

SUCCESS STORIES

Newfoundland Firm on the Road to Exports... in Mexico

After focusing for the last three years on the Hibernia project, FGA Consulting Engineers Limited of St. John's is turning its attention to exports, starting with Mexico.

Not that the small civil mechanical engineering firm — specializing in welding engineering, quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) as well as non-destructive testing — has turned all its attention to exports.

It still has a team of non-destructive technicians, with its joint-venture partner Canspec Group Inc. (FGA-Canspec) working on Hibernia. But it is now actively pursuing export markets, starting with Mexico.

Why exports and why Mexico?

"With a freeze on construction in Newfoundland and a generally depressed local market," comments FGA President Gary Follett, "we decided to take our world-class expertise and reputation acquired on the Hibernia project to new markets."

Participation at last year's Offshore Technology Conference in Houston, Texas gave Follett a chance to meet counterparts from many countries, including Mexico.

This was followed by a trip to that country last May. And although Follett stayed only a day in Mexico, he found that there was plenty of work potential but very little financing.

"We were extremely interested in the privatization program of the state-owned petroleum con-

glomerate Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX)," explains Follett.

FGA pursued its marketing efforts in Mexico during the Canadian Technology Showcase held there last November, making "a tremendous number of contacts," says Follett.

Market prospecting

His well-received paper on Quality Assurance (QA) at the Showcase gave Follett and FGA fur-

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ther visibility in a Mexican industry hungry for building QA into its operations.

Next step in FGA's prospecting in Mexico is another trip later this month when Follett hopes to finalize a partnering agreement with a local Mexican company.

Follett also sees several other possibilities in that market, including seminars on QA and helping Mexican companies attain the ISO 9000 standard.

With its expertise in structural engineering as well as non-destructive testing (X-ray, ultrasonic, magnetic particle and liquid penetrant inspection), Follett believes that FGA is well-placed to work with the Mexican industry to help bring it up to speed.

"But there again," advises Follett, "it will take several trips before finding a partner in Mexico, and a partner is essential," he emphasizes.

Doing business in Mexico

Follett also believes that Mexico has been given a worse name than it deserves on account of its financial difficulties.

"People are friendly and very anxious to do business," says Follett, "and they like to deal on a personal level and seem genuinely interested in you personally."

But he also advises that Mexicans negotiate straight, hard and very direct.

"Things don't happen quickly," warns Follett, "and contacts need nurturing, so you better be prepared for that," he adds.

That being said, Follett believes that "there are many opportunities in Mexico, and even though the supply of money is limited, things will change."

That's why he advises that now is the time to make solid contacts and get in on the ground floor.

As for the language, that shouldn't present any problem as most people speak English, but Follett suggests that "you're miles ahead with an interpreter

Continued on page IV — FGA