

AEC NATURAL FIT FOR A&B

When Arnett and Burgess Pipeliners decided it needed to expand several years ago, it didn't take long for them to decide to build in Athabasca County, in the heart of the Alberta Energy Corridor.

In 2007, the Sedgewick, Alberta-based company constructed a 10,000-square foot fabrication shop, with a 160-acre yard just north of Highway 55 on Range Road 194a.

Athabasca Operations Manager Clif Lett said the location was a natural fit for the pipeline company.

"We've always done a lot of work up north, and our new shop in the AEC brings us a lot closer to the action," he said.

In A&B's 53 years in the business, they had field offices across the province, but



the shop in Athabasca is their biggest expansion by far.

"It's a large, permanent shop that allows our business to cover a much larger area," he said.

Although location was one of the biggest factors for the business to build in the AEC, they've since found many other benefits of being located in the blossoming industrial hub.

"There is a lot of other businesses in the area that support the work we do," Lett said, noting that has many advantages.

Lett said A&B is always in constant need of manpower for jobs, and their Athabasca County location has made workers much easier to find. The company is now able to find workers much closer to home, rather than bringing in people from across the country.

The new location has also given A&B significant exposure, Lett says.

"There's so much work happening up north, and we're right in the middle of it," he said. "Other companies know who we are and what we do, and the community knows us too."

ALBERTA ENERGY CORRIDOR ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

New for 2011 is the AEC Associate Membership. This new Association allows more companies to participate in the development of the region, while taking advantage of the opportunities that collective partnering offers. New members to the AEC Association will have access to new means of marketing through industry and trade events as well as priority listing through the AEC website and in print media. In turn, revenues from the Association will provide the AEC the necessary funds to develop new networking opportunities, events for local businesses and gives the resources to provide a strong voice for the association at all levels of government.

"The Alberta Energy Corridor can provide local businesses the connectivity with industry that they may be missing, while those same businesses provide the collective pool of resources that those same industries will draw from," says Jodie Pruden, executive director. "We want to ensure that the existing companies that operate within the corridor are being represented through the AEC."

Associate Memberships are available, contact the Alberta Energy Corridor at www.albertaenergycorridor.com or by calling Jodie at 780-689-0002 for information on becoming a member.

STUDENTS GET A REAL EXPERIENCE

When students graduate from the Portage College Heavy Equipment Operator program, chances are they are going straight into an industry that the majority of them have never worked in before.

That's why the college has done everything they can to recreate the real world in the 12-week program taking place in the village of Boyle.

"Our goal is not only for our students to be ready for employment, but ready for life in that type of work too," said Portage College Dean Stuart Leitch.

Students will be trained on the equipment and they'll be exposed to life in camp, which will be a reality for many graduates. Camp life isn't for everyone, Leitch said, so students get to experience the camp atmosphere over the course of the 12-week program.

To ensure fresh graduates have a smooth transition into their new careers, the program also offers two weeks of safety training so that students get certified in things like first aid, flagging procedures and pipeline safety.

The 12-week program is a mixture of classroom time and hands-on experience. The school has access to a wide variety of equipment, which students can use and get experience

with, as well as several computer simulators that students can train on before getting behind the controls of a real machine. The simulators, which are made by John Deere, are very realistic and offer students a chance to get acquainted with the many controls of equipment such as graders and dozers, according to lead instructor Russ Connor.

With training and simulator experience under their belts, students are ready for the real thing. Walk out the door of the classroom facility and a full team of equipment and a large section of land are right there for students to go to work on.

Progress is already very visible at the school site. Students have landscaped the site around the classroom and, when classes started, the lot next to them was all brush. Now, students have cleared and burned the brush and done a considerable amount of work in preparing the land for future use.

"Most of these students had never operated machinery before, but if you look around and see what they've done, you're very impressed," Connor said. "We've seen tremendous improvement from all our students."

The school has brought in rock trucks so students get experience loading them

with the excavator, because that's what they'll have to do in their future jobs. They were given the opportunity to drive the rock trucks as well.

