

Westmount's work on display at the Children's Aid building in Windsor, ON.



WESTMOUNT STOREFRONT SYSTEMS LTD.

A leading curtain-wall supplier to Ontario's commercial contractors

BY ALYSIA SHIVERS

WHEN TIM MITCHELL STARTED WESTMOUNT STOREFRONT Systems in 1993, doing very small jobs out of the back of his truck, he had the ultimate goal of one day being a leading supplier and installer of curtain-wall systems in Ontario. Today, with 80 employees, a log book holding no less than 80 jobs annually—from strip plazas, chain stores, and commercial buildings—and a 26,000-square-foot office and manufacturing facility, Mitchell's vision has become his reality.

Helping to build Mitchell's vision is his right-hand man—vice president and general manager Rino Messore, who came on board in 2005. Westmount was experiencing rapid growth, having just acquired its first major contract,

the Loblaws head office in Brampton, Ontario. Requiring 500,000 square feet of glass, this project was among the reasons Mitchell decided it was time to bring on a general manager to help with Westmount's continuing expansion.

"This was a high-profile job that proved our ability and opened the door for other similar projects," says Messore, who after 20 years in the architectural and structural-steel business was eager for the new opportunity Mitchell was offering.

Together, Messore and Mitchell make an effective team: they share the same business principles and vision for the company. More importantly, though, it has given Mitchell

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
KITCHENER, ON

EMPLOYEES:
80

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
CURTAIN-WALL
SYSTEMS

2009 REVENUE:
\$28 MILLION



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—Rino Messore, Vice President & General Manager



comfort in knowing his company will be in good hands when he chooses to retire. Recognizing that an exit strategy was needed, Mitchell hired an independent consulting firm that could help him leave behind a core team for Westmount's future owner. To assist with this transition, a board of directors was formed in 2008 under the guidance of Larry Klar and The Succession Fund, a Toronto-based company that is assisting Mitchell in planning his retirement from the company.

Messore, with the help of his management team, is putting systems and procedures in place to create a structured approach to the day-to-day operations of the business. "We do not want to be reliant on any one individual in the organization," Messore explains. "We cross-train at all levels and keep open lines of communication so we can always move forward without any unsuspected stops."

This strategy positions Westmount's employees as key members of the organization, ultimately promoting teamwork and creating a sense of pride in workmanship. This comes through in the company's projects, which continually present its staff with new challenges—most recently with the Amgen Canada Building in Mississauga, Ontario.

The building's interior features a large, wing-shaped wall that transitions to the exterior's front face. Westmount's craftsmanship and state-of-the-art facility produced a solution that supported and concealed the seams while maintaining the building's aesthetics. "We were successful, and the customer was very pleased," Messore says.

Operating as a one-stop shop often gives Westmount the upper hand when faced with challenging projects. Its use of the latest 3-D design software and CNC equipment helped with the sloped walls and compound mitered corners of the three-storey Mammoet building in Edmon-

ton. And its current work on four new MTO buildings throughout Ontario (as well as Durham College Student Center in Oshawa) involve the same challenges, with sloped walls, a suspended curtain wall, and compound mitered corners. "We use the solved challenges of past projects to overcome new challenges," Messore says.

While Mitchell is still involved at Westmount, quoting the majority of projects and acting as project manager on most of his own sites, the management team is busy preparing for his retirement. Staff is being put in place to help slowly reduce Mitchell's heavy workload. Management also continues to pursue cutting-edge technology, create a positive environment for its employees, and achieve steady company growth of 5–10 percent per year. Says Messore: "We are quickly making a name for ourselves in the industry." CBQ

A MESSAGE FROM COMMDOOR ALUMINUM:

Commdoor Aluminum has been in business for more than 20 years, providing aluminum windows, curtain wall, entrances, and doors. The growth and strength of Commdoor comes from its strong relationship with Westmount Storefront Systems. We are committed to providing excellent service and initiating development of new products in response to the needs of all of our clients. Westmount Storefront Systems has long been a supportive customer of Commdoor Aluminum, and in return we remain committed to the ongoing relationship between our two companies. Commdoor will continue to develop its curtain-wall systems and entranceways to meet the demand of an ever-changing marketplace.

A MESSAGE FROM ARGOSY PARTNERS LTD.:

The Succession Fund of Toronto buys shares from selling shareholders in owner-operated businesses and helps resolve family-business-ownership transition issues. When business owners want to buy out one or more of their shareholders, or want to sell some of their own shares for succession planning purposes, this unique private-equity fund has a solution. The Fund buys shares in a direct secondary-share purchase and does not complete its transactions using debt. The Succession Fund becomes the new partner for the continuing management team, often owning a significant minority share position and becoming involved at the board-of-directors level. The Succession Fund adds value by improving the depth of management teams and by providing financial and strategic input to support corporate growth plans. The Succession Fund is a proud investor in Westmount Storefront Systems, where it helped the founder achieve a partial liquidity solution by taking "Chips off the Table."