

Chapter 13

Retirement

The writing on the wall

December 21st, 2005 was my last working day and, apart from volunteering on the Town of Goderich Municipal Heritage Committee from March, 2007 to November, 2010, I have remained inactive in the workforce. My normal retirement date was to be December 1st, 2010. However, the opportunity to take early retirement from Volvo Motor Graders Ltd. came at a good moment; not just because it was a personal desire but, as it transpired, the fate of the company was sealed when its doors were permanently closed on June 25th, 2009. It was plain to see that Volvo's corporate attitude was having an effect on worker morale. The constant quest for profitability and a healthy 'bottom line' was becoming paramount. The ruthless business practice of acquiring potential moneymaking companies and closing unprofitable Volvo facilities at random was worrisome. Despite all the changes and modernization, the writing was on the wall that the ageing motor grader factory was likely to be a candidate for closure.

The new automated methods of the ALLADDIN software were taking the creativity away from my job and daily challenges were becoming fewer. So with the prospect of an extra five years of freedom and the means to depart with dignity and on a high note, this opportunity came at the right time.

Pensions, compensations and farewell events

Volvo's early retirement package was very generous. For example, a lifetime company pension; paid outstanding vacation days; retirement allowance, and company paid benefits until my 65th birthday. The company pension was augmented with payments from the federal government's Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and later, when I was eligible, payments from the Old Age Security (OAS) supplement. At age 60, however, the CPP payments were reduced by a certain percentage of the full allowance normally paid at age 65. Additional to this, I was eligible for a lump sum paid out of the Employee's Fund, and we used this windfall to help finance our 2006 annual holiday to St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thirteen senior employees working in the Volvo Customer Support building, whose accumulated service amounting to 464 years, had opted for the early retirement package. At the end of February 2006, the company organized a farewell event to recognize their loyalty and hard work over the years. Various supervisors introduced the soon-to-be retirees and spoke at length about their time at Champion/Volvo; including amusing anecdotes and personal reflections. The employees had opportunity to give their thanks as they received a retirement testimonial. Ray was on good form as he reiterated some of the adventures he and I had been through since 1982, and I respected him for his approach to our sometimes rocky relationship (this was common knowledge). Finally all the guests indulged in refreshments with coffee and two celebration cakes.

The union also wanted to recognize its long service brothers before they retired. Following a monthly meeting at the Saltford Valley Hall, IAM&AW Local Lodge 1863 president Duane “Dewey” Horton presented each retiree with a union monogrammed wristwatch. I decided to make a short speech to the assembled membership citing the assistance given to me by the union during the times when I needed help. As the years went by, and after the company had closed its doors, the union’s legacy continued as the Local 1863 Retirees Club, of which I was a founding member and still take an active part in organizing events.

Winding up SAE and TAS activities

Although retirement allowed me to spend more free time on personal projects, activities for both SAE and Technical Authorship Services (TAS) were on the wane. The year 2005 saw a decline in the number of SAE Southwestern Ontario Section events; two plant tours – Diamond Aircraft Industries, London, Ontario, and CenterLine (Windsor) Ltd., Windsor, Ontario – and a golf tournament. Furthermore, Ruth Cooper, the Section chair at the time, was moving away from the area; and other executive members intimated that they preferred not to continue for another term. The final blow for me was the Section’s newsletter shifting into the electronic age and going completely online; thus a printed and mailed version became immediately obsolete. With the decrease in member interest and a weakened executive, the Southwestern Ontario Section was eventually absorbed into the larger and more influential Ontario Section. My SAE membership lasted for twenty-eight years (from March 28th, 1978) and had proved most satisfactory in terms of involvement and personal advancement at a professional level. It was difficult to resign, but the experience had run its course.

Similarly, my hobby business was garnering fewer jobs, and the loss of the SAE Southwestern Ontario Section’s newsletter was the final nail in the coffin. In January, 2006, Ray Frydrych asked me to do a proof-reading task and, together with another the next month, they amounted to the only TAS consulting work received from Volvo. In March, 2006, I attempted to acquire some technical writing work based on a request for proposal from the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA). I had an informal interview with Tim Cummings, the ABCA executive director, but nothing conclusive came of my enquiries. This was probably the last effort to look for any business as I anticipated winding up the company. Following an extended period of inactivity, the company books were closed in April, 2007 and the Ontario provincial government business licence No. 970645362 registration expired on May 20th, 2007; thus ending an adventure that started September 16th, 1983 (see Chapter 9).

