

ROAD **Builder**

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 4

The quarterly publication of Ontario Road Builders' Association



SMOOTH INNOVATIONS

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

RESISTING “COVID FATIGUE”



BRYAN HOCKING
Chief Executive Officer

Welcome to the Fall 2020 issue of *ROADBuilder* magazine. I'm sure I'm stating the obvious when I say this edition lands on the tail end of a monumental year for ORBA, its members, and the construction community at large. Yet as much as we'd all like to eliminate COVID-19 from our vocabulary, now is not the time to lose focus on our people's health and the recovery of our industry.

In the last issue, I wrote how ORBA is embracing its advocacy role throughout the pandemic. I can report with confidence that we have not lost steam. Our team continues to meet with Ministry of Transportation (MTO) leaders and industry partners to communicate our members' concerns and define the road to recovery. Rest assured that COVID-19 was also a principal focus during our September 25th board meeting, and will remain so until we resolve several key issues.

For one, we've yet to see the introduction of clear contract language related to the additional costs of doing business in our climate. Even after all these months, contractors lack clear remedies when dealing with additional expenses that are a direct result of the pandemic, particularly regarding contracts with the MTO.

The MTO is well aware of this issue. In our regular interactions, the Ministry assures us it is working alongside multiple organizations (e.g., Metrolinx, Infrastructure Ontario, etc.) to amend

contracts so contractors can have some semblance of comfort knowing that any additional expenses will be dealt with in a reasonable and timely manner. The problem, MTO tells us, is that this issue extends to all government contracts and must, therefore, be dealt with on a larger scale.

In fairness, the MTO has introduced some new contract language when it comes to project extensions. They recently announced "excusable non-compensable extensions of time on current provincial highways contracts" for projects that are delayed specifically due to COVID-19. Granted, this isn't as pressing an issue as incurred expenses, but it is a start. The issue of contract language during COVID-19 is one that has taken much longer to resolve than we would have preferred, but it seems that things are at least moving in the right direction.

We've also been working diligently to address delays and uncertainties within MTO's project pipeline. The tendering process is going much slower than we would like, and although we understand that few plans are going as they should at this time, we would much prefer to see the MTO's projected road building initiatives being tendered well in advance of each quarter so our members can schedule their activities accordingly. After all, without a clear view ahead, contractors have no choice but to consider cutbacks, layoffs and delayed investments in such things as capital expenditures. This affects the

entire industry. Ultimately, we hope the MTO stays committed to its \$2.3 billion spend.

Another major concern is that some municipalities are now holding back in capital spending in a bid to soften the economic impacts of COVID-19 on their operations and therefore avoid deficits, which is, of course, unacceptable at the municipal level. These financial anxieties could be helped with a much-needed stimulus from the federal government, so we will have to wait and see if that support eventually comes down from Ottawa. It is our understanding that all provincial governments have been making a strong case to the federal government for such funding, but thus far to no avail.

IN GOOD STANDING

While many organizations are feeling the financial strain of COVID-19, I am pleased to say ORBA is in a more fortunate position. Our finances remain strong, having benefited from the successful 2020 Annual Convention and AGM that took place in Toronto before the world shut down. Our convention and AGM is always a substantial generator of revenues, and this year was no different. Thanks to the success of the convention and a very well attended Road Building Academy, both held in February, ORBA is well positioned to weather the storm in 2020. Unfortunately, the balance of the year has seen many

ORBA's office staff have shown great initiative and perseverance over the past months, as have our Board members, the Executive Committee, and our many devoted volunteers. We would not be in this strong position without their efforts.

cancellations of events. However, we have made a quick pivot to provide virtual events. Most recently, the highly popular Fall Asphalt Seminar has gone virtual.

All of this said, 2021 may be a very different story. The new year carries new uncertainties. We don't know how long COVID-19 will last, or if there will be more waves to come. The beginning of 2021 will be much slower than we would like, and we will have to budget for it as best we can.

Tight controls will be necessary in the new year. Our team has already made the decision to turn the ORBA Annual Convention into an online substitute, called the 2021 ORBA Virtual Summit. Rest assured, we will give all virtual events to come the attention, energy and resources they deserve. Moreover, we will make the very best of their new digital formats.

ONE STEP IN FRONT OF THE OTHER

Making the best of a bad situation is an apt theme for 2020. I am immensely proud of how our staff, members and partners have risen to the occasion. ORBA President James McVeety jumped in with both feet since day one and provided his support and leadership where needed. Similarly, ORBA's office staff have shown great initiative and perseverance over the past months, as have our Board members, the Executive Committee, and our many devoted volunteers. We would

not be in this strong position without their efforts.

I must also give praise to our members who have demonstrated a great degree of leadership and resilience. Interestingly, our industry only accounts for less than one per cent of the COVID-19 related claims that have been submitted to the WSIB since the pandemic began. As of September, the WSIB indicated that there is a very low rate of COVID-19-related claims for the 50,000 plus employees, direct and indirect, who call our industry home, and none of those claims have been life-threatening. That is a stat to be proud of, and it is evidence that Ontario's road builders are taking

this challenge seriously. Thank you for keeping our industry moving and remaining committed to our workers' health and safety.

