

ALASKA THIS MONTH • POWER LUNCH • ENGINEERING SECTION

# Alaska Business

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MONTHLY

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**Women of the Oil Patch**  
Breaking new ground  
in a traditionally  
man's world



**FEATURING:**

**Michael L. Foster & Associates Inc.**

**Proud to provide quality engineering  
and construction services.**

**Sherri Kelly**  
Project Manager  
West Dock  
North Slope  
BP Exploration

# Michael L. Foster & Associates Inc.

Proud to provide quality engineering  
and construction services.



*The operator, an MLFA employee, prepares to load a Northstar Trucking Inc. side dump using an Alaska Construction Equipment Inc. 450 excavator. Approximately 40,000 tons of contaminated soil was transported from Whittier to Anchorage during the winter for thermal processing.*

BY BROOKE PIELLI

**W**e're a different kind of animal in a different kind of world, explained Michael Foster, owner of Michael L. Foster & Associates Inc. Located in Eagle River, in the An-

chorage Bowl area, the company known as MLFA was established in 1998. Its mission at that time was to provide quality planning and engineering services to Alaska clients while emphasizing client

satisfaction and project performance. While its mission has not changed, those services have expanded over the years to include the resources and skills of Alaska Construction Equipment Inc.,

Northstar Trucking Inc., and Michael L. Foster Properties LLC, all owned by Foster.

With the combined resources of all four companies, MLFA can, and does, service its clients from the inception of the idea to its ultimate completion. Foster believes that this positive response to clients' needs is a tribute to the economic climate in Alaska, as well as to the careful planning and professionalism of MLFA.

"The market is so good here," states Foster, "although reputation, service and innovation are critical to success."

Over the past nine years, some of MLFA's projects have included HTRW remediation projects for the DOD, design/build of a state-of-the-art maintenance facility, and water and sewer improvements for rural Alaska communities. MLFA additionally offers its consulting services for cold regions, environmental and geotechnical engineering for investigation, design and construction projects, preparation of documents for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, geodetic surveys and mapping, as well as litigation support.

All this didn't just happen. It is the end result of a professional lifetime of understanding the business needs of clients, as well as a unique familiarity with Alaska.

Michael Foster grew up in the Glennallen area during the pre-pipeline years. Fresh out of high school, he went to work on the trans-Alaska oil pipeline as an equipment operator. "It was during this project, that I knew I wanted to be an engineer."

He went on to earn a bachelor's degree in civil/structural engineering from Oklahoma State University and a master's degree in Arctic Engineering from the University of Alaska Anchorage.

For a number of years he was employed with the Dames and Moore Group, an international engineering and consulting company, where he served as a senior vice president and corporate officer.

When Dames and Moore was acquired by URS, Foster thought about retirement. But it didn't last long as "several of his clients contacted him

about their projects." Shortly thereafter, MLFA was formed. MLFA then proposed on four large defense contracts, hoping to get just one, but ended up with all four. "With the existing work, and the new DOD contracts," Foster states, "MLFA had to grow to meet the needs of our clients. Finding quality staff is always difficult, but in this market it is even harder."

Some people might have faltered at that point, perhaps even given up and given in.

However, Foster has earned a reputation of meeting aggressive schedules and successfully completing challenging projects.

"It only took me a couple of months," he said, "to add 20 people to our team." Many of them had worked for him at Dames & Moore.

Foster has hardly looked back since then. "I don't regret for a minute all the hard work and hours that I have put in to build a quality organization.

"The technical side still requires attention," he said, "but I like what I am doing."

One of his favorite projects was the design and construction management of the sewer improvements for his hometown of Glennallen. "It was a very rewarding experience to help improve the living conditions of the folks I grew up with."

In 2002, Foster started Alaska Construction Equipment Inc. (ACE) to provide heavy equipment leasing services and sales for MLFA and its clients.

"Over the next two years, we spent about \$5 million on new equipment. We specialized on the heavy end of stuff." He even went as far as Scotland to buy off-road 40-ton dumps for the Pogo project.

In 2004, tired of dealing with trucking companies not delivering on time, Foster added Northstar Trucking Inc. (NST), which specializes in heavy hauling.

In 2005, this new way of doing business was put to the test when MLFA was tasked with excavating and transporting 40,000 tons of contaminated soil from the DOD facility in Whittier to Anchorage. "We utilized the resources of MLFA, ACE and NST on this one project." MLFA provided the engineering and construction



*The sewage lagoon expansion project was done by Michael L. Foster and Associates Inc. (MLFA) in Glennallen. MLFA was responsible for the design and construction management for the project. The expansion included a 2.5-acre facultative primary lagoon and a 5-acre percolation secondary lagoon.*

support, while ACE provided the heavy equipment, and NST transported all of the contaminated soil to Anchorage for processing.

"Innovation and Services, that's what we bring to a project," explained Foster.

In 2006 Michael L. Foster Projects LLC was formed "to hold our real estate assets," said Foster. With the four companies we can work on just about any project and know that we will have all the resources, the equipment and the people we need, when we need them."

This attention to detail and innovation is extended to all of MLFA's clients.

However, Foster worries that "the work force in Alaska is extremely taxed, and finding qualified and experience individuals is challenging."

Foster also is concerned that "Alaska's oil production is in decline and, therefore, our dependency on foreign oil is increasing. By exploring and producing our oil reserves here at home, it will result in more stability and national security. We also need to develop our natural gas resources to supply our energy needs, as well as those of the nation."

Foster adds, "the future of Alaska in the world market is promising, and our role in providing services to support these needs is exciting." □

www.mlfaalaska.com

(907) 696-6200

13135 Old Glenn Highway Suite 200; Eagle River, Alaska 99577

# Michael L. Foster & Associates, Inc.



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