

 **Canada's Lifeline:** Our frontline

“

**This is much more than a job to me.**

Read more at [blood.ca/stories](https://blood.ca/stories)

**Bert,**  
Canadian Blood Services  
Building technician in Ottawa, Ont.



*During the COVID-19 pandemic, we're bringing you stories of our employees who continue to work on the front lines. Bert Rodrigues is a building technician in Ottawa, Ont.*

I was hired in 2005 to do maintenance. I didn't know a lot about the organization when I started, but my first winter here I attended a very moving event. There was a woman who talked about how blood products had saved her daughter's life. It really touched me. After that, this became much more than a job to me.

To become a building technician, I did night classes for three years. I was working here during the day, and my three daughters were young, so that was hard. But I really like what I do. There's a lot of variety at the sites we look after in Ottawa. There's a donor centre, labs, a warehouse, and the facility where we process blood and stem cells. I still learn every day.

---

## 'We're on call 24-7'

---

We manage building conditions for both people and products. The products often require rooms be kept at a certain temperature and humidity. We're in charge of the equipment that controls that, as well as the fridges and freezers. We do regular checks, and we're also on call 24-7.

Remember the tornado in Ottawa in 2018? Well, I was on call that week. I'll never forget that. It was a Friday, and I was outside in the backyard barbecuing with my family when my pager went off. It was about the facility where we process blood and stem cells. I looked at my wife and kids and said, 'I'll be back in an hour.' I was gone for three days. Our facility wasn't damaged, but the generator was running because power in the area was out, and it stayed out for several days.

In that situation we have to do checks every hour, because if the generator fails we have to stop production. I remember that my director, manager and staff all brought me food so I could stay on site.

---

## **‘COVID-19 has kept us very busy’**

---

Some of our buildings are very empty right now, so we’re not getting the daily requests for ergonomic assistance or for fixing lights and leaking toilets. But COVID-19 has kept us very busy.

We’ve installed plexiglass barriers in our donor centres. We’ve added sanitizer stations and new screening at our entrances. We work with contractors, so we have to make sure they’re following our new procedures such as wearing masks. At the same time we’re getting caught up on other maintenance that is hard to do when the buildings are full.

We’ve also been setting up a new lab for COVID-19 research, which makes me feel proud. There’s a new walk-in freezer and walk-in cooler. I’m not sure what some of the other machines do. I just know I have to get them power!

---

## **‘I miss the old world’**

---

I was an empty-nester for three years, but with the pandemic, my wife and I have our three kids at home with us again. That’s been an adjustment. And being a frontline worker, I’ve worried about bringing COVID-19 home to my family, especially in the beginning.

I also just miss the old world. I like shaking hands and sitting around a table of family and friends. I love the music festivals and outdoor concerts that normally happen in Ottawa but aren’t happening this year. I just love being around people. I’m a people watcher. I’ll go to Vegas for a week and not spend a nickel. I’ll just sit in a casino and watch everybody! So I miss that. I want the old world back.