

# Bell Graders are a cut above for VTH Plant & Civil

**Bringing water to three villages in rural Botswana may not seem that big a deal, even in this sometimes arid country, but when you consider that a young woman with training in international politics heads up the civil construction company that made this possible, the story becomes more intriguing.**

Her father, Rory Bennett, arrived in Botswana from his native Zimbabwe as an apprentice diesel mechanic working for an earthmoving company. This was in 1972 and by 1974 this energetic and innovative man decided to be self-employed and started a repair shop. This grew into a business hiring out small utility vehicles and trucks and so his

company Van and Truck Hire (VTH) was born and soon made its presence felt in Botswana's capital, Gaborone. Rory saw gaps in the local market which he turned into business opportunities by hiring out plant and machinery. Further ventures saw his company doing logistics and abnormal transport.

Working in civil construction, bulk earthworks and plant hire points to a business owning earthmoving and material handling equipment and Rory bought what he considered to be versatile and tough machines for his business. "I started off buying Bell Equipment Haulage Tractors as I knew they were designed and built in Africa for African conditions," he says. "Their simple robust design, versatility and toughness of build have stood us in good stead over the years and added so much in establishing us as serious players in a competitive environment."

The company has always owned Bell 1206, 1756 and 1866 Tractor models that have proven their versatility in hauling water bowsers, 9-cubic metre dump trailers and grid rollers.

Rory's daughter, Sarah, joined the company some 10 years ago. Armed with a post-graduate qualification in international politics, she had worked in property development in South Africa before opting for a less hectic lifestyle in the country of her birth, Botswana. Since then, the Bennett family business has unbundled with Sarah's sister, Kerry, running a separate company that specialises in excavation equipment and Sarah managing what has become VTH Plant & Civil.

The latter's list of completed projects makes for impressive reading. Road construction all over Botswana features prominently but added to this are layer works and civil construction done for shopping malls, game lodges, agricultural entities, bush clearing and electrical infrastructure. Water reticulation services and pipelines are also





installed, and it was one such pipeline that brought much needed water to three rural villages. "We work only in Botswana as we believe there is enough scope to not have to venture outside the country's borders," Sarah says when we meet in the company's offices in Gaborone.

VTH Plant & Civil has a core staff of administrative, maintenance, supervisory and operator staff numbering around 80 people. When contract work is undertaken in rural areas, local labour is sourced with skills training offered as a means of upliftment. "Whenever we notice someone with potential, we employ and train such a person, which adds value all round," Sarah says.

When working on the many road construction and projects with layer works it has completed over the years, VTH Plant & Civil has put its trust in various models of Bell Graders starting with Bell 670C and 670D models. "We've had fantastic service from the six machines in our Bell Grader fleet and one Bell 670D is fast approaching 21 000 hours, which again is true testimony to the brand's toughness and longevity," Sarah explains. "We're tendering on some big and promising new roads projects right now and with this in mind, we've traded in a Bell 670C Grader on the new Bell 620G machine, about which we're really excited."

"Our Bell Grader fleet has stood the test of time and while we have no fixed policy on replacing a machine, we're confident that given the strict maintenance regimes we follow, this new Bell 620G Grader, possibly the first of its series in Botswana, will also give us many years of service," she adds.

VTH Plant & Civil employs 24 mechanics and assistants and they offer support to machine operators who work through daily checklists prior to starting a shift, to ensure that all the company's yellow fleet remain in good condition. They have learnt that preventative maintenance is key to longevity of equipment and it shows in the high production hours that their Bell Grader and Bell Haulage Tractor fleets return.

"I should also mention the support of Kanu Equipment we've enjoyed over the years," Sarah says. "We know that we have the benefit of open lines of communication to the company's Service Manager, Kobus Bezuidenhout, and his teams of mechanics and staff in the parts department. When there are issues on parts availability, Kobus and his team make sure that our downtime is minimised."



Kanu Equipment Service Manager, Kobus Bezuidenhout (left) with MD of VTH Plant & Civil, Sarah Bennett.

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***Rory Bennett***