"COVID fatigue" is very real. We cannot let our guard down. To ease up on our infection prevention measures or start cutting corners will undo all our good work. We know this period has been trying, and that's why ORBA will continue doing its part to steer us through the remainder of 2020 and beyond.

Wishing you all a safe, healthy and prosperous season.

Bryan Hocking
Chief Executive Officer, ORBA



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By **ANDREW HURD**
Director, Policy and
Stakeholder Relations

AROUND QUEEN'S PARK

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic is upon us as we enter the winter months. Aside from some minor difficulties in navigating PPE price increases and rapid testing availability, ORBA members are well positioned to continue the excellent efforts that saw the construction industry through the pandemic's first wave relatively unscathed. As mentioned in the Message from the Chief Executive Officer, in September the WSIB indicated that there is a low rate of COVID-19-related claims for the entire construction industry.

The provincial budget is set for November 5, 2020 and is expected to feature the government's fiscal outlook for three years. The upcoming budget followed a one-year budget outlook released in April. The regular budget release schedule will resume in 2021 with a budget offering a longer-term forecast to be delivered in March or April 2021. The ORBA pre-budget submission this year focused on the urgent need for appropriate contract relief language and municipal infrastructure stimulus. On both issues, we have been consistent and clear in delivering a strong message about the urgent need for these priorities to be addressed to government and agency leaders, as have our allied Associations.

PROVINCIAL PIPELINE

Throughout the pandemic we have continued to raise the crucial issue of early provincial pipeline exposure with senior government leadership.

This concern has been echoed through Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO) submissions to the provincial cabinet. Our principle ask throughout this period has been a list of tenders by quarter, well in advance, coupled with an understanding of the in-year carryover costs.

At our meeting with MTO in September, we received updated program projections of 140 tenders worth over \$1.9 billion for this calendar year, which is down slightly, as has often been the case, from MTO's May projections of 154 projects. It does appear that the Ministry is listening regarding advanced notice, as we also received a list of 106 projected tenders covering this year's Q4 and next year's Q1 (October to March 31 2021). The 43 projected tenders from October to December have an estimated value of over \$860 million, while a further \$1 billion is earmarked for January to March 31. We continue to seek clarity on the carryover portion and associated fiscal questions.

SPIF AND AXLE WEIGHTS

As of December 31, 2020, the grandfathering period allowing for triaxle dump trucks will end. Trucks older than 15 years or those that have not been retrofitted to SPIF (Safe Productive Infrastructure Friendly) standards will have reduced weight limits imposed. The grandfathering period for trucks less than 15 years old has been extended and ends once the truck reaches 15 years. Discussions with the Ministry are ongoing

regarding the end of this grandfathering period.

ORBA and the Ontario Stone, Sand & Gravel Association (OSSGA) also met recently with the Minister's Office at MTO to discuss additional details needed for the completion of a business case study for the creation of a digital axle database. We believe that a solution to the axle weights issue is a necessary step towards meaningful Commercial Vehicle Operators Registration (CVOR) reform.

ENVIRONMENT

After more than seven years of intricate negotiation between OAPC, ORBA and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), the Asphalt Mix Industry Standard (AMIS) was finally published on October 27. This is excellent news, as asphalt plants may now register for benzo(A)pyrene and other contaminants. The published standard also includes negotiated details important to the industry, such as an average annual weighted temperature performance standard of 168 degrees, as well as the fact that plants can engage in crushing Recycled Asphalt Pavement (RAP) and concrete under the Standard, with the stipulation that they cannot register for particulate pertaining to those activities. Congratulations to the members of the OAPC Environment Committee and the Technical Standard Working Group for their hard work and perseverance in seeing this through.

On January 1, 2021, the phased implementation of MECP's Excess Soils

Regulation begins. If you didn't have the opportunity to join us for our Excess Soils Webinar in June featuring MECF leadership, ORBA has collaborated with the Ontario Waste Management Association (OWMA) and the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association (OSWCA) to present another webinar featuring MECF on November 17. A recording of this webinar is available on ORBA's website.

We are pleased to announce that Anthony Rossi of Coco Group is the new ORBA Environment Committee Chair. Anthony's leadership will be an asset as the Committee navigates excess soil and many other important issues on behalf of the Association.