The municipal and marine heritage committees

One of the attractions of the small Ontario town of Goderich is its built heritage: that is, the large number of homes and commercial buildings that date back to the Victorian era. Many of these structures have been preserved, and a special interest group called the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee (LACAC) existed to prevent violations against good taste where maintenance or alterations were concerned. Some of the more outspoken citizens of the town, such as Dorothy Wallace and Nicholas Hill, went to great lengths to keep heritage issues alive – even to the extent of buying at-risk prop-

erties and convincing town council that they should be saved from demolition. In 2016, long after Nick Hill's untimely death, his legacy was influential enough to keep a certain designated property intact due to his previous work with LACAC.

Goderich is also noted for its connections with the maritime industry as being a 'harbour of refuge' and early boat building centre. Two committees of council had been created to further both the aims of LACAC and support the maritime component. They were the Municipal Heritage Committee (also known as Heritage Goderich) and the Goderich Marine Heritage Committee. Just over a year into my retirement I was looking for a new diversion and, noticing a request for interested persons to join Heritage Goderich, applied for a position on the committee. Following negotiations I was accepted and the appointment was noted by the town's Clerk-Administrator, Larry J. McCabe, on March 21st, 2007.

At the time I joined, Heritage Goderich was managed by co-chairs Kathy Ferguson and Ken Hughes, and the committee met in what used to be the Police Station and Parks Department building on West Street. The Goderich Marine Heritage Committee was independent and chaired by Terrence Gilhuly. In July, 2007, both co-chairs vacated their positions and I was chosen to lead the group as the official chair of Heritage Goderich. About the same time, another special interest group was formed to help revitalize the now disused 1907 former Canadian Pacific Railway Station. Known as the Friends of the CPR Station (FoCPRS), this group was represented by Heritage Goderich; the Maitland Trail Association; the Menesetung Bridge Association, and concerned citizens. By default I was connected with this *ad hoc* committee.

Over the course of the term of office for the town council, which expired on November 30th, 2010, Heritage Goderich was kept busy with many issues. In 2008 the old Police Station and Parks Department building was demolished to make way for renovations to the old Town Hall (a designated heritage building) and a modern extension containing the municipal offices. This meant temporary quarters for the committees and, over a year or so, meetings took place in different locations. In June, 2008, the OHT Heritage Conservation Conference was held in Collingwood, Ontario, and that proved to be an interesting experience.

Generally under my watch, Heritage Goderich overcame most of its challenges; with some compromises and major successes. The high water mark was when the town mayor, Deb Shewfelt, accepted the Lieutenant Governor's Ontario Heritage Award for Community Leadership from the Hon. David C. Onley and Hon. Lincoln M. Alexander at the Queen's Park parliament building in Toronto, February 19th, 2010. The application for this award was instrumental through the efforts of myself and the heritage liaison councillor, Heather Lyons. Other notable events were the September 15th, 2007, unveiling of the 1907 Canadian Pacific Railway Station heritage designation plaque and the Menesetung Bridge centennial plaque and, in concert with the Marine Heritage Committee, the 1847 Goderich Lighthouse designation plaque on June 20th, 2010.

The municipal elections of November, 2010, required all committee of council members to reapply their positions. However, I decided to step down in favour of pursuing a different interest and ended my involvement with Heritage Goderich. Recognition, however, came in the form of a special presentation where Heather Lyons gave me a coffee table picture book documenting the development from beginning to end of the new extension to the municipal offices – a project that required special input from Heritage Goderich.

The last gasps of Volvo Motor Graders Ltd.

From the outset of full production in January, 2006, the Volvo G900 Series motor grader was continuing to sell well. The “Voice of the Customer” marketing campaign became the standard for product improvements, and product quality was monitored through Operational Development (OD) and participation in OD co-worker seminars. The new Volvo Production System (VPS) was also implemented.

