

# SARGENT CONSTRUCTION: BUILDING ON A LEGACY OF FAMILY SUCCESS

Lyall Sargent Has Spent A Lifetime In The Construction Industry

**V**ICTORIA – Destiny is defined as: a predetermined course of events often held to be an irresistible power or agency. **Lyall Sargent**, the Director of award-winning **Sargent Construction Ltd.** appears to have been destined to be in the construction business, even if that wasn't his first career choice.

"It was one of those things where I didn't know what I wanted to do out of high school so my father encouraged me to go to university. Even after the four years (he is a graduate of the Economics Program at the **University of Victoria**) I still didn't know what direction I wanted my career to take. That's when my uncle (**Don Sargent**) called me up and he asked 'What are you up to?' and I said 'Nothing', and his response was 'Well, you better come work for me then', that's where it really began," he recalled.

The second generation of his family to be in the construction industry, Sargent's Uncle Don had owned **Tel-Bay**



Sargent Construction specializes in new construction and renovations such as this Chemainus Garden Expo office reno

**Developments Ltd.** while his father **Rick Sargent** was the owner of **Mira Construction Ltd.** These two successful companies, with long track records and with extensive inventories

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Starting young, two year old Lyall Sargent being introduced to the business by his father Rick Sargent



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The Holiday Inn Express in Colwood is one of the larger projects completed by Sargent Construction

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of completed projects located all across southern Vancouver Island, had been the focal point of the younger Sargent's early life, and the springboard that launched him into founding a construction company of his own.

Having grown up working for both Mira Construction and Tel-Bay Construction during summer months as well as through the school year Lyall Sargent had learned the intricacies of the construction industry quite literally from the ground up. Starting when

just a youngster wanting to help out, to taking a more leadership role as he grew and became more experienced, Sargent was involved in all aspects of the industry and grew adept in the management side of the business.

Working with his uncle for six years after graduating from UVic, Sargent spent four of those years learning his craft as the Site Superintendent on the landmark Swallows Landing condominium complex, a spectacular nine-storey luxury development located in the heart of Victoria overlooking the city's Inner Harbour. That invaluable experience involved

with overseeing a project as high profile and complex as Swallows Landing was like taking another degree course, only this time in construction management.

"Project management involves me hiring a Site Superintendent to run the day to day operations, while I deal with all of the budgets, paperwork and client interaction. In a way it's like being the conductor of the orchestra, directing the piece, pulling all the different parts together," he explained.

"But I refused to be pigeonholed. I routinely monitor site

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safety issues, visit sites over the weekend, hang temporary lighting – I will do whatever it takes to get things done or to fill holes where they need to be filled. To get the jobs finished I’ve routinely worked around the clock, over weekends, holidays – whatever it takes.”

By 2008, the local construction market began to slide and as a result both his father and uncle began to consider a slow move toward retirement, a situation that provided Sargent with the opportunity to go to work for local developer **Len Wansbrough**. “There’s actually



Here is Sargent’s team putting the finishing touches to the foyer at the Holiday Inn Express

a personal link between my family and the Wansbrough family which is kind of neat. My grandfather **Doctor Raymond Sargent** actually delivered Len and his twin brother **Lloyd Wansbrough**,” Sargent said.

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One of the company’s newest projects is a six storey development called The Shire on Inverness

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Blast from the past: It's August 1985 with young Lyall Sargent working his summers for his uncle and father

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The guest rooms at the Holiday Inn Express showcase the attention to detail Sargent Construction provides



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An earlier Sargent assignment involved putting a new roof on the Chemainus Garden Expo pavilion



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“Later my father Rick and Bill Wansbrough (Len’s Father) were business partners for many years. So there really must be something to this whole business being in the blood or being genetic in some way, it’s as though I really was destined to be in this business.”

Working as part of Wansbrough’s team Sargent was involved in constructing a wide range of projects including developing a trailer park in Chemainus, a local parkade and the Lee Valley Tools store located at 314 Wale Road in

Colwood. After working with Wansbrough Sargent continued to learn the business working alongside of other Victoria contractors through to the end of 2011.

But as time went on, and as he gained in both experience and confidence in his skills, Sargent realized that the only true way to prosper and to develop a name and reputation of his own was to launch his own company. The end result of that soul searching was the opening of Sargent Construction Ltd. in 2012.

“In reality my whole career had been spent working with friends and family and I

hadn’t really learned what my full capabilities were. I’m not a carpenter, but obviously when you’ve been involved in this business for as long as I have you’re going to pick things up. I consider myself pretty well rounded in terms of skills but knew that my aptitude for organization and attention to detail would lead me to the construction management side of the business and that was where my focus was going to be,” he explained.

Having learned his business organically through on the job training, Sargent had literally

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The Westridge Landing mixed use project was another successful Sargent Construction undertaking

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gained experience in all aspects of a project, skills which had helped prepare him to operate his own business. The experience of working for others also motivated him to test his own wings in the industry. "It took a couple years working for other contractors in town for me to realize that the only way to get proper recognition for all of your hard work was to work for yourself," he said.

"In time I realized that working for others was feeling restrictive, that the recognition for the work I was doing simply

wasn't there. There eventually came that awareness where I said to myself 'Why am I doing this? I'm not going to get anywhere doing this so why not do it for myself?' and that's where my desire came from."

Once he had elected to branch out on his own he knew his strong personal connections with the local industry would be the right catalyst with which to launch his new business. With belief in his own skills and with the credibility he had earned while working with Len Wansbrough he approached his old mentor and employer with a proposition.

"I like to be able to control my

own destiny, so I went back to Len who was still involved with his Lee Valley project, which involved a number of phases, and told him that I don't like working for other people and that I want to do this on my own. So I asked him if he would trust me to do this, he said no problem so that's how it got started," he said.

Today Sargent Construction has become a leader in the Greater Victoria construction industry, specializing in the construction management of condominiums, major renovation projects, and on occasion

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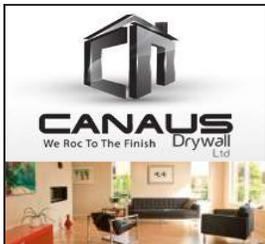
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single family detached homes as well as multi-family residential projects.

Working with Wansbrough on the phased Lee Valley development has seen Sargent, operating as the Construction Manager, complete a number of very high profile projects including developing a 200 vehicle parking structure, constructing tens of thousands of square feet of office space, which now include a modern Coastal Shared Office, a 63 unit rental apartment complex and most significantly being the builder of the new **Holiday Inn**

**Express** in Colwood, a state of the art luxury 80 room hotel.

This recent massive (50,000 square foot) project was so spectacular the development was the winner of a 2016 Commercial Building Award from the **Victoria Real Estate Board (VREB)**, with the development earning Hotel/Tourist Accommodation Project of the Year honours.

Operating a lean and focused company (Sargent Construction only has four full time employees) the company has in the past four years made larger undertakings such as condominium developments its bread and butter projects. One of the latest assignments for the

company is The Shire on Inverness, serving as Construction Manager for **Shire Urban Living Limited Partnership**. This development, located at the corner of Quadra and Inverness near the city's downtown core will include more than 90 one and two bedroom homes when complete. Conveniently located close to all levels of shopping and services the development will appeal to the urban professional.

"I've always gravitated toward the larger projects, where you can spend months or sometimes even years pouring over the details. Such as the two nine

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storey concrete condominiums we built in Esquimalt, a project that took more than three years to complete. When I first got out of university I did the Christmas Hill Apartments for Tel Bay, worked as the on-site coordinator on a 40 unit rental apartment building, a luxury four-plex on Beach Drive, did the 40,000 square foot Lee Valley building and others. I just enjoy working on the bigger projects," he explained.

One key to Sargent Construction's success has been to deliver top quality service and results every time by not taking on more work than it can properly handle. With the current hot Victoria area construction market the temptation to take on just one more job has appealed, but Sargent has been diligent at limiting his workload only to the number of projects he and his team can manage.

"Historically, I've always worked on one project at a time, focusing on one and as that one's winding up look for the next job. I try to have something else lined up and then we just jump to that one once the first one wraps up," he said.

"Right now there's so much work you have to figure out how to grow at a reasonable pace. You don't want to find yourself in the position of having too much work and not having enough people."

The role of a construction manager for a major project is similar to that of a general contractor building a single family home - but on steroids - a much bigger budget is at stake and there are many more pieces to the puzzle to assemble. A construction manager might not do any of the physical construction themselves, but has a team of trusted and compatible sub trades who look after the various elements, such as carpentry, plumbing and wiring. To construct the sort of projects routinely handled by Sargent Construction a similar process

**"I will do whatever it takes to get things done or to fill holes where they need to be filled."**

**LYALL SARGENT**  
DIRECTOR, SARGENT CONSTRUCTION LTD.

That level of commitment to a project doesn't end when the keys are handed over. For Sargent there is no expiry date on quality and service. "Whatever happens I'm there. I feel that I'm 100 percent responsible for the work that happens under my purview. The hotel has been open a year but I'm asking what the problems are before they have to call me. I have to know what worked out well and what may need tweaking or improving for the next time," he said.

One key to the success of the company is Sargent's knack for making every job a learning experience, discovering what works and what doesn't and then incorporating that hard won knowledge into the company's next assignment. Another central factor in the company's growth over the past four years has been the instant local recognition of the Sargent name in the industry. A universal acknowledgement attributed to the decades of service provided to the sector by his father and uncle, Rick and Don Sargent.

"Having operated their own companies all those years means the Sargent name is still very recognizable, I'm fortunate enough to be carrying on that legacy. Even though this is an entirely new company the Sargent name is still recognizable, which is a bonus in terms of marketing," he said.

"I found that if I put that name front and center it was a recognizable brand and allowed me to get the business off the ground and carry on that legacy all at the same time."

For the future Sargent anticipates a reasoned level of growth, but never at the expense of quality or in a drop in the level of personal service provided. For Sargent networking with developers and other key members of the construction community is central to his firm's future expansion.

"I'm already talking with developers who have some other projects coming up which is paramount in terms of finding that next job," he said.

"Expansion for expansion sake has never been the goal. For me if there's growth it's with the people I already know and work with. I probably have two or three jobs already set for next year, which is two more than I currently have now. They will probably require me to bring in two more people to help handle the load. But I'm not going to be placing an ad for a new superintendent, I'm going to be going to the people I know who have the skills and who have the time to take this on."

As a growing Construction Management company Sargent believes his enterprise can only expand at the rate qualified local personnel are available. By maintaining a high benchmark for the sort of persons he hires to work on his projects he ensures a consistent level of quality in all aspects of the assignments.

He has discovered over the years that the best results occur in terms of hiring if all of the employee recruiting and vetting takes place in-house, preferably through personal relationships nurtured over time. He has witnessed too many companies who hire ad hoc and find themselves dealing with incompetency. That ability to personally qualify the worker has helped to establish Sargent Construction as a leader in the

regional construction industry.

While relatively young as a corporate entity, Sargent Construction has deep roots in the region's construction industry. The company has definitely benefitted from the input and experience which comes from working with two highly successful and respected construction contractors. That experience has provided Sargent with a unique place in the local building sector. It has allowed him to carry on decades of relationships with a name that is both well known and respected in the industry.

"It also certainly doesn't hurt to know that if I have an issue I can tap nearly a century of collective building experience with a single phone call," he said.

"If I have a question, or need some other input or just need a new idea on how to get something done they're just a call away. There have been times I've called Rick or Don Sargent to pick their brains because they might have a different way of looking at things. So it's a case of building a new company, but drawing on a recognized name and having access to a great industry resource all at the same time. It really is the best of both worlds for me."

To learn more visit the company's website at: [www.sargentconstruction.ca](http://www.sargentconstruction.ca)

occurs, with entire sub trade firms playing pivotal roles.

"One of our strengths is that I'm very dedicated to the project, I take a definite personal interest in it, in how it's built and ensuring everything is exactly as required. The client always knows what they're getting, there are no surprises," he said.

"That goes for everyone else working on the project as well, all of the sub trades. I make certain the work done is the best it can be, every time."



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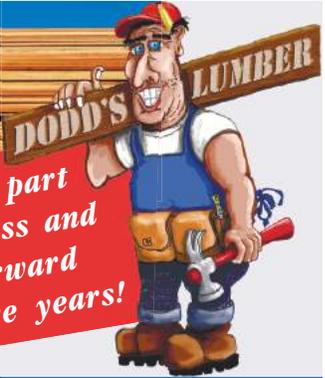
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