

LITTCO ENTERPRISES MARKS TWO DECADES OF QUALITY WORK

SPOTLIGHT

Local wall and ceiling systems contracting company celebrates 20th anniversary

KELOWNA - **Littco Enterprises**, a commercial wall and ceiling systems contractor headquartered in Kelowna, is celebrating twenty years of service to commercial and residential clients. Incorporated in 1995 by its founder, **Rick Little**, the company has grown to become one of the Okanagan's largest contractors of drywall, insulation and

related services. "Our company does a variety of work - all the way from big jobs to little jobs," **Ty Winterbach** tells Business Examiner Thompson Okanagan. Ty and his wife, **Rhonda**, are the third owners of Littco Enterprises. Ty explains.

"In 2001 Rick's son, **Jim**, took over [the company]; in 2002 I began working with him. I purchased the company from him in 2010. For a short time before that it belonged to a big U.S. conglomerate but that wasn't successful."

Over the course of the past two decades Rick and Jim Little's vision became reality

and today the company employs between thirty and fifty employees including subcontractors.



Left to right: Ty Winterbach, Rhonda Winterbach, Andre Jung and Johanna Campbell

"Honest work. Good people. Quality and a schedule the client was hoping for. Nothing brings us more satisfaction."

TY WINTERBACH
CO-OWNER OF LITTCO ENTERPRISES

and today the company employs between thirty and fifty employees including subcontractors.

"Currently we have thirty employees - fifteen hard employees and fifteen subcontractors. Later [in the year] we usually have twenty employees and thirty subcontractors," Ty explains.

Having that number of employees involves maintaining a constant stream of contracts and projects, a challenge made easier by the variety of services offered by Littco Enterprises. Some of these services include: drywall, steel stud framing, insulation, fire caulking, acoustical ceilings and wall panels as well as small repairs.

"We take on houses, do a lot of big high-end elite residential contracts, spec houses for some builders, multi-family construction, commercial town houses and more."

Littco Enterprises also offers a number of lesser known services. One example is the company's small repairs service. Ty recounts a recent example.

"A client called and said she had a carpet coming the

next day and she wanted to have her ceiling re-textured and painted before the carpet came. Within an hour we had someone in there and working on her project. We are - and we want to be - known as a company that can come to you. We will take care of things for you," he said.

Small or home-based businesses also benefit from small repair services. In another example, Ty cited the renovation of a small office in need of renovations.

"We have a few employees who are jacks of all trades. They can do all the work and then clean up at the end of the day - all without the office having to shut down during the process. By using a small crew, the office can still be occupied and there won't be a lot of different people coming in each day. That means there is less disruption for the operations of that office and no loss of time for the client."

Another lesser known service and one that isn't heavily advertised is that of fire wall

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Feature bulkheads in master bedroom at Sole Kelowna, a new construction multifamily project

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caulking. “There is more need for this service as fire codes have become more intense. It involves sealing any wall penetrations that are in a fire separation.”

Littco Enterprises also specializes in the installation of acoustical panels, a skill made increasingly popular in the Okanagan Valley by the design of modern buildings containing glass and harder surfaces.

Because multiple services

demand multiple skills, employees and subcontractors represent specific skill sets: there are framers who also install suspended ceilings and steel studs, boarders who specialize in hanging drywall and tapers who focus on mudding, taping and ceiling texturing.

In addition to certified trade’s people, Littco Enterprises employs a number of apprentices.

“We are a member of and I’m on the board of the Wall and Ceiling Association that represents our industry. I am the current treasurer and a

director on the Southern Interior Chapter board. Within that organization we have Red Seal certification. Training is primarily done in the Lower Mainland but it takes eight weeks to do any of the modules. That makes it difficult for our local guys to do that. However, the program is not government subsidized and as a result of the downturn in the economy from 2008-2014, there wasn’t a lot of work going on so there weren’t enough

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apprentices to run a program up here. When there is enough interest in the Okanagan we manage to run programs up here. We have a number of guys we've put through."

No matter how many or how skilled the employees and sub-contractors, office staff are at the heart of operations. Four individuals fill vital roles in the running of the daily operations of the company.

Andre Jung, as project manager, oversees the contracts and crews. In a highly visible position, he looks after day to day operations, liaises with

clients and co-ordinates the on-site work crew.

Office manager, Johanna Campbell, on the other hand, is responsible for the vital but more behind the scenes work of bookkeeping and managing our Certificate of Recognition (COR) with WorkSafeBC office.

"That means we get audited every year for safety programs, that's part of the Workman's Compensation Board (WCB) program to create a safer work environment. Safety is constantly being addressed on the worksite and also during our monthly meetings. We also discuss 'tool box topics' on a weekly basis. For example, in the colder weather we talk

about safety concerns around snow and ice on the job site."

Co-owner with Ty, responsibilities for Rhonda Winterbach include price checking, marketing and website content management. Coordination of small repairs services are also part of Rhonda's portfolio.

Responsibility for the overall administration of Littco Enterprises rests on Ty's desk.

"I work on communication and addressing things ahead of time before they become a problem. Strong communication allows us to build strong relationships with our clients. We try to push our schedules to help our clients as much as possible; we take the building from its 'stick frame' [phase] until it's ready to be occupied."

When asked if finding qualified employees was ever a problem, the response was immediate.

"It's always an on-going problem and it has been for a long time. In fact, it seems to be more prevalent as we see an aging work force readying for retirement plus fewer young people going into the trades. That's why we work on keeping a consistent work flow.

Nowadays people will live here and work in other locations that pay more. If the work slows down there they come back home to look for work."

In light of labour market challenges and in spite of solid growth and an even stronger market share, Ty noted there were no planned changes in the company's future business plan.

"No. No planned changes because if it ain't broke, why fix it. We feel we are pretty good at what we do. We don't want to be the largest company, our goal is to maintain the good relationships we have with our clients and with our employees.

I don't think there is anything greater that we want to achieve in the future, rather, we want to keep the people who work for us working so they can provide for their families. We want interesting projects so they feel challenged. We

are unique in that we're not forced to do the same thing day in and day out and this allows our employees the opportunity to show their skill sets. Examples are the construction of big wooden suspended ceilings and feature walls - just to name several. The results of their work is then showcased on our website."

According to Ty it is important to note that in all the different trades in the industry, Littco Enterprises brings together a variety of products and people to create a finished product. It's always the matter of each person contributing a skill and as these skills are utilized and synchronized, the creation of someone else's vision emerges. To reach that goal, individual trades do individual things and then they are finished.

"We need specific conditions to have the finished product look as it should. Examples of things that must be taken into consideration are the influence of heat and moisture. It takes a lot of time for residential and other structures to dry enough so we can continue. Sometimes people push too hard and it [drywall or mudding] hasn't dried properly but it continues to dry out behind the scenes. It's important for people to understand that our scope is a process. There are so many variables that affect the final product."

While their work may be a process, Littco Enterprises' commitment to hard work, products of excellence and client satisfaction has been unchanging since its inception twenty years ago. Nothing in the future means more to them.

"Honest work. Good people. Quality and a schedule the client was hoping for. Nothing brings us more satisfaction. I feel honoured to work here with great employees who enjoy getting up everyday to do an honest day's work. We have to work together; feeling focused and fulfilled is what keeps us coming back and doing our job."

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