SPECIFICATIONS

ORBA continues to assess advocacy options to alleviate the imbalance in the Hot Mix Asphalt End Result Specification (ERS). While evidence-supported discussions with MTO seemed promising this summer, recent challenges call for other avenues to be considered. ORBA is also working with OSSGA and the Ready-Mix Concrete Association of Ontario (RMCAO) to address issues with the 2018 revisions to OPSS Prov 1002: Material Specifications for Aggregates Concrete. These revisions include excessive penalties, which, if not addressed, could lead to diminished product choice, potential supply issues and higher costs for public owners.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

ORBA looks forward to working with new Ministry of Transportation Deputy Minister Laurie LeBlanc and bids a fond farewell to departing Deputy Minister Shelley Tapp, who became Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Colleges and Universities recently. The President of the WSIB, Tom Teahen, has announced that he will be stepping down at the end of the year. ORBA has enjoyed working with Tom over the past five productive years, and appreciates his strong leadership on eliminating the WSIB's unfunded liability. And last but not least, Ken Thomson, a member of ORBA's Occupational Health and Safety Committee and the WSIB's Construction Industry Advisory Group is retiring at the end of the year. I will miss Ken's council and expertise on all WSIB matters and wish him well for the future. ■

ORBA looks forward to working with the new Ministry of Transportation Deputy Minister Laurie LeBlanc and bids a fond farewell to departing Deputy Minister Shelley Tapp.



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SMOOTH INNOVATIONS

AS 3D MILLING TESTING CONTINUES, THE NEW TECHNOLOGY IS STARTING TO MAKE ITS MARK ON ONTARIO ROADS

By **MATTHEW BRADFORD**

ROTO-MILL INC. is bringing milling innovations to the highways of Ontario. This year, the Orangeville-based firm collaborated with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), tech trailblazers and road building partners to test drive 3D Profile Milling technology on major routes throughout the province.

The concept of 3D milling, especially the newest 3D differential milling techniques (aka “corrective” milling), holds significant potential for the industry. The process combines 3D scanning technology and ground control points to produce a 3D differential milling control plan that contractors can use to fine-tune their milling depths according to variances along the road. As demonstrated in several of ROTO-MILL’s pilot projects, the result is a smoother base with a corrected cross slope for surface asphalt.

“Essentially, this milling model reduces milling depth in areas of the road that are already a low point in the model, such as ruts or potholes, and increases milling in higher points of the road, which reduces the overall height variation along the milling surface,” explains Josh Guest, Manager of Innovation & Fleet Operations with ROTO-MILL. “This provides a superb base profile upon which new or recycled asphalt can be laid. This improves the overall ride quality of the road while extending the service life of the new road as a result of the optimized base profile.”

The process of 3D milling requires fewer surveyors than traditional means. A truck equipped with the 3D scanner



ROTO-MILL Executive Chairman Ted Arcscott, right, showing a Digital Grade Sheet at a trade show.



The cutting-edge 3D milling technology allows for variable milling depth on a road, resulting in perfect smoothness.

uses satellite GPS and newly surveyed ground control points along the road to locate and record directional data points along its surface (e.g., elevation, longitude, latitude, distance from the pavement, etc.). These data points are then fed into a Point Cloud model and used to create a 3D model of the road's existing surface to an elevation accuracy tolerance of 2-3mm. The resulting virtual profile can then be used to produce a "best-fit milling" model.

"Constructing a 3D model before milling also gives us the ability to optimize the milling profile dependent on the specific client," says Guest. "For example, a project in a remote location where recycled asphalt is in high demand could have its milling profile adjusted so that additional recycled asphalt is generated to increase nearby quarry stocks. Alternatively, for a project in a busy, urban centre, where existing recycled asphalt stockpiles are significantly full, the model could be adjusted such that the resulting recycled asphalt production is limited, reducing the required trucking and associated costs like as greenhouse gas emissions and storage availability requirements."

SMOOTHER FINISH

3D milling offers several advantages. By enabling milling crews to remove material in the right places and the correct

and optimal depth, less material is needed to complete the job. "When you begin your milling with that highly accurate survey, you can usually save 20 to 40 per cent material on any project because you're changing the milling depth to get the optimal smoothness," says Vitek Obr, CTO of Control Systems CA and European Exact Control System, a technological leader in 3D differential milling technology that has been helping ROTO-MILL introduce this new technology to the Ontario road building community.

Beyond saving materials, the highly precise nature of 3D differential milling prevents the process from breaking through the pavement into the granular, thus requiring asphalt grader patches. Moreover, it offers road builders the means to produce an improved product in terms of cross slope accuracy, International Roughness Index (IRI) ratings, and the ride's overall smoothness. This is a benefit to both contractors and their clients.

"Municipalities will see immediate benefits from 3D milling," offers Guest. "Some of the advantages include the improved ride quality of their newly constructed roads, and the improved base asphalt structure resulting from milling with an optimized 3D Model will prolong the service life of the road, reducing the amount of future maintenance required on the road."



3D milling allows milling road crews to work with less material to complete the job.

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Added benefit: 3D milling allows for the adjusting of forecasted recycled asphalt production, trucking and storage for each job.

3D milling is already making its mark in Ontario. In the summer of 2019, ROTO-MILL teamed with general contractor Aecon and Control Systems to pilot the scanning technology along four kilometres of Highway 10. Using an Exact Street® optimized model, crews were able to mill from 0mm to 50mm to an average depth of 27mm across the entire 3.9-kilometre section of the highway, as opposed to the

standard 50mm depth requested during the pre-milling operation.

