

“Hard skills get you in the door”

Story by Rob Rombouts
Photo by Blackbird Photography



Mike Biro has seen many different careers, and the inside of many different classrooms, as a student and as a teacher. The Brantford resident has also been a victim of the changing economy.

When Mike graduated in the early 1980s with a diploma as an Electronic Engineering Technician, he was among a generation “conditioned to be trades people. We couldn’t go to university because there wasn’t funding for us.” He was told there would be jobs available “and we were conditioned to believe the best reward was monetary.”

And for many years, that was true. Mike worked with Canada Post for many years and began working in the Millwright trade. He also began teaching at Mohawk College. With some money saved, he went to university part-time to study psychology.

He soon saw his colleagues losing their jobs in the trades, and changes in the college left him without a teaching job.

Mike felt he had a choice. He could stick with a job in technology or he could focus on human services. With [Second Career](#) funding, Mike returned to school to complete a diploma in Addictions and Community Service and now works at [St. Leonard’s Community Services](#).

“I’ve never had a machine thank me for fixing it, but now people are thanking them for helping them fix their lives,” said Mike.

Mike takes a pragmatic approach to his education, and he knows he wouldn’t be in his job if he followed a different path. “I’ve been told I got my job because of my university degree. The BA doesn’t open doors, but it provides a foundation. Doors swing open if you get the right college course,” he said.

He suggests people get into a good college program, learn a “hard skill” and then do a university program part-time while employed.

“I have a lot of people ask me for advice, and this is a very viable path. University gives people a broader outlook, but hard skills get you in the door.”

Education Works Alliance is a community group dedicated to building prosperity through training, education and lifelong learning. The group’s mandate is to raise the education, literacy and skill levels of Grand Erie residents, in order to broaden opportunities for employments and economic development. For more information visit www.educationworks.ca