

## ARHCA Update 2008



In the whirlwind of activity in most areas of our sector, the ARHCA continues to look for innovative ways to enhance our core services to a rapidly growing membership. In 2008, the membership grew by about 150 members - a 25 percent increase.

### Strategic Information and Communication

This is a core service that with the ARHCA's *Industry Tracker* quarterly, and the newly developed *Roadrunner Detours* newsletter have broadened from informing members about more operational issues, such as capital budgets or legislation changes, to globally-based economic information, and the latest information about HR issues. These newsletters help ARHCA members plan for their future and make better strategic decisions about their businesses. It is our intent to continue with and enhance these vehicles so that we can build a reliable data base of economic and HR information as it relates to our industry.

### Education, Training & Recruiting

During this past winter we participated in seminars and industry workshops with other sectors to develop recruitment and retention strategies. We have established a great partnership with Olds College in Southern Alberta to provide Heavy Equipment Operator training that makes the students "real-world ready." The ARHCA also contributed \$35,000 toward the completion and implementation of Olds' Underground Utility Installer program, which will be ready to accept students in late 2009.

For professional development of existing employees, we worked with the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) on a "pick and choose" menu of roadbuilding and heavy construction courses, and after a certain number of courses have been completed, the employee will receive a Level I or Level II certificate from NAIT. This kind of certification/professional development/ accreditation is what our employees demand, and our industry has been reluctant to implement these kinds of programs. There are now 12, 12-hour courses, available through NAIT's Continuing Education Department. Courses are reasonably priced, and will run during the winter months, when our employees are most available to take advantage of this training.

From a recruitment perspective, the ARHCA is attacking this issue on all sides. We are working with Alberta Employment and Immigration to coordinate a Canada-Mexico temporary employment Pilot Project. In May, ARHCA staff and volunteers hosted a booth at the Skills Canada Competition and Career Fair in Calgary. More than 500 students attended. As a result of the success at this fair, the ARHCA will now be attending the two largest career fairs in Alberta each year - one in Edmonton and one in Calgary.

And we are still running the members-only Job Bank, which had 52,000 hits on the "browse jobs" page in 2007. This service is free and for members only.

Also during 2008, the ARHCA continued to work with Careers: the Next Generation, an industry-driven private/public partnership dedicated to the career development of Alberta's youth, on high school recruitment, and we also worked with the Operating Engineers Union on a new recruitment "tool box" for heavy equipment operators, which is nearing completion. And under the heading of "the early bird gets the worm," highway maintenance contractors in partnership with Alberta Transportation, visited 1,000 grade 2 students this winter to "Show Off the Plow" events across Alberta. You never know, some of these kids may one day be plow operators!

## **Advocacy**

While there has been substantial government investment in Alberta's transportation system during 2007 and 2008, there remains a need for adequate, predictable, and sustainable investment over the long term. In spite of all the construction and rehab activity, Alberta continues to fall further behind each year in the rehabilitation of its existing infrastructure systems, and this "infrastructure deficit" is growing rather than being addressed and reduced. We were told by Transportation Minister Ouellette at the ARHCA convention in November, that transportation infrastructure spending continues to be a top priority for Premier Stelmach's government, in spite of recent economic turmoil. Our industry is ready to meet this challenge, but we also need to continue to send the message to government that long term, SUSTAINABLE funding is the real solution, not a frenzy of projects that suddenly dries up a few years down the road.

We have good working relationships with Alberta Transportation and the two major cities, and continue to develop these relationships using vehicles such as the annual tri-party Transportation Conference and the Strategic Priorities' Group. Both of these events include contractor, consultant, and owner representation. We also have a good relationship with Alberta Environment, which was illustrated by us being invited to the table to discuss changes being made to the Codes of Practice for Asphalt Plants and Concrete Producing Plants. We may not always get our way, but it is still a great advantage to be invited to the table.

Our membership continues to be well represented on the ARHCA's Board of Directors. The directors and committee chairs are very committed to the ARHCA, and work hard to make sure that the ARHCA is effective, efficient and representative of all of its members. Issues affecting members concerning aggregates, safety, the environment, municipal issues and contracts, provincial issues, human resources, maintenance, insurance and surety, and our consultant partners are always at the forefront with the board. Membership itself has grown to record numbers, with 763 members, an increase of 25 percent or 150 members over the same time last year. In fact, the contractor membership has increased even more dramatically, from 349 regular members in April 2007 to 486 regular members as of December 1, 2008, - a 39 percent increase.

Many politicians and financial experts have suggested that investing in infrastructure - transportation or otherwise - may be the most effective way to mitigate the recent economic upheaval, and the risk of long-term recession. Our industry is more than prepared to take up this challenge, as the above increase in membership proves.

2009 promises to be an interesting year, to say the least.