

Helping people walk on water

By Drew Harris BVI Writer

COBBLE HILL - West Coast Floatation Systems Ltd. (WCFS) is celebrating 6 years of building docks, ramps and other floatation requirements.

The company is literally "walking on water".

"We do a lot of really high-end docks for clients all over the world. We're getting 20-30 email requests for quotes daily," notes owner Robin Rooke, who says the company works with a partnership of a tightly knit crew of divers, fabricators, and welding specialists based in the Cowichan Valley.

"We have years of experience in steel and aluminum fabrication and years of experience in the fabrication and installation of Piers, Docks and Walkways," Rooke outlines from his Duncan office, noting he first started working in the industry in 1973.

"We sell all over the world. We handle fabrication and transportation to site preparation and installation," he says.

"We always take an environmentally friendly approach with our designs. As such, we've innovated some specific designs through our working relations with governing agencies such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO)."

Rooke notes they also manufacture and install all types of marine dock support structures and accessories, including: floating heli pads, bridges, fuelling facilities, marinas, waste handling facilities, aquaculture floats, breakwaters and fishing



Robin Rooke with one of his West Coast Floatation creations

lodges.

Rooke was raised in Lake Cowichan. His wife Michelle helps with administration and they live and work from an acreage in Cobble Hill.

"The business really started taking on a life of its own two years ago, after a fine-tuning of the website and a real refining of the market niche," he says.

"There was a time when I'd wait for the phone to ring. Then business picked up but it was seasonal. During those days I used to say that no one stands on the beach in the rain and says 'I want a dock,'" Rooke laughs.

Looking back, Rooke says part of the reason for success is that he has a great crew. "We also have great suppliers who hung with us in tough times. And we've been worked really hard."

"We get loads of inquiries from the US, England, Hawaii, Denmark, Panama and the Middle East," he says. "I'll get a deposit, starting fabricating the dock here, and then ship out the finished product and we'll never actually meet the client face to face. I'm still getting used to that part a little but the contracts keep coming."

Rooke says the BC waterfront is going crazy. "I ask my clients all of the time how they came to find BC. Word is out about BC and so many people want a BC gulf island waterfront property," he says.

On the product line-up, he says WCFS works with aluminum, steel, plastic and wood.

"We have a very diverse product line designed to fit every budget," Rooke continues. "From the LLF (Light Weight

Lake Float) system, to the Heavy Industrial Steel Pontoon Barges, we can work with all of our clients needs."

Rooke adds another popular service is exporting the dock systems.

"WCFS has developed a dock system in kit form that can be economically shipped anywhere on the planet. These kits are especially attractive in countries or areas where timber and lumber supplies are not readily available," Rooke outlines, adding lumber supplies are limited in places like Mexico, Central America and Hawaii.

"Purchase the same heavy service docks built by us, in kit form, and the customer saves thousands. We supply for the export the complete dock kits that can be assembled by the local labour force with very few tools," Rooke explains, adding the kits include timbers, rail ties, decking, skirting, plastic or foam billets, bolts, washers, nuts and a complete dock plan.

"This is perfect for government work experience programs, marina expansion projects or residential dock installations," he says, adding a complete line of aluminum decks, ramps and bridges have been successfully exported all over the world as well.

Rooke has several other irons in the fire. One is a series of mineral claims in the Port Renfrew area. The other is pioneering his own designs for float billets (the part that the dock sits on).

"We're ready to go the mould stage. This way we'll be supplying part of own projects," he says.

Decade for Fountain

NANAIMO - As the Fountain Tire store in Nanaimo celebrates its 10th year, the Fountain Tire Group it belongs to has yet again been named among the Top 50 Best Managed Companies in Canada.

"We first achieved that distinction in 1994," notes Nanaimo owner/manager Bryan Muise, who has been with the company for 26 years.

Muise moved up to take over the Nanaimo outlet four years ago, after first moving out from Alberta in 1996 to open a new location in downtown Victoria.

In 2000, Muise had an opportunity to become involved in Fountain Tire Nanaimo.

The Nanaimo shop has a staff of 12 and a shop of about 8,000 square feet with 3 large bay doors and 6 hoists.

Muise's son Philip is the Assistant Manager and is about to become a partner in the business.

Fountain Tire offers a complete line-up of tires, custom wheels and mechanical services. "We carry a full line of high performance to large truck tires," Muise notes.

Before moving to BC, Muise had owned and operated several outlets all over Alberta. Bill Fountain first started the franchise in 1956 in Wainwright, Alberta.

"From that two car garage, we have expanded to 167 locations from Thunder Bay to Vancouver Island," Muise explains.

Fountain Tire store managers are given the opportunity to grow their careers within the company. When managers turned the store to profitability, they were given the opportunity to own the business by becoming 50/50 partners in their operation.

With the passing of Bill Fountain in 1976, the management team vowed to continue operating the company as he had, with a strong focus on great customer service and partnerships.

In the 1980's, the company opened a new Home Office based in Southeast Edmonton. In 1987, it sold a 49% interest of its business to Goodyear Cana-



Fountain Tire's Bryan Muise

da; a move that was a first for the industry, yet has ultimately proven to be a mutually beneficial partnership for both companies.

By the end of the 90's, 100 new Fountain Tire stores had been added across Western Canada. The Home Office became much more of a resource center for the stores, providing support in the areas of purchasing, point-of-sale systems, training, accounting, credit, insurance, legal services, payroll, and marketing.

This unique partnership structure has helped Fountain Tire to be named one of the "50 Best Managed Companies" every year since 1994.

Muise came to BC as part of Fountain Tire's expansion outside of Alberta.

"At the time we were back running a location in Lacombe, Alberta. Fountain Tire Corporation approached us on a move to open a location in Victoria," Muise recalls, noting the rest is history.

Muise notes the Nanaimo location has also expanded into the wholesale tire market, buying/selling mag wheels direct from the manufacturers.

"We are also focused on expanding our commercial and tire sales base," he says.

What has been the key to increased growth and success?

"It's all about service," Muise notes. "We call it 'Customer Delight'. Our goal is for the consumer to have the best possible purchase experience."

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