In so doing, the optimized milling profile produced approximately 2,223 cubic metres of milled asphalt, 45.9 per cent less than what was initially projected using traditional means, and reached optimal smoothness. “This means that along with an ideal ride profile, 3D milling allows us to adjust the forecasted recycled asphalt

production, trucking and storage for each job, depending on the area’s requirements, such as the distance from the closest quarry, quarry stock, and such,” notes Guest.

“The project was amazing,” adds Obr of Control Systems CA, which worked alongside ROTO-MILL and the Ministry throughout the multi-year pilot initiative. “This was the first project in North America on a very complicated road, and it came out great.”

GROWING INTEREST

The success of ROTO-MILL and Control Systems’ pilot project has spurred other 3D milling initiatives. In May 2020, ROTO-MILL brought the technology to a job with Pioneer Construction that spanned four kilometres of Highway 17 and equalled approximately 62,000 square metres of surface area. More recently, ROTO-MILL used the technology to mill 12.4 kilometres of Highway 89 for a Cox Construction project in June 2020.

While 3D milling technology may not be new to the Canadian market, thanks to its successful implementation on several high-profile Ontario projects, its profile is on the rise. And its benefits to the country’s road building industry cannot be overstated.

“Innovations like 3D differential milling are important to our industry as they allow road builders to use our machines to the best of their abilities, and continually improve the quality of the product that we provide to the province,” notes Guest. “Ultimately, this increases the value for money that the province gets in return for every dollar spent on road building.” ■



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PROVINCIAL SNAPSHOT: TENDERING PROGRAMS

MUNICIPAL TENDERING PROGRAMS ARE AT A CROSSROADS IN THE ERA OF COVID

By **BRIANNA PUIGMARTI**

Each Ontario municipality is impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Major societal changes we have all become familiar with over the past several months cannot be separated from operational and capital funding issues.

In an effort to understand the wider implications of the pandemic on the tendering programs of municipalities, ORBA reached out to municipalities, industry and partner associations, including the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), the Ontario General Contractors Association (OGCA), the National Capital Heavy Construction Association (NCHCA), and ORBA members. ORBA interviewed officials from nine municipalities across the province: Windsor, London, Hamilton, Peel Region, Toronto, Ottawa, North Bay, Sudbury and Thunder Bay.

A major theme that was revealed during these interviews was that both municipalities and contractors are facing challenges that will extend into next year; upcoming capital budgets, in particular, are the greatest concern.

In the northern half of the province, cities like Thunder Bay and Sudbury have managed to enter autumn with very few, if any, project delays. In Thunder Bay, Dan Munshaw, Manager of Supply Management, confirms that, “although the work year was compressed because of many factors, the city managed to award approximately 90 per cent of its total capital budget, other than some small projects pushed into next year.” Munshaw maintains that “there are no plans to restrict budgets in 2021.” Chief Procurement Officer for Sudbury, Kari Bertrand, tells a similar story. “Capital contracts that were budgeted for this summer have

all been awarded. The procurement process has not been greatly affected by COVID-19,” she says.

Moving east towards North Bay and the Ottawa region, Gord Young, Communications Officer for the City of North Bay, says there have been no cancellations, and all other road projects have proceeded as planned. Much like the Northern half of the province, both North Bay and Ottawa have carried out their capital programs as planned. In the City of Ottawa, Carina Duclos, Director of Infrastructure Services, confirms that “Ottawa never stopped, cancelling only two tenders in 2020, both of which were not COVID-related.” Out of all of the municipalities interviewed, the City of Ottawa has done the best, offering more work than contractors were expecting and keeping them very busy throughout the summer.

Around the Golden Horseshoe, the Toronto area has had its share of difficulties with tendering over the summer construction season. According to the Chief Procurement Officer for the City of Toronto, Michael Pacholok, “there was not as much activity this summer as there normally might have been. In all of construction, numbers are tracking at around 200 tenders, a bit behind the 300 projected for this year.” Pacholok assures ORBA that, “although the City might not hit the 300 mark, work still continues.”

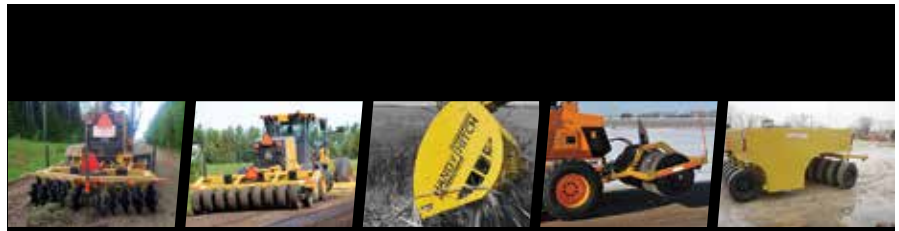
In Peel Region, sources also confirmed a slowdown, stating that the Region has really had to adjust its program – \$200 million in tenders projected for 2020-2022 have been deferred to 2023-2024. Out of all the regions across the province, it seems like procurement in the central region has been hit hardest by the effects of COVID-19. Francois Vachon, President at The Miller Group, estimates work tendered in the GTA has dropped by 25 per cent since the beginning of the year.

