

# The *Aluminium Times* profile: Eloise Harvey, President, Mecfor Inc



Eloise Harvey B.Eng. & Mgmt, is President of Mecfor Inc..

**The purchase of intellectual property from Brochot SA features product areas similar to Mecfor. Can you advise the strategy behind the acquisition? What advantages and new product areas will it bring to Mecfor?**

The purchase of Brochot Intellectual Property (Aluminium Magnesium division) is a great opportunity for Mecfor. Brochot's line of products is in some cases similar but for the most part complementary to Mecfor's expertise. In the long run, we expect that this acquisition will broaden Mecfor's offer, allowing us to bid on larger packages that will include diverse equipment (in a turnkey approach), not to mention that Brochot SA was active on markets Mecfor is trying to grow in, like Russia and China, while also having a far more active presence in India.

In the past, Mecfor had the opportunity to purchase the aluminium division of another Canadian equipment manufacturer (Vallée) that added various casthouse equipment to our existing line of products. The integration of Vallée vehicles in Mecfor's offer has proven

to be very successful. Most importantly, the clients were the ones to benefit the most from the transaction, as they continued to get the best casthouse solution for their plants with the improved quality and reliability that is a key characteristic of Mecfor's equipment.

This deal will certainly help to consolidate Mecfor's leading position as an equipment designer and manufacