

Lawrence Babichuk celebrates 10 years at Highways

He's the kind of worker that most employers dream of: punctual, efficient, cheerful, and without complaint. He also happens to have a learning disability.

Ten years ago, the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure hired Lawrence Babichuk as one of the Ministry's first intellectually-challenged shop assistants.

"I get to pick up garbage, recycle oil cans, scrape tar off the floor," he says with a broad grin. "When I first started, I was nervous, but the guys, they make it easy. I like working here."



Shop assistant Lawrence Babichuk sweeps up

With Lawrence's disability, he reads at a Grade 5 or 6 level. He doesn't drive, but he understands verbal instructions very well and is eager to learn.



Brian Perih,
Shop Supervisor

"When he was first brought in, I don't think the Ministry realized his full potential," explains Yorkton Repair Depot Supervisor Brian Perih. "But we've really mentored him and worked closely with him to realize his full potential. Originally, he was just our clean-up person, but now we're expanding his skill level and challenging him in new areas."

For example, he's been tasked with priming and painting the rims on ministry trucks and tackling rust problems on the snowplow blades.

“I think the key to his success is that he’s been fully integrated into the shop as a member of our team,” Brian says.

Lawrence was hired through a letter of understanding in partnership with the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL). There are currently eight persons with intellectual disabilities working for the Ministry as shop assistants from Meadow Lake to Weyburn.

“When we first came up with the idea of hiring people with intellectual disabilities, there were those who said this wouldn’t work – it was too high risk and people would get hurt on the job,” explains Dave Fischl, Diversity Coordinator for the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. “But we persevered and proved that with a lot of mentoring and support, intellectually-challenged individuals could be very successful. In fact, we now have shop assistants who have graduated to entry level jobs in the Ministry.”



Dave Fischl,
Diversity Coordinator



Lawrence Babichuk

For himself, Lawrence is quite happy with the variety and challenge of his day-to-day duties at Highways, and he plans on staying put.

“I ride my bike here in the summer, and one of the guys gives me a ride in the winter,” he says cheerfully. As he smiles for a photo, one of his colleagues ribs him about liking the media attention. He blushes and smiles.

When he’s not at work, Lawrence is a multi-talented Special Olympics athlete, having won honours in everything from floor hockey to softball.

“I won a gold medal in shot-put at the Yorkton games (in 2000),” he beams proudly. When asked to explain his proudest accomplishment, Lawrence beams as he refers to his other favourite past-time – collecting hockey cards. “I got an Alex Ovechkin. He’s with the Washington Capitals. He’s my favourite.”

When the interview is over, Lawrence grins and picks up his scraper to finish cleaning the floor of the service bay, the warmth of his smile still present in the room.