Standing On Shaky Ground:
Will Aging Watermains and Temporary Fixes Spell Economic Disaster?

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- Watching out for Counterfeit Safety Products
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Message from Henry Heyink, President, OSWCA

Looking Back at 2006

It’s hard to believe that the spring and summer season is over and many companies are now trying to put the finishing touches on their water and sewer work before the snow flies. The Board of the OSWCA is also in the process of completing tasks from the past year and setting goals for 2007.

This year the OSWCA Board has been working on the issue of governance and assessing the policies and procedures in place within the Association in an effort to ensure that we remain accountable to the members and the mandates of the Association. The governance review has been a positive learning experience for all of the directors and a rather timely introduction of policy for our Executive Director, Frank Zechn er, who is completing his first year with the OSWCA. Frank is proving to be a valuable team member and is to be commended for his efforts in the past year.

One of the biggest disappointments for the Board this year is that the Liberal Government has not moved forward with the development of regulations for Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, 2002. The Liberal campaign promise was to commit to the recommendations in the O’Connor report, but nothing has been done on the pipe related recommendations. It may be time to take our message of ‘Clean Water is Everybody’s Business’ to the public through the media. Discussions are ongoing as to the best approach in this area.

The Board has also been involved in a Scholarship Program for the past two years and we encourage all regions to take advantage of this program. Attracting the youth of Ontario to the many opportunities available to them in our industry remains a priority item and is the future of our businesses. We are also continuing our work with the One Call damage prevention law for Ontario and appreciate the input of our membership. We would like to hear from you if you have unresolved locating issues or suggestions for improvement.

In order for our association to be successful in these areas, we need to hear from the members and remember that this Association is here to work for you. Recently, many members of the Association took part in our first “MPP days” at Queen’s Park in an effort to raise awareness about our Association and the mandates of the OSWCA. There was an excellent response for this event from the membership and we encourage everyone to consider volunteering for this event next year. My year as President is coming quickly to a close. I want to thank the Association for the opportunity to serve and for the support given to me by the members and the staff at the Association office. I look forward to future involvement and events with the OSWCA.

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Message from Frank Zechner, Executive Director OSWCA

A Financial Fix for the Leaking Pipes

In October 2003, the Ontario Liberal Party, under the leadership of Premier McGuinty, assumed office with a mandate to deal with finance and provincial needs, including health care, education and our decaying public works infrastructure. Our members were particularly pleased that a separate provincial ministry, Public Infrastructure Renewal, was established for the first time. In the years that followed, the Liberal party has spoken of addressing four main deficits: a health care system deficit, an education system deficit, a financial deficit and an infrastructure deficit. We remained firmly convinced that Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage System Act, 2002 would be a key element in addressing the large water infrastructure deficit.

On the matter of the ‘infrastructure deficit’, we were encouraged when the new Ministry of Public Infrastructure Renewal commissioned the Expert Strategy Water Panel in the summer of 2004. The final report, “Watertight”, released in the early summer of 2005 has, thus far, been met with very little action or definitive plans by the Ministries of the Environment and Public Infrastructure Renewal.

The government response to the ‘Watertight’ report has not yet materialized, although there were references to the pending release of the white paper in the Province’s budget documents in May 2006. Through August, September, October and now November of 2006, the white paper is no longer mentioned in any of the speeches from the Minister of Public Infrastructure Renewal or other ministry personnel. There is also a silence from the Ministry of the Environment regarding the fact that it has responsibility for the drafting of the regulations that are needed for the four-year-old statute we call Bill 175.

The past 10 to 12 months, however, have seen growing media attention surrounding watermain breaks and sink holes. Recently, it seems that watermain breaks have become a common occurrence in many morning traffic reports on various radio stations.

Clearly the public and the politicians recognize that the water infrastructure is old and in too many cases, quite fragile. Everyone is also aware of the huge costs required to fix the problems and the lack of traditional financial resources available to the municipalities and the provincial government. The answer inevitably falls back on you and me, as customers, to provide that revenue. I honestly believe that the public would accept the recommendations of the “watertight report” calling for a move to full cost pricing for water services, provided that all of the money paid through their water bills is actually used for water infrastructure. The requirement to apply water revenues to water infrastructure needs is one of the key elements of Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, 2002.

