



Kitchener firm's patcher puts heat on potholes

By Chuck Howitt, Record staff

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KITCHENER – Bob Kieswetter calls it one of the biggest untold stories of the road construction industry.

When new highways are built or repaved, the centre-line joint linking the two lanes is often not sealed properly, causing potholes and cracks to appear prematurely, he says.

Exhibit number one is Highway 401 between Kitchener and Toronto. A few years ago, cracks and potholes along its centre line made travelling to Toronto like driving on the moon, he says.

The province let the problem get so bad it ended up milling up and replacing the entire surface of the road, when proper repairs to the joint could have saved big bucks in maintenance costs, Kieswetter says.

His Kitchener company, Heat Design Equipment Inc., makes a joint heater to fix problems like the 401 crevice, plus a series of patchers and asphalt recyclers that can defeat almost any pothole, crack or pavement imperfection.

Its expertise is in such demand that twice it fixed cracked joints on special asphalt in front of the White House in Washington.

The key to the company's technology is an infrared heater that warms up the surrounding pavement and the new or existing asphalt to create a seamless and long-lasting patch, Heat Design says.

"Just using hot mix alone will make that patch last longer than traditional cold patch," says Kieswetter's 33-year-old son, Matt, vice-president of technical sales at Heat Design.

Throwing away used asphalt is a no-no at Heat Design, which makes several asphalt recyclers, including one dubbed the "pizza oven," to reheat the chunky black material right at the roadside.

That he is still travelling all over the continent flogging pavement repair equipment at age 65 amuses Bob Kieswetter.



rec-heat design-13. Bob Kieswetter (left) owner of Heat Design Equipment Inc., and his son, Matt, stand next to an infrared asphalt heater used to repair potholes and road cracks. Record staff Source: Record staff

He and brother Bryan ran B&B Kieswetter Excavating for 24 years until shutting down day-to-day operations in 2002. The company operated seven gravel pits in Waterloo Region including one that houses Heat Design's 6,000-square-foot office and manufacturing facility on Bleams Road.

In 1995, impressed by an infrared heater sold by Heat Design, they bought the company from founder and inventor Allen Neufeldt, who started the firm back in 1976.

After buying out his brother's interest in 2002, Bob thought it would be simple to sell the infrared heaters and related equipment in semi-retirement.

But the product and its potential for revolutionizing road construction demanded more than his part-time attention, he says with a laugh.

While half of its customers are municipalities and private contractors in Canada, including the three cities in Waterloo Region, Heat Design has clients in the U.S. and as far away as South America, Europe and Asia.

Working the trade show circuit is part of the company's marketing strategy. Last week it was in Memphis and in December Bob travelled to Alaska.

Though design and final assembly of heaters, patchers and truck attachments is done in-house, much of the fabrication work, including laser cutting, forming, painting and some welding, is farmed out to companies in the area.

A sister company, co-owned by Bob and Matt, called Infrared Pavement Repair Corp., repairs and maintains parking lots for commercial and industrial clients in the area.

One of Heat Design's best customers is the state of Tennessee. About four years ago it researched ways of improving road and centre-line joint construction. Part of the study included evaluating the technology of seven companies, including Heat Design. The Kitchener company came out on top, says Bob Kieswetter.

Since then Heat Design has sold six asphalt recyclers to the state and nine joint heaters to contractors in Tennessee, he says.

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