

The Magazine of the Maine Better Transportation Association

MAINE TRAILS

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CCB, Inc.
riding the
winds of
opportunity

Will Maine keep on trucking?

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Winds of opportunity

CCB, Inc. finds strength through diversification

By Kathryn Buxton

THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN mid-June that Westbrook construction company CCB, Inc., had won a contract to install a wind turbine for the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority signals the firm's latest venture into the fast-growing wind energy market. The 120-foot turbine is the sixth wind project for the company during the past five years.

"Community wind" is just part of the company's "green construction services" strategy, according to CCB President Beth Sturtevant and Director of Business Development Tom Donnelly. The market category also includes installation of patented energy conservation units for HID (high intensity discharge) lighting. The emphasis on green services is a relatively new niche for a company that has built its reputation as the go-to firm for a variety of other markets: pulp-and-paper, commercial, clean room construction and renovation, gas turbine construction and more.

CCB is also expanding their reach into building envelope restoration and structural concrete rehabilitation for airports and, possibly, bridges. As CCB President Beth Sturtevant describes it, the adaptive skill of CCB's workforce has allowed the company to evolve and thrive in the changing New England economy – even during difficult times.

"Our crews are used to working in environments that require constant attention to safety, creative thinking and efficiency," said Sturtevant. "Those skills are easily transferrable."

The focus on workforce agility has served the company well, particularly during the past two years as the region has struggled to recover from the economic downturn. It has kept the company's core workforce of 150 busy and the business competitive. Recent projects have included: a \$6 million foundation project for the new Life Sciences Building at Dartmouth



CCB has added "community wind" to its portfolio of construction services and most recently has worked on a wind turbine installation for the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority.

College; installation of a wind turbine at the Grand Hotel in Whitefield, New Hampshire; and the interior fit out of an entire floor at the Tip O'Neill Federal building in Boston. Currently, CCB is working on a new fish passage for the Shelburne Falls dam in Massachusetts and completing masonry restoration work at the Verso paper mill in Bucksport.

"We're weathering this downturn very well," said CCB Vice President of Finance Donald Raye. "We're as strong as we have ever been in terms

of capital and cash on hand. My feeling is we're very well positioned for the recovery."

Green future

Tom Donnelly, a 25-year veteran of construction and facilities management, joined CCB earlier this year and is leading the company's expansion into the green construction services market. As he explains it, the markets CCB is pursuing are a result of the company's strategic partnerships to install energy efficient

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Beth Sturtevant, President



developments. Other new markets include building envelope rehabilitation and historical renovation, both specialties Donnelly has been involved in throughout his career. Each of these disciplines requires a special skill set, skills which CCB has and can excel at.

“These markets aren’t easy,” said Donnelly. He added that community wind or large-scale historic renovation projects can take more than a year to cultivate from concept to project initiation and can take even longer when there is limited access to capital and debt financing. Still, there is demand, and the benefit for CCB’s customers can be significant. The community wind project on Cape Cod will save CCB’s client an estimated \$60,000 a year – about 60 percent of the transit agency’s operating costs. The HID lighting control system offers potential savings of 20-25 percent of lighting energy costs annually – and in some cases will pay for itself in just 24 to 36 months.

And there is a market for this specialized “green” construction work. The recent announcement that CCB would be constructing the wind turbine on Cape Cod has generated interest from transit organizations from as far away as Texas and Nebraska.

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Don Raye, Vice President of Finance



project to completion. Those are things we are very good at,” said Donnelly. “CCB self performs the majority of the work on these projects. We take pride in the quality of our workmanship, and we don’t farm it out to the lowest bid.”

Navigating change

The company has navigated challenging times before in its 65-year history. CCB, Inc. was founded in 1945 by Robert Dawson, Clifford Johnson and John Kibler – the original name was Consolidated Constructors & Builders. The new company had its headquarters in New York and a satellite operation in Portland, Maine. In 1963, when the original owners retired, Edward Milvaney, and Stanley Pawlowski bought the firm, closed the New York office and moved the

headquarters to Portland.

Another turning point came in 1980, when Herbert E. Sargent, founder of the heavy construction firm H.E. Sargent in Stillwater, Maine, bought CCB. The company was in need of new leadership, and Sargent was just the person to take it on. Known for his business acumen, Sargent saw potential in the firm and under his leadership, the company became more financially stable, increased its bonding capacity and strengthened critical business functions, including project management, data processing, estimating and cost accounting.

