



PRAZTEK CONSTRUCTION
GENERAL CONTRACTORS

CHANGING LANDSCAPES WITH THE BEAUCAGE NAME



By Rajitha Sivakumaran

When Pete Beaucage started Timmins-based Praztek Construction in 2003, it was only meant to be a part-time venture. Working on a four days on, four days off schedule as a project manager, he only wanted more time doing

hands-on work. But the undertaking became too much of a large-scale enterprise for Beaucage to devote enough time to his day job, and a decision had to be made. He chose the riskier path of entrepreneurship, but the choice for him was an obvious one.

A carpenter by trade, Beaucage is a third-generation entrepreneur. Before him, both

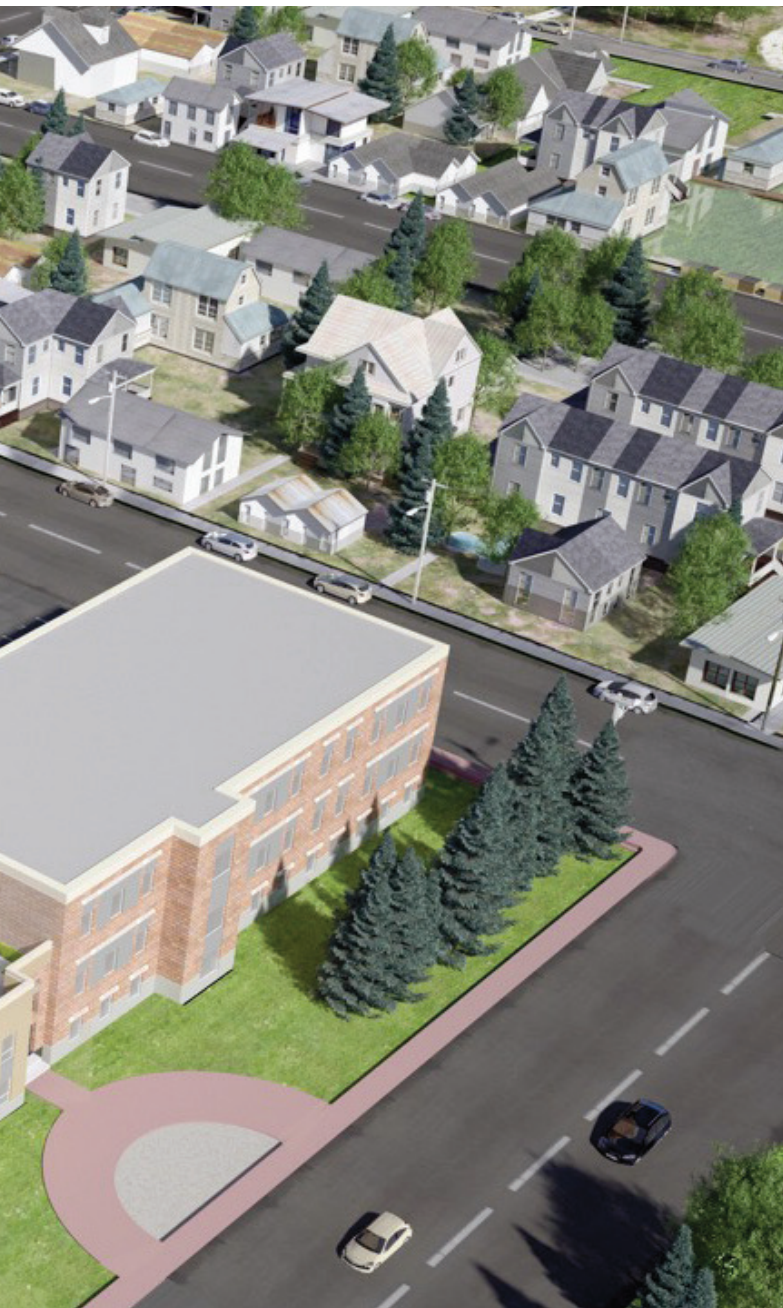


“It’s a tough battle to be self-employed.” Pete Beaucage, president

his father and grandfather were contractors; the Beaucage name has mingled with the construction industry for nearly 50 years. Most boys wanted to be astronauts or race car drivers as children, but young Beaucage had paternal influences that steered him in a completely different di-

rection. “It’s been my dream since I was a little kid to own my own construction company. Working with my grandfather and my father when I was young, that’s what my goal was, to be a contractor,” he said.

