

Relationships, requirements, reputation:

Robert Construction built 50 years of success on three pillars



Robert Construction celebrated 50 years in business on April 1. Its longevity is due in no small part to a reputation for delivering exceptional work and building long-standing relations with clients, subtrades and employees.

Catholic Elementary School Lamoureux, 1963



Bourget School, 1969



Hawthorne Secondary School, 1963



Centennial Library Nepean, 1967

A company that has been in business for 50 years is undoubtedly doing something right. No business lasts a half century in construction through sheer determination and a bit of good fortune. Success is based on a number of factors, not the least of which is a reputation for delivering exceptional work.

Over the five decades, Robert Construction has distinguished itself among Ottawa's light-commercial general contractors as a firm that builds strong relationships and is intimately familiar with its clients' specific requirements. Combined, these qualities have earned Robert Construction a reputation as a trusted construction partner to a number of private-sector clients.

Exceptional work, fair prices and a handshake: Robert Construction's founding principles

The history of Robert Construction dates back to April 1, 1963. At the time, founder Robert Lafortune was eager to make a name for himself as a builder of light commercial buildings in the growing national capital. Like many of his competitors, he grew his business incrementally by performing exceptional work at a fair price for prominent local owners such as school boards and banks. His aim on every job was to use his expertise to make every project run smoother than the last and to conclude every project with a handshake. Success ensued.

Relationships for the long-term

Fifty years later, Robert Construction owes much of its longevity to Lafortune's founding principles. The company stands today as a testament to the strong relationships it has built in the industry. Indeed, Robert Construction's relationship with at least one client—The Royal Bank—dates back as far as 45 years. And although project personnel, scopes of work and construction methods have changed significantly during that period of time, the ties between the two businesses are just as strong today as they ever have been.

"I think we've been on site at every Royal Bank in Ontario east of Peterborough," says Lee Harrington, who began work at Robert Construction in 1969 and assumed control over the business's operations in 1998. "We do everything for them, from construction of whole new branch offices to the smallest maintenance contracts."

Such commitment and dedication to the needs of its core clients—Royal Bank is far from the only beneficiary of Robert Construction's all-in approach; other long-term customers include the LCBO, BMO and a number of local car dealers—is what Robert Construction means when it talks in terms of building relationships. No job is too small, no scope of work too detailed for the company to refuse work for a preferred client. Even jobs valued in the range of hundreds of dollars—those that most competitors would turn down—are within



Robert Construction's scope of work. Why? Because such work enables the company to remain top-of-mind in the eyes of its clients, and because this approach generates repeat business. Drawing on a team of dedicated service technicians with fully equipped service trucks, Robert Construction's new — and growing — facility-maintenance service ensures prompt and reliable service across eastern Ontario.

"The relationships we enjoy with our regular clients have carried us through to year 50," says senior project manager Mark Bickmore. "Anything they need, we deliver. We get the job done for them and we do it well."

Robert Construction's commitment to relation building doesn't end with its clients. Harrington and Bickmore know that a construction team is successful only when all of its elements are well cared-for. To that end, the firm is mindful to foster exceptional relationships with local subtrades. Those who stand side by side with Robert Construction on the job-site know that the firm will deal with them fairly, pay on time and run a well organized project. In return, these trades know to seek out business from Robert Construction and where possible offer their best prices.

Family ties run deep



Three generations of Robert Construction: Mark Bickmore, Lee Harrington and Robert Lafortune

There's an interesting dynamic at play at Robert Construction. This is a family business, but not in the conventional fathers-and-sons or brothers-and-sisters sense. Founder Robert Lafortune is father-in-law to Lee Harrington who in turn is father-in-law to Mark Bickmore. In many ways, it's the ideal family-business structure. The men are close enough to one another to enjoy relationships outside the office. At the same time, there is enough distance among them to ensure that personal connections don't cloud professionalism.



Robert Construction employees and their spouses celebrate the company's 50th anniversary on April 1.

Finally, Robert Construction is passionate about developing the best relations with perhaps its greatest asset: its staff.

"It can be difficult to find great employees, so we do our utmost to grow our senior people from within," says Bickmore. "For example, all our site superintendents began as general labourers and gradually worked their way through the ranks to the point where they run our jobs. Many of them have been with us for more than 20 years. That's important to us not only because they know our systems and our processes, but also because they serve as examples of the career paths young people who are just starting with us can follow."

No requirement overlooked

Not to be omitted from Robert Construction's list of assets is the firm's capacity to consistently address the particular requirements of its clients. Of course familiarity with its clients is a significant contributor to that asset, but the company is also mindful to ensure that its people are trained up to the highest standards, are properly educated about the mechanics of construction (labour regulations, building codes and environmental laws among them) and are empowered with the freedom required to make the decisions on site that contribute to the betterment of a job.

"Our experience is an asset, particularly when speaking in terms of the needs of our long-term clients," says Harrington. "It may sound bold to say this, but we sometimes know our clients' requirements better than anyone else. That level of understanding enables us to raise questions and ask for clarification on particular issues when we see something that we think is wrong or that might not be the best possible expression of the client's needs. After all, it's far easier to make changes on ink-and-paper drawings and specifications than it is to change something that's already built."

Above all, an outstanding reputation

Robert Construction's capacity for developing long-term relations with its clients, subcontractors and employees enables the firm to build the best possible construction teams for any project. Its capacity for understanding project requirements and refining them to suit their clients' precise needs means the company always delivers to a high standard of construction. The combination of these two elements is the company's reputation. In every way, Robert Construction is a trusted partner to its preferred clients in the light commercial industry.