

Company name: ECL Engineered Coatings Ltd.

Jurisdiction: Ayr, Ontario

Established: 1993

Specialty: ECL Engineered Coatings Ltd. specializes in infrastructural coatings for the mining, municipal, industrial, oil and gas, pulp and paper industries. Services range from mining rock support, bridges, water towers and storage tanks to gas and water pipelines in 15 countries.

NOBODY SAID WE CAN'T - SO WE DO



Thomas Corbett

Preamble: Thomas Corbett spoke with Top Coat about the choices he's made that have positioned his company for success. The foundation for those choices is a can-do attitude that has opened doors of opportunity at home

and in the international market. "Nobody told me why I can't do something, and I didn't read the rule book — so I just do it," he says. In 2000, Thomas opened a lucrative shop facility to align with his field services, and continues to build his reputation as an international niche service provider in 15 countries.

It's a good fit, combining shop services with field services.



We're known around the world for 100 per cent solids plural component applications.

Thomas, like many OPCA members, had the advantage of learning the trade as a boy.

My father owned a construction company, so I grew up in it. When I finished school, I took a job as a sand blaster and made good money. I never left the trade from that day on. I spent a fair bit of time with three industrial companies that treated me well and taught me a lot of the tricks of the trade. Then I started my own company in 1993.

He's quick to acknowledge quality and cost-efficiency as contributors to his success...

We give everyone high-quality service and good prices so they're getting value for their dollar. If the pipeline guys call on Friday and want a crew on Saturday, we're there. They know they can count on us. We don't advertise, other than through our website and the yellow pages. All our work is either repeat business or comes through word of mouth. Usually the same four or five contractors bid on the same jobs that interest us. You win some, you lose some. Sometimes my pencil's sharper and sometimes it's not.

...but also has an appetite and aptitude for honing ECL's competitive edge by implementing innovative solutions in response to trends in the market.

In 2000, we branched out from field services and opened our own shop facility. We have three bays: a large sandblast bay at 2,040 square feet; one large paint bay at 3,000 square feet, and one smaller paint bay at 1,500 square feet. It started when I saw that we were losing some of our work in the field to stuff coming to the job site pre-finished. I thought, how can I capture a piece of that market? So I started focusing on the shops, and it's worked out well. It's a good fit, combining shop services with field services. All our doors are oversize so we can handle over-weight, over-length, over-width and over-height loads of steel or tanks. We're able to produce a better quality job in a controlled environment. And sandblasting and painting in the shop is more economical than in the field—we don't have to pay lodging, meals or mileage, and we have multiple shifts. It gives us an edge.



Running a shop implies the company sticks close to home-base - but nothing could be further from the truth for ECL's foot-loose field crews.

All our equipment is skid-mounted for transport, so we can go anywhere. We've worked in 15 countries, including Australia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Singapore, Mexico, Ireland, Saudi and Qatar. We look at it this way: if you take a job that's more than 100 kilometres from home base, you're still paying the men lodging, so it doesn't matter if you're in Chile or Gravenhurst. For overseas work, we pay flight



costs and eight hours travel. It's not that big an expense in the overall scheme of things, plus everyone you're bidding against is in the same situation. Our field crews like to be on the road. They're travellers. We rotate them every six weeks on out-of-town projects, but some choose a second rotation. Before I started my own company, I was a traveller, too.

our hydra-cats are skid-mounted and designed to fit on an airplane, or go by sea container.

The biggest challenge for OPCA members, says Thomas, is attracting apprentices.

The most important reason to choose a union employer is safety and training. Our customers demand that we have all our training certificates. We set our health and safety to a very high standard. In my business, for example, we have our own egress plan, rescue team and safety equipment. If something happens, we don't rely on the fire department to rescue us. It's just the cost of doing business. You can't put a value on a life. Other companies fly by the seat of their pants. It's either ignorance of the law or they figure they've done it this way for years and so far, nobody has been hurt. Well, the law of averages says you can do that only so many times before the chamber comes up with the bullet in it. These com-



panies spring up in business for three or four years, then disappear and come back under a different name. We all know why. That's no legacy to leave. I can look back and I'm content with the way I've treated everyone: my customers and my employees. I think that's the way to do business.

Thomas Corbett is President and Owner of ECL Engineered Coatings Ltd. He can be reached at 519-622-8811, ext 22, or thomas@engineeredcoatings.com.



ECL builds its reputation by focusing on what it's good at, and by taking a far-ranging but selective approach to its bids.

We don't just bid anything. We look for niche projects. We're known around the world for 100 per cent solids plural component applications. Other countries have the same water towers, sewage digesters and big oil petroleum tanks as we do in Canada, but they don't have the skilled trades that know how to do the coatings, so they outsource. We use special equipment and fly it to the site. For example,