As more and more municipalities start to implement regular increases to their water rates, the emphasis will need to shift from a need to move towards full cost pricing to an acceptance that all of the water revenues generated by escalating water rates are used for our water infrastructure.
Standing on Shaky Ground

Will aging watermains and temporary fixes spell economic disaster?
People across Ontario have discovered that the province’s water piping system is full of holes. While provincial and municipal officers debate the issue of financing, aging watermain pipes in the province continue to break and leak, many causing spectacular sinkholes that are devastating to their communities and costly to fix. Justice O’Connor, who headed the Walkerton Inquiry, recommended full cost pricing to stop the cycle of insufficient funding for infrastructure. In 2002, the Province passed Bill 175, the Sustainable Water and Sewage Systems Act, 2002, but without regulations for that bill, full cost pricing is at a standstill. While many statutes come into force the moment they receive Royal Assent or within a few months thereafter, the entire statute that is Bill 175 has sat unproclaimed for four years!
Until Walkerton, the interest in sewer and watermain infrastructure spending could be best described by the adage “out of sight, out of mind”. Since Walkerton, certain sectors of the public have come to regret the indifference towards infrastructure replacement that has prevailed at all levels of government since the 1970s. Older cities in the province suffer continually as their infrastructure disintegrates underground.

In the last year and a half, the City of Toronto Works Department has been kept running as they fix one watermain break after another. In late January 2005, a watermain burst on Bay Street flooding an electrical transformer station and cutting off power for hours. The break occurred on a Sunday when Bay Street’s office towers were empty. If the break had occurred 24 hours later, it might have cost millions in lost salaries, not to mention billions in stock market trading. It was only a few days later when another break occurred in the west end of the city, but this time during business hours. This year, residents have witnessed some spectacular leaks around the city, including some that have caused sinkholes. In April 2006, the Sheppard watermain that is 60 centimetres wide burst, causing a sinkhole that was ten metres wide. The watermain was about 50 years old.

Earlier in February, the city of Vaughan experienced a watermain break at Jane and Highway 7 that...
created a 1.2 metre-deep sinkhole. The problem occurred after water in an underground aquifer bubbled up, undermining the sewer and water infrastructure. This caused the sanitary sewer to sink by more than a metre, breaking the pipe. The water main also settled, causing the main’s valve chamber to tip, pulling the joints apart. An area about 15 metres across collapsed. Instead of going the traditional route with a temporary fix, the city decided to replace the old pipe with two new replacement lines. This made sense for the long term, even if traffic had to be re-routed for more than three months while crews worked to fix the problem.

Some analysts estimate that Toronto has the highest rate of water mains leakage in Ontario, approximately 30 leaks annually for every 100 kilometres of watermain. Certainly Lou Di Gironimo, Toronto’s manager responsible for water services, said the city gets about 1,500 watermain breaks every year and it is hard to predict when and where the next break will occur. “If you use an analogy from the health sector, it’s like having cancer...You know it’s in the body but you have to find where it is,” he said to reporters earlier this year.

Those leaks are only on the delivery side. For sanitary and storm sewer systems, the city of Toronto witnesses hundreds of collapses each year. Those collapses cannot only trigger sink holes, they can also result in backed up systems, leaving homeowners and businesses with the mess.

Toronto’s city hall is spending nine per cent more this year to keep its infrastructure in working order. Nine percent will not be nearly enough to fix the aging underground water pipes, seven percent of which are more than 100 years old. Even in Kingston, residents experience their share of watermain breaks. Utilities Kingston maintains a system of underground pipes that stretch approximately 515 km and range in age up to 100 years old. The city recognizes that the breaks mean water leaks and unbilled water resulting in costly losses in the system.

