

BEST MANAGED

Grascan Construction Ltd.

Mary Teresa Bitti, Special to Financial Post | March 10, 2015 | Last Updated: Mar 10 7:35 AM ET

Website: grascan.com

Location: Toronto

Sector: Construction (infrastructure)

Market: Southern Ontario

Size: 60-100 employees

Grascan Construction's portfolio includes some of the most complex infrastructure projects in Southern Ontario. Co-founders Angelo Grassa and John Balazic are overseeing the \$75-million redecking of Toronto's Gardiner Expressway. This, on the heels of the successful completion of the West Toronto Diamond Bridge slide — one of the



most difficult projects in the history of Metrolinx.

"We built the bridges off to the side of the tracks and then slid four bridges into place within seven-hour time openings between rail traffic," says Grassa. "This had never been done before in Canada."

It's a far cry from the basic roadwork Grascan undertook when it launched in 1987. It wasn't long before the founders decided to focus on more challenging, unique public-sector projects and in the process compete against multinational firms 10 times their size — and win. "The bigger the challenge, we're in," says Grassa. "We are highly focused and prepared to expand and go anywhere to get the technology, expertise and knowledge to do high-risk, high-reward work."

The company has also developed a reputation for getting out in front of where the industry is heading in terms of adopting leading-edge technologies, techniques and safety practices, including becoming COR-certified. "It's



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important for us to be at the front of the line when it comes to everything from time management to specialized equipment to computer-assisted costing.”

While all of this has helped the company attack challenging projects, Grassa credits Grascan’s success to the work



ethic, dedication and innovative mindset of its people.

“We are a service-oriented business. We build and fix things. There’s no secret formula. From the top to the bottom, our people are motivated, passionate and committed to the satisfaction they get from the work they do. From Day One we have focused on attracting the best and providing them with the best tools to do their job.”

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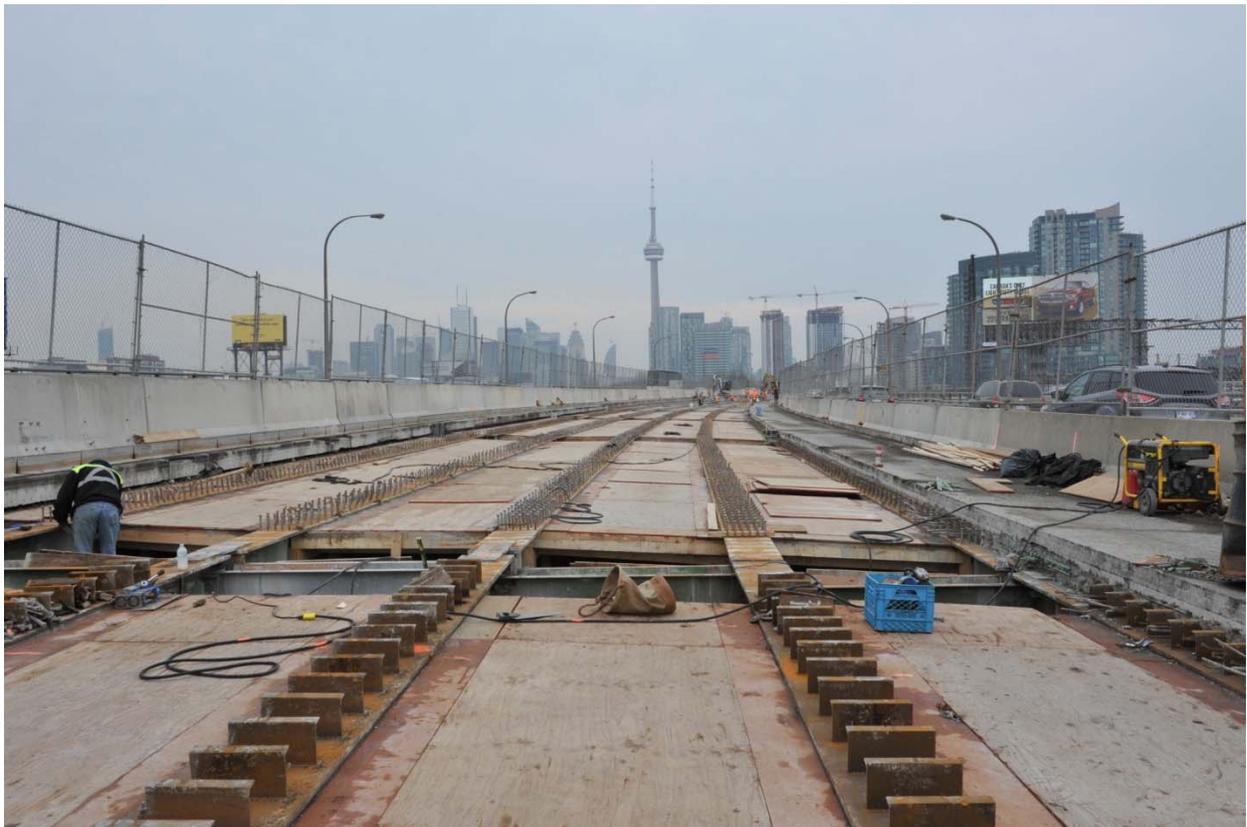
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Grascan Construction has demonstrated a willingness to take on difficult jobs — such as Toronto's Gardiner Expressway.

Successful companies know the need to innovate

“Best Managed companies are extremely customer-centric and increasingly using CRM [customer relationship management] systems and data to really understand their client base and identify the markets they should be in,” says Mike Runia, national co-leader of Canada's Best Managed Companies program and Ontario managing partner, Deloitte. “They are also entering these markets through partnership arrangements that help manage downside risk and create upside opportunities.”



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That's exactly what Best Managed winner Grasca Construction Ltd. has done. Angelo Grassa and John Balazic, co-founders of the Toronto-based company, understood early that they wanted to focus on the most complex and challenging infrastructure projects. To do that they would have to broaden their knowledge base by tapping into the expertise of partners and subcontractors.

"It has opened us up to new ideas and techniques and helped us compete successfully against much larger global competitors. At the same time, these relationships minimize our risk when taking on jobs that haven't been done here before," says Grassa.

"Risk is the unknown. The minute you shed light on it, it's not risk any more. We have a lot of risk because we are the first to tackle the projects we take on. We can discuss projects with people from around the world with similar demographics and landscapes to learn how they achieved certain goals and to shed some light on what we need to do. There is always risk, but we've minimized it by opening all the cupboards."

Grasca's willingness to serve as an industry pathfinder is nicely illustrated by its approach to a significant project in Toronto. The company is working on the \$75-million re-decking of the crumbling Gardiner Expressway. The first step: learning how to dismantle it — something no other contractor in Ontario had done before. Grasca reached out to partners that have tackled similar projects.

"We learned [that] how you put it up is how you take it down. Did we know that? No. Partners helped us get there," says Grassa. "We also developed specialty forming techniques geared to work in cold weather and speed up the process. We were able to do this thanks to the unique relationships we've developed and the experience of the people around us. Will it work? We're in the third phase of a six-phase project — ahead of schedule."