The ‘Volvo Way’ corporate culture held sway as, more and more, the head office in Gothenburg pushed for globalised standard methods. The Volvo Group Attitude Survey (VGAS) played an important part, and participation in this annual review had steadily increased; the VGAS-2007 response of 84% being an improvement over the previous year. Since the outcome of the VGAS defines the Employee Satisfaction Index, every employee is affected by it. Four of the ten VGAS categories are: Respect, Co-operation, Delegation/Influence and Performance. It would appear from the VGAS-2007 response, the Technical Publications Department rank and file rated their supervisor’s attributes in these categories as they saw fit. The fallout of this signalled Ray Frydrych’s dismissal from the company effective March 29th, 2007. A difficult but necessary decision according to company officials, but as Dave Long said to me, “The people have spoken.”

For the first half of 2008, steady productivity and quality improvements were being made. Again, Volvo motor graders were proving popular at the ConExpo industrial trade show where, from March 11th to 15th, they were displayed alongside other Volvo CE products at Las Vegas, Nevada. Design changes to comply with the EN474 European Union standards were projected to be launched in September, and the new two-person cab built for interactive training was ready for production.

My previous statement: “... the writing was on the wall that the ageing motor grader factory was likely to be a candidate for closure ...” was a presentiment of the fateful event announced to the amassed workforce on September 30th, 2008. Regardless that everything possible had been done to design and manufacture a world class product that met the One Company Vision principle of Volvo CE, the die was cast to close the Goderich facility. It made more financial sense to move the entire operation to Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., consolidate motor grader production with the Road Machinery Division of Ingersoll Rand acquired in May, 2007, and create the Volvo Road Machinery Business Line. Patrick Olney took over as president of the new company and was replaced by Jay Davis, vice president and general manager of the Goderich facility. Volvo motor grader manufacturing in Paderneiras, Brazil, remained unaffected, but its death knell was sure to sound in the future.

Tuesday, September 30th, 2008, became known as “Black Tuesday.” All Volvo Motor Grader Ltd. employees were requested to attend the Knights of Columbus Hall at 8:00 a.m. Rumours abounded as to the reason for this mass meeting. Presiding over the gathering were Pat Olney and Jay Davis. The news was delivered quickly – “... Volvo CE will move the majority of its motor grader activities currently located in Goderich, Ontario, Canada, to the company’s facility in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.” In total, 335 hourly and 165 salary workers were to lose their jobs. Production would be moved in stages and the transition completed no later than 2010. The workers were given permission to take the rest of the day off. As the upper management quickly left, the full impact sunk in and stunned employees returned home.



Ray Frydrych Presents Barry with his Retirement Testimonial, Goderich, Ontario, February, 2006.



Monica and Barry Pose with the CST Employees' Retirement Cakes, Goderich, Ontario, February, 2006.



What Retirement is all about. Free to Travel Anytime. Barry on Signal Hill, St. John's, N.L., June, 2006.



Headline on the Front Page of the Signal-Star Newspaper, Goderich, Ontario, October, 2008.



Volvo Motor Grader Employees Salute the Last Production Machine, Goderich, Ontario, June, 2009.



The Last Volvo Motor Grader Manufactured at the Factory in Goderich, Ontario, June, 2009.



2009 Model Pontiac G5 SE Coupé. This Model Superseded the Pursuit and was Powered by a 2.2 litre Inline 4-Cylinder Sequential Fuel-injected Engine Coupled to a Manual Five-speed Overdrive Transaxle and Front Wheel Drive. The Colour was Described as Quicksilver Metallic, and Standard Features Included Air Conditioning, Cruise Control and CD Player. The Instrumentation Panel Had Basic Gauges. Photograph Taken Outside our Cambria Road Apartment, Goderich, Ontario, in December, 2008.



Municipal Heritage Committees and Town Council, Lt. Governor's Award, Goderich, ON, Feb., 2010.



Heritage Liaison Councillor, Heather Lyons, at Barry's Presentation, Goderich, December, 2010.

To Volvo's credit, a trauma counselling service was implemented the same day. Also, the Adjustment Advisory Program, headed by veteran Volvo employee, Karen Mabon, swung into action as a means to help displaced workers find a new job and train people, whose only employer was Champion/Volvo, to upgrade skills and learn the basics of résumé writing. An Adjustment Advisory Committee provided assistance and counselling for workers and spouses beyond the projected final day of production on Thursday, June 25th, 2009, when the current union collective bargaining agreement expired. That day, the workers left the factory for the last time. Not in a solemn mood, but something akin to upbeat and with their heads held high. As a finishing gesture, many impaled their work boots on the factory gates.