While sinkholes and gushing water are the more spectacular effects of broken water mains, municipal officials are also wary of underground leaks that can exist for a long time without the water bursting to the surface. Such leaks are difficult to

In April 2006, the Sheppard watermain that is 60 centimetres wide burst, causing a sinkhole that was ten metres wide.
In St. Thomas, the municipality has begun using high technology systems to probe the infrastructure for unseen leaks. In March 2006, city crews pinpointed a leak on a 100mm, 100-year-old cast-iron watermain using their new techniques. The leak was determined to be a circular break at the bottom of a 100mm cast-iron watermain. In this case, the water did not surface. However two years previously, the City did repair a sinkhole near the curb at the leak location with approximately 2 cubic metres of crushed gravel. After crews uncovered the leak, it was found that the leaking water was escaping into an unplugged sanitary sewer lateral, thus never surfacing. Costs to repair the leak were less than $2,000.00, but the actual costs associated with the lost water using the appropriate water and sewer rates were about $4,000 per month of leakage.

The aging infrastructure/limited funds situation has been a continuous circle for decades in this province, and throughout Canada. In his report after the Walkerton inquiry, Justice O’Connor said we have to adopt a full cost pricing system for water. Since then, two governments have taken the political mileage to show their good intentions by saying they support full cost pricing. There is legislation that requires full cost pricing, but for most communities nothing has changed.

“We are still waiting for regulations,” said OSWCA’s Executive...
close and recover the full costs of providing these services. It makes municipalities obligated to set up dedicated reserve accounts in order to build up the funds needed to deal with on-going maintenance, repair and the eventual replacement of their water and sewage infrastructure.

When the government was developing Bill 175, the OSWCA formed a coalition with other industry groups and pushed for three major regulations to be developed. First, they asked the province to set a deadline for municipal compliance with the full cost pricing policy, phasing in the concept over a five to eight year period. Secondly, the OSWCA insisted that the province clearly define full cost pricing, so consumers and municipalities will know exactly what they are paying for and keep consumer buy-in high by ensuring that everyone is on a level playing field. Thirdly, the OSWCA called for regulations that make water meter-

For the first time ever, the principle of full cost recovery for water and sewage systems has been legislated in Ontario.
ing mandatory across the province, recognizing that metering is the most effective way to track leakage and consumption while allowing consumers to see how much water they are using relative to its cost.

The regulations that move Bill 175 from a legal bit of paper to actionable legislation are expected from the Ministry of the Environment, but the Ministry said it will not look at the regulations until they have finished with Bill 43, the Clean Water Act. Zechner said that the Ministry of the Environment seems to be solely focused on Bill 43 and other water related issues are on hold. While the legislative battle for Bill 43 ended with its Royal Assent in late October, 2006 an eleventh hour look at regulations may come to naught. Due to the fixed date election of October 4, 2007, it is quite likely that this current government won’t have the time to both draft the necessary regulations and obtain meaningful stakeholder input and buy in.

“We are trying to raise awareness and remind people that the McGuinity government has only done half the job. Although there is legislation in place, nothing compels municipalities to invoke full cost pricing. It is like having a brand new car and driving without any gasoline and tires,” Zechner said.

In the meantime, Ontario municipalities will continue to treat their infrastructure as they would an old car. It would be great to have everything refurbished or re-done, but until the government regulates and people start paying the full cost of water, relying on emergency fixes seems the only way forward.
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Ontario can expect to have a revised Liquid Fuel Handling Code (LFHC) by early 2007. The TSSA has been working on revisions to the LFHC together with a group of stakeholders that includes representatives from affected industry groups.

OSWCA Executive Director Frank Zechner, one of the participating stakeholders in the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (TSSA) meetings, said that although the code directly affects only a small number of OSWCA members who have their own refuelling tanks, all members should be aware of the new regulations. “A lot of the revisions are directed at gasoline stations and marinas. It is only a very small minority of our members that have their own yards with their own tanks who are affected by the new code,” he said, “Most members rely on outside fuel supply services”. For these members, it is important for them to ask some questions to ensure that the contractors they are dealing with are up to speed with the revised requirements of the LFHC.

Zechner said that for the OSWCA, the biggest concern is potential changes to the mobile refuelling sections of the regulation. “To the best of my knowledge there are no significant changes regarding mobile refuelling. There is a clarification in
addresses safety in various areas including fuel handling. Prior to the establishment of the TSSA, the LFHC was administered and enforced by the Fuel Safety Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations. Barker said that in addition to safety, the LFHC has an environmental protection mandate and so many of the changes are focussed on protecting the environment and preventing leaks. “We prefer prevention to remediation because a leak causes more havoc and is more costly,” she said.

