



HELMETS TO HARDHATS



JOE TALKS TO US ABOUT HOW A
BOILERMAKER TURNED INTERNATIONAL
UNION LEADER FOUNDED AN
ORGANIZATION TO GIVE BACK TO
VETERANS FOR THE SACRIFICES THEY
MAKE.

HELMETS TO HARDHATS CONNECTS
VETERANS WITH CONSTRUCTION JOBS,
AND EMPLOYERS WITH DEDICATED,
HARDWORKING EMPLOYEES.



“The problem we have in Canada is that a lot of people don’t think about our Veterans the way they should. Most people think about Veterans on Remembrance Day. They think: ‘a Veteran? Oh my God! That’s an old individual. That’s World War II, Korean War, that kind of thing. They don’t understand that a Veteran is somebody who has served in uniform, and they could have served for 5 years,

10 years,

15 years,

but they’re still a Veteran.

The average age that we place a veteran into the construction industry is 32-34 years old. So, they’re not old people. These people have served their country, and now they’ve decided to have a new chapter in life and they’re going in a different direction; they have a whole working career ahead of them. So, we talk to them about the construction industry

JOE MALONEY



...and we get them into an opportunity.”



Helmets to Hardhats Canada, Part One: The Foundation

Joe Maloney talks life as a boilermaker and the creation of Helmets to Hardhats.

In a long career as a union leader, Joe Maloney was well accustomed to facing – and overcoming – political and bureaucratic impediments. Starting his career as a boilermaker in 1974, Maloney had risen through the ranks of the Local 128 in Ontario. “I served in various capacities on the Boilermaker executive board,” Joe recalls, eventually becoming business manager, the top position in the local. He went on to be “the international rep, representing Ontario” for the Boilermakers, and soon after was “nominated to the Governor General’s Canadian Studies Tour, which selected about 220 Canadians” in 1991.

In 1993, Maloney was asked by the General President of the Boilermakers to attend the Harvard Trade Union Program (now known as the Labor and Work Life Program), run by the Harvard Business School. There, he worked alongside unionists and businesspeople from all over the world, while studying under such luminaries as Paul Weiler (1939-2021), whose work helped to establish the British Columbia Labour Relations Board, and John Dunlap (1914-2003), economic adviser to Franklin D. Roosevelt and secretary of labor under Gerald Ford. Joe’s time at Harvard was life changing. Reflecting on his time there, he states: “It broadens your horizons as a trade unionist, and makes you think outside of the box when you get home. You really come to the understanding that it’s not all about you and it’s not all about your backyard. It’s a bigger picture.”

On returning from Harvard, he became executive secretary treasurer of the Canadian Building Trades Office in Ottawa, and eventually, in 2000, found his way to Washington D.C. as the secretary treasurer of the North American Building Trades, where he represented over three million skilled workers. Over the course of his storied career, Joe learned how to wrangle in the political rodeos of both Ottawa and Washington.

