

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

R.E. Postill and Sons has evolved over four generations of ownership but the things that have led to success have stayed the same

BY TRICIA RADISON / PHOTOS BY SHAWN TALBOT

It's not uncommon for Linsey Postill-Johannson to get requests from repeat customers to come back and do another project, like a driveway. What is uncommon is that every once in awhile a call will come four decades after the initial project was done – by her grandfather Russ.

“They tell me R.E. Postill did such a good job last time. Last time was so long ago!” laughs Linsey. “But they call us and they depend on us, so we go and do a good job for them again, and hopefully they’ll call us next time.”

That’s the kind of attitude that Postills have taken since 1944, when R.E. Postill and Sons was founded by

Russell Eugene Postill and his five sons in Coldstream, B.C., a small community on the outskirts of Vernon. Linsey is the fourth generation Postill to run R.E. Postill and Sons, along with husband Jamie Johannson. They bought the business in 2011 from Linsey’s father, Brian. In the mid-1970s, Brian had taken over from his father Russ, who had bought the business from his father in the 1950s.

With each owner, and in response to changes in the marketplace, R.E. Postill and Sons has changed. Initially the company did underground work, drainage systems and water systems. Over the years it developed the Silver Star Mountain Resort and subdivisions, and



FAMILY BUSINESS: (L-R) Jamie Johannson, Linsey Postill-Johannson and Brian Postill know that the family that works together, stays together.

PIT BOSS: A summer job delivering gravel prepared Linsey Postill-Johannson for management.



did underground work for cities and municipalities. From the late 1990s until 2007 underground work stopped and the focus shifted to the gravel operation, excavations and earthmoving.

Today the company specializes in producing gravel products for commercial customers, the City of Vernon, the District of Coldstream, and the public; trucking and delivery; excavation and site prep; and site servicing for commercial and residential properties. Their underground is through Postill Nixon Earthworks, a partnership between R.E. Postill and Sons and Nixon Earthworks, owned by Braden Nixon.

“My dad thought that Braden was keen and hardworking, and saw an opportunity to expand with Braden’s help,” says Linsey of the partnership, which was formed in 2007 and takes the company full circle, back to the work Linsey’s grandfather had been doing.

With the evolution of services, other changes have taken place. Most notably, R.E. Postill and Sons is no longer run by a son.

Linsey didn’t plan to get into the construction business. But she accepted her dad’s offer to teach her to operate a Caterpillar 966 loader in the gravel pit the summer after she graduated from high school. That summer and the next were spent loading trucks and feeding the gravel crusher. Then she earned her Class 1 license and did gravel deliveries in town for a couple of summers during her summer breaks

A loyal staff keeps things humming and some employees have worked for the company for their entire careers.

from the University of Alberta. In her third year of university she decided that although she would complete her pharmacology degree she would not pursue a career in the field. Instead, she went home to run the family business.

Linsey’s experience in the pit proved invaluable when she decided to come back as manager to prepare for ownership.

“She didn’t just show up and start in the office as the boss. She actually has done the stuff that our crew is doing and that’s how you earn respect in this type of business. Then the guys know you aren’t asking them to do anything you wouldn’t do,” Brian explains.

Linsey and Jamie share management duties, with Linsey focusing on the day-to-day operations and Jamie spending more time on project-related work. In July, they made their first major equipment purchase, a 980H wheel loader with a seven-yard bucket.

“This is the new Cat Performance Series bucket,” says Kenny McMullen, product support sales for Finning in Vernon. “It has greater load and carry, and it leads to optimized performance with the machine, increased productivity and lower fuel consumption.” The bucket holds two yards more than the buckets on the 966s R.E. Postill and Sons owns. More importantly, its design – it’s curved in a half-moon shape – reduces inefficient spillage.

The machine joins a fleet that includes two 966H wheel loaders, one 966G wheel loader, a D8R dozer, a 320D LRR excavator, a 320C LRR excavator, a 236B skidsteer, two D250E rock trucks, a 980G loader and a 3406 genset that runs the crushing plant. All five gravel trucks also have Cat engines. There’s also a 320B excavator with almost 17,000 hours on it that just had its undercarriage changed for the first time. According to Jamie, that would typically have to be done every 5,000 to 6,000 hours.

“That’s one thing about Caterpillar equipment; it’s made to be rebuilt,” puts in Brian. “A lot of times we will trade around the 10,000-to-12,000 hour mark for new but the odd time we’ve opted to rebuild and get some more hours out of it. You can do that with Cat equipment.”

The company has been purchasing equipment from Finning since the days of Russ, Brian’s dad. People have changed; for instance Brian dealt with retired branch manager Randy Blaker for many years and Linsey and Jamie now work with McMullen. The relationship continues to be strong and trusting, with Jamie citing reliability as the key reason the new generation has chosen to follow in the previous generation’s footsteps when it comes to their equipment.

It’s been a period of transition for R.E. Postill and Sons but they’ve managed it smoothly by sticking to the tried-and-true. Brian believes that the company’s success lies in part in taking a conservative attitude to business, cutting back when the economy takes a downturn and owning their own backyard – they don’t worry about trying to go outside their area of about 100,000 people. A loyal staff also plays a role; some employees have worked for the company for their entire careers.

McMullen credits the thriving nature of R.E. Postill and Sons to the fact that it’s a homegrown business that supports the community, another thing that hasn’t changed.

“Brian used to be mayor of Coldstream and they are active in the community,” he says. “The family name is how they get their business, because of who they are, how they treat people, and the quality of their work.”