Under the proposed changes, owners are asked to submit an assessment report whenever they are removing or replacing an underground tank or large above ground tanks. For tanks that are 5000 litres or less, an assessment report would only be required if they suspect there has been a leak that has not been dealt with properly. Barker said the responsibility lies with the tank owner to submit the reports and the liability of not submitting a report is great. “If a leak was found and an assessment report had not been previously submitted, the owner could face penalties under the Technical Standards and Safety Act,” she said. Such penalties could be in addition to any fines, clean up orders or other consequences of a spill under the Environmental Protection Act.

Barker said there is an entirely new section of the code on leak detection. Most of this section is taken from part 4.4 of the National Fire Code of Canada, with some changes. In the new version of the LFHC, if a manual method of leak detection is used, a precision leak test must be completed every two years. As well, if there is a leak in single walled piping, the owner may repair the leak in the interim, but must replace the pipe with double walled piping within twelve months. “This will improve the current situation where we see leaks most often from single walled piping. Replacing these with double walled pipe is an effective method for
business can’t tell by looking at a tank which regulations apply. Quite often the LFHC will refer to ULC or CSA standards and those standards may in turn refer to a US code. It would be nice to have a separate guideline available for people who are not in the gasoline business like farmers and construction contractors,” he said.

Barker said the TSSA is hoping to publish the revised LFHC by early 2007, and it will be in effect within two weeks of its publication date. Most of the work in developing the revisions is complete, and the document now has to be edited and sent to the Ministry of Government Services for review. The new code has already been posted on the EBR registry. Barker said that TSSA will notify stakeholders when the new Liquid Fuels Handling Code has been published though postings on the TSSA website and articles in the newsletters.

Zechner, who was the OSWCA representative during the consultative process, said there was nothing that was particularly opposed by the association. “The code is very much an environmental measure and it makes sense. As an association we want to protect the environment; we don’t promote activities that lead to contamination,” he said. However, Zechner said for the future, there is one area of the code that could be made clearer. “It is always confusing to determine what brands or types of containers are permitted by the code. Those who are not in the gasoline industry can’t tell by looking at a tank which regulations apply. Quite often the LFHC will refer to ULC or CSA standards and those standards may in turn refer to a US code. It would be nice to have a separate guideline available for people who are not in the gasoline business like farmers and construction contractors,” he said.

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Work in Tight Quarters Redefined

It is time to make sure your organization is not locked into old regulations. On September 30, new regulations regarding confined spaces came into effect. The confined space regulations were previously found in sections 60 to 63 of the Construction Project Regulations. These sections have now been replaced. The new requirements can be found in the Regulations for construction projects Part 11.1.Confined Spaces.

There are three major areas of change to the regulations for confined spaces. Some definitions have been changed, including the definition for “confined space.” The other major change is a requirement that employers have a written program for confined space entry and the third major change is a requirement that constructors have a written coordination document when workers from more than one employer work in the same confined space.

Under the new definitions, “confined space” means a fully or partially enclosed space, which is “not designed or constructed for continuous human occupancy” and in which atmospheric hazards may occur because of its construction, location, contents or because of work that is done in it. Confined
spaces include vaults, process vessels and tanks.

As part of the changes, the atmospheric level limits have become more stringent. Acceptable levels for the concentration of any explosive or flammable gas or vapour less than 25 per cent of its lower explosive limit for inspection activities (reduced from 50 per cent in previous regulations), 10 per cent of its lower explosive limit for cold work, and 5% of its lower explosive limit for hot work. Oxygen content must be at least 19.5 per cent (previously 18 per cent), but not more than 23 per cent by volume. Overall, concentration of atmospheric contaminants cannot exceed what is reasonable for the protection of workers.