Despite being only 37 years old, Beaucage



is the owner of two other companies that complement Praztek; one specializes in real estate and development, the other provides plumbing and heating services.

"To be honest, this success doesn't rely only on myself. I have a really good team behind me as well," Beaucage said, adding that although his company consisted of a one-man team in the beginning, it now employs 22 people. Like many inspiring success stories, Praztek emerged

from humble headquarters, Beaucage's basement. Now the firm occupies an 8,000-square-foot facility. The expansion has been a gradual one, Beaucage says, and it is ongoing.

Dabbling in industrial projects from time to time, Praztek concentrates primarily on the residential and commercial sectors. The power of construction lies with its ability to completely change the facade of a street and Praztek has demonstrated that in its home base of Timmins. A few years ago, when the city sold some property, Beaucage daringly bought a building that few would have considered. It was the former site of a hotel and bar, and it sat in one of the gloomiest parts of town. But Beaucage had a vision for the spot, revitalized beyond recognition, and accordingly, Praztek developed a \$7-million, 34-unit senior apartment complex.

What made this project rather special was that Beaucage designed it as well. What are the perks of having your construction company involved in the design process? Clients save tons of money. "An architect is an architect. They're going to design something on paper, but they've never built these buildings. They're designing it really nicely, but the problem that happens is that they don't really know how much it's going to cost to build it that way." Having a designer with a construction background allows for efficient, cost-effective design.

Beaucage has contributed 146 apartment units to Timmins in the last five years.





The units were built during a time when the city was in need of more housing. Yet nobody was building. It was an untapped market and Praztek dove into it, eventually solving the housing dilemma. Before Praztek's involvement, a new building hadn't been built in Timmins for 25 years.

Despite the company's success, Beaucage admits that in the last five years, manpower has become an issue. "Reliable people

are very hard to find. There is always a day when somebody is not there," he said.

This problem is more profound than it appears, the result of everything from the internet to video games and inactive lifestyles. The day-to-day experiences of a young Canadian are usually occupied by one screen or another, and include little time for a soccer game and even less time for strenuous labour. Entering the workforce, our modern generation may be fit for a desk job, but most will suffer terribly in a labour-intensive industry like construction. In Beaucage's experience, the younger generation carries with it a different definition of good work ethics.

"When I was young, we played outside all day. I see kids nowadays and you don't see that anymore. I think that's a big factor on how these workers are growing up. Physical labour, they're not exposed to any of that," Beaucage said.

The folks at Praztek fall into the older workforce category, but according to a report released by BuildForce Canada, the labour force of the construction industry is going to be affected by retiring workers in the next 10 years. Although none of Beaucage's employees will be retiring in that proposed period, the news is troubling nonetheless in the long run.

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The problem multiplies by many folds when novice workers venture off to start their own company, something Beaucage has witnessed firsthand. Eager for capital, oftentimes the lack of experience compromises quality because the rules are being invented on the go. What is the solution to this?

"I think the legislation should clamp down on construction companies. We should have licences. A guy off the street could walk into the city and get a business licence and say I'm going to start a construction company," Beaucage said. In Quebec, conversely, construction companies are li-

censed and there is a big difference in the quality of work, he added. "There are a lot of good carpenters in Ontario, but the problem is if you don't have a certificate, you can't really gauge what their experience is. You don't know if they were trained properly." Beaucage himself has worked in the industry for 24 years.

Labour force challenges are just one of the many steep hills and valleys of being the owner of a business. "It's a tough battle to be self-employed," Beaucage said. There is always a surplus of work that needs to be done, so maintaining normal hours is virtually impossible.



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“You have got to have dedication to your company and you have to give it 150 per cent to make it go. There are a lot of hurdles in owning a business and you’ve got to be able to overcome those hurdles, stay positive and keep going. My hats off to everybody who is self-employed,” Beaucage said.

Despite the hardship and perhaps as a result of it, Praztek is growing and Beaucage’s plan is to expand his workforce accordingly. Being a Metis, he hopes to venture into First Nations communities in the near future and share some of his success by enhancing the landscape of Canada’s remote regions.

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