In some major southwestern Ontario municipalities, such as London and Windsor, project tendering has continued with only a few minor deferrals. During the beginning stages of the pandemic, most municipalities halted their project tendering for a period while they awaited federal and provincial direction. Municipalities were also waiting for specific industry indicators, such as the capacity for contractors to continue work, and the development of appropriate health and safety protocols.

Michael Cappucci, Transportation Planner for the City of Windsor, states, “Most tenders had an early start this year, despite a brief two-week shutdown. Although the budget for 2021 is still up in the air, we’re not expecting any problems.” The initial delays related to “COVID-19 uncertainty” lasted anywhere from a week to a month for every municipality interviewed across the province.

In London, the program for 2020 has been released as normal and Ugo DeCandido, Division Manager for Construction Administration,

Even if or when upper-tier government stimulus comes, there is not always a lot of consideration placed on how construction happens on a sequential basis.



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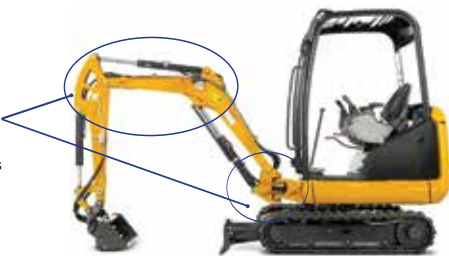
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confirms that “with the recent senior government assistance, [the support] reaffirms full programs and we are planning to go forward with a similar robust capital program in 2021.” It is unclear whether this stimulus is related to the Safe Restart Agreement announced in August by both the federal and provincial governments.

The Safe Restart Agreement will deliver \$4 billion to Ontario’s 444 municipalities out of a total \$7 billion province-wide, as part of a two-phase stimulus plan covering operating and some public transit costs, and a variety of social programs.¹ When asked, most municipalities that were contacted weren’t able to speak to any recent funding through the Safe Restart Agreement, and most were looking towards the fall budget for more clarity on the capital pipeline. In a recent letter released from Ontario to the federal government, it appears that phase one of the relief plan – one of the only major sources for additional COVID-19 relief funding for municipalities – will be released over the next six to eight months.²

FUTURE CONCERNS

An unsettling thought that was expressed by many of the interviewees, including the City of Toronto’s Michael Pacholok, was that even if or when upper-tier government stimulus comes, there is not always a lot of consideration placed on how construction happens on a sequential basis. Design work needs to be done first, which takes time.

Alfredo Maggio, President at Graham Bros. Construction Company, agreed, stating, “tough decisions will need to be made even if government money is allocated. It will only get worse if finances are delayed to next spring.” It is important to note that a study funded by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO) found that for every \$1 billion invested in Ontario’s infrastructure, it supports \$16.3 billion in GDP in the province.³ Ontario cannot afford to delay infrastructure spending. It will be crucial to our economic recovery.

ORBA has engaged in regular conversations with senior MTO officials as well as the Minister of Transportation, advocating for increased capital stimulus funding from both the provincial and the federal governments to support the industry in general, but in particular, to support much-needed municipal funding. “It has been a long nine months,” says ORBA CEO Bryan Hocking. “We have witnessed remarkable resilience in our industry, despite facing significant challenges. Through our advocacy efforts and continued collaboration with other sister associations, such as the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO), our multi-pronged approach will continue to apply pressure on the provincial government for more capital transparency and the continued and early announcements of their commitment to capital funding.”

One of the ways that municipalities are trying to offset the effects of COVID-19 is by strategically aligning their project proposals with as many federal and provincial political priorities and objectives as possible. Some of these priorities include green initiatives, community

and social benefits, and provincial and federal supports for shovel-ready projects, and sewer and water priorities. Carina Ducos, Director of Infrastructure Services, City of Ottawa, says, "If there is stimulus, Ottawa will position itself in such a way as to offer something to as many streams of programs as possible, and will have a pool of projects set up in such a way to maximize any financial support [the city] receives." And Ottawa is not alone. Sources at Peel Region have revealed similar sentiments.

Unfortunately, this leads to a sense amongst contractors and industry associations that municipal governments will have to go through a degree of belt tightening next year because all levels of government are financially stretched thin. Even municipalities that have managed to do

relatively well throughout the early stages of the pandemic will likely experience difficulties moving into next year. The uncertainty of government funding, paired with the decrease in municipal revenues, will trickle into next year, affecting capital budgets and operating costs. Craig Reid, Senior Advisor at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), states that, "the effects on municipalities are varied, particularly for those with larger transit systems." Having a large transit system (like in the City of Toronto) adds further complications to the municipal deficit and has been a concern shared with ORBA by many other associations and contractors interviewed.