The definition of atmospheric hazards has also changed in the new regulations. Any accumulation of flammable, combustible or explosive agents is considered a hazard. Oxygen levels below 19.5

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**THE NEW CONFINED SPACE regulations are quite specific about the contents of the plan. There are 11 areas that must be covered. They include:**

1. Duties of the workers;
2. Constructor's coordination document (if workers are moving to different spaces);
3. On-site rescue procedures;
4. Rescue equipment and methods of communication;
5. Protective clothing and personal protective equipment;
6. Isolation of energy and control of material movement;
7. Attendants – the employer must ensure that an attendant is assigned and stationed outside or near the entrance to the confined space and must be in constant communications with the workers inside the space;
8. Adequate means of access and egress;
9. Atmospheric testing by a competent worker;
10. Adequate procedures for working in the presence of explosive or flammable substances – workers may enter a confined space where flammable, combustible or explosive agents have accumulated, provided that
   a. Only inspection work is performed and the concentration of explosive or flammable gas or vapour is less than 25 per cent of its lower explosive limit.
   b. Only cold work can be performed and the concentration of explosive or flammable gas or vapour is less than 10 per cent of its lower explosive limit.
   c. Hot work can only be performed if the concentration of explosive or flammable gas or vapour is less than 5 per cent of its lower explosive limit, oxygen content is not greater than 23 per cent, the atmosphere must be monitored continuously, and there must be an appropriate alarm system; and
11. Ventilation and purging
per cent or greater than 23 per cent by volume is a hazard. An accumulation of atmospheric contaminants that can result in acute health effects that could interfere with a person’s ability to escape unaided from the confined space, or could cause acute health effects that pose a threat to life is also considered a hazard.

The existence of having a written program in place for confined spaces takes on new importance. Workers may not enter a confined space until a written program is in place. The written program may apply to more than one confined space, but each individual confined space must be identified in the plan. The written plan must include methods for recognizing each confined space, assessing the hazards to which workers may be exposed, having a plan for hazard controls and training workers. Employers must give a copy of the program to the constructor of a project, and the constructor must distribute copies to the project’s joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative. The plan must also be properly distributed. There is a requirement that constructors have a written coordination document when workers from more than one employer work in the same confined space.

The importance of training continues to be stressed in the new regulations. Employers must provide every worker who enters a confined space with sufficient training that complements the plan. Training must include hazard recognition and safe work practices. Employers are obligated to maintain a written record of who provided and received the training, along with the date it was delivered. The record of training can be incorporated in the entry permit.

Before any worker enters a confined space, a competent person must verify that the entry permit complies with the plan. Many requirements under the program including assessment, plan, and inspection of rescue equipment can be incorporated into the entry permit. However, the regulations state that there are some minimum requirements for the entry permit. They include the location of the confined space, description of work, description of hazards and controls, time period, name of attendant, record of each worker’s entries and exits, verification that rescue equipment is in order, results of atmospheric testing, and provisions and controls for hot work if applicable. The entry permit must be easily available to every person who enters the confined space or performs related work.

The new regulations demand greater planning and written information when working within a confined space. In order to keep these details organized, employers must keep every document and all records of inspections and tests available for inspection at the project.

Employers can view more detailed information at the Construction Safety Association of Ontario website which is at www.csao.org.
Counterfeiting in general has been happening in various forms forever,” said Anthony Toderian, Senior Media Relations Officer for the CSA (Canadian Standards Association) group. “As manufacturing is being outsourced and as more products are being manufactured, we are finding more CSA forgeries. The counterfeiters are becoming more aware that to pass their products off as legitimate, they not only need the brand names, but also the certification marks.”

Toderian said that while all counterfeits are illegal, counterfeit safety products pose great hazards for the user. “The problem is that in order to make a profit, counterfeiters have to cut corners. Often they will make the product look similar to the real thing but will cut out the safety feature. With counterfeit T-shirts and DVDs there is mainly a quality issue, but counterfeit safety products can kill!” Toderian said.

There recently was an issue with counterfeit safety boots. The CSA found a nail going through the heel of the boot and making contact with the metal heel plate. This posed a threat to electricians who would have no protection if the nail came in contact with a live wire. As well, these boots did not have a proper toe cap. “If something is dropped onto the toe, there is none or very little protection. If you did drop something then you have this chunk of cheap metal bent into your foot,” Toderian said.