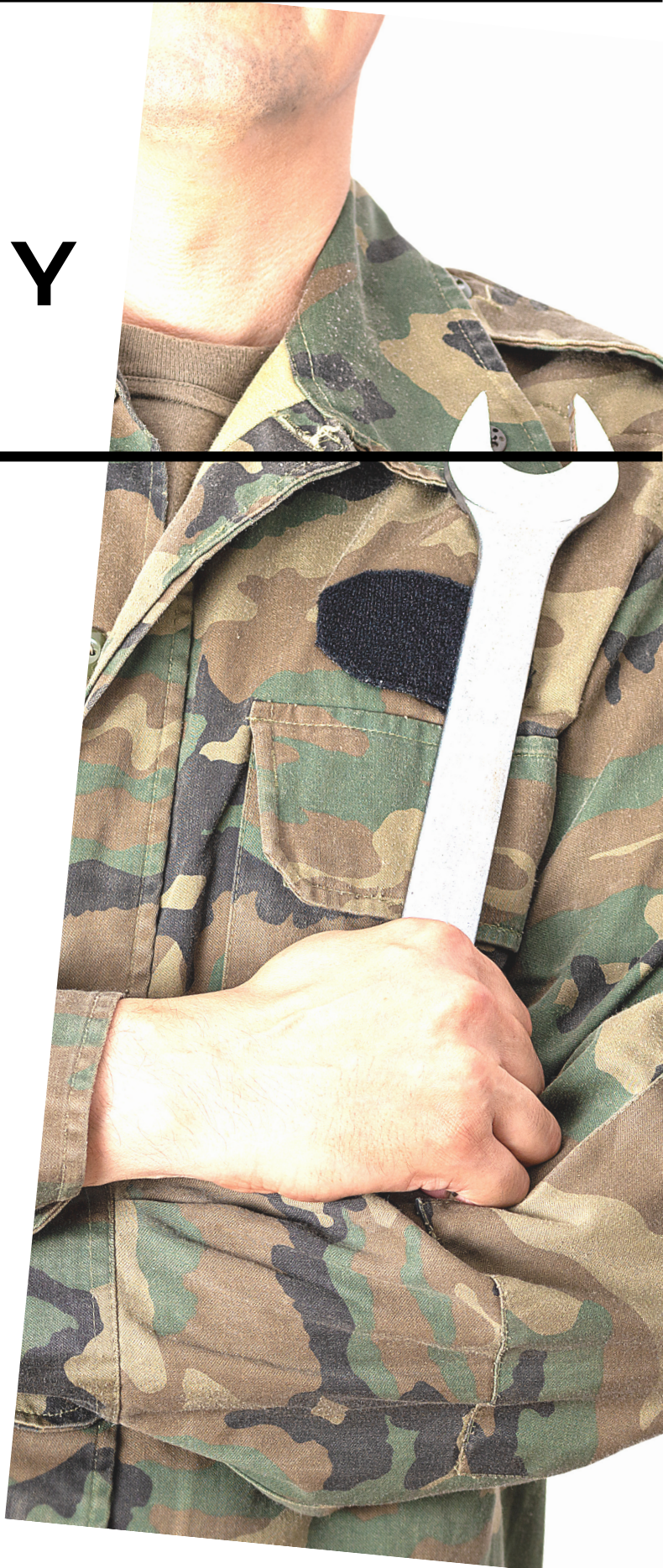
“...it’s not all about your backyard. It’s a bigger picture”



THE JOURNEY

Perhaps no success better demonstrates Maloney's unique abilities than his founding of Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) America in 2003. At the time, the United States was facing a critical shortage of skilled tradespeople. Learning that some 250,000 people leave the American military annually, Joe consulted with the heads of various unions to inquire if anyone had "considered going to the military and seeing if any of these 250,000 people would be interested in joining a trade when they transition out?" Laughing, the unionists questioned what a Canadian knew about the American military, but this did not deter Joe. By chance, he soon met retired U.S. Marine Corps Major General, Matthew Caulfield, and enlisted his aid to help Veterans transition from active service to civilian life by finding them careers in the unionized construction industry. Thus, Helmets to Hardhats was born.

Shopping the idea around the Beltway, Maloney and Caulfield soon found support from Congressman John Murtha (1932-2010) of Pennsylvania. "He thought it was a great idea," Joe recounts, "he said 'I can support this. How much money do you want?' And we looked at each other and said: 'we haven't got a clue.'" To Joe's and John's surprise, Murtha opened the doors to the Capitol and the generosity of Uncle Sam was poured out in the sum of five million dollars. With this seed money, the boilermaker and the marine brought their dream into reality. Joe laughs: "That's how simple it was to found the program in the United States."





“H2H bridged not only the labour gap, but also the pit of post-service peril...”

Over the next eight years, thousands of American Veterans made the jump from the trenches to the trades – thanks to H2H. Eventually, the government ceased funding H2H, but it “is still in operation in the United States 20 years later; they’re funded through a variety of industry funding. But they are still operating, and Veterans are still being placed into construction opportunities.” In this way, H2H bridged not only the labour gap, but also the pit of post-service peril, commonly experienced by many Veterans.

