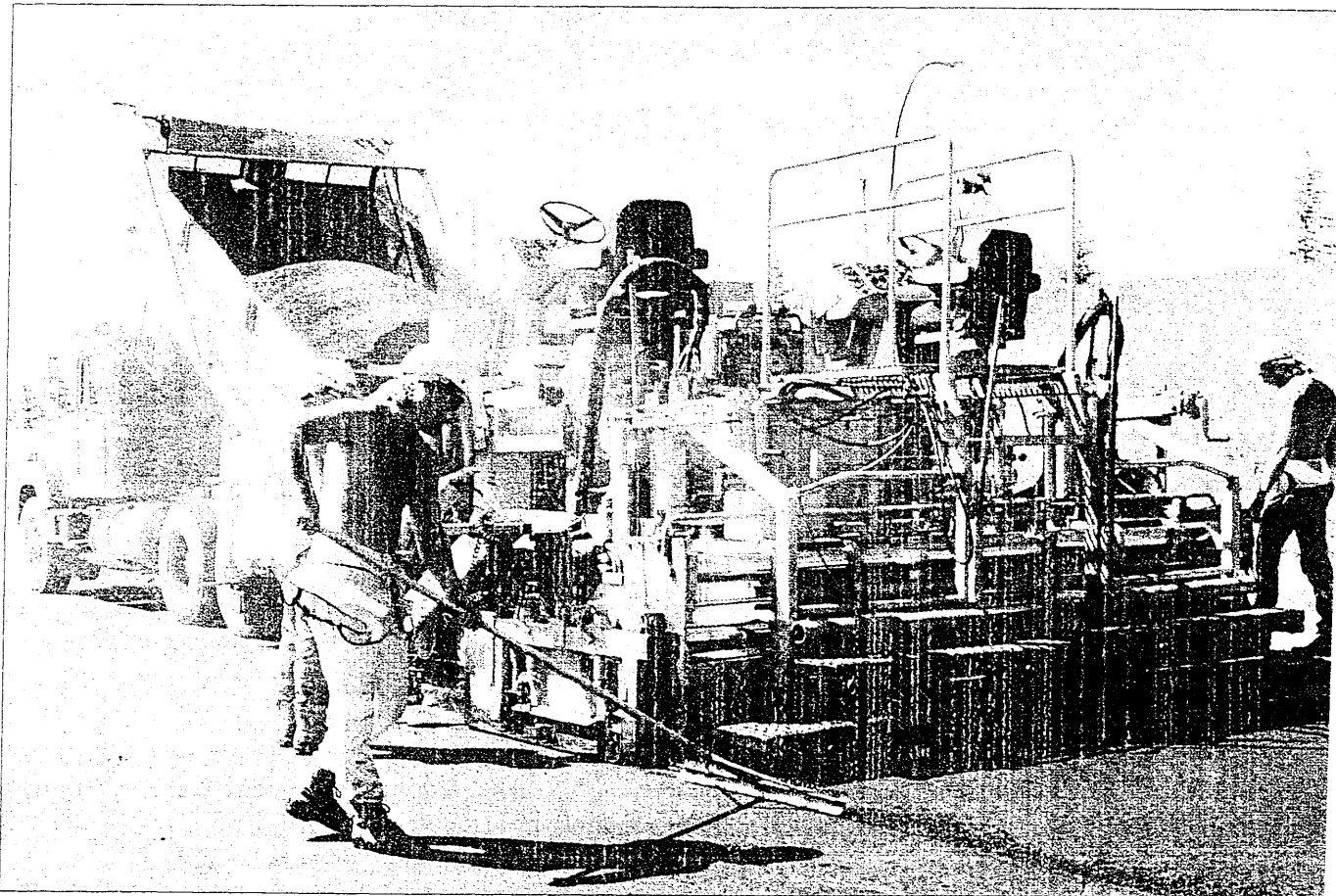


“Lean” company is getting fatter



Paving roads and building golf courses are two extremes, but this company does both, and lots more.

Charlottetown P.E.I.'s Island Coastal Services Ltd., had its baptism in 1969 when founders Robert Dawson and Harry MacLauchlan joined forces to supply boats and other supplies to the teams of surveyors charting a proposed fixed transportation corridor from P.E.I. and New Brunswick.

At that time both a steel bridge and a tunnel for vehicular traffic to the

mainland were being considered and, because P.E.I. had an operating rail network, a rail component was also a factor of the link equation.

In 1970, when the survey work ended, Island Coastal traded in its boats for a pair of backhoes and went back to the type of work the firm's founders were most familiar with — road grading and site preparation. Both Robert Dawson and Harry MacLauchlan had been involved in this type of work on the island since

1955. In 1973, Harry's nephew, Blair MacLauchlan, joined the company as project engineer.

Blair, who is now General Manager and Secretary Treasurer, has really seen the firm grow and mature. During the early years, the company was involved in the construction of concrete fish ladders for both P.E.I. Fish and Wildlife and Ducks Unlimited at various water control projects on the island. Along with grading and equipment rentals, the work was welcome

the project, the company took on a completely different set of parameters for construction.

"It was very different, but enjoyable working on the project," says MacLauchlan. Usually we are working to pretty exact specifications and alignments. For the golf course we had to learn to think in an artistic way. It was important to pay attention to the way the contours of the course were formed and to work closely with the desires of the architect. Sometimes that meant changing a feature because it was not in keeping with the overall flavor of the course. We were forming a landscape that had to convey a message or a meaning to those who were using it."

Blair proudly notes that the course was awarded "Best New Golf Course in Canada" by Golf Digest Magazine in 1994.

Building the course has not improved his golf score when he has had the opportunity to play it.

Last year was also a busy year for Island Coastal.

Among projects undertaken were the closing and topping of the landfill at St. Eleanors, P.E.I.. The work involved covering the site with 300 mm of brick clay and covering the seal with 150 mm of top soil, then seeding the area.

The company was able to complete the \$650,000 project using its own equipment.

It was also able to complete its \$4,000,000 project of constructing the Charlottetown Waterfront Access Road, which leads to the Charlottetown Commemorative Park project. The project called for the construction of a new road that would allow heavy vehicles access to the waterfront area without the need to use the congested downtown streets of the city.

Island Coastal performed many infrastructure improvements during construction including the construction of a pipeline crossing. The existing pipeline links the harbor with the Maritime Electric generating station and allows for cooling of the facility. Because it was situated on unimproved land, it required strengthen-

ing against the types of load heavy trucks would place on such a structure. The crossing had to be excavated to bedrock and rebuilt as a concrete culvert.

In addition, the access road, two signaled intersections installed and curb and gutter construction was used throughout the project.

The company also undertook sub-contract work on the rehabilitation of Canadian Coast Guard Base, Charlottetown.

Blair MacLauchlan has seen a lot of changes. The company's size has gone from two handfuls of employees and equipment to 150 employees at peak season (50 regular employees) and 200 pieces of equipment. He still describes his operation as very lean.

He's seen changes in the way the construction business works on P.E.I..

"We used to do a lot of bidding on tenders in the past and that's changed. The cost of auditing a tender process and policing the contractor and his work is quite high. The process has been replaced, to a large part, by repeat business based on estimate of cost. Contractors who do above average work find themselves being called back by the same customer to do other jobs. Those jobs never go out to tender.

"I think that a big part of the success of Island Coastal can be found in its people. We try not only to meet the customer's specifications, but we will suggest improvements and try to do the job even better if we can. Everyone here is 'hands on' when it comes to a customer's project."

MacLauchlan is about to see his operation change again. Currently, the company brings in shiploads of aggregate from Newfoundland to Charlottetown for its construction projects. Using 28 000 to 35 000 tonne loads at a time, the aggregate is stored at the company's facility over the winter. But this practice may soon change to using trucks to bring the aggregate from New Brunswick.

The fixed link, the project that started Island Coastal in 1969, will change the way it operates when it is completed in 1997.

H.C.N.

for the fledgling construction company with its staff of six and four pieces of equipment. Blair purchased Robert Dawson's portion of the company in 1975 and formed a corporate identity for the business with his uncle.

During the construction intensive 1970s and early 1980s, the company was involved in site preparations for many of the schools, provincial office buildings and hospitals in and around

P.E.I.'s capitol.

Eighty per cent of the company's work occurs within an 80 km mile radius of its offices.

In 1981, the company was successful bidder to operate and maintain Parks Canada's "Green Gables" golf course at Cavendish P.E.I. and continues to operate the course. Early success with this project led to the management of the "Twin Rivers" golf course in Newfoundland in 1985 until it changed owners in 1990.

Eventually the experience and knowledge gained from understanding golf course operations, and upkeep, payed off when the company won the contract to construct and develop the province's "Links at Crowbush Cove" golf course in 1992.

Working with Tom McBroom and Associates, course architects and Ontario Greens Limited, a partner in