

ESSROC (cont)

By Jack Evans
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Making cement. By any definition, it falls under "heavy industry." Even the product is heavy. Roberto Callieri, who was recently appointed plant manager for the Picton area's Essroc plant, quips: "Everything is heavy here."

The company is also a heavy-weight in the industry.

The recent announcement that Essroc is now part of Italcementi means it is part of one of the major cement industry players on the world stage, part of a complex of about 50 plants scattered around North America, Europe and Morocco.

"This is the only plant in Canada and one of the largest in North America, so it is a very important plant for our company," said Callieri.

It is certainly a heavyweight employer for Prince Edward County, with more than 180 hourly and salaried workers. It is also part of a basic heavy industry in Quinte, which has played a major role in the area's economy for almost 100 years, starting with turn-of-the-century works at Marlbank and Point Anne.

(The former Marlbank operations, incidentally, are the source for a classic oxymoron. Just outside Marlbank is "Dry Lake," the origin of which is the man-made quarry for limestone there, long ago filled in with water.)

Major cement making operations remain near Bath and Colborne, plus about 20 sub-product plants in the area involved in precast concrete products, ready-mix cement, cement blocks and pre-stressed concrete beams. Employment in the small sub-product plants totals about another 100 jobs. Several of those plants are in Belleville.

Essroc itself, formerly known as Lake Ontario Cement, goes back to 1958, a dream project of a former Picton mayor, the late Harvey J. McFarland. Using limestone from the plant's own adjacent property, and for most of its early years fine natural sand from the nearby Sandbanks Park, the small, independent company quickly generated major markets around Ontario and northern parts of the United States.

Those markets continue under the new owners, said Callieri, with shipping by water during the open season to Great Lakes ports in the company-owned vessel, the Stephen B. Roman, plus year-round trucking operations. About 85 per cent of the plant output moves by ship and more than half goes to the United States.

Cement is not just a simple, generic product, Callieri explained. The basic formulas are almost all the same between

competitors, but Essroc, for instance, makes three kinds of cement and two kinds of mortar cement. "The formulas vary depending on the application," said Callieri.

As for the raw product: it is cement, originally called and still commonly known as Portland cement. Once it is mixed with water and sand or gravel and actually applied for building purposes, it becomes concrete or mortar.

The term Portland comes from its inventor, English stonemason Joseph Aspdin, on the Isle of

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