

NEWS

Mobile U.K. operator finds new job in Canada

Despite obstacles, persistence and help from an advocacy group pays off

AMANDA SAFFIOTI
SPECIAL TO CRANE & HOIST CANADA

Arriving at the yard for a 5:15 a.m. start before the sun has peeked out, Stephen Bird has always been ready for whatever the day will throw at him. With a potential 12-hour shift in store, Bird picks up his mobile crane at the yard where a few others are waiting, getting ready to inspect their machines and head off to their job sites.

"I think I'll stay a crane operator forever," said 55-year-old Bird, who has been operating mobile cranes for over 30 years. "I think once you are a crane operator it's not the type of job you chuck away and go and do something else. No, I think I'll stick with crane operating."

Bird's journey to operating a mobile crane in Canada has not all been smooth sailing. He received his job offer in March 2011 and immigrated to B.C. the following December – a process that had its share of obstacles.

"You can't operate a crane for 32 years and not be qualified," Bird said. "But it is harder than you may think to immigrate, especially in our game."

Born and bred in the U.K., Bird began seeking out jobs in Canada four years ago when he came to help his daughter settle in B.C. with her partner who was starting a new job.

"I tried but I couldn't get out to B.C. without a job offer," said Bird. "You'd be surprised how hard it is to immigrate without a job offer."

After countless Internet searches and constantly being told he needed an offer, Bird took it upon himself to contact companies personally.

"Many companies would rather not go down that road but I was lucky to find one that would," he said. Bird's long search came to an end one day when his daughter saw a crane parked near her work. She asked the driver if

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~ Stephen Bird, mobile crane operator

his company had any vacancies. He gave her a company card. She passed the details along to her father, who then phoned the owner and spoke with him directly.

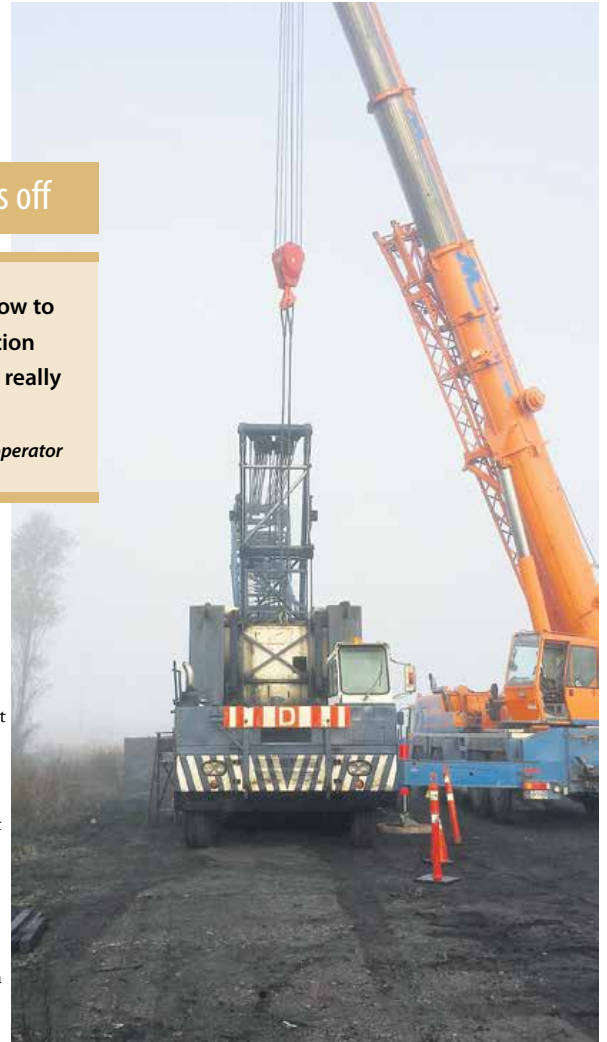
"The company was prepared to give me a shot, take me on and go through the whole process," Bird said. "They were interested in giving me a start."

It was after Bird finally got his job offer that he got in touch with Patricia Johnson with the B.C. Association for Crane Safety. She walked him through the necessary steps to obtain the correct B.C. crane operator certification.

"It can be time-consuming," Bird said about the process. "You need someone who knows how to get you out here, a good immigration consultant and an employer that's really interested in you."

Johnson recommends that crane operators interested in immigrating to B.C. should first review all the available information available on the BCACS website at bcacs.ca.

Fraser Cocks, the association's executive director, said that crane operators who are trying to immigrate have to take the lead and



Obtaining a mobile crane operator job in Canada involved a series of obstacles for immigrant worker.

sell themselves "a much bigger way" than crane operators coming from environments more familiar to a Canadian employer.

"The employer needs to know what you have been doing, and where, in a fair amount of detail," Cocks said. "The operator also has to be open to change: for example the fact that he might be working in both metric and imperial is a seemingly small detail but one that often comes as a surprise to a newly arrived crane operator."

With a trade shortage, there will be many more cases of the employers looking for qualified operators rather than the applicants doing the hunting, Cocks said.

"When it's the industry side looking, they are going to find what they are looking for," he said.

Despite the unpredictable hours, understanding Canadian slang and some obstacles along the way, Bird has not looked back since he set foot on Canadian soil. He even helped his son immigrate to Canada to become a crane operator.

"Oh I love it, I absolutely love it here," he said. "The city, the politeness of people, the scenery ... there's just so many things. I guess you take it for granted since you've been here your whole life, but you have got yourself a great country here."

Editor's note: The preceding article was submitted by the B.C. Association for Crane Safety.

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