been working outside the Greater Toronto Area.

"They certainly don't seem to be available to vote, and they don't seem to be able to picket," Dupuis said.

He added his group is hearing reports of threats against non-union workers. "I've had six calls today from different builders."

Lewis said he's heard nothing about his members finding work outside the strike area, and added, "These builders who want to play games and bring non-union people in and going to find it harder to get workers once the strike is over."

Photo a winner for local woman

Former Markhamite and new Stouffville resident Luanne Griffin has captured first place in the Toronto Star Photo Contest with her unique shot of a mouse in her pool.

A life-long shutterbug, her first-place finish in the Pets category, is her second win in three years in the popular annual contest. This year there were more than 15,000 entries.

"It's very exciting," said Griffin. "It's hard to believe I could win twice out of 15,000 pictures — it's quite something."

The \$650 Canon camera she was awarded is the second high-tech, modern camera she has won — but she still relies on her old Minolta for her best shots.

When she spotted the mouse "doing laps" around her pool in her former Rae Cr. home last summer she knew she'd better grab her camera.

"I thought my grandchildren would enjoy the picture anyway, but it turned out really well," the 57-year-old mother of five said.

How the tiny field mouse ended up in the pool remains a mystery, but once in, it couldn't get out. The poor thing was forced to keep swimming around and around.

After getting the picture, Griffin scooped the exhausted mouse out and it scampered away safe at last.

Two years ago, Griffin placed second in the People category with a shot of her three daughters leaping over a sand dune.

Many of her best pictures are displayed every year at the Markham Fair.

Last year Griffin's son-in-law Mitch Burdey earned an honourable mention in the contest for a shot of his wife Sue throwing their two-year-old daughter Anna in the air during a swim.

Griffin moved to Stouffville in March.



Above: Mouse photo won Luanne Griffin top honours in this year's Toronto Star photo contest in the pet category. At left, her second-place shot two years ago, of her three active daughters.



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