

# 25 years & BUILDING

BY PAUL KNOWLES

*Melloul-Blamey has a new headquarters, a strong reputation, and an unfolding succession plan*

The men at the top at Melloul-Blamey Construction agree on almost everything. They agree that their company has seen remarkable growth over its 25 year history. They agree that a flexible and aggressive approach to marketing their services has paid dividends. They agree that their impressive new head office in Waterloo is an appropriate and useful way to mark their quarter-century celebration. They agree that celebration is an important part of doing business.

And they agree that they are in the midst of a well-thought-through succession plan. They just don't quite agree as to the exact point they have reached in that succession plan.

The goal is clear: a four-man team of vice presidents will succeed co-founders Bernie Melloul and David Blamey at the end of what all define as a "ten-year succession plan." That number, ten, seems a little fluid, though – the vice-presidents explain that they are at least six years into the ten-year plan, while Bernie Melloul estimates that about six years remain before the plan is complete.

But from the enthusiasm and commitment shown by all of the key people at Melloul-Blamey, it seems that minor variance in definitions or mathematical formulae will not affect their corporate success... or their enjoyment in building a strong company together.

*continued on page 16*



Bernie and David at the first headquarters of Melloul-Blamey

In the beginning: Melloul-Blamey was founded, 25 years ago, by Bernie Melloul and David Blamey, who met in college.



David and Bernie enjoy a baseball game. (photo right) Founders David Blamey and Bernie Melloul

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### In the beginning

Melloul-Blamey was founded, 25 years ago, by Bernie Melloul and David Blamey, who met in college. Both remain principles with the company, Melloul based in the Waterloo head office, Blamey heading up the American side of the operation in Greenville, South Carolina. The expansion to the US took place in 2000 – Bernie describes it as “our millennium project.”

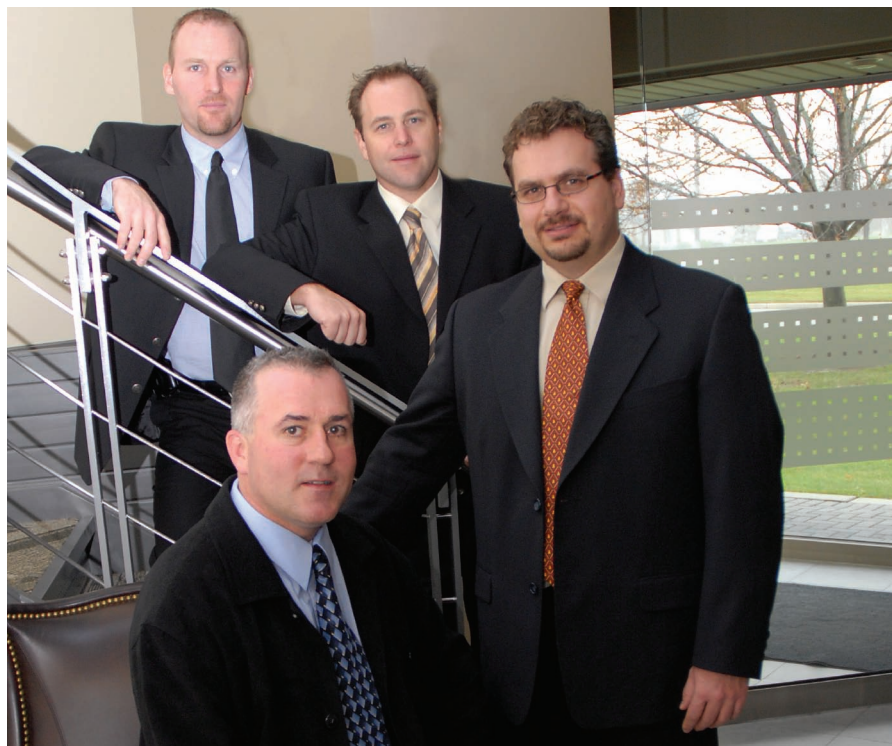
Sometime in the next half-decade or so, they will be succeeded as owners by a team of four men who currently carry the title of Vice-President: Jeff Heimpel, VP,

Waterloo Region, finding another company that employed them both, and then, in 1982, launching out on their own.

Bernie recalls that on February 4, 1982, the company was incorporated. They began work out of a cramped office on Borden Ave. Their first projects were small, but “we began to get bigger and bigger contracts.”

“We’ve been at it,” says Bernie, “for 25 years. We’ve developed significant skill sets in all the disciplines of construction.”

That’s evident in the Melloul-Blamey of today – 500 construction projects later – in



The succession team: Jeff Shantz (left front), VP Project Development, Joel Melloul, VP Estimating, Steve Hanley (back left), VP Construction and Jeff Heimpel, VP Business Development.

