

# Mission possible

*DF Barnes looks to the future, a stable prosperous workforce in Newfoundland*

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SPECIAL TO THE TELEGRAM

Gerry Byrne is on a mission. The president of DF Barnes Ltd. is determined to bring home as many Newfoundlanders who want to return to the island.

"Newfoundlanders love to put their boots on in their own homes," he says. "I think what you're going to see is eventually Newfoundland is going to have a stable workforce ... we'll be able to live in our own homes and take our boots off in our own homes and I think that's every Newfoundlanders' dream and that day will come and I am convinced of it."

DF Barnes isn't a fly-by-night company looking to take advantage of the resources available in Newfoundland and Labrador and then run off with the kitty, Byrne says.

Created as a manufacturing shop in 1932, EF Barnes was originally a manufacturing company with a focus on the marine industries and even built the biggest iron ship ever in the 1960s.

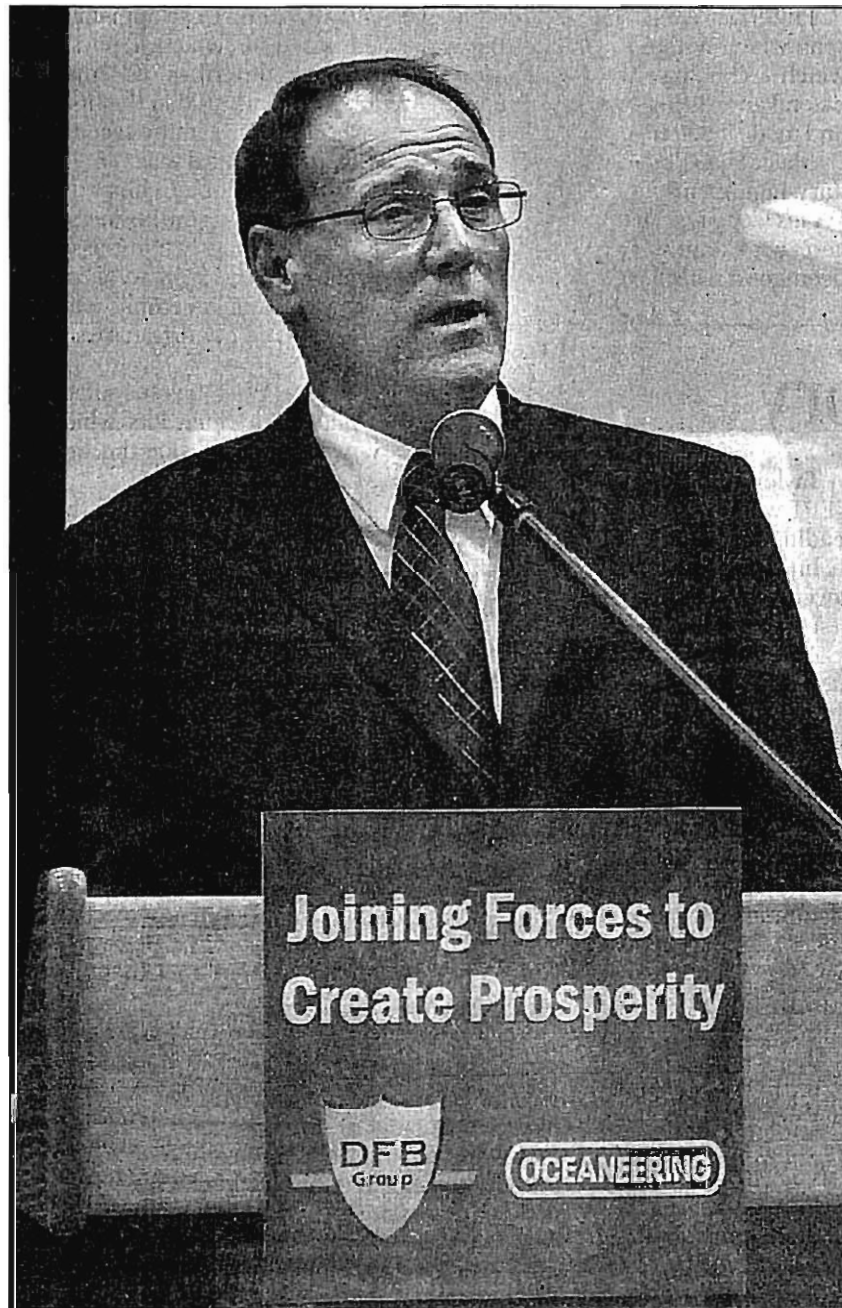
With an evolving purpose, focusing in on welding, the company went through many ups and downs financially and in the 1980s shifted to preparing to work solely for projects in the oil and gas industry.

