

# Mabona Civils enters into contract mining with two Bell B40Es

**When Andile Mbele was a young graduate working his way up through the ranks in a small municipality in the northern part of the Eastern Cape province, he always thought that there had to be a more efficient way of delivering infrastructure projects to ease the lives of people living in rugged conditions in that province.**

Andile and his single parent mother had early on realised the value of tertiary education, and his double degrees in Quantity Surveying and Construction Management are proof of this. "During my studies I gained valuable work experience with Group 5 Housing and Projects, building low-cost housing and after 12

months I resigned, went back to school and later became a Project Manager in the Umzumvubu Local Municipality in Mount Ayliff, which is the area where I was born and grew up," Andile says. "When another more challenging opportunity opened up in the nearby Ntabankulu Local Municipality, I jumped at the chance to learn even more about infrastructure development as I thought I could make a difference to people's lives."

The dedication Andile showed brought rewards as he got to gain more valuable experience working in community-based public works programmes and overseeing infrastructure projects funded by the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) scheme to help municipalities develop their infrastructure.

"It was when I was involved in training SMMEs to develop local contractors in building trades and civil works that I had the inkling that should I be able to obtain a 4CE grading, I could become a contractor as well. I thought starting a plant hire company would be a challenging but manageable business plan, except I didn't have money and certainly no plant to hire out," Andile says with a self-effacing grin.

But help was at hand and Andile's older brother, who is a doctor, assisted him financially, and with a mutual friend signing surety, this enabled them to scrape together the money to buy a rebuilt grader.

"This happened in 2009 and my company Mabona Civils & Plant Hire came into being," he says. "I'm proud to say that 14 years down the line, we're still using that grader."

The grader alone was not enough as Andile realised that to successfully tender on roads contracts, he'd need a roller and a water truck as well, as those three machines form the backbone of any roads project. Andile subsequently attended an auction in Johannesburg where he met people who promised that on payment of a large deposit, which was in fact his entire savings, they would build him a new water truck in no time.

"I duly paid my money and these guys kept sending me pictures of water trucks to supposedly show the progress on my truck, but all I had in the end was these pictures as these unscrupulous people took my money and ran. An expensive but unforgettable lesson to learn."



Fast forward to 2012 and by now Andile and his company, Mabona Civils & Plant Hire, had grown beyond merely doing plant hire and had successfully tendered on several infrastructure projects. "I had, through hard work and saving more, built up the funds to buy both a roller and a water truck and completed an R8 million roads project in Umzimkulu along with other smaller projects in water reticulation, drilling boreholes, and doing bulk water line projects," he says. "I was also able to buy an excavator with funds from a house I had sold, and successfully completing these projects lead my company to being upgraded to 6CE status, which meant we could tender on even larger projects."

Andile soon discovered that on many of the projects he had landed, he was the site manager, the HR manager, a driver, the supervisor and had to fulfill many other roles that did not necessarily stimulate him. A chance meeting with the mutual friend who years before had signed surety for his grader, led to them discussing contract mining in the Mpumalanga coalfields where the friend had become a successful contract miner.

"This was a completely new challenge to me and it really got me thinking that I could do plant hire in coal mining, running big trucks," he says. "I had made many new connections through networking and road-running, a sport I love, and soon found two rebuilt Bell B40D Articulated Dump Trucks (ADTs) with relatively low hours that I bought for a contract on a coal mine where they actually wanted five such trucks."

Not wanting to put all his eggs into the proverbial single basket, Andile started looking around for other coal mining contracts and found one on a large mine near Belfast, Mpumalanga, but here the demand was for new ADTs that would guarantee production.

"I researched the broader ADT market and again came back to Bell Equipment. The company struck me for notably designing and building an ADT fit for the South African mining environment and that in my book had to count for something," Andile says with a smile. "I obtained my own financing and ordered two new Bell B40E ADTs in November 2022 and they were delivered to our site near Belfast in February 2023."

His two new Bell B40E ADTs have slotted into a fleet of similar haulage vehicles, at times hauling overburden to a dump some 1,5km from the mining area and coal 2km to the run-of-mine tip.

The two new Bell B40E ADTs have been bought with extended warranties of 10 000 hours on their wet drivetrains along with a care package, which translates into Bell Equipment mechanics handling all servicing, maintenance, and repair during that time.

"Looking ahead, I believe this will be the core of my business plan in the future," Andile says. "The confidence that a proven model like the Bell B40E ADT provides, along with legendary technical backup from Bell Equipment, will surely prove successful with sustained uptime and positive production figures."

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### **Andile Mbele - Owner of Mabona Civils & Plant Hire**



**Owner of Mabona Civils & Plant, Andile Mbele (left), with Bell Equipment Sales Representative, Anthony Enslin.**