No detail is spared when trying to make the school as real as possible, Connor says. When the students park at the school, they must back into their spots, which allows vehicles to leave quicker in case of an emergency. While they don't anticipate any emergency evacuations, when the grads get to a real job site, backing in will be standard procedure, so they might as well get used to it now. Pipelines and power lines are also marked according to industry standard so that students get used to them in a controlled environment.

Leitch said programs like this are important, so that people remain in the community.

"We don't want people to grow up here, but then leave to get a job and never come back. We want our students to stay here, get local jobs and be a part of our future," he said.

The pilot project of the program has been a huge success for the college, and the school is now planning a permanent campus in the region for the course.





HUGE POTENTIAL IN AEC REGION

The potential for industrial, commercial and residential growth in the areas of Athabasca, Boyle and Wandering River is huge, and that development, when it comes, will bring even more services, more residents and more options to the area. That potential is why the Alberta Energy Corridor exists.

Given the geographic position of the region combined with a strategic marketing plan, it is anticipated that the Alberta Energy Corridor region will experience substantial increase in industrial, commercial and residential growth.

“The reality is that there are challenges in promoting a rural location for business development,” said Executive Director Jodie Pruden. “Our function is to identify what those challenges are and develop strategies that address them in a way that enables the region to accommodate certain sudden growth.”

One of the challenges identified by the Alberta Energy Corridor is land availability. With businesses looking to develop on serviced land — complete with water, sewer, power and gas — being able to provide what the prospective business wants is crucial.

“The AEC is addressing how to service the land available within the region,” said Pruden.

“The regional waterline extending to both the hamlets of Grassland and Wandering River will allow commercial, residential and industrial expansions in those two areas in the future, but that project is still a year away. We need to look at what land is available for servicing now.”

That’s where the strategic land use committee comes into play. Along with consultant Chris Davis from MMM group, the AEC will develop a strategy to have services available for the newly-annexed portion of industrial-zoned land in Boyle and continue along the route north. “We need an inventory of available properties, so that when we are in conversation with prospective companies, we have the confidence in knowing we can provide them with the land they want,” said Pruden.

The Alberta Energy Corridor is close to oil sands development in Fort McMurray, but at the same time very close to Edmonton and the future upgrading hub of Alberta’s Industrial Heartland. And the corridor is close to more than just oil — it’s also on the doorstep of Alberta’s forestry industry.

This factor has created a central piece of infrastructure that is the core of the Alberta Energy Corridor, Highway 63.

Proposed twinning of the highway is to commence in the spring of 2011, with the goal of having the northern leg from Atmore to Fort McMurray complete by 2012.

Alberta Transportation has expropriated certain lands, and has a hold on others, until the twinning is complete. This means that proposed expansion for industrial land along Highway 63 may not get permits for development on such lands.

“As positive as this project is for the region, it is also posing huge challenges for landowners and future development along the region,” noted Pruden. “The role of the Alberta Energy Corridor is to ensure Alberta Transportation understands what the impacts are of current policy, and find ways to work with the province to move development forward in a way that accommodates both the growth of the region, and the twinning of the highway.”





GRASSLAND TRAILER SEEING BENEFITS

Grassland Trailer and Ski-Doo has seen first-hand what the influx of industry can do for your business. Manager Colin Derko, has seen the business grow over the last 10 years to meet the needs and demands of the area.

A large part of the company's business is building custom-made trailers, ranging from flatbeds to fully enclosed units, and many of which are used in the oil industry locally and in Fort McMurray. Their custom trailer projects start as just an idea, move to a design, then finally a

finished product, and they've been very successful doing just that.

The company has recently added a new building with three bays of working space, so they have room to keep up with the fabrication and repair work.

Derko says, along the quality of his product, there is a major reason for the company's success — location.

"There are 35,000 vehicles that drive by us every day, and they are the people who support us," he said. Grassland

Trailer is located in a highly visible location right on the busy Highway 63.

Location is also important for the other part of Derko's business — selling recreational vehicles. Grassland Trailer is a full-service dealer for Ski-Doo and Can-Am products, which are both popular in the northern Alberta region.

"We're just a few minutes away from great trails, lakes and anything else you would want to ride on," he said.