

Match Made in Heaven

Two family businesses come together to create one powerhouse, PRECO-MSE

By Heather Hudson

Two leading family businesses have merged – and expect to become a powerhouse in deep foundation and drilling across Canada.

In October 2017, PRECO Foundations, a division of Roxboro, and the companies of MSE Group, including ICANDA Corporation, Forage MSE and the Toronto subsidiary MSE Drilling & Grouting, merged to create PRECO-MSE.

The two Quebec-based companies had enjoyed a business partnership for more than a decade, providing complementary services on many large-scale projects in Ontario and Quebec. With similar organizational and operational structures, the decision to formally unite was an easy one.

“We’ve always had a good relationship. We think the same way. We’re both big on quality, we both often beat our schedules and we both take good care of our customers,” said Marco Lessard, president and general manager of PRECO-MSE. “It was a natural fit.”



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PRECO-MSE

COMPANY PROFILE

The MSE Group story

MSE stands for Marco, Stéphane and Eric, the late founder's three sons. In 1972, Leo Lessard began Forage L.C. Drilling with his step-brother as a geotechnical drilling operation in Ville Mercier, Que. The two parted ways in 1981 and Leo founded Forage MSE to work on bigger construction projects.

The shop was situated next to the Lessard home and became a true family business. The matriarch answered phones and prepared invoices. The three boys played and worked on-site from an early age.

"Since the age of 12, I worked on job sites. We learned how to drill, make cement, install and test anchors – all areas of the job," said Marco, the eldest son and president and general manager of PRECO-MSE.

When Marco graduated with a Bachelor's degree in administration and business in 1998, he officially joined the company and was immediately sent to Toronto to work on a project.

"My father said, 'If you want to understand and run projects someday,



you have to do the job yourself,' so he sent me to a muddy Toronto job site beside the CN Tower to help the driller on a drill rig machine," he said.

Despite not knowing much English, Marco made connections, handing

out business cards and talking with workers from all industries. When he returned to Quebec, he proposed expanding to Ontario to take advantage of a bigger market.

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“My father said he didn’t have time to take care of Ontario but I could; if I got quote requests, we would bid if it was a good job.

“Back in 1998 we were doing maybe \$50,000 a year in Ontario. These days, we average maybe \$5 to \$6 million in Ontario,” said Marco, who went on to head up the MSE Group when his father passed away in 2015.

Over the years, the company has expanded to work on drilling projects in New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Marco’s brother Stéphane followed in his footsteps, studying business administration and accounting and is now managing MSE Group’s equipment fleet. Like his late father, their brother Eric prefers to be on the ground. He’s a superintendent and skilled driller with the company.

MSE also owns other companies:

In 2000, they partnered with Metric Drilling, a Quebec City-based business with operations in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa.

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“Now we can offer a turnkey solution. Customers can decide to hire us for an entire project or just certain components.”

– Marco Lessard, PRECO-MSE



In 2007, MSE formed MSE Drilling and Grouting, an Ontario-based company serving Toronto and Western Canada.

In 2013, MSE Group bought ICANDA Corporation from Laval, Que., a company specializing in foundation work, retaining walls and driven piles.

In 2016, MSE Group bought Solfix from Chicoutimi, Que., a company specializing in foundation work, retaining walls and driven piles.

Today, MSE Group has 105 employees.

“Last year, we brought in \$40 million in revenue. That’s not bad for what started as a small company in a very small market in Quebec. I’m very proud of our history,” said Marco.

The PRECO story

PRECO-MSE vice-president David Théorêt also brings an esteemed family business to the merger. His grandfather,

Jean-Guy Théorêt, founded Roxboro Excavation Inc. in 1972 in Montreal’s West Island. He and his five sons went on to grow the business to become one of the biggest excavation companies in Quebec today, with 700 employees and \$200 million in annual revenue.

They founded PRECO Foundations four years ago, specializing in the design and execution of deep foundations, underpinning and repairs, installing piles, anchors and retaining walls.

Like MSE Group, Roxboro also owns a number of other companies in the equipment and maintenance, real estate, roofing and soil rehabilitation and remediation industries. The company is in the midst of transitioning from a second to third-generation operation as the sons and daughters take over for their fathers, the original five sons who helped grow the business to what it is today.

When two companies come together

As PRECO-MSE, the two companies are equipped to provide a full range of services, from piling to excavation to soil remediation to drilling and installing rock anchors.

“Now we can offer a turnkey solution. Customers can decide to hire us for an entire project or just certain components,” said Marco.

Altogether, PRECO-MSE has 165 dedicated employees and is a \$50-million-plus company. MSE Group brings 105 employees; PRECO brought 60. MSE employees will focus mainly on engineering, management and operation of the foundation work and Roxboro staff will take care of equipment maintenance and transportation, IT, HR and legal matters.

To start, PRECO-MSE headquarters is in Lachine, Que. By summer 2018, they hope to have found a central location where a large shop and office space will be their more permanent home.

The new company expects to be involved in industrial, commercial, institutional (ICI) and civil work and looks forward to bidding on big projects such as condominium buildings, overpasses and bridges. Marco already has his sights set on the REM train project in Montreal, a public transportation initiative purportedly worth \$5 to \$6 billion. Roxboro Excavation is already involved in the bidding process of that big project with its partners.

“As PRECO-MSE, we now have triple and quadruple the capacity for foundation work than we had before. We bring a lot to the table – opening doors for our business but also the industry. The future is bright!” said Marco. ☺

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