The company made a key hiring decision about that same time. Beth Sturtevant, who had first worked for H.E. Sargent during her student days at UMaine Orono, joined CCB as a field accountant/engineer in 1982. Sturtevant became a project manager in 1985 and vice president of operations in 1993 when she and then CCB President Donald Starr purchased the company from Sargent.

Big on paper

The 1980s and 1990s were a time when CCB became adept at reading the New England market and developing its niche approach to industrial construction. By the late 1980s, the company had developed a name for itself in the paper industry and formed a special branch just to serve that market – Northeast Papermill Services, Inc. The new division provided “in-house capabilities” to Maine’s paper mills – industrial piping, millwright, rigging and maintenance services. Just three years later, the company broadened that “in-house capabilities” approach to work with other industrial clients in the region and changed its name to Northern Industrial & Papermill Services.

During the mid-1990s, the industrial landscape of Maine was beginning to change. Maine’s pulp and paper industry was facing intense market pressure from overseas competition. Don Starr, CCB’s president and majority owner at the time, recognized the ramifications changes in the paper industry held for the company.



Crane operator Phil Bolduc captured this patriotic image of a CCB crew working at BIW.

Don Raye, who worked for Bancroft Contracting at the time – another firm with close ties to the paper industry – described the atmosphere as one where relationships between contractors and their paper industry clients were strong and the work flowed freely.

“It was a user-friendly environment,” said Raye, a former MBTA president (1985-1986) and Maine Transportation Achievement honoree who joined CCB as vice president for finance in 2002. Raye said that a steady stream of contracting work for the mills was something that firms like CCB and Bancroft could count on. He describes an almost symbiotic relationship between contractor and client where “there was an understanding . . . we took care of you and you took care of us.”

To his credit, said Raye, Starr saw the writing on the wall and began to diversify CCB’s client base. “CCB had a heavy investment in the paper industry, and Don saw the business had to change if it was going to survive in the open market,” said Raye.

A craft approach

Under Starr’s leadership, the company transitioned to a business model with a more diverse client base. CCB honed its focus on craftsmanship and customer service. The company is one of the few in Maine that employs union craftspeople. That is by choice, according to Sturtevant, who said that being a union shop encourages a high level of training and career commitments – factors that are a major contributor to the company’s efficiency and ability to compete

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Tom Donnelly, Director of Business Development



with non-union contractors.

The focus on customer service has included establishing satellite offices near its client base that now reaches across New England to New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont. In 1996, the firm opened an Old Town office with a fabrication shop to better serve clients in Bangor and northern Maine. In the early and mid-2000s, CCB established an operations centers in Massachusetts. The Wilmington, Massachusetts, location includes a millwork



CCB crews erect a steel structure at the new international border crossing station in Calais, Maine.

shop that produces custom finishes for commercial customers throughout southern New England.

Team builder

In 2005, Sturtevant and Raye purchased Starr’s majority stake in the company. Sturtevant is majority owner and the company is a certified women’s business enterprise (WBE). The business, according to Raye, has benefited from Sturtevant’s open management style.

“Beth believes in consensus and team building,” said Raye. He describes CCB as “family

often experience tensions between operations and finance – particularly in challenging economic times – Sturtevant’s comfort level and understanding of finance have served the company well. “We have a nice working relationship,” Raye said.

A key element in CCB’s business strategy has been to expand its pool of management expertise to streamline operations and increase efficiency. In 2008, Sean Ferguson joined the company as controller. A CPA by training, Ferguson is CCB’s information systems guru and has helped streamline operations and improve efficiency. The addition of Donnelly earlier this year has further strengthened the company’s ability to seek new business and service its customers better. That all points to a strong outlook for CCB.

“Bringing on new talent like Sean and Tom is how you get more efficient and break into different markets,” said Raye. ■

At a glance

CCB Inc.

Founded in 1945, CCB provides general construction contracting in the green building, commercial, industrial, power and pulp and paper markets.

Headquarters: Five Star Industrial Park, 65 Bradley Drive, Westbrook. Offices in Bangor and Wilmington, Massachusetts

Employees: 150

FMI: 207-464-2626; www.ccb-inc.com