As counterfeiters get more sophisticated with their products, consumers find it increasingly difficult to check your boots! The Canadian Standards Association is sending out an urgent message to the construction industry to watch out for counterfeit safety products.
is different than on the product; there are misspellings on the packaging – legitimate manufacturers take great care to ensure everything is spelled correctly – the product seems of flimsy construction or there are missing parts; there are no instructions or manufacturers warranties, or if there are, the warranties have obvious misspellings. These alerts indicate that there is a possibility that the product is counterfeit. Sometimes you will find mismatched things from two different manufacturers in the same package, but competing brands would not have their items in the same packaging."

Tonderian says even with keeping your eyes open, it is still easy to be taken in by a counterfeit product. "If a consumer or a buyer or anybody in the general public is unsure about a product, they can always check our website at www.csa-international.org. We have a recalled product listing on the site. Consumers can also check the certification and check the product listing," he said. Consumers can also call the CSA for similar information. Tonderian said that sometimes they cannot respond immediately because there may be an enquiry going on about the product. The CSA has an investigations team who will look into reports of potential counterfeits. There have been counterfeit workplace safety boots, construction parts (including counterfeit plumbing supplies), air compressors and electrical cords.

Tonderian said the CSA is determined to discourage counterfeiters. "We have a zero tolerance policy. The first measure is to alert the public that the product is counterfeit and harmful. Then we work with suppliers and retailers to get the products removed from store shelves. We also work closely with the RCMP, Canada border services and other organizations to educate them about the risk posed by these counterfeit products. We work with retailers, suppliers, and buyers to educate them so that these products hopefully don’t reach store shelves to begin with. We also work with other regulators on how to identify CSA markers versus counterfeit marks. We work with the Canadian Anti-Counterfeiting Network and International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition in the USA to help raise awareness in the media and the public. The message we are trying to get out is to take a close look at those bargains when you buy them – even though you may be saving a couple of dollars you may be putting the lives of your loved ones at risk," he said.
“Keep it simple, keep it small and baby the contracts.” With this maxim, Vince Bellissimo has guided his company, Timbel Limited, for 19 years through the flush and lean times of the sewer and watermain construction industry.

Bellissimo started his company when he was in his mid-twenties. He got hooked into the industry by working for his father during the summers and then for two years after graduating from civil engineering. “One of the problems I foresaw was that I was too young to be in a position as contractor-owner or project negotiator - I would not be taken seriously. My father came into the business to add some of that grey-hair seriousness,” he said. Today, Bellissimo has only one partner in the business, Nicola Ierullo.

When he first got into business, Bellissimo said his goal was to find a niche and lock into it. “My goal was to work with close sheathing in vertical trench construction. I wanted to get in and compete with people doing larger size watermains in the City of Toronto, who design steel pipe construction,” he said. “Those were the projects that intrigued me and I knew I had found my niche.”

Bellissimo realized early on that if he wanted to keep his company going, finding a niche was just the start. “I wanted to have control and a good handle over the day-to-day activities and where the company was going. I recognized that the key was to keep the company small and not to expand beyond our capabilities. By keeping it small and simple, we can ‘baby’ every contract,” he said. “If you have one child to take care of they get spoiled rotten, and that’s what we want to do with every contract.”

Timbel Limited takes on between three to five contracts each year. “We have a rollercoaster type of business when it comes to volume. In my office we have an overhead of two people – my administrative assistant/office manager and myself. The key to me getting through a lot of the lean times is that we are lean, there is no fat on the books.” Bellissimo said. Being lean means that Timbel Limited has to choose carefully the bids it wishes to enter. “I don’t profess to compete with large companies or to manage many projects,” he said, “I’d like to know I can carve out a half decent-sized piece of living through providing a good service.”

If reputations alone won contracts, Timbel would be able to pick and choose their jobs. Bellissimo has developed a reputation of being the kind of contractor with whom municipalities like to work. “Before I start a project, I try and bring to light all the difficulties we might encounter. Having adopted that kind of policy, we seem to go through the job fairly quickly, with control. Everybody on the job knows exactly what is expected when we get there,” he said, “Being a small company, I can’t afford the time and effort that is required to go out and battle. I need to have the issues sorted out in advance and have a harmonized working relationship with the vendor, the employees, the owner of the project and so on.” Bellissimo said when he’s on a project he sees himself as a partner in
said it’s important for the company to be selective about the projects they tender. “I am always looking for the right job that suits my guys. I am unlike some companies that go after anything and everything. They look for volume, I look for the right job and the right money,” he said. As a result, Timbel Limited has a favourable reputation with bonding companies because they know Bellissimo chooses jobs carefully and because Timbel is not at risk.

