

# QUITE A ROAD

## MHCA President has long history and keen interest in public service

BY HEATHER HUDSON

It's a long-forgotten fact that was never quite a secret. When Chris Lorenc first took the office of President of the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association (MHCA), he couldn't tell a grader from a dozer.

"I had no prior knowledge nor history with the heavy construction industry. I would make the typical rookie errors, driving others crazy by calling concrete cement, things like that," Lorenc chuckles.

But it wasn't long before his new colleagues began to understand why he got the job: there's no one more passionate about public policy than Lorenc.

While some with his experience might have deemed the heavy construction industry as decidedly outside their comfort zones, Lorenc looked at it as an opportunity for MHCA, and the industry it speaks for, to play an instrumental role in making a tangible difference in improving cities, the province and ensuring the growth of the Canadian economy.

"I consider it a tremendous privilege to serve in this capacity and to be given an opportunity to work with an enlightened, progressive industry that makes so many positive contributions to our community and country," says Lorenc.

Before taking the helm of MHCA in 1991, Lorenc practised law, served on

Winnipeg's City Council for nine years (1983-1992) where he chaired a number of standing committees, served on the labour relations committee and was a fixture on the Executive Policy Committee (EPC).

"I always had an interest in public service and public policy. I got a good taste of it and enjoyed it very much when I served on city council. It gave me an opportunity to focus on the big picture and try to influence positive change," he says.

Relishing his role in the heavy construction industry, in 1995, Lorenc was named and continues to serve as President of the Western Canada Roadbuilders and Heavy Construction Association (WCR&HCA), which represents the heavy construction industry in Western Canada. In addition, Lorenc has an established profile with the Canadian Construction Association (CCA), where he serves on numerous committees including its Civil Infrastructure Council, Industry Advocacy & Regulatory Affairs Committee and its National Gold Seal Committee, just to name a few.

To round out his resume, he's led or co-authored several pivotal reports that continue to help shape public policy. Those include the 1998 and 2000 Strategic Infrastructure Reinvestment Policy (SIRP) reports for Winnipeg. As well, his name appears on 2011's

*New Relationships: A New Order: A balanced approach to funding municipal infrastructure in Manitoba* report of the Infrastructure Funding Council (IFC) Task Force, which he chaired at the request of Winnipeg Mayor Sam Katz and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM).

Lorenc also led the initiative for *At the Intersection: The Case for Sustained and Strategic Investment in Public Infrastructure*, a report released in February 2012 by the Canada West Foundation. It, for the first time, evidences the linkages between sustained and strategic investment in infrastructure and economic growth.

Lorenc is most proud, however, of the Mayor's Trade Council (MTC) Report released in 2008, an effort he initiated and chaired at the request of the mayor. Its recommendations directly led to the creation of CentrePort Canada, Canada's first inland port on a 20,000-acre footprint of land straddling Winnipeg and the RM of Rosser.

"CentrePort Canada is a transformational long-term economic growth investment which will help re-establish and cement Winnipeg, the Capital Region, Manitoba and, by extension, Canada's global trade and distribution role," says Lorenc. "CentrePort Canada has already leveraged more than \$300 million



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in infrastructure investment with hundreds of millions of dollars yet to come."

In 2009, he was appointed to CentrePort Canada's Founding Board of Directors and currently serves as Vice-Chair as well as Chair of its Governance & Nominations Committee.

To lead and achieve, Lorenc networks with roughly 40 stakeholder organizations at the local, provincial and national levels. And he engages. To name a few: he is a management representative on the Manitoba Labour Board; member of the Manitoba Employers Council; member of the Winnipeg Partnership Committee; chairs the Winnipeg Chamber's Trade & Transportation Committee; an active founding board member of the Manitoba Construction Sector Council; and continues to lead the multi public/private stakeholder SAFE Roads Campaign Committee.

While Lorenc always has his eye on the big picture, he's also got his finger on the pulse of how best to support the people in the heavy construction industry.

