

For McKeil Marine, no structure is too large to transport

BY MARK CARDWELL

Synergy is a word that comes up often in conversation with Paulo Pessoa about the projects he's been working on of late on behalf of McKeil Marine. "We are involved in a lot of stuff, both as subcontractors, and as partners in joint ventures," said Pessoa, Vice-President, Business Development of the Hamilton Ont.-based company. "We move a lot of steel."

One recent project – and one of the biggest ever undertaken by McKeil Marine – was centred on the huge Vale Inco nickel mine in Voisey's Bay, Labrador and the building of the nickel smelter facility in Long Harbour, Newfoundland.

Working in conjunction with Mammoet Canada Eastern, McKeil was awarded – and recently completed – a marine transportation contract to provide Vale Inco with a turnkey solution for the building of the processing plant.

The services provided included land transportation, barge loading using self-propelled modular transporters (SPMTs), engineering, securing modules, tanks and other materials for ocean shipping, unloading and final on-site placement.

Begun in March 2011 and completed in November of this year, the project required the use of nine tugs and nine barge units, five of them 400 feet long and 100 feet wide. The vessels were sometimes simultaneously loaded with everything from modules and electrical buildings to tanks and structural steel in several Canadian and American ports,



This 440-tonne unit was destined for the Alcoa aluminum plant in Deschambault.

Photos: McKeil Marine

including Cornwall, Hamilton, Port Weller, Miramichi, Duluth, Corpus Christi and Jacksonville, Florida.

"It was a big project that required a lot of very detailed planning and schedules," said Pessoa. "At the height of it, the nine tugs and barges were running flat out at the same time for months on end."

According to Pessoa, the project was a textbook example of McKeil's ability to ramp up for large turnkey projects and to establish solid working relationships with specialized companies.

Transporting and delivering construction equipment, building materials, large modules and lodging structures using integrated tug/barge units to help build a mining site, however, is just one of the many innovative marine transportation and day-to-day business services and solutions that McKeil has been providing to its customers since it was founded in 1956.

Organized as two divisions – Transportation, and Special Projects, that deal mostly with overweight and oversize pieces of equipment or materials by water, like the three submarines McKeil moved around by both water and over land for the Department of National Defence – the company is both backed and buoyed by skilled and experienced sailing and support crews, naval architects and engineers who work at offices in Hamilton, Montreal, St. John's and Moncton.

Chief among them is the company's

President and CEO for the past 30 years, Blair McKeil. A dedicated and valued member of Canada's maritime community, McKeil's success in business and in his many philanthropic initiatives in Hamilton earned him the 2012 Medal of Merit Award from the Association of Canadian Port Authorities in August.

McKeil's core business – which generates about 70 percent of company revenues in an average year, says Pessoa – is providing marine transportation and logistics support to a wide array of industries throughout the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Seaway system, the East Coast and Canada's North. That work is carried out using the company's diverse and versatile fleet of marine assets, which include 17 tugs of various sizes and capacities and 20 barges – including jack-up and semi-submersible vessels – capable of carrying between 500 and 12,000 tonnes of cargo. "All of our barges are flat bottomed and have 22-24 feet of draft, which means they can go into areas most ocean-going, free-flowing bulk cargo carriers can't," said Pessoa. He added that the barges' ability to carry the equivalent of between 300-350 truckloads of cargo into shallow-water harbours like Iqaluit help to make McKeil both an important and indispensable player in a growing niche market. "Barges can't carry 25,000 metric tonnes of cargo that big ships can, but we have more flexibility," said Pessoa. "Having the right distance and the right quantity allows us to be competitive."



Shipment of cogeneration equipment to be installed at Fortress Paper Company's Thurso, Quebec, dissolving pulp mill.

He noted that many of the company's assets, together with the skills and expertise of its employees, are particularly well suited for use in mining projects located in remote areas with no existing infrastructure. For example, in addition to being able to install temporary dock structures where none are available, McKeil's jack-up and/or deck barges provide bases for loading and offloading of materials.

Working with independent engineering firms or its own engineers and naval architects, McKeil also has the ability and experience needed to plan and execute turn-key intermodal solutions that combine marine, road and rail transportation in a timely, money-saving manner. "People are always looking for the most-cost effective way to move merchandize or material," said Pessoa. "By creating and ensuring a seamless interface with customers we create efficiencies and create opportunities for them to move more cargo faster and cheaper."



The MM Newfoundland deck barge loaded with tanks destined for the Vale Inco project in Long Harbour, Newfoundland.



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