

# From Banker to RV Tech



There are very few RV apprentices that have heard of the RV Service Technician trade prior to becoming an apprentice. Does it surprise you that while many Canadians cite RVing as a favourite activity, very few know about the people that repair and maintain the RVs? Stephen Hockridge has recently completed his apprenticeship program at SAIT and enjoying a full-fledged career as a Red Seal RV technician. His story may inspire you to look within and ignite that passion to follow your dreams.

## How did you learn about the RV Technician Trade?



I started in sales at Parkview RV in Wetaskiwin, AB. Despite working in the dealership, I did not know servicing RVs is a licensed trade until a customer needed their unit serviced. That was when I realized this trade is more than the commonly perceived handy man job.

## What did you know about the trade before you became an apprentice?

I didn't know much. I worked in the shop for a while without any formal training. That was when a technician suggested I explore the apprenticeship program. I learned that I need to attend SAIT and receive on-the-job training and supervision from a licensed technician. After the dealership hired a journeyman technician, he showed me a breakdown of what I would learn each year and walked me through the application process. It was great to have a mentor that showed me the ropes of how to do my job properly and relayed the importance of slowly building my tool collection.



## What motivated you to apprentice in this trade?

Frustration! There were several units that came into my shop that I had no idea how to fix. I had a severe lack of understanding and often didn't know where to start. After gaining some base knowledge and guidance, I was excited to learn as much as I could. I knew I needed to be properly trained to be able to do more for our customers. My work became fulfilling, challenging and a little addictive all at the same time.



Intimidating. I had no idea what I was doing when I first set foot in the shop. I went to school to become a banker and had no guidance in anything mechanical growing up. I was out of my element... but not for long.



## How was the first week on the job or in school?

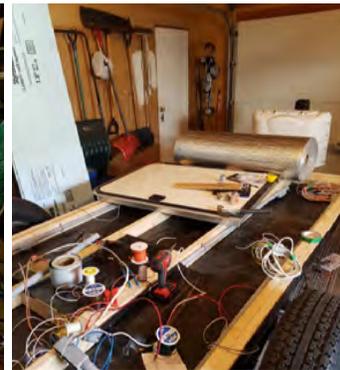


## If you didn't come from a skilled trades background, what motivated you to make that switch?

My background was most definitely white collar. I had attended university for business and had been a personal banker for a major bank. I made the switch to do financing at a car dealership and then transitioned into RV sales. After some time, I realized my passion wasn't in sales or financing. After I gave notice to my employer, he invited me to work in the shop while I look for my next challenge. It was then that I discovered I love working on trailers, especially learning how everything worked! I like to tease that I still don't know what I want to be when I grow up. But, everyone that knows me well, knows that I'm an RV geek.

## What have you learnt about yourself since entering the trade?

That I can do the job well. I have always viewed myself as someone who wasn't that skilled with tools. With practice over the years, I now have great confidence in my abilities. I recently challenged myself to build a teardrop trailer from the ground up. It encompassed every bit of knowledge I have gained and actually taught me a few new things too. Not only can I swing a hammer, I can weld, staple, paint, wire, plumb, and glue too.



Building of the Hawk Ridge



Attending class at SAIT



## What hard and soft skills should technicians have?

As far as soft skills go, I'd say having compassion combined with a humble desire to learn. Regardless of the economic status of the RV owner, each of those customers entrusted me with their unit so they can go on more family holidays and create more memories. While it's unrealistic to think that I'll be able to know and fix all of their mechanical problems, having this attitude motivates me to search for solutions and information needed to do a proper repair. Hard skills? Aside from having the proper certifications and understanding how everything works, a technician should be able to lift a 5<sup>th</sup> wheel hitch into the back of a truck! It seems simple, but those darn things are heavy!



## Are you a planner?

Yes, because it's essential for this job. It is nice to think of yourself as a free spirit who goes where the wind takes you. In reality, that creates too much stress with this job. Planning and organization are key in keeping costs low and reducing waste. A tech has to see the job from start to finish before the first screw is turned. Do you have all the new materials needed to complete the job? Are the tools needed close by? No one likes to take unnecessary trips to the toolbox, and they eat up time.