"But the offshore didn't go," Byrne says. "So by the time 1987 came along the company was really in bad financial shape."

Byrne's brother, Doug, was working as a welder with the company and with another worker saw where it was headed. The pair became partners and decided to buy out EF Barnes in 1987, however they weren't permitted to take the name with them. The company name was changed to DF Barnes.

The company did quite well in its location on the waterfront in St. John's until the city decided in 1999 that the waterfront should be for tourists and not welders.

Byrne, who was living in Virginia at the time, often spoke with his brother



D.F. Barnes president Gerry Byrne.

about the shop and told him they would find a better location.

And in 2001 they did.

The company which was working out of the 2,000 square foot waterfront location moved to a 10,000 square foot warehouse space on Sudbury Street,

further up Water Street.

Around the time of the move the company was succeeding, but with the departure of one of the partners the business end was beginning to fishtail. As a welder, Byrne's brother knew how to manage the shop and

complete orders but not how to take care of the books and other business challenges.

"They were getting really stressed out over that and I had an opportunity then to leave Virginia and take over as president of DF Barnes and we put together a business plan starting off with the offshore oil industry," Byrne says of his big move in 2002.

The company started with a three-year vision - the first business plan that had ever been drafted for the then 70-year-old company.

"When I got there we had like three computers in the place, we had 10 or 12 people on average, sales were on average \$1 million a year. A nice little business, very profitable but limited in its scope and abilities, mostly because it didn't have a plan and a vision."

At present, the business is comprised of seven integrated companies that employ nearly 300 people, there is plenty more technology including 75 computers with sophisticated, industry-specific software. DF Barnes alone is worth more than \$20 million and has 70 employees.

"Our mission is to become an international company for export manufacturing and contracting work with a head office here in St. John's, Newfoundland," and Byrne says. "It's been amazing."

The most recent phase of the DF Barnes plan, and probably Byrne's most ambitious goal, is to not only be creating the products needed for Newfoundland's offshore oil industry, but to tackle projects in Alberta too.

It's a personal crusade to be able to have people in this province working here to provide products for Alberta's oil sands projects.

"We didn't want to lose all our people to Alberta so what we tried to do is create a duality where we could have a large contingent of people here in Newfoundland, we could have an operation up in Alberta and grow both of those opportunities to the advantage of and to the benefit of us and the company and the province itself," he says.

And the downhome boys are just

happy to be working for Newfoundland-owned company while they put in their time in Alberta.

"They know that we have a vested interest in their future they know that we're on a mission to bring them home in the long term, they know that if they're out in Alberta for an extended period of time that ... there's lots of other people here that want to go to Alberta and take their place."

Technology keeps the two far-away contingents of the company close and, in time, Byrne says, there will be enough projects happening in Newfoundland and Labrador to bring everyone back home.

The North West Passage will be an incredible advantage when it comes to competing for work in Alberta and, he says, the company is building up a loyal - and more importantly - young workforce, that when brought home, will mean a future for Newfoundland.

Unlike other skilled-trades workforces in the province, Byrne says, the average age of a DF Barnes worker is 33.

"There's \$184 billion been identified in capital projects in Alberta in the next five years and, I mean, we need a made in Canada solution not a made in China solution," he says. "Here we are with all of this capacity and thousands of people who don't want to go away and so the more skilled workers that we can bring into this province ... you got to take advantage of every opportunity you can get."

Byrne calls it a "really special incentive" for the people he has working for Newfoundland in Alberta.

"If somebody wants to be out in Alberta then they can stay in Alberta but if they're having problems at home and they need to stay home for a few rotations then we ... can send some one else to Alberta," he says. "The guys know that we are growing in Newfoundland and Labrador and that ultimately they will be able to come home and retire with DF Barnes in Newfoundland and Labrador."

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