Like every other company in the construction industry, getting the project done with skilled people will get harder for Timbel. Bellissimo said he has some key workers, but they have been with the company a long time and have aged, and some even retired. “The younger generation does not want to get into the heavier labour intensive work – which is exactly the description of this niche. Instead, they all want to go on a piece of heavy equipment. The older generation can’t handle the work because it is too demanding,” he said. He is concerned that labour shortage is one of the biggest problems facing the industry, “... and there is nothing except the money to attract the younger generation.” Even the money, Bellissimo said is not enough to attract the younger generation because most of them want to be white-collar workers. He said that sometimes a university degree can get a person a salary of 60K, but some of his workers get 75K without it.

Already, Bellissimo has begun adapting Timbel for the new workers. Traditionally sheathing operations required work with lumber, using timbers that were 12” x 12”, or sheathing that is 12” wide and at times 4” thick. As the price of lumber increases, steel is more often the replacement. Bellissimo said the willingness of crews to work with heavy lumber in the early days no longer exists. “Now when we do projects, I make the materials so heavy that workers can’t handle it, so there is no need for them to try. They have to use a piece of equipment. This takes away the opportunity for the crew to not want to work,” he said.

Timbel’s niche market has also seen other changes. As infrastructure develops, Bellissimo said the projects have been getting more complicated and bigger. With ever-increasing utilities crossing each other, excavation has to be restricted and minimized. He said close sheathing vertical trenching is more favourable when you have to minimize space. “The idea is to try and make the job easy to handle - like Lego Blocks. We try and compile components that fit into each other to form a system as we go, instead of erecting a prefabricated system,” he said.

The pace of Bellissimo’s life is not meant for the faint-hearted. Since Timbel is a small company Bellissimo is the estimator, project manager, controller, and CEO. He said he’s done everything from answering the phones to working on the site himself, although his partner handles most of the field work. Bellissimo is
and I like the fact that it is constantly changing. One of the integral elements that make a good sewer and watermain contractor is the ability to change and adapt,” he said.

Despite most of the younger generation ignoring the opportunities in the construction industry, Bellissimo feels he may have found some good help to grow the business into the future. “My partner and I have sons that are interested in the business. They have gone into construction management and engineering programs. They see themselves going into the business,” he said. “My son realizes there are not many people interested in this type of work, so that means it’s going to provide for a good paying job/career. The proposed regulations for Bill 175 mean that the municipalities are positioning themselves to increase infrastructure in Ontario. There is a lot of work for those who want and can handle it.”

Bellissimo’s involvement with the ORCGA stems from first hand experience and valuable lessons he learned about ten years ago. In 1997, one of Timbel’s sub-contractors was involved in an incident where 10,000 telephone lines were knocked out. Much of Streetsville (Mississauga) was left without phone service. At the time, there was speculation that this was the biggest break in Canadian history. That very evening, Bellissimo met Mayor Hazel McCallion, who mentioned her phone was out. Bellissimo introduced himself as a cause for the disruption. “She laughed and said we would get over it!” Bellissimo explained. However, the insurance companies, their lawyers and accountants were not as forgiving as the Mayor, and as Bellissimo waded through the claims, he was already deciding to take on the fight for a better locate system. Even just a few years back, Bellissimo said he had a project where everything had to change frequently due to continual modification of the utility locates. “The cost associated with too much change is very taxing, for all parties ... I pride myself on being able to adapt, but too much change due to locate inaccuracies can destroy a project,” he said.

There’s little rest when Bellissimo goes home – his two boys are actively into hockey so there is always a game or practice to attend. “I don’t know where I find the time. You try and juggle your time. I try as best as I can to be organized. Sometimes my desk gets cluttered, and then I have to make time and clean everything off. I like the business, I like the diversity,
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- Dual Phase Extraction Systems
- Groundwater Treatment Systems
- Geotechnical and Environmental Drilling Services
- Sediment/Weir Tanks
- Oil/Water Separators

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