We've all had to deal with grumpy customers. Majority of the time, customers get frustrated because we didn't plan properly and realize halfway through that we either didn't have the tools or the materials needed to get the job done on time. Other times, the service writer will hand you a job not knowing everything involved in the repair. It's the technician's responsibility to plan it out, see any potential problems, and keep the customer informed.



## What aspect of this trade/line of work interests you the most?

My unique skill helps people achieve a higher quality of life. Relationships are everything! I'd like to share a story that is very close to my heart. This story always lifts my spirits during my difficult days at work.

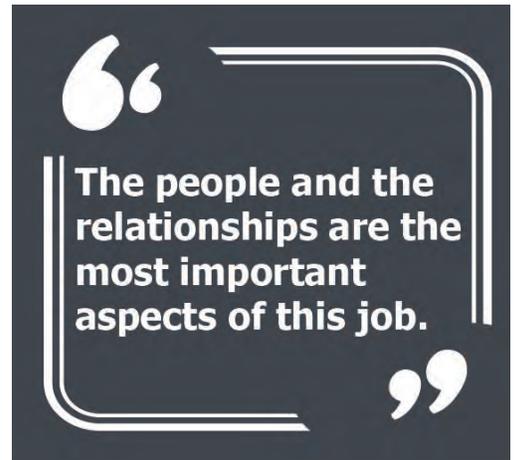
A couple in their late 50s came to the dealership looking for the perfect trailer for their trip across Canada. After they settled on a trailer, we prepared it with our usual care. As we did the walkthrough, excitement builds as they're eager to make the trip. Everyone was excited for them. As we were saying our goodbyes, they shared some very sad news with us. The gentleman has terminal cancer and this trip would be their last adventure together. They thanked us for working hard to prepare them for their journey. When they drove off, our chests were heavy and the rest of the day was quiet and somber.



A year later, the widow came back to our dealership looking to sell the trailer. Her eyes were wet as she told us, **THEY DID IT!** They had made the trek from coast to coast and back! It was such a happy and sad moment. In that instant, my job became more than a job. I have made an impact on someone's life; on helping someone achieve a dream. We've since sold that trailer and taken it back in on trade several times. I've cared for that trailer for well over a decade now. The people and the relationships are the most important aspects of this job.

## What excites you about your job each day?

Lunch break and quitting time! All kidding aside, I would say that the day is always unknown. When I walk into the shop, I know to expect a few different puzzles presented to me each day. It is up to me to solve these puzzles in as little time and cost as possible. The exciting part is getting better and better at it each day without ever knowing what is going to come at you. It's never the same, and it's never boring.



## What are your best moments during your apprenticeship and on-the-job?

There are so many highlights to choose from. While at school, I formed deep connections with the other techs in my class. Since I work in a small shop, it was the only opportunity I had to connect with my peers. It was a fun time and I have made lifelong friends because of it. While on the job,



think one of the best moments was when a customer was walking through the shop and spotted the tear-drop trailer I've built. He was interested in buying it and wanted to know the company that manufactured such a neat trailer. For me, that was validation of my skills, and gave me a confidence boost like nothing else.



## What is your ideal family vacation?

I feel like I've already experienced one of my ideal family vacations. A few years ago, my two teenage sons, my parents and myself, went on a wild adventure with our 24' class C motorhome. We saw things we never imagined and visited places we did not know existed. Amusement parks, shopping malls, mountains, lakes, car shows, incredible architecture, the variety was endless. I could live a hundred lives and never see everything there is to see between my small town to the north western United States. My sons learned so much on that trip. They saw things they never would have seen if they didn't venture outside their small town. Their grandparents had many incredible stories to tell. We maximized all life had to offer us in those few weeks of holidays. It's a trip we all look back fondly as one of our favourites.



Stephen's teardrop trailer



Family vacation