

Business Times



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Eco-friendly - hold the salt

By MIKE BEGGS

With some 5,000 registered landscaping/snow removal companies in the GTA alone, the heavy salting of roads amounts to a serious environmental concern.

But situated on the Caledon/Brampton border, the longrunning BP Landscaping & Snow Removal is taking measures to reduce that footprint. Three years back, they converted some of their trucks to a wetting system, in which they spray the dry salt before spreading.

"Salt doesn't melt anything until it is wet," explains owner Brian Perras. "We've used 30 per cent salt."

"Also by wetting it, we've kept it from bouncing into ditches, or other unwanted areas."

Now BP has upped the ante, by adding a patented Beet Juice Extract product to the mix. This acts as an "organic accelerator", making the salt work immediately, and allowing the freezing point of salt to go down from -10 degrees Celsius to -30 degrees C. Perras sought out FutureTransfer and Geomelt in Tillsonburg, which provides Pearson International Airport with (99 per

cent corrosion-free) Gen 3 Runway De-Icer. He's now one of three suppliers of Geomelt to the GTA.

"The best part is the product being applied to the roads, dry rock salt, can be reduced by 30 per cent when sprayed with Geomelt," he says. "We're putting out a huge amount less salt, and are getting good results."

"Our plowing is now mostly done by tractors, so we can be done faster and do a better job scraping to asphalt and therefore using less salt."

However, at this point the process is not cost-effective.

"No, it doesn't save us any money, because we're using less salt but we're spraying twice as much time," he says. "But I want to reduce the carbon footprint. We think it's a positive. We try to always be respectful and stay ahead of the curve."

"[And] in the next few years, the province is going to legislate how we salt the roads," he predicts. "Oversalting causes a lot of corrosion. It's causing way too much damage."

Perras' environmental consciousness was boosted more recently, by joining the Waterloo Region group, Smart About Salt. But in actuality, it dates back 20 years to his decision to begin spot spraying weeds, "instead of blanket spraying healthy lawns, like everyone else was."

"I told myself, 'this is silly.' You couldn't even see the weeds anymore," he relates. "I said, 'Spray where the weeds are.' We reduced our chemicals by 80 per cent."

According to Perras, his 1980 decision to trade his Peel Regional Police Force badge for a lawn mower and "become an overachiever," was inspired by meeting the late Terry Fox.

"With the drive I got from what I witnessed from Terry, I developed a very good team to help build a company that strived for perfection, and was always forcing the bar higher and higher," he says.

"Then, we decided to be as responsible as we could with regards to the environment."

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Brian Perras, owner of BP Landscaping and Snow Removal.

Photo by Stephen Uhraney

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*"So foul a sky clears
not without a storm."*

Shakespeare, King John

By RICK DRENNAN

Wallace Rasmusson rose from depression to be president and CEO of Beatrice Foods. When he retired a while back, he offered up this warning:

"We're in the declining-morality period. This is what ruined Rome – greed. I always said, 'In God we trust – everything else, we audit.'"

Now meet Jeff Hull. Jeff likes storm clouds. He sings in the rain. He believes in silver linings.

He thinks the Shakespearean quote that opened this story is apt in light of the bald cupidity that has infested our financial markets for too long. He thinks the economic meltdown of '08-'09 is just what the doctor ordered.

The doctor, in this case, being his friend and mentor, Warren Buffett, the famed genius behind Berkshire Hathaway – and one of the world's richest men.

How a freckle-faced kid from our area

became a Buffett friend and disciple, and current senior investment advisor with Manulife Securities, is a case of good timing and like-minded thinking, and there's not enough room here to note how their friendship has blossomed over the years.

Few get to sit in the inner sanctum with the Oracle of Omaha. Hull, Jeff, is on the invite list.

Buffett is like your favourite Uncle Fred – homespun, and as bland as Quaker Oatmeal. His aw shucks Nebraskan twang isn't a good measure of his business acumen. The guy is spilling over with common sense. He's parlayed this shrewdness into billions for fellow investors. Hull was fascinated from the get-go.

Hull has been in these pages before – a year ago, this month, in fact. I like to give him the opportunity to look at where we've been, and where we might be going.

He admits that no one can predict the future, but his

clients think he can, and given his track record, they're probably right. So is he – the majority of the time.

After all, if you were smart enough to throw a few quid into Berkshire Hathaway a generation ago, you wouldn't even be reading this column.

You'd be in the Caymans, living large.

Hull is like a modern-day Luca Pitti or Gregory Datti, the Florentine bankers who, during the Renaissance, became poster boys for the "ricordi," a literary form that acknowledged the virtue (knowledge and understanding) of turning a huge profit. It was believed that by recording these business maxims, and then passing them on to generations to come, we'd all wind up like the Italian masters – filthy rich. Cont. on p.4

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NEWS

Landscaping for smaller carbon footprint

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BP subsequently pursued Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Level 2 certification, meaning they promote sound horticultural practices - using chemical control as a last resort.

Over the past 29 years, Perras has built up a company with four dozen clients. That includes such marquee players as Rogers Communications (at their 56-acre facility in Brampton), the Orlando Corporation (100 buildings, mostly in Mississauga), CB Richard Ellis, and the City of Brampton, all of whom have bought into their environmental choices.

BP has been serving Orlando since 1982 and is its biggest landscape contractor. Last year, they tested an electric lawn mower powered by a Lead Acid Battery Type at the home of Orlando owner Carlo Fidani, himself.

"Carlo just believes in what is right," Perras says. "He is totally on board with whatever we can do to be environmentally responsible. They built a LEED building."

At the Rogers' site last winter they attempted to reduce their carbon footprint by melting snow onsite.

"When we plow Rogers, we generate about 4,100 cubic yards of snow, and this takes 200 tri-axle dump truck loads to haul it offsite, as they have no room for snow. Hauling costs lots - in terms of dollars, dump truck exhaust, and a dump site charge," he adds.

Like BP, the City of Brampton is an IPM promoter. And the two parties have agreed on a higher cut level for all of the boulevards they maintain for the City, in order to better control weed germination and growth.

"Over the past decade, we've taken the level of cutting from slash and dash to finely manicured lawns," he says. "It's a big thing. The [City grounds] look really good."

Perras, 55, is involved with several industry associations. He sits on Landscape Ontario's Health & Safety Committee, and is involved with the Snow Ice Management Association.

However, he says many competitors are not following suit, and the turnout is "sadly



Eco-friendly guys. Brian Perras, owner of BP Landscaping and Snow Removal (L) and Manager Bill Alders fill up one of their trucks with liquid Geomelt. Brian's company uses the Geomelt instead of just straight salt which is harmful to the environment.

Photo by Stephen Uhraney

small" for some of these meetings.

"What landscaping needs is a Mike Holmes out there promoting it and encouraging it to change," he comments.

"Companies are slow-moving. The money thrown away for salting, should be going for grants or research to help the environment."

"The biggest thing is to educate people. What we're doing is going to help, but we're a small company with 50 trucks. The more we can educate people the better."

"The other thing that will have to change, we are still allowing slip and fall accidents we know are bogus," he adds.

"Until the judges stop it, we won't stop them from oversalting. That to me is the biggest travesty of justice."

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To obtain a copy of "A Vision for Tourism" e-mail tourism@brampton.ca or call 905.874.3601. As a tourism stakeholder, you can get involved! Contact Sharon Wilcox, Manager of Tourism, at 905.874.2664, or visit www.tourismbrampton.ca.

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