

MARCH/APRIL 2008

# venture

THE MAGAZINE FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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# Picking *up* speed

Soon to turn 50 years old, Hugh Munro Construction uses increased communication, diversification and recruitment to remain successful. *Hugh Munro Construction*

genzyme



Hugh Munro hopes to increase communication between office and field workers.

**Genevieve Diesing** Soon to turn 50 years old, Hugh Munro Construction uses increased communication, diversification and recruitment to remain successful.

**P**resident Hugh Munro founded Hugh Munro Construction in 1959 as a one-man operation. The company has since blossomed into a leading heavy construction company, specializing in site excavation, drilling and blasting, aggregate processing, base laying, surface treatment, seal coating, fiber-optic cable laying, heavy equipment repair and equipment and material hauling.

Munro's daughter, Colleen Munro, is vice president of the Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada-based company.

In addition to being one of the

few female executives in the industry, she was the first female president of the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association and Western Canada Road Builders Association.

After working her way up through the company for the past few decades, Munro has seen the company struggle to maintain a sizeable work force while it experienced recent rapid growth.

She tells *Venture* how increased communication, diversification and teamwork all contribute to Hugh Munro Construction's success.

**Venture:** What are some recent challenges your company has faced?

**Colleen Munro:** The labor shortage has been our biggest obstacle to overcome. The industry has been slow for years.

The government is not putting the work out for highways and we lost a lot of people to other trades.

It's becoming a crisis scenario – the work force is older, and we're trying to play catch-up with the work force. Our main focus is to keep the people we have, and making our company one that people want to work at.

**Venture:** How are you doing this?

**CM:** We're trying to get strategies on how to recruit new people.

We try to provide incentive programs, and we've also looked further south for recruiting people as employees.

We've lost them to other provinces within Canada.

A lot of them have come back, but it's a constant battle to keep employees.

There's also a cultural change. In our industry, men were the primary people in construction; now you find their partners – the women – are also working.

Hugh Munro construction realizes the value of their employees, putting their safety as their No. 1 priority.

Our company is registered in COR training and strives to exceed all the rules and regulations set by the Manitoba Safety Association.

**Venture:** Have you experienced any challenges as one of the few female vice presidents in the construction industry?

**CM:** Oh, it presented problems twofold: Not only were women not accepted in the industry, I was the boss' daughter.

I worked during summers growing up, and when I got older, I was running the machines.

My father put that right in line early on: you earn your respect here. Part of me felt this was a great lesson, but I recommend for family businesses that you go work somewhere else for a while. It's quicker and easier to gain employees' respect.

I think, as a woman, you need to handle a situation maybe differently than a man would.

My biggest strength would likely be people skills. I think I know my weaknesses and can



Hugh Munro says women are becoming more accepted as leaders in the construction industry.

admit them. A sense of humor is also important. As soon as you start taking yourself too seriously, I think no matter what you do, there's a problem.

**Venture:** Your revenue has doubled in the past five years, how?

**CM:** That has a lot to do with the projects through the Manitoba Flood Authority beefing up the whole floodway situation.

Manitoba has had a lot of problems in the past with flooding. We've worked on approximately 15 projects with the Authority throughout the last couple years, that really have increased our revenue locally. We're doing drilling and blasting, crushing, excavation and hauling.

**Venture:** What are your plans for

the future?

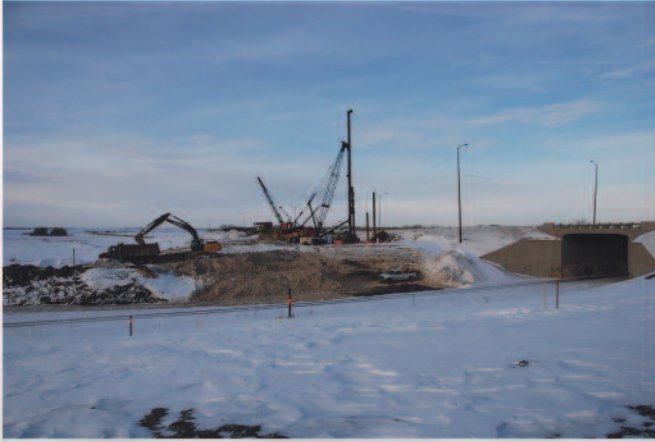
**CM:** We're innovating and considering what we can diversify again into multiple areas.

For instance, we have a huge repairs shop, and our equipment is kept in top-notch shape.

Say that the economy changes – if we need to, we can sell and downsize. Hugh Munro is also in the business of buying and selling equipment.

I'm also hoping to get our people more involved in the costing and hopefully the profit on the job.

There seems to be a pattern in our industry – between the office and the field, in the past there have been conflicting agendas. We are now orientating everybody and trying to get more communication, so we can identify where we make mistakes and what we're doing right. ■



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**HUGH MUNRO  
CONSTRUCTION LTD.**

P.O. Box 185, RR5 • Winnipeg, Manitoba R2C 2Z2  
Tel. (204) 224-9218 • Fax (204) 224-9212  
Website: [www.hmcl.ca](http://www.hmcl.ca)