

**Harrison Muir Inc., Ajax**

# Respect, relationships, skills and innovation

achieve painting and coating solutions in challenging environments

*Lead paint remediation and abatement, plural component coating application, and corrosion repairs, LaSalle Causeway Bridge, Kingston, Public Works and Governmental Services Canada – Ontario Region.*



*Lead paint remediation and abatement and plural component coating application, Dixon Rd. and Hwy. 401, Toronto, Ministry of Transportation Ontario*



*Protective coating application and upgrading of elevated sewer crossings, Niagara Power Canal, St. Catharines Municipal Golf Course*



*Cathodic protection, thermally sprayed aluminum, reactor silencer, Toronto*

**STAFF WRITER** – The OCR Construction Report Special Feature

How can Harrison Muir Inc. consistently succeed at some of Ontario’s most challenging and complex painting and coatings projects?

The answer, says company president Dan Orrett, is the combination of skills, experience and relationships between the 48-year-old contractor’s management, staff, suppliers and clients. As well, the business has a built-in stability through its ownership legacy and succession system which allows it to adapt to new technologies and processes, while retaining an embedded knowledge of its clients’ highly-specialized requirements.

Harrison Muir, based in Ajax near Toronto but serving the entire province, provides surface preparation and protective coatings for challenging structures including power plants, unique industrial equipment in manufacturing plants and heavily-travelled bridges – which must remain open to transit and auto traffic while construction is under-way.

The unionized contractor, a member of the Ontario Painting Contractors’ Association (OPCA), works to keep its employees steadily employed year-round, allowing it to count on highly skilled tradespeople with specialized skills and the highest safety reliability – essential since often Harrison Muir crews must work in truly challenging environments.

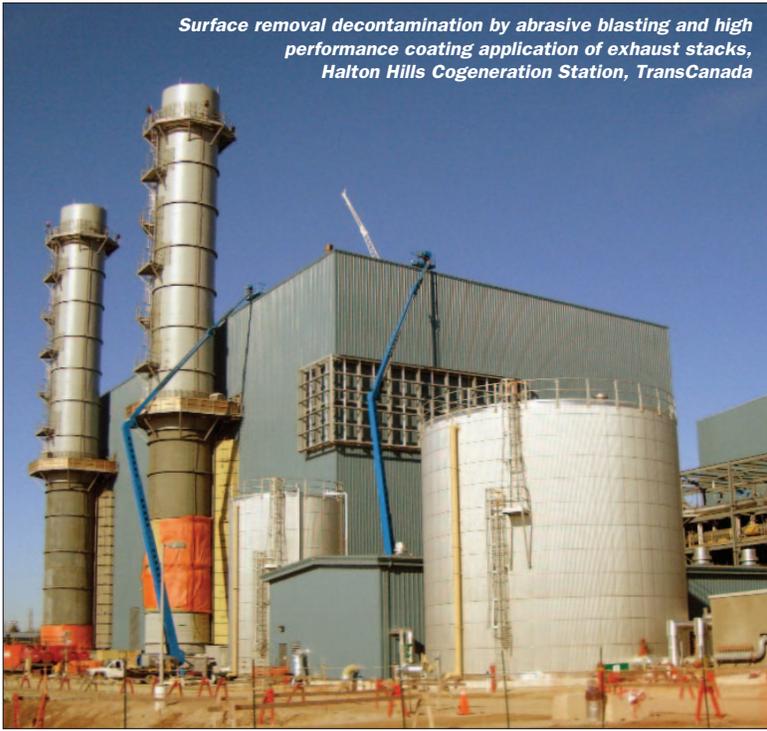
“Our work is specialized and due to the unique and specialized equipment and processes we use, we rely on our trained employees which helps maintain reliably in



*Restoration of resin silos & fire water storage tank, Belleville*

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Surface removal decontamination by abrasive blasting and high performance coating application of exhaust stacks, Halton Hills Cogeneration Station, TransCanada



High temperature, moisture cure urethane and zinc high performance coating application, equipment, cooling towers and structural steel, Nanticoke, Ontario



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work schedules and specific training and certification requirements,” Orrett says. “We take care in ensuring that our workers receive the right upgrading and training in conjunction with support from the IUPAT and the Ontario Industrial and Finishing Skills Centre (OIFSC).”