Joe explains: “When a Veteran is in the military, their food is taken care of, their lodgings are taken care of, they know what they are doing everyday of the week; they have their assignments and their duties. But when you’re leaving, and you walk off that military base back into civilian life, you’re totally on your own. If you don’t have a connection or a place to go or a lead, you could very easily fall through the cracks – and many of them do. That’s what Helmets to Hardhats does. (A person leaving the military) will say ‘Hi, I’m in the military, I’m leaving this summer and I would like to become a carpenter in New York, or a pipefitter in Detroit – or even here in Canada – and we make that happen. Helmets to Hardhats makes that connection for you, so when you leave the military base, you know exactly where you are going in the geographic area that you decided to reside in and (you know) who to contact, and they are waiting for you.” This alleviates much of the stress and barriers a retiring Veteran faces, as it helps to give them a structured life and a second career to walk into when they leave the base.





OTTAWA, ONTARIO CANADA

In 2007, Maloney returned to Canada as the international vice president of the Boilermakers representing Western Canada, and in 2010, he became vice president of the Boilermakers, representing all of Canada. In his home and native land, Maloney discovered the same problem he had found south of the border; there was a major deficit of skilled tradespeople. The solution seemed simple enough: bring H2H to Canada. Roughly 8,000 people retire from the Canadian Military every year, so why not offer them the same opportunity as their American counterparts?

Joe wasted no time. Utilising some of his contacts in Ottawa, he went to work on establishing H2H in Canada. Tirelessly, he called around the capital, but he soon learned that the road would not be so smooth as he had found it in the USA. Joe's efforts were proving fruitless. He recalls: "Getting the program established in Canada was a little bit more complicated than it had been in the United States." About 8,000 military members, including reservists, leave the Canadian military each year, in comparison to 250,000 in the USA: this is a massive difference. Moreover "we were not exactly welcome at the beginning. A lot of people weren't buying into [H2H]. The military thought at the very beginning that we were going to poach their best and their brightest. That wasn't the case. We only wanted to speak to people who had already made the decision to leave. We didn't want to entice people to leave. Even on the construction industry side, a lot of people said 'Military? 5,000 people a year!? They're not coming to us!'"

**“About 8,000 military members,
including reservists, leave the
Canadian military each year...”**





TO JOE'S SURPRISE, THE VOICE BELONGED TO JACK LAYTON

Undeterred, Joe continued to lobby every level of government, but things were moving slowly. “The Conservatives at that time were in power under Stephen Harper (ca. 2011), and they were warm to the idea of this program, but there were no commitments.” Until, one day, while on a flight from Toronto to Saskatoon, Joe was sporting one of the iconic red Support Our Troops sweaters – popular Friday attire in Canada circa 2011 – when suddenly, across the aisle, a voice broke the silence, complimenting Joe on his shirt. To Joe’s surprise, the voice belonged to Jack Layton, then head of the New Democratic Party. The conversation quickly turned to Joe’s plans to bring H2H to Canada and the impediments he had thus far faced. Jack Layton “had never heard of Helmets to Hardhats.” Upon hearing Joe’s explanation of H2H, Jack exclaimed: “That’s amazing! Can we talk again next week when I get back to Ottawa?” Joe happily agreed to a future meeting.

A week later, Jack Layton called Joe, “true to his word.” Joe reminisces: “Believe me, I’m a union guy, but I’m not an NDP supporter, I don’t join political parties; I’m a construction, labour, business leader...I’m not a left-winger or a right-winger. But Jack phoned me back! And he arranged an all-party breakfast.” Joe did a presentation that morning to the Conservatives, the NDP, the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois. “All parties endorsed the concept of Helmets to Hardhats.” After this, “Jack Layton went and talked with Prime Minister Harper. This was around budget time. And if you remember back then, (Joe) Flaherty was the finance minister. And in that budget that he delivered that day, he announced support for Helmets to Hardhats.” Maloney was elated! H2H had the support of the federal government

The triumph, however, was short lived. The Liberals and NDP had a nonconfidence vote and brought down the government. The Conservative minority government fell before their budget could pass. An election was called for 2 May 2011. The fate of H2H seemed in peril once again.

