

Bot Construction

Builds Bridges to Eager Elementary Students

As Bot Construction continues to push north with new roads and bridges in the multi-year Highways 69 and 11 expansion projects, the company is also building bridges to the young people that will be the construction tradespeople and professionals of the future.

Since the summer of 2006, Bot has been responding to the interests of students and teachers alike, by hosting tours that brings construction to the kids both in their classrooms and at the jobsite. Most recently, in June of this year, it was the Grade 3 students from Sundridge Centennial Public School who were learning about construction careers. It starts in the classroom with Bot engineers and technicians talking about their work with the aid of diagrams and samples of materials, always with the emphasis on safety. Then it's off to the jobsite where, from a distance, the students watch and hear about the construction work, ask questions and see the big equipment in action. The tour wraps up with a visit with a specialty trade, mechanic or operator.

Marlene Yakabuski, Vice-President, Corporate Affairs at Bot, credits the teachers who have jumped at the opportunity to use the work on Hwys 69 and 11 to support the class curriculum, in contrast to the popular notion that teachers are one of the barriers to introducing young students to the construction industry. The schools take care of getting releases from the parents, organizing buses and providing chaperones. Bot takes it from there.

But it's Bot's project team that adds the sizzle to the tours. "They're enthusiastic about their work and enjoy sharing their knowledge with the students. We've discovered that they're natural teachers," says Yakabuski.

Each of the participating elementary students is fitted with their own hard hat and safety vest before stepping on site, and at the end of the tour they get to keep the gear. "They love wearing the gear, and it goes a long way to reinforcing the safety-first message," say Yakabuski. The company got a note from one father who sent along some vacation pictures with his son building roads on the beach, proudly wearing his Bot hard hat with his bathing suit.

"By Grades 6 and 7, we found that the students are already learning about soils and structures and they seem eager for more, says Marty Harris, Chief Estimator at Bot and one of the first to step into the classroom. "They are fascinated by the heavy equipment," says Harris, but it goes further than that. "They ask insightful questions and they want to know more. At St. Peter's School in Parry Sound, we were blown away by the students' knowledge of various bridge designs."

The girls are equally interested, Yakabuski confirmed. They ask about the equipment and about what sort of education they need to get into construction work.





Yakabuski also credits some of Bot's main subcontractors with adding significantly to the experience the students have on the jobsite. In particular they find blasting operations exciting and at Sundridge the blasting subcontractor went through the drilling, loading and timing calculations involved in the process.

These student tours of the jobsite take a lot of preparation and involve key personnel, so why does Bot do it?

"It's a way to support the community, it's good for us and it's good for our industry," says Yakabuski. With the looming shortages of skilled trades and professionals on the horizon, it's a good thing to do for the kids too because without this kind of introduction at

an early age, construction may never hit their radars. By exposing them to the industry before they have made any serious career choices, they are provided with one more option that can offer a bright future and an exciting career. ■

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