Because Harrison Muir knows and has confidence in the skills of its work-force, Orrett says he and partners Bill Mogavero and senior partner Jack Mills, 74, can confidently estimate specialized projects where labour costs represent upwards of 70 per cent of the budget.

Mills, who continues to work with the business several days a week, arrived in the

greater Toronto area in 1964 as the management representative sent from his firm in Montreal after they acquired the assets of Harrison Muir, then a struggling commercial painting contractor.

“Mills was offered part ownership of the business if it succeeded and in 1966 he became President,” said Orrett. Orrett joined Harrison Muir Inc. in 1995 and within a year become a partner in the firm and its president in 2003. Ultimately, when Mills is ready to retire, a succession plan is in place and has been well thought out by the firm’s management to ensure seamless operation and enhanced strength for the future.

Orrett says he, and Mills are all civil engineers whom have spent all of their careers working in the contracting field. Mogavero, like his partners, shares an extensive background in construction with more

than 30 years of experience. Together they work with other staff members, suppliers and sub-contractors to determine innovative solutions to challenging industrial and institutional projects.

“For commercial painting, for example, contractors might reasonable rely on an estimate per square foot, and multiply the square footage by the estimated cost to come up with a number,” he said. “But this doesn’t work so well when you are in an industrial plant and you are painting industrial process equipment, stacks, tanks and complex structures. Factors such as scaffold access, engineering controls for dust collection, surface preparation and application of coatings, atmospheric conditions and curing requirements complicated further by complex schedule requirements way heavily to make each project unique in nature.”

Conditions are truly different – but equally challenging – when you are working on the Dundas Street Bridge over the Don Valley Parkway in Toronto. This \$2.4 million project nearing completion requires special scheduling and co-ordination because traffic (both car and rail) must be maintained on the roads and railways beneath the bridge even as it is refurbished.

Orrett said Harrison Muir, with the help of Tower Scaffolding, determined they could fence in areas to separate the work from the rail tracks, avoiding the need for flagging services and allowing the project to move much more quickly than originally scheduled. “Originally, this work was to be done over to seasons and finish next spring – but we’re almost completed everything and only will have a small amount of final

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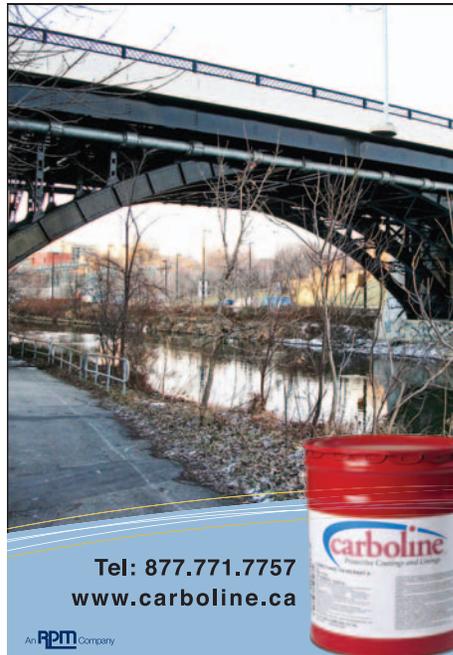
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work in the spring,” he said.

Here, the scaffolding contractor completed most of its work well ahead of the original schedule and contract payment terms, but Orrett called the sub contractor and said “we will be paying sooner due to their performance on the project” thereby paying this supplier well ahead of contractual obligations.

This sort of business fairness and respect underlies Harrison Muir’s overall philosophy. “We realize that there is merit in expediting the work to pay a sub trade in terms of milestones and often before we have been paid,” he said. This approach, of course, enhances relationships and ensures that Harrison Muir achieves competitive prices from its supplies and sub trades.

