

GeoRocFor goes the extra distance to keep their customers up and running—literally

When a single piece of equipment breaks down, it can start a chain reaction of delay that has the potential to stall an entire construction project. In June of 2016, a company called Thomas Drilling, at work on a bridge project near Saranac, New York, was facing just that possibility. But, thanks to some creative customer service on the part of drilling parts manufacturer GeoRocFor of Sherbrooke, Quebec, an equipment failure that could have been a big problem turned out to be just a momentary wrinkle.

Thomas Drilling Inc., based in Spofford, New Hampshire, has been in business for 42 years. Since it was founded by Carl B. Thomas in 1971, it has become one of the largest drilling contractors in New England and is now run by Carl's son, David Thomas.

The company provides specialized drilling services of all sizes, for uses ranging from the smallest rock anchor to the largest quarry blast. "We do everything from furnishing the material to drilling, casing, installing, grouting and testing all different types of rock and soil anchors," says Thomas Drilling estimator, operations manager and project manager John Whittaker.

"We do micropiles for bridge abutments, anchors for wind towers, foundations for cell phone towers, tiebacks for slope stabilization and everything from small hole drilling up to 36 inches in diameter," he says.

On that particular June day, Thomas Drilling was working as a subcontractor on a New York State Department of Transportation (NYDOT) project to provide drilled micro piles for the replacement of the True Brook Road Bridge, which crosses over True Brook near the town of Saranac.

"We drilled, cased, installed and grouted thirty-six 8.625-inch diameter drilled micropiles through the overburden into ledge," he says. Unfortunately and unexpectedly, the shank bit failed in mid-job.

"We needed to get a replacement as soon as possible so we could stay on schedule with the project," says Whittaker.

It was a tough situation. If the bit could not be replaced quickly, "it would have definitely delayed the completion of the overall project and would have put our GC (General Contractor) behind schedule as well; it would have had a domino effect," he points out.

There aren't very many companies manufacturing down-the-hole casing systems and drill bits in Canada, but GeoRocFor is one of them. In fact, the company, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2015, is known as a leading manufacturer of drilling tools and an industry leader in overburden casing systems. Add in the fact that GeoRocFor's facilities are only about three hours by car from Saranac, and the company was uniquely situated to come to the rescue—literally.

As it turned out, solving the problem was as simple as making a phone call. "GeoRocFor happened to have [the right bit] in stock, and with the logistics of them being in Canada and us being in the United States, they were gracious enough to meet our superintendent in an agreed-upon location that same evening, and were able to bring it back and get back into production the same day," says Whittaker.

It's a little uncommon to receive a shipment of drilling equipment in the trunk of a private car, but sometimes that's what it takes to keep a job on schedule. "Their attentiveness to our needs was commendable," Whittaker says. "They're very, very customer-oriented and wanting to provide good products and good customer service."

In short, he concludes, "We love doing business with them."

By Sarah B. Hood