The last road grader made in Goderich was acquired by the County of Huron. On Tuesday, June 30th, 2009, the model G960 (S/N 40000) was handed over at a special ceremony attended by many ex-Volvo employees. Distinguishing the machine are the two engine side panels inscribed with the employees' names.

The final motor grader chapter

After the Goderich factory closed, a few employees decided to transfer to the Shippensburg plant. These included both production workers and office personnel. Some product support staff was retained at a satellite office until 2010. The Shippensburg facility was enlarged with a dedicated motor grader assembly building and, on April 7th, 2014, a group from the Local 1863 Retirees Club toured the plant and reconnected with their old colleagues.

Despite the injection of capital to produce the G900 Series motor grader and take advantage of the more favourable U.S. dollar exchange rate, the product languished and sales stagnated. Even the Brazilian built machine was not performing well in the lucrative South American market due to increased competition and a volatile domestic economy.

Volvo CE had to improve profitability and reduce costs and, true to form, instituted a drastic solution. In November, 2014, cost-saving measures resulted in discontinuing product development and production of motor graders in Shippensburg, U.S.A. and Pederneiras, Brazil. These products would instead be manufactured by Volvo CE's Chinese company Shandong Lingong (SDLG).

Not only was this the death knell for the once proud Champion product, but all design work was now in the hands of SDLG. With the resumption of production in China, the SDLG branded machine took on a different look, and the only design elements attributed to the original version were from the front axle to the front frame at the cab; the cab and rear portion being SDLG influenced. Needless to say, the legacy that was the Dominion Road Machinery Company Ltd., later known as Champion Road Machinery Company Ltd. and then Volvo Motor Graders Ltd. is now consigned to the history books.

In an effort to preserve some of the past Champion glory and essence of camaraderie, several old union employees formed the Local 1863 Retirees Club. Every month, a crowd meets for breakfast at a local Goderich restaurant to exchange memories of the 'good old days' at "Dominion Roads", "DRMCO", "The Roads", "The Good Roads" or "Champion Roads." Long may it continue.

Into the sunset

Retirement is good; very good. The freedom from the stresses of a workaday week and the bonus of spending more time with Monica contributed enormously to my life. Certainly the opportunity to replace the paycheque with pension cheques presented no problem whatsoever and, after the company paid benefits expired on my 65th birthday, universal health care in Canada provided all the medical services we needed. Senior citizen discounts and other perks related to the 'golden years' were readily available.

The Internet was becoming all-pervasive, and the ISP 'dial-up' connection I had with Hurontel Telecommunications Co-operative Inc. now required upgrading. The other local telecommunications company, Bluewater Cable TV, was also an ISP and, since we already used the company's cable service for FM stereo radio reception, on August 1st, 2009, we terminated our Hurontel account and signed an Internet agreement with Bluewater. Later, Bluewater Cable TV was taken over by Eastlink Inc., based in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Unfortunately this was detrimental as the Goderich office was closed and all business with Eastlink Inc. had to be done by phone or e-mail.

Still, the unlimited broadband Internet offered a whole new world of connectivity and, anticipating a computer upgrade, on March 17th, 2009, I bought an Apple MacBook 2.0 GHz laptop device from Mostly Digital, London, Ontario, for \$1,415.98. The latest operating system (OS X.5.8) on the laptop had new characteristics that I had to learn, and the Safari Internet browser was superior to Netscape which I was using on the Apple PowerMac G4/450 Cube. Monica's Apple eMac computer soldiered on for a while but was becoming more erratic in its behaviour. In November 2010, it finally gave up the ghost and, although I tried to resuscitate it with recovery software, it was a lost cause and so I erased everything on the hard drive and took it to the e-waste environmental dump. Monica's replacement was an Apple iMac 3.06 GHz Model A1311, bought from Mostly Digital on November 9th, 2010, for \$1,352.36.

Now that we were fully independent and footloose the world was our oyster, and it only required us to lock the front door and head off into the sunset in our brand new Pontiac G5 SE coupé to a destination of choice. Life is good; very good!