These fair and respectful attitudes also relate to employees and clients.

Employees have a long-standing safety track record to observe all safety requirements and regulations and, Orrett says, they receive safety incentives based on the yearly firm assessment of their safety record. As well, with in-house training and scheduling, employees can be confident of

job stability, with opportunities to learn and grow with new skills and challenges.

Meanwhile, clients enjoy thoughtful bidding, accurate pricing, and complete transparency.

“These days, the highly dynamic nature of business and more important client issues, means that painting and maintenance is often subject to budget and last minute constraints,” Orrett told the OPCA’s Top Coat Magazine. “We manage this uncertainty by fostering a tremendous amount of transparency in our company – we’re always communicating our activities and opportunities with one another.

“Another strength is using today’s technology to reduce costs and risk, and create efficiencies in basically every aspect of our business – Just ask “Jack Blackberry Mills” (the 74-year-old founder). We’ve computerized most of our systems, which puts all of the information at our fingertips and helps us roll out a project faster. When one of our supervisors fills in an order, for example, he’ll use a computerized equipment requisition that has been customized for the job.”

Orrett says he expects Harrison Muir will continue to do what it does best. “We’ll focus our work in Ontario with about a 50/50 mix between private and public sector work,” he said. Harrison Muir is

willing to travel within the province. It has completed significant projects in northern and Eastern Ontario.

The company will continue to develop and maintain strong client relationships, so when businesses or institutions are thinking about upcoming projects, they’ll call for budget information and suggestions well before the work goes out to bid. And when

Harrison Muir is invited to bid on a project, Orrett and other estimators will develop strategies and innovations to allow the work to be completed in a timely manner, according to specifications, with efficiency and creativity far beyond the norm.

“I highly recommend Harrison Muir for

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Water blasting and protective high performance coating application on copper metal, David Dunlap Observatory, Toronto



Maintenance coating program, manufacturing plant, Ontario

## Harrison Muir takes safety seriously

Harrison Muir’s safety practices go far beyond compliance – the company’s culture is to take safety seriously on every project, says safety consultant Roger Tickner of Tickner and Associates Inc.

“If there’s any doubt whatsoever, there’s a lengthy discussion about making sure things are made as safe as humanly possible,” he said. “They are not bound by compliance – they seek the

best solution possible.”

This attitude has spanned a 15-year-relationship. “Harrison Muir understands the importance of health and safety,” Tickner says. “They get it.”

Tickner Associates is managed by three Canadian Registered Safety Professionals (CRSP). For more information, visit <http://www.safetyway.com> or phone (416) 891-7120.

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any coatings related project,” said a construction manager at Alberci Constructors after a recent project. “I trust Dan’s knowledge in his field more than anyone else I have ever dealt with. Dan takes a lot of pride in his work and he always does what he says he is going to do.”

Meanwhile, the David Dunlap Observatory in Richmond Hill, housing North America’s second largest telescope, has been refurbished with new exterior coatings to preserve the observatory’s integrity, overcoming years of patchwork repairs and neglect since its original construction in the 1920s.

When the building was owned by the University of Toronto, the university needed the work done within budget and in an open-bid, low tender approach, but the



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project required exceptional thoughtfulness. You certainly can’t sandblast old accumulated paint off a site with a working telescope. Harrison Muir, instead, co-ordinated high-pressure water blasting through its affiliated company, Aquablast, with a careful work schedule and pace to minimize disruption and site contamination. The contractor had to be exceptionally careful to be tidy on site. Grime and dust particles certainly cannot be tolerated in this environment.

For more information about Harrison Muir Inc., visit <http://www.harrisonmuir.com> or email Dan Orrett at [dan@harrisonmuir.com](mailto:dan@harrisonmuir.com).



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Surface removal decontamination by abrasive blasting and protective coating application, steeple, St. Mary’s Immaculate Church, Richmond Hill