

LMCI Contractor Spotlight: Harrison Muir Inc.

In January 31, 2011, International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT) industry partner Harrison Muir Inc. was presented with the George Campbell Award by the SSPC. According to the SSPC, this award recognizes outstanding achievement in the completion of a difficult or complex industrial or commercial coatings project.

The long-time IUPAT industrial painting contractor, based in Ajax, Ontario, Canada, won the honor for its work on the La Salle Causeway Bridge which spans over the southern end of the Rideau Canal in Kingston, Ontario. Originally built in 1917, the bridge still had nearly 80 percent of its original coating with only minimal maintenance touch-ups applied sporadically over the last nearly 40 years. The IUPAT painters of Harrison Muir were tasked with prepping, blasting and coating 60,000 square feet of steel in Canadian winter temperatures ranging from an average of low 20°s (F) during the day to a low of 0° (F) at night.

[Read more about the award and the project at <http://bit.ly/paintsquare>]

HARRISON MUIR INC.

Founded in 1962, Harrison Muir began its successful run in business as a commercial and industrial painting contractor. "When HM [Harrison Muir] started under part of the present management team in 1964, the company did commercial and industrial work," said HM President Dan Orrett. In 1978, the company started concentrating solely on industrial work for economic reasons as the principals had come to the conclusion that it was too difficult to try and do both categories

of work and make a reasonable return on investment.

Recently, Orrett took some time to speak to the *Journal* about Harrison Muir and its industry:

What prompted your company to make the switch to primarily industrial painting?

Commercial work primarily involves working for general contractors, and the company decided that as much as possible they wanted to control their own destiny by working directly for various government agencies (bridges & tanks) and industry owners. Commercial and Industrial work requires different crews, who do not integrate well, which was another big factor in the decision. The company also had made a large investment in their own equipment for abrasive blasting and access, which meant additional overhead costs that are not chargeable in the commercial market. These are the main factors that influenced this decision.

Is such diversification required for success in this industry?

We operate our services in Canada. Remember, we have a relatively small market compared to the more densely populated United States. A company operating in the Detroit area can succeed just painting bridges locally. We can't do that in Canada as there just isn't a big enough market to survive. We have to be ready and able to do a wide range of projects. Our



services include metalizing, plural component spray applications, all types of protective coatings, and trowel applied coating. For surface preparation, we may use walnut shells, mineral abrasives, steel grit and/or specialty sponge jet blast media. Our projects involve protective coatings work for bridges, tanks, conventional and hydro power plants, transformer stations, ships, process manufacturing plants or other steel structures. There is no set pattern for the type of work that may come up year to year.

That fact pushes our workers to be able to adapt well to meet the challenges of these projects.

How many painters to you typically have on payroll?

We operate seasonally, so our workforce ranges from 20 to 40 workers.

You mentioned that the need for diversification in your projects requires more skills to be utilized in performing the work. What corporate strategy do you follow to make certain your employees are well adapted to meet the diversity of skills?

We certainly strive to invest in new technology in our field but, more importantly, we invest in our people as well. We take full advantage of the training sessions and programs provided by OIFSC, LMCI and FTI. That's important because all of the state-of-the-art technology in the world won't do a bit of good in enabling us to be successful on our projects if our workers don't know how to use the equipment.

The other thing we put a lot of effort into is retaining our workforce. The specialty nature of our equipment, safe work procedures and applications requires our crew to have day-to-day familiarity to safely and proficiently per-



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**Dan Orrett
President, Harrison Muir Inc.**



form the work. It is of utmost importance that our crew knows our procedures from day one on a project instead of learning on the job. The IUPAT, our labour partner, understands this requirement and assists us where they can with mobility of our specialized workforce. The continuity of our workforce is a strategy that not only leans itself to project success, but also builds culture and positive relationships with our employees. You can't treat those who work for you like a tool where you use them and put them back on a shelf after a project is done. It's about keeping people working, fine-tuned for production, and making certain we're constantly improving ourselves. We also incorporate new apprentices into our crews and provide mentorship for the next generation of painters.

The SSPC [The Society for Protective Coatings] gave you the George Campbell Award this year for the La Salle Causeway Bridge project. Was

the strategy you describe above a key to your success and the honors that followed?

Without a doubt. This project presented multiple challenges for our painters - weather, traffic, schedule and extremely tough inspections, to name a few. The specification called for workmanship well above industry standards to the point of perfection. It was extremely difficult for our crew to perform to these expectations under the harsh conditions. Yet, the discipline of this crew, drawn from their excellent training and the leadership support of Bill Mogavero, our Vice President, Operations Manager and fellow IUPAT member, contributed to our crew overcoming all obstacles in performing the successful project.

Thanks to Dan Orrett, president of Harrison Muir Inc., for his time. To learn more about Harrison Muir Inc. and their award-winning projects, go to www.harrisonmuir.com.