Ivan Levac from R.W. Tomlinson says it well: "The industry has difficulties dealing with extreme highs and lows." The wider industry implications of these municipal tendering difficulties have meant that contractors are increasingly competing for projects outside their usual bidding regions, driving the price of work down. This adds to a complexity of issues. Don Gardonio, President, Facca Inc., explains that, "the other residual effects of COVID-19, like workers not wanting to travel, and COVID-19 testing challenges have now become amplified."

In speaking with contractors operating across Ontario, it is clear that ORBA members bring a genuine passion to contributing to the local communities they live and work in. Despite the uncertainty, the second wave will be approached with the same ingenuity, resiliency and remarkable sense of community that helped to keep Ontario moving through the beginning of the crisis. ■

¹ Ontario News Room (August 12, 2020). "Ontario Providing Municipalities With up to \$1.6 Billion in First Round Emergency Funding." Accessed: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/57970/ontario-providing-municipalities-with-up-to-16-billion-in-first-round-of-emergency-funding>

² "Safe Restart Agreement Response Letter: Premier of Ontario." Accessed: <https://www.canada.ca/en/intergovernmental-affairs/services/safe-restart-agreement/letters/ontario.html>

³ Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis (2015). "Investing in Ontario's Public Infrastructure: a Prosperity at Risk Perspective with an Analysis of the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area."



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TOOLS FOR WELLNESS

IMPROVISING A WAY FORWARD TOWARD MENTAL HEALTH

By **ABIGAIL WRIGHT PEREIRA**

As we brace for the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, many of us face challenges unlike any we have encountered before. Maintaining one's mental health may feel like a tight-wire act over Niagara Falls.

As part of its October webinar series, ORBA addressed mental health and wellness, featuring the webinar *TOOLS IN YOUR TOOLBOX: Strategies for Building Mental Health in the Construction Industry*, held on October 29 and presented by Nancy Watt, President of Nancy Watt Communications. Watt, a Second City Conservatory alumna, is a sought-after speaker, writer and improviser who presents dynamic workshops on mental health and communications in unconventional environments.

At first glance one might wonder what improv has to do with mental health. Earlier this fall via a zoom meeting, while I was in my basement office and Watt at her cottage, I asked her to tell the story of how improv can lay the foundation for the roadmap toward mental health and wellness.

How did you first make the connection to implement improv into psychology as a means to help people to improve mental health?

NANCY WATT: This strange convergence of improv, mental health and positive psychology came together unexpectedly. I was acting and needed to improve my performance in auditions, so I went to Second City improv classes. At around the same time I was asked

to be part of St. Joseph's Healthcare Quality Council for Addiction and Mental Health in Hamilton as part of their Patient and Family Advisory Council. I became intrigued by the emerging science of optimal human functioning, and so I became accredited in positive psychology.

I was also inspired by this story. Years ago, improv workshops were offered at a mental health drop-in centre in downtown Toronto.

An unconventional idea, but the community centre staff thought it was worth a shot. It was. Mostly attended by young male sex-trade workers and other street kids, this improv workshop series was very successful. They didn't come back for the counselling, free muffins or housing applications, but they kept coming back for improv. Why might that be? As it turns out, we learn and heal while laughing and connecting with each other.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the construction industry is one of the most at-risk industries for suicide.¹ How does the improv offer a non-conventional way to address mental health that better speaks to our industry?

NW: Talking about mental health is tough, period. It really is. And while the construction industry takes occupational health and safety very seriously, there exist real speed bumps for our men and women to take advantage of programs that are in place but underutilized. Applied improv offers an environment where the people can laugh their way into talking about taboo subjects. We offer camaraderie in a way that builds not just a “safe space” but a “brave space.”

You mentioned the “power of the narrative” in using improv. What does this mean and how does it work?

NW: Social science and pedagogical research show that humans learn, understand, and retain information better when it is in the narrative. We’re just built that way. We’ve been telling each other stories since we’ve been around a fire, so it’s better to learn through a story than Power Point bullet points. With improv, because we co-create “in the moment,” we employ something called active listening which attunes our story-making and offers experiential learning. The theory is Cognitive Emotional Pedagogy.²

Focusing on mental health is always important, especially now. You mention that part of resiliency is learning how to suffer well. What does it mean to suffer well?

NW: A fact of human life is that we all suffer. We all experience adversity at some point in our lives. We hurt, our children will hurt, and organizations will suffer. The point of positive psychology, often erroneously thought of as some sort of “happiology,” is that as a scientific study of optimal human functioning, we learn not to avoid suffering but



MENTAL HEATH FACTS

According to a study released by The Conference Board of Canada in 2019:³

- On any given day 500,000 Canadians are unable to work due to mental health related challenges.
- Depression and anxiety cost the Canadian economy nearly \$50 billion each year.