Business Development; Jeff Shantz, VP, Project Development; Joel Melloul, VP, Estimating; and Steve Hanley, VP, Construction. All four – along with Bernie Melloul, who is Joel’s father – are based in a futuristic, newly-renovated head office at 700 Rupert Street, in Waterloo.

As the company enters its second quarter-century, Melloul-Blamey employs more than 130 full-time staff, as well as being responsible for thousands of workers on many simultaneous job sites. But the company started small – as a two-man operation. Bernie Melloul and David Blamey met as students in 1969, and graduated together from Conestoga College’s construction engineering and technology program. After graduation, they also worked together; when their first employer moved to Orillia, they stayed in

the skill sets shown by the four vice-presidents, each of whom heads his own division of the company, but all of whom cooperate constantly.

### Flexible approach

When the company began, Melloul-Blamey contracts were won, primarily, through fixed bidding on projects, most of which were in the public sector. That has shifted in recent years, to where the majority of their projects are now in the “design-build” sector.

The company says it has built about 500 buildings. The figures are impressive – they have constructed hundreds of industrial, commercial, institutional and commercial projects. Some contracts have reached figures like \$40 million. Overall, the company has built projects worth close to \$750 million. While they

also work far afield, Waterloo Region is home to a large number of their buildings.

Yet while the company adapts to constant change within the construction industry, focusing ever more strongly on "construction management," Melloul-Blamey is proud to state that "The founders and new owners of Melloul-Blamey are bound by the same distinct vision that has successfully shaped the company for the past 25 years."

Exchange magazine carried out exclusive, individual interviews with all four vice presidents as well as with co-founder



Jeff Heimpel, VP Business Development.

PHOTO: CLUCK PHOTOGRAPHY

**"We will build almost anything with a roof on it." - JEFF HEIMPEL**

Bernie Melloul. It was quickly apparent that this leadership team does share a vision; it was also clear that they share a lot of respect and affection for one another, and for their company.

Their conversations are peppered with phrases such as "this company is forward-thinking, innovative, and diversified"; "we're a leader in our community in the construction industry"; "we are doing something right and we want to keep

growing"; "we have a growing team with a lot more ability to do more projects"; and "we need to build."

The pride and the enthusiasm is palpable.

#### Networking

Jeff Heimpel has been with Melloul-Blamey for 12 years. He offers a concise personal job description: "bringing new work into this office."

Part of that work continues to be in the public sector, and there, Heimpel's role

relates to Joel Melloul's estimating department. When projects are advertised, the leadership team has to know of the project, and prepare the bid.

But in the private sector, things are a little more complicated... and a lot more secretive. Heimpel says that a crucial part of his job is "knowing what's going on in the community." Private construction is often literally "private," as companies have reasons not to reveal their expansion plans. Heimpel says new projects are often "kept pretty close to their chest." In order to capture the job, Melloul-Blamey has to first of all know the job exists – networking plays an important part in Heimpel's assignment. "I have a vast circle of relationships," he says.

The company's reputation is a big plus, says Heimpel. "We're getting more and more of a reputation as the local builder," he says. "Our jobs signs, and client referrals, are our best forms of advertising."

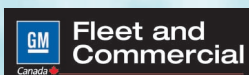
Heimpel echoes Bernie Melloul's comment about skill sets. "We're the true form of the 'general contractor,'" he says. "We will build almost anything with a roof on it."

#### Construction Management

The majority of those things with roofs on them are construction management

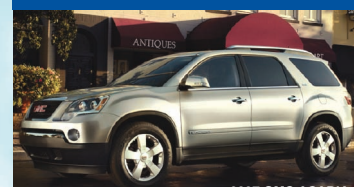
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projects, says Jeff Shantz. Shantz joined Melloul-Blamey in November 1993. Today, as Vice President, Project Development, "I oversee the development of a project from the construction design side." He becomes involved in design-build projects the moment Heimpel has identified a job.

As noted, Melloul-Blamey began as primarily a fixed bid company, working in the public sector. Not any more – "the bulk of our work is construction management now," says Shantz.

He says that the 25th anniversary has brought with it more effective department-



Jeff Shantz, VP Project Development,

PHOTO: CLUCK PHOTOGRAPHY

talization in the company. In part, that is because the renovations to the headquarters have created specific new department areas for each of the vice-presidents and their teams – although there is constant communication and cooperation between them. A visitor to Melloul-Blamey is as likely to find one of the VPs in someone else's office, deep in consultation about a project. Shantz laughs that the renovations – carried out while the company continued to operate – were a challenge, but in the end, "we're our own happy client."

### Family atmosphere

Steve Hanley has also been with Melloul-Blamey since 1993. He joined straight out of Conestoga College, one of many employees with a similar tale to tell – "We typically pick up a few Conestoga grads every year," he says.

But this particular new recruit went on to become Vice President of Construction, supervising all construction managers, and negotiating contracts with sub-contractors. With the growing number of construction projects and ever-increasing employee roster, Hanley continues to believe the key to Melloul-Blamey's success lies closer to the heart. "It's the close-knit family atmosphere," he says. "The team atmosphere."

