

CREATIVE SPACES LTD.

Building a dream on perseverance, tight-knit relationships, and staff empowerment

BY CHRISTOPHER CUSSAT

SOMETIMES THE SHORTEST PATH TO A destination is not a straight line. Just ask Bill Black, president and project manager of Creative Spaces Ltd. (CSL). Although he began in the trades as a masonry labourer when he was just 16 years old, it took many more years of personal and professional experiences before he achieved his dream of starting his own construction company.

After working in the commercial construction industry until he was 20, Black pursued a piloting career. Even though he was soon employed in northern Alberta as a commercial pilot servicing a gas-plant build, construction remained embedded in his being. Black explains, "We were only flying four hours a day, so I asked if I could have a job working on site during the idle time. I was given a job as a carpenter apprentice with flex hours on the project."

Six months later, Black began flying throughout the high arctic region of Melville Island, servicing oil-drill rigs. After doing this for three years, he developed malignant melanoma, and severe restrictions were placed on his pilot licenses, preventing him from furthering his profession in aviation.

But rather than looking at these events as a setback, Black decided to turn them into an opportunity. "I was determined to pursue a career as a carpenter, eventually hoping to open my own renovation business," he says. And after working as a carpenter apprentice for another two years, Black felt that he was ready to fulfill his new dream. "Immediately following this short period in the trade, I thought that I could most certainly do what my current employer was doing," he says. "At the time, my



This finished cottage is located on Lake Winnipeg in the Victorian Beach area.

wife and I had just had our first child, but I still jumped in full strength." So in one sense, along with his first daughter, another new life was born—CSL—and in another sense, Black was reborn.

Today there are two sides to CSL's business. The first is in the commercial sector, where a majority of the company's work lies in renovations or additions to existing buildings. "We typically are engaged as construction managers, working with the owners, architects, and engineers from concept through completion," Black says.

Secondly, CSL specializes in residential construction—building new, high-end recreational properties within a 150-mile radius of its headquarters. The company also constructs high-end custom homes in Winnipeg, as well as "renos" or whole-house renovations and top-to-bottom remodels. Black notes

that all of CSL's residential work is by referral and that the company usually works on a project management or a cost-plus basis.

"In the residential sector, we have developed a reputation as a builder that will provide our clients and partners with a high-quality product," he says, "paying great attention to detail and incorporating the intent of the original architecture and design." Black also attributes CSL's commercial success to personal communication with clients. "We listen to our clients' needs and provide excellent customer service," he says.

According to Black, CSL's success is directly tied to a dedicated and committed team that works extremely hard, wants to learn, and helps establish strong relationships with clients. "The most important thing that I have learned in business is to empower your staff," he

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:

WINNIPEG, MB

AREAS OF SPECIALTY:

COMMERCIAL
RENOVATIONS
AND NEW CUSTOM
RESIDENTIAL AND
RECREATIONAL
PROPERTIES

SALES GROWTH IN 2008:

\$4.1 MILLION

EMPLOYEES:

8

“The most important thing that I have learned in business is to empower your staff.” *Bill Black, President and Project Manager*

says. “People thrive on challenges when they are given the opportunity.”

From labourer to pilot to construction entrepreneur, Black has built a successful company on experience, fate, perseverance, and never losing sight of his dream. Of all the things that he loves about his work, Black enjoys the people, process, and products the most. “The construction industry provides exceptional opportunities to meet people and to problem solve,” he says. “Every day is a new occasion for learning. It is very rewarding to see the end result and reflect on all of the challenges that occurred during the build and the relationships that have been built.” CBQ



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