

# CONCRETE INNOVATORS

In the 15 years since its inception, ABS Concrete Systems has built its reputation providing innovative, cost-effective solutions for concrete construction that are longer lasting, durable, and more attractive.

"We're known as a company that can solve challenging problems," says Jayne Steffler, general manager of ABS.

ABS has been an Alberta pioneer in developing the market for overlaying and resurfacing concrete sidewalks and other civil infrastructure issues. The company also advanced the market for gypsum-based underlay for radiant heating applications. And it helped create the concrete sealing, diamond grinding, and polishing business in the province.

"We've been fortunate to get in the door of a lot of contractors because of our original solutions and unique product lines and equipment," says ABS founder and president Mike McLeod. "We have two streams in the company, a product distribution stream and an applications stream. And we plan on growing both streams further in the future."

McLeod, a civil engineer by training, founded ABS Concrete Systems in 1993 after working for the public works department at the City of Grande Prairie. Its first novel technology offered to the Alberta construction community was Fusion-Crete, an overlay and resurfacing system for the repair or renewal of damaged concrete sidewalks, curbs, and gutters.

ABS piloted Fusion-Crete at Grande Prairie, developing the product and creating an effective application system for Alberta conditions, before taking it to the wider marketplace. Since its introduction, over 90 towns and cities have used Fusion-Crete. ABS has also developed a market for the



BEFORE FUSION-CRETE APPLICATION

product with institutional and commercial clients, repairing and renewing parking structures, loading docks, floors, and other concrete construction.

"Prior to Fusion-Crete, no one believed you could resurface sidewalks," says McLeod. "It took us awhile to develop the application technology, but now the end product looks exactly like removal and replacement, but it's actually just been resurfaced. And, of course, it's much more cost-effective."

McLeod was so impressed with Fusion-Crete that ABS went from being the Alberta and then Canadian distributor of the product to buying it from its manufacturer in 2005. It is now the global manufacturer and supplier of the product.

"What's unique about Fusion-Crete is the way it's packaged," he explains. "Typically, premixes are sand, cement, polymers, colour, and other inert particles. We sell the polymer additives to use with locally available sand and cement. The applicator can match colours more accurately this way and has more control over consistency."

In 1996, ABS Concrete Systems went public, allowing the company to expand into other areas of concrete specialties and to grow its existing business. A pumping unit



AFTER FUSION-CRETE APPLICATION

was purchased that would play a key role in future growth.

A chance conversation with an Edmonton architect looking for a better way to overlay radiant heat tubes led to the next innovation for ABS.

"A week before, I had heard a lot about a gypsum-based concrete called Firm-Fill," explains McLeod. "I got on a plane to San Antonio and came back as a Certified Applicator for Hacker Industries, the manufacturer of Firm-Fill and Gyp-Span Radiant."

McLeod says the gypsum-based concrete provides a number of advantages. It has a three-hour fire rating if installed properly. It also offers great sound attenuation.

"And, from the practical side, you can install 30,000 square feet per day at three-quarters of an inch thickness," he adds. "Over radiant tubes the biggest fear is cracking, but there is no cracking with gypsum. And you can bond any finished flooring to it."

In 1999, McLeod took ABS private and became sole owner of the company. Following the move, ABS became the western

*ABS Concrete Systems provides proven products and tested application*

Canadian Distributor for L&M Construction Chemicals product line, and supported the FGS PermaShine system plus SealHard, a top-of-the-line floor sealer and densifier.

"In 2001, we got into grinding and polishing in addition to our sealing operations," he explains. "We went from a company that was weather-dependent using Fusion-Crete outside, and with a shift in focus showed we could work inside as well. It transformed the company."

Since then, ABS has also become Alberta Distributor for IntegraSpec insulated concrete forms. McLeod says the ICF market is just beginning to develop in Alberta, with environmentally conscious homeowners leading the charge.

"It's more about people who are building their own houses right now," he explains, adding that some condominium developers are beginning to see the value of ICF construction. ICF is ideal for commercial construction, with lower construction costs, faster turnover, and environmental benefits as well.

With ABS Concrete Systems' major product lines firmly established in the western Canadian marketplace, the company is looking to expand their use throughout the industry.

Steffler, ABS Concrete Systems' general manager who is also in charge of product

marketing, says one of the company's major future goals is building the infrastructure needed to get more contractors using its products.

"With Fusion-Crete, we want to grow by training more applicators to use the product and by adding more distribution," she explains. "Overall, we want people to know we have the right mix of products to meet any of their needs, top to bottom."

"We support what we believe in and what we know works, so we can help others," she adds. "Our biggest hurdle is getting contractors to change their mindset, to go beyond the tried and true. By showing them the possibilities, instead of talking about it, we get their attention."

Steffler points to the restoration of a historical building in Innisfail, Alberta, as an example of ABS Concrete's out-of-the-box thinking.

"The general contractor had initially poured a concrete floor, but the weight was too heavy for the second-level floor and it started to sag. The concrete was removed because of the risk of collapse," she explains. "We were asked to determine a flooring solution that was structurally sound but no thicker than two inches. After some investigation and analysis, we completed a lightweight concrete floor system using EPS Styrofoam sandwiched between gypsum concrete. According to Daryl Hillman of Sundance Management, it was an ingenious solution that allowed the project to get back on track.

McLeod, who is in charge of the applications side of ABS Concrete Systems, says his key responsibility is getting the



products ABS represents on job sites to show their effectiveness. A second responsibility is to develop new applications for those products for continued growth.

"We have worked hard to make sure our systems and products are listed in specifications and that there are trained applicators that can complete the work," he explains. "But I'd also like to see us become more specialized and concentrate on more innovative and creative engineered solutions."

ABS is already well on its way to meeting these goals.

"Once people know of contractors that can do something unique and special, they call on you," he explains. "We really offer them more possibilities in meeting their concrete restoration or new build needs." ♦



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