"We're our own happy client." - JEFF SHANTZ



Melloul-Blamey won the 2006 GVCA Industrial Award of Excellence, over \$10 Million for the 300,000 plus sq. ft. Home Hardware Additions, Phases One and Two, in St. Jacobs (left). The 2006 GVCA Industrial Award of Excellence, \$750,000 to \$2 million went to the Brick Brewing Distribution and Bottle Wash Facility built by Melloul-Blamey

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Everybody is very close."

He notes, as well, that Melloul-Blamey employees share a pride in the company's accomplishments. "Everybody takes the rewards and the awards seriously." When something good happens – and that happens a lot – everyone joins in "the celebration. It's what keeps drawing everybody to this company."

He certainly celebrates the new Melloul-Blamey facilities. He likes the building very much, with its glass-and-steel highlights and carefully designed offices and open spaces. He believes a good work space is important, both for efficiency – which has improved, he says – and for morale. After all, "employees spend most of their life here," he notes.

#### "In the trenches"

While his three co-vice-presidents can identify the year they started at Melloul-Blamey, Joel Melloul simply says, "I've been here forever; I've been around construction forever." But he adds that he joined the company full-time in 1997, when he graduated from the civil engineering program at University of Waterloo. Today, as Vice President, Estimating, Joel Melloul must prepare often last-minute bids on projects that can stretch up to \$40 million.



Steve Hanley, VP Construction

PHOTO: CLUCK PHOTOGRAPHY

struction management field.

The construction management method sees a project develop, step by step, with many key decisions made en route. Joel Melloul says, "the contractor negotiates his fee, and then everything else is transparent, open book."

"To be a really good construction manager, you have to know what it's like to be in the trenches." That could be said of all four Melloul-Blamey Vice Presidents and future owners. They have learned the construction business the hard – and effective – way. Joel Melloul, for example,

"It's the close-knit family atmosphere. The team atmosphere.

Everybody is very close." - STEVE HANLEY

All this in a business that is rapidly changing. Joel recalls that only five years ago, virtually "100% of our business" involved fixed bids. Today, "construction management is really taking off," as "owners want to have fun when they build." Joel says that the shift has been significant – he estimates that 75% of Melloul-Blamey's business is now in the con-

worked on his Dad's construction sites from a young age ("from age 12 to 20, all my summers were spent working in the field"); Heimpel's first contact with the company was as a workman on the St. Jacob's Factory Outlet construction project; Shantz began with Melloul-Blamey as a site superintendent; Hanley joined the company as a young employee right out




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of Conestoga College, and admits that Melloul was his first choice of employer – he got exactly what he wanted.

All four men know the construction business; and all four know their own company very, very well. They are eager to move into full leadership, and Bernie Melloul says the succession plan is “going really well.” He acknowledges, though, that “financing is always tough... it’s financing from corporate profits,” and the company also needs funds for other projects, including the impressive renovations that were



Joel Melloul, VP Estimating.

PHOTO: CLUCK PHOTOGRAPHY

proud we never stagnated,” he says. “We have had a steady climb up,” both in Canada and, after a brief initial struggle, in the US operation as well.

He says he is proud they have brought the company to the point where it can be turned over to the next generation of corporate leaders. Not that he is going anywhere all that soon – “Dave and I are expecting five or six more years.”

And overall, says Bernie Melloul, “I’m proud of our reputation.” Today, Melloul-Blamey can be carrying out up to 25 projects at any one time: “That’s a lot of projects,” he says. “At any one time, under our care and control, we are responsible for thousands of workers.”

The result? Award-winning projects, satisfied customers, and enough client referrals to keep Melloul-Blamey in business and growing for another quarter-century.

It’s a company built on relationships – with clients, with sub-contractors, and with one another. Joel Melloul says that all four new partners care about and understand every aspect of the business. There is a strong bond between them, he says. “We seem to be more like brothers. We don’t carry any baggage... and we try to have lots of fun.” X

“To be a really good construction manager, you have to know what it’s like to be in the trenches.” - JOEL MELLOUL

done to mark the 25th anniversary. “You still have to continue to invest in the company,” he says.

But he knows the key investment is in the future leadership. Pointing to Joel Melloul, Jeff Shantz, Steve Hanley and Jeff Heimpel, Bernie says, “our team is an excellent team.” And he adds with parental pride, “I have family in that team... my son.”

He believes the four men will give long-

term, visionary leadership to the company that carries his name. “There is youth in this group,” he says. “The oldest is 42... These young people have been able to develop their own style under my management style. I’m a delegator, not a micro-manager. I trust people at face value.”

Bernie Melloul believes that, 25 years after he and Blamey founded the company, they have much to be proud of. “I’m

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