According to Statistics Canada:⁴

- Thirty-three per cent of labourers involved in skilled trades report poor mental health.
- Many of those workers do not receive a diagnosis or treatment, placing the construction industry at the top of the list of male-dominated occupations at high risk for suicide.



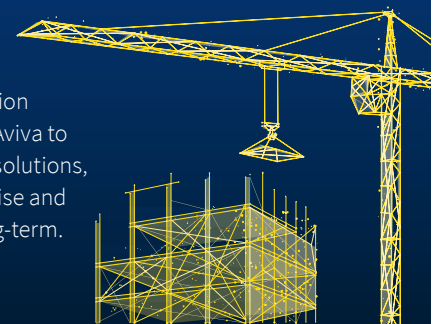
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The point of positive psychology, often erroneously thought of as some sort of “happiology,” is that as a scientific study of optimal human functioning, we learn not to avoid suffering but instead know how to suffer well.

instead know how to suffer well. Resiliency, as the research shows, is like a muscle that needs to be flexed. We build resiliency when we fall and get back up repeatedly.

What are some of the key tools in the mental health toolbox that will assist in developing healthy habits for mental health?

NW: Coincidentally the acronym for these tools is ORBA – Observation, Resiliency, Bravery and Adaptability.

First **Observation**. We have something called cognitive distortions, which are stories we tell ourselves which are untrue. Things like black and white thinking or catastrophizing. Observation relates to metacognition, which is the act of thinking about thinking. One can think of it as “mental sonar.” This means that we have to take an objective view of our thoughts and acknowledge what we are thinking, without falling victim to such

negative and potentially harmful thinking.

Resiliency is like a muscle. Part of resiliency is learning to observe our situation through an objective lens and pick ourselves up. The more we do this the stronger our resiliency “muscle” becomes.

Then there is **Bravery**. Having courage rarely feels courageous. However, being brave feels vulnerable in saying what needs to be said and by doing what needs to be done.

Lastly, **Adaptability** is agile thinking, mental flexibility (holding two opposing thoughts/ideas at the same time) and being able to pivot to adjust to new circumstances. Adaptability is important in order to navigate our way forward. ■

A recording of the TOOLS IN YOUR TOOLBOX: Strategies for Building Mental Health in the Construction Industry webinar can be downloaded from ORBA’s webinar archive library at <https://orba.org/orba-webinars/>

Nancy Watt will be teaching Emotional Intelligence (EI) In Leadership and Wellness Works – Improving Workplace Mental Health at ORBA’s 14th annual Road Building Academy, February 22 - 26, 2021. Please go to <https://orba.org/academy/> for full details.

¹ “Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation – National Violent Death Reporting System, 32 States, 2016.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 24 Jan. 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6903a1.htm>.

² “Cognitive Emotional Pedagogy.” Wikipedia, 22 Jan. 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cognitive_Emotional_Pedagogy

³ “Canada’s mental health agenda should address mental health in the workplace.” The Conference Board of Canada, 9 Oct. 2019 <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/blogs/canada-s-mental-health-agenda-should-address-mental-health-in-the-workplace?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

⁴ “Making Headway on Mental Health.” Express Scripts Canada, 10 Jul. 2019 <https://www.express-scripts.ca/news-room/important-information/Making-Headway-on-Mental-Health>

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ORBA is pleased to partner with Constructionlab Ltd in supplying field notebooks to students enrolled in a 10-day program focused on the introduction to construction and road building being delivered in Aroland First Nation. The course was designed for Confederation College through an agreement with Minodahmun Development LP, which is a First Nation-owned partnership created by Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek, Aroland First Nation and Ginoogaming First Nation to help maximize Indigenous participation in development projects. Constructionlab Ltd is facilitating the program.



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JOIN ORBA #ONROADSTOGOODNEWS

As an association and industry, we are united together to help combat the COVID-19 virus. Thank you to the companies who have donated their time, resources and ideas to the front lines. ORBA has created and dedicated a page to highlight ORBA members' contributions to flattening the curve. If you would like to share what your company has done, please email dana.beechey@orba.org.



REGISTRATION IS NOW AVAILABLE FOR ORBA'S 2021 ROAD BUILDING ACADEMY


ORBA is pleased to announce its program for its 14th Annual Road Building Academy to take place February 22 - 26, 2021 at the BMO Institute for Learning in Scarborough, ON. Bringing world-class instructors and courses from across North America to Ontario, the Academy is offering 30 courses of which 14 are new. Courses cover management, leadership, business practice, health and safety and legal topics.

For the first time at the Academy, a certificate in project management is being offered through the University of Waterloo Professional Development. The curriculum is compatible with the project management industry standard set by the Project Management Institute (PMI). The certificate consists of two five-day modules comprising 10 days of training and delivering 70 Professional Development Units (PDU) / Contact Hours of training.

The Asphalt Institute (AI) is partnering with ORBA again this year, offering a two-day Paving Inspector course covering fundamental information that every asphalt plant mix roadway inspector should know. The course first debuted in Canada at the 2020 Academy and is the only course of its kind available in Canada.

