

Civil & General Contractors has confidence in Bell products and service



Building small brick structures suitable for a braai may not seem the ideal way to start a construction company, but if you build enough of them at a reasonable price and to the customers' satisfaction, the sky could be the limit.

This is what George van der Westhuyzen discovered when he and his wife, Linda, set out to start their business, aptly named Civil & General Contractors cc in Queenstown, in the Eastern Cape Province. This was back in 1987, but soon building braais grew to home renovations and then to more civil construction related work.

George, a civil engineer, knew where he wanted to be and when his fledgling company landed work for the State's Department of Trade & Industry, building factories for the Ciskei Industrial Development Corporation, as it was called then, he felt he had made the correct decision about settling in the Eastern Cape.

"We had to build two factories within the space of three months and we literally worked day and night to complete them on time and on budget," he says with a smile when we meet in the company's well-appointed offices at their Glenside quarry, just north of Queenstown. "Owning our own quarry, which produces material ideally suited for road construction, led us into road rehabilitation and construction quite naturally and we do work for local and district municipalities as well as the South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL)."

In 1992, Civil & General Contractors landed a seemingly lucrative contract to re-gravel roads for the former Ciskei Forestry Department in the hilly Katberg area and given the nature of the terrain, Van der Westhuyzen immediately thought that he needed a Bell B18A Articulated Dump Truck (ADT). "By that stage of our business, we had built up a good relationship with Graham Reeves and Alan Pottow, two sales representatives for Bell Equipment, and Alan in particular recommended the Bell B18A as being the ideal haulage tool for the job at hand," George explains. "Unfortunately the contract got cancelled but we kept this marvellous new truck and used it extensively for the next 10 years, eventually selling it when it had done over 20 000 hours."

Civil & General Contractors has since then been concentrating on road rehabilitation and rebuild contracts. The company's fleet of Bell ADTs currently numbers eight but at a peak it had 13 of these machines. A remarkable feature of this fleet is that it consists of Bell B20B and Bell B20C ADTs, all boasting around 20 000 hours of service, which is difficult to believe given the pleasing exterior appearance of the fleet. Looking at the excellent condition of these Bell ADTs' paintwork, immediately speaks of care that is taken by the operators and management alike.

"Whether they are used in our quarry or on road contracts, our Bell ADTs work relentlessly for us, and at an average fuel burn of around 18 litres per hour in certain applications they are more economical than rigid tipper trucks," George says.

The company employs its own diesel mechanics who handle daily checks and small repairs but believes that Bell Equipment is better equipped to undertake major services such as those on 500 and 1 000 hours, even though they may be out of warranty. Servicing is done out of the Bell Customer Service Centre in East London.

A new addition to the Civil & General Contractors fleet is a Bomag BW 161 AD-50 Tandem Vibratory Roller, which the company acquired recently. "Bell Equipment's former Director: Sales & Marketing, Terry Gillham, suggested that we have to look at this machine for a task we had compacting G1 base course and premix material and after he arranged for it to be demonstrated on one of our sites, we bought and are very happy we did," George says. "We're also grateful for the training Bell Equipment provided because this machine brings First World technology to us with its Variospeed™ offset drum feature."

Civil & General Contractors often work far from their Queenstown base and the correctly sized material, especially for road construction, is not always readily available. The company recently took delivery of a Finlay J-1160 Jaw Crusher to replace an older crusher. "We had seen this machine performing at the Finlay Open Day demonstration in Gauteng and it suited our purposes perfectly as a mobile crusher and of the correct mass," George says.

"We've come a long way with Bell Equipment and as I'm sure my one son Rhys, who is also a civil engineer and in the business with us, will agree with me that Bell really does understand and care about their clients' needs in their attention to detail and listening to our requirements," George adds. "Enjoying Bell Equipment's legendary solid technical back-up and sustained parts availability, gives us the confidence to face the challenges of business today."



Linda and George van der Westhuyzen.