In the 23 years since Lorenc became President, MHCA has risen in local, provincial and national prominence and relevance; forged strategic industry, municipal, provincial and federal government partnerships; introduced an industry-wide Heavy Construction EXPO, a vocational, skills and safety education venue unique to Canada;

developed a continually improving and maturing WORKSAFELY™ Safety Training Program; and helped persuade the Manitoba government to require the safety program's Certificate of Recognition (COR™) certification as a condition of contract on contracts exceeding \$100,000.

More recently, the City of Winnipeg's council has adopted the thrusts of recommendations he championed at City Hall associated with dedicated funding to address Winnipeg's infrastructure deficit. Council has allocated a two per cent annual increase in realty taxes dedicated equally between its regional and residential streets assets. This will see billions (instead of millions) of dollars dedicated over 25 years in a transparent and accountable manner. Further, consistent with his advocacy, the mayor has appointed an Economic Development Secretariat led by the current Chair of the Finance Committee to ensure a coordinated focus on growing Winnipeg's economy.

At the provincial level, the Manitoba government will dedicate the one per cent increase in its provincial sales tax over the next 10 years to core infrastructure – streets, roads, highways, bridges and structures – with a focus on investments that grow the economy and create jobs. Over the 10-year period, an additional minimum \$3.5 billion will be invested

in core infrastructure. It could potentially leverage annual increases of \$900 million.

"This is a first in Canada," explains Lorenc. "And it will immeasurably enhance Manitoba's economic well-being."

Lorenc says MHCA is always a hive of activity with no shortage of topics to cover. Some of the current portfolios include:

- Making headway with persuading the provincial government to accelerate the tender schedule to help the industry organize human resources, investment and capital, purchase aggregates, lease equipment, etc. in anticipation of big jobs
- Negotiating similar adjustments with the City of Winnipeg's tender schedule
- Participating in constant discussions on the interpretation of workplace safety regulations and their enforcement
- Continuing to develop the Safe Roads Campaign, which advocates to the public the imperatives of appropriate driving habits through construction zones

"There's never an issue that's too large or too small for MHCA to address," says Lorenc. "But we will champion only those things we believe are in the public's best interest."

## MHCA STAFF PROFILE



Lorenc and his wife, Maria, who has played a major role in his tenure with MHCA

Photo courtesy of Samanta Katz Photography

“We always review any position that we promote to the public, media or government against a public best-interest test. If we can’t legitimately demonstrate advocacy that makes best public interest sense, we won’t advance it, even if that might be counterintuitive to narrower industry self-interests,” he affirms.

Like most astute business leaders, Lorenc is quick to point to the support he has received from past and present MHCA Chairs, board and association members and MHCA staff as the true “do-ers” responsible for great public policy achievements.

“The organization has been blessed with incredibly smart business men and women who have occupied the position of Chair of the Board as well as members of our Board of Directors. These are individuals who are not afraid of making decisions. They are leaders who focus on the horizon and are long-term big picture thinkers,” he explains.

When asked about what’s on the horizon for MHCA, Lorenc hopes to persuade the public and government that sustained and strategic investment in infrastructure is our economic healthcare program. Lorenc believes that there exists a strong body of public opinion that would support a six principle-based public investment strategy.

“Our approach should be permanent in nature, no different than healthcare or education; focus on economic growth investments while rehabilitating existing assets; embrace innovation in the design, construction, maintenance and rehabilitation of assets; harness the strengths of partnership with the private sector; dedicate funding in a transparent, purpose-driven manner; and ensure that our investment strategies and outcomes are periodically reviewed to ensure astute adjustments going forward,” explains Lorenc.

Another key priority for MHCA is to develop Indigenous Peoples Procurement Best Practices. Its purpose would be to establish benchmark best practices, which transparently help Canada’s Indigenous peoples’ meaningful entry into mainstream construction industry commerce.

Lorenc plans to be with MHCA as long as he can, enjoying the challenge of constantly trying to move public opinion, communicating with the media, negotiating with governments and supporting the industry as best he can.

“There’s no question that this vibrant industry will continue to be a vital part of the economy and be a major contributor to the quality of life in this country,” he says. “I’m excited about the prospect of what that means for our country.” **M**



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