While we learn to accommodate the new normal in unprecedented times, the 2021 ORBA Road Building Academy is set to take place in person. All health and safety protocols will be in place at the BMO Institute for Learning. Class sizes will have a limited capacity. Therefore, it is important to register early. In the event of circumstances beyond our control related to the COVID-19 pandemic, contingency plans are in place to offer courses online if needed. Course content and instructor are subject to change. Go to <https://orba.org/academy/> and register today!





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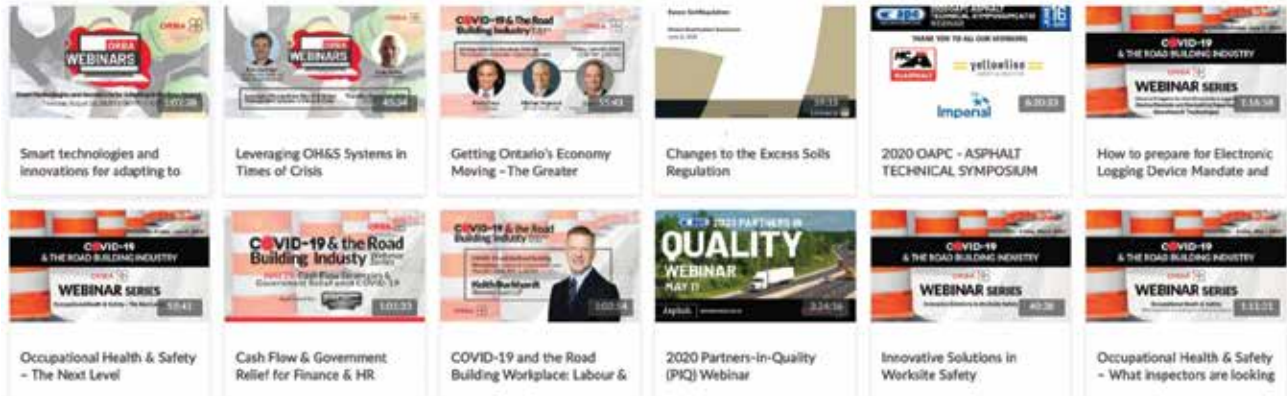
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In case you missed it, ORBA has created an online library of past ORBA webinars. The library is complimentary to everyone and aimed at providing information to the road building industry. The library includes:

- ORBA Webinars: Covering the Hard-Hitting Issues that Matter Most Series
- COVID-19 & the Road Building Industry Webinar Series
- Changes to Excess Soils Regulation Webinar
- 2020 OAPC Asphalt Technical Symposium
- 2020 Partners-in-Quality Webinar

Please go to <https://bit.ly/3ijMjt8> for access to our webinar archives.



Thank you to PGC Services for sponsoring the Friday, May 29, 2020 webinar: *Cash Flow Strategies & Government Relief Amid COVID-19.*

Thank you to our supporting webinar sponsors Kiewit and Yellowline Asphalt Products Ltd. for sponsoring the three-part webinar series (October 15, 22 and 27): *Welcoming Diversity and Inclusion in our Workforce*





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ORBA AND OAPC ATTEND ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES ONTARIO (AMO) VIRTUAL 2020 CONFERENCE



From August 17 to 19, 2020, ORBA and OAPC participated in AMO's virtual Conference and Trade Show. The conference brought together 1,500 participants, 46 exhibitors and 22 sponsors. For the first time, the conference was held virtually and ORBA and OAPC shared an AMO exhibitor booth. Through this virtual experience we had a great opportunity to connect with Ontario municipalities and their stakeholders.

The ORBA/OAPC booth had video conferencing capabilities and a chatroom to network with guests. Thank you to Doubra Charles Ambaiwei, ORBA Technical Director, Sharon Headley, ORBA Events Planning Manager, Jasvinder Singh, ORBA Events Planning Coordinator, Abigail Wright Pereira, ORBA Marketing & Communications Director, and Dana Beechey, ORBA Marketing & Communications Coordinator, for hosting the ORBA/OAPC booth.

Also, a special thank you to our 170 booth visitors who browsed and collected ORBA and OAPC digital swag. ORBA/OAPC booth guests were also encouraged to participate in an Asphalt Facts – Test Your Knowledge – Quiz. Those who received 100% on the quiz were entered to win a prize!

The virtual exhibit hall offered ORBA and OAPC an opportunity to safely connect with delegates during the pandemic. We hope to be back, in person, at AMO next year.



ORBA OAPC EVENTS CALENDAR

Registration, agendas, speakers, and recordings of complimentary events will be available at www.orba.org. Check back frequently for updates.

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LIUNA represents more than 80,000 members in all sectors of the construction industry in Ontario including; industrial, commercial and institutional (ICI), residential, roads, gas pipeline, sewer and watermain, electrical power systems, demolition, utilities and heavy engineering.

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