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## Handling Specialty celebrates its global reach



**Handling Specialty celebrates its global reach.** Staff at Grimsby-based Handling Specialty recently gathered for the unveiling of their new landmark on the front lawn of the business. Company president Thomas Beach and Grimsby Mayor Bob Bentley did the honours after a meeting to discuss some of the company's most recent major projects, including underwater stages for major aqua-theatres in Macau and on two Royal Caribbean cruise ships. *Scott Rosts/Staff Photo*

### Scott Rosts

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The yellow scissor lift that stood in front of Handling Specialty for 30 years was a familiar sight for people travelling through Grimsby.

So last fall when the landmark was removed, it prompted calls and e-mails to company president Thomas Beach.

"We got calls asking if we were closing down – it was synonymous with us," said Beach.

Now, the Grimsby company has an even more meaningful landmark in front of its head office on the South Service Road. What was once a rusting sphere found in a field, was converted in house to become the focal point of the new symbol — a small chrome lift, heaving a spinning globe into the air. It's a symbol, said Beach, of the company's global reach with projects that have reached as far as China and Finland.

"This is kind of a new chapter for us," said Beach. "The globe signifies our evolution from the North American market, to serving custom projects and applications on a global scale."

Several years ago Handling Specialty was in the spotlight when it welcomed officials from Lockheed Martin's Joint Strike Fighter program to Grimsby. That partnership, which dates back to 2003, continues today, with Handling Specialty working on multiple projects for various Lockheed Martin facilities in the United States.

The company has reached even further abroad over the past few years, however, with its most recently projects including an underwater stage at the House of Dancing Water in Macau, China, and aqua-theatres – including underwater lifts, tilting diving boards and even a rotating trampoline - for the Royal Caribbean International cruise ships Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas, which featured custom work in Turku, Finland.

"These are very exciting projects for us," said Beach, who recently showcased the projects to Grimsby Mayor Bob Bentley, who helped unveil the new landmark out front of their headquarters. "They will ultimately open the door to even more projects across the globe for us."

That, said Beach, is in part proved by the success of these recent projects, which represent tens of millions of dollars in contracts for the company — Macau at \$21 million, and the Royal Caribbean ships at \$8.5 million. Handling Specialty originally built its reputation for constructing unique and innovative solutions when it built the world's largest underwater hydraulic stage for the Cirque du Soleil show, O. The project, at the Bellagio in Las Vegas, earned them recognition from Guinness for the world record.

"That has really helped us," said Beach, noting it was integral to the work in Macau. "It was the first time we really made our mark in the entertainment industry, and now we've been able to forge that reputation with some of these other innovative projects we've done."

Innovation, he said, has been the key. The company has worked hard to create products that meet very technical standards requested by the clients. The project in Macau, which is featured in the City of Dreams Casino, features not only the underwater stage lift, but also the specifications to make the water "dance" throughout the show. About 1.5 million holes were water-jet cut into the flooring to allow the water to flow, and escape, as quickly as possible. The project, which took about 1.7 miles of continuous seal weld to weld the carbon steel, features eight lifts with a capacity to lift 322,000 lbs., the equivalent of about 80 minivans. It took over two years to complete.

The lifts for the cruise ships, Beach explained, included work to hide diving boards, and even a rotating Olympic trampoline that is used by aerialists during performances. Throughout the day and evening, the lifts can be raised and lowered to meet the needs of the various performances. The system is made up of two side lifts and a runway lift, with a total capacity of 90,000 lbs., covering an area of approximately 1,000 sq. ft. The aqua-theatre premise is something that has never been done before, and the sheer detail and size is staggering. For example, there are 3,500 bolts and a kilometre and a half of welding in the turn-key installations.

While starting primarily in the automotive sector, Handling Specialty has diversified immensely since it was founded in 1963, now moving into industries such as aerospace, defence, advanced manufacturing and entertainment.

"These are the types of projects we want to continue to evolve and complete," said Beach. "We're so much more diversified than we were years ago, and we want to continue to look at innovative projects like these."

Beach said the company will continue to aggressively seek further projects on a global scale, and while its strong reputation is already helping through word of mouth, it is using modern tools such as social media to help spread the word and reach out to companies in North America, and overseas. He said he is proud of what the company is accomplished and its workforce has been key in the success to date.

"We've got good skilled people, and that's an important," he said. "Our outstanding people help make us what we are."

Beach said the company is also proud to say some of these innovative projects are also made right in small-town Grimsby.

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