

Saanich House-lifting Company Gets Off the Ground

FailSafe House Lifting B.C. uses patented system for lifting homes.

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Saanich has become the test ground for a house lifting company that hopes to build on the tight housing market in the Greater Victoria area with the help of its patented lifting system. FailSafe Housing Lifting B.C. is currently replacing the basement of the house at 3218 Glasgow Avenue after lifting it during its first foray into Greater Victoria using the ATLAS 5 House Lifting System.

Company founder Monty Wensel said his company chose Victoria because its housing market characteristics have created a demand. The combination of low vacancy rates and high housing costs have made it appealing for home owners to add more living space, he said. "If you are going to add a suite to your house, often the best place is underneath," he said.

The roots of the company reach back to Regina, where basements require frequent repairs, thanks to the city's geology. Its clay base — the remains of an ancient sea bed — exposes basements to a continuous, damaging cycle of freezing and thawing. As a contractor, Wensel worked with traditional housing lifting techniques using wood cribs, but eventually found them to be unsatisfactory.

One defining incident happened in 2006, when a house lifted on wood blocks nearly injured the people working underneath following the failure of the house lifting equipment. This incident inspired Wensel to develop a more secure method that eventually culminated in its ATLAS 5 House Lifting System. Its core consists of four lifting towers,



Monty Wensel of FailSafe House Lifting B.C. stands underneath the home at 3218 Glasgow Avenue that his company recently lifted. The company uses a new system to lift homes higherto improve access and safety.

two primary lifting beams and two secondary lifting beams that can lift one, two and three story houses ranging from 500 to 3,000 square feet up to 18 feet into the air. It can accommodate additional towers and beams to increase lift capacity.

Wensel said it takes about 10 hours to set up the system and another five hours to lift a house. The entire system weighs 31,000 pounds and fits on a single tractor-trailer. Wensel said this system offers several advantages. It offers greater safety and movement of freedom for crews and their equipment underneath lifted buildings, said Wensel. These advantages add up, he said. When you make it easier and safer to access the underneath of a house, the work becomes faster and more affordable, he said.

Wensel's company also offer package deals that combine lifting a structure with performing the work underneath it. This eliminates working with different contractors and having to coordinate them. "It makes it a lot easier and less stressful for the home owner and more affordable," he said.

The company has also sold the ATLAS 5 House Lifting System to contractors across North America. Because of its systematic nature, contractors unfamiliar with lifting houses themselves can eventually perform the work themselves. While the system requires a higher initial investment upfront, it will save money down the line. "It allows projects to go so much smoother, so much faster," he said.