

## THE ACADIA GROUP OF COMPANIES

# Putting the “success” in succession

By Colleen Birchwood



**A**fter running Saskatoon-based Acadia Construction since 1976, Don Swenson, the founding partner, along with his other partners, arrived at a crossroads. Should they find successors or should they sell off all the construction equipment?

It was not an easy decision. For almost four decades, the partners at Acadia Construction focused on building a company that specialized in civil-based construction projects. They created a niche in the marketplace and earned a strong reputation for their work on pipelines, roadways, subdivision developments, lagoons and water reservoirs.

The partners ultimately made a decision to proceed with succession rather than liquidating. This plan provided long-term dedicated staff with continued employment and the existing partners with an opportunity to wind down but remain in the industry for a few more years.

Acadia Construction started out with a focus on underground water and sewer infrastructure and built a venerable civil construction business. When the succession of the company began in 2012, the company was able to capitalize on Acadia Construction's brand recognition in the Saskatchewan marketplace and began expanding the services.

Concrete paving of a residential subdivision near Regina



Nipawin Water Treatment Plant underground piping



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A culture of continual improvement is the glue that holds the diverse team of close to 200 employees together.

After the addition of new partners and other key staff members, the original and new management teams brought their efforts, experience and knowledge together, which resulted in a period of rapid growth. The size of the company doubled over a period of two years.

Even though they did not have a particular target in mind, they were passionate about their work and there was a high market demand for construction services. In response to the rapid growth and to meet the demands of the Saskatchewan marketplace, they founded additional companies.

First in 2012, Integrated Engineering Inc. was created to provide engineering services. Then in 2015, they added Acadia



Concrete paving along  
Highway No. 10 in Yorkton

## Services and Sectors

### Acadia Group of Companies' scope of services includes:

- Engineering design and construction administration
- Tendering and procurement
- Construction management
- Site grading
- Trenching and excavating
- Bridges and other drainage structures
- Asphalt and concrete works
- Concrete paving
- Buildings and structures
- Fluid transfers
- Well point dewatering systems

### Acadia Group of Companies provide services to diverse sectors, including:

- Industrial agricultural
- Railways
- Mining and other industrial site development
- Municipalities
- Airports
- Developers
- Numerous government agencies and crown corporations

Paving Ltd., which specializes in asphalt and concrete services, as well as Acadia Construction Management Ltd., which focuses on general contracting and construction management projects. In 2017, they founded Acadia Pumping and Dewatering Ltd., which focuses on unique fluid management, large water transfers and specialized well-point dewatering systems.

By combining their collective expertise, the Acadia Group of Companies is able to take on a diverse range of projects. These projects run the gamut from earthworks, water and sewer, streets and roadways, buildings and other structures.

Over the last five years, there have been a number of internal changes. One of these changes is the availability for employee share ownership. If an employee has the right attitude and demonstrates a passion for his or her work, there are usually ownership options available.

The director of operations for the Acadia Group of Companies, Jason Horner, estimates about 15 per cent of employees own company shares.

"If employees have been with Acadia for a reasonable period of time and they

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Industrial site development

demonstrate drive and interest in Acadia's future, we make the offering available to them," said Horner. Whether they are management, field staff or office support, all members of the Acadia team can have ownership.

"Acadia Group of Companies is all about our people," said Horner. "Anybody can purchase the equipment needed for the projects, but it is the people who work together as one team that leads to success on the projects and within our businesses.

We strive to provide opportunities for our staff to grow and to have a stake in the ownership."

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"This can take many forms, including mentorship, job training, project planning and providing input from various points of view," said Horner. "Although we believe that our people are experts in their respective fields of practice, there is a common mindset of continual improvement. We are constantly seeking to improve who we are as individuals as well as who we are as a company."

Getting the job done safely is another core value.

"Our management team does a great job of ensuring that the culture of a safe workplace is communicated down from the top to every worker in all of our companies. As legislation, technology, products and current best practices around safety continue to evolve and change, so does our Safety Program," said Horner.

Acadia Group of Companies has obtained their Certificate of Recognition (COR) through the Heavy Construction

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Horner also factors in Acadia's Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association (SHCA) membership as a part of its recipe for success and growth.

"With SHCA, we do not have to be the largest company within our sector areas in order to have a voice," he said.

He added that SHCA has done a great job building and fostering relationships with provincial government agencies and providing a voice for the issues and concerns of its members. He says that SHCA is often used by government agencies as a conduit to get messages out to the heavy construction industry.

"As a member, we benefit from SHCA's two-way, open dialogue with various government bodies. They do an excellent job of making sure everyone is heard and communicating critical information," said Horner.

The partners at Acadia Group of Companies don't view Acadia as the player that builds all the mega projects; they focus on being one of the most diverse players



Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure – Highway No. 6 grade raise and widening

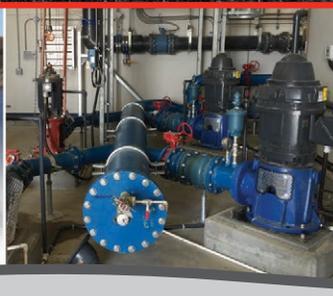
in the Saskatchewan civil construction market.

With all the milestones achieved since 2012, when the owners first began

transitioning out, they can retire knowing that their legacy will be left in capable hands and Acadia Group of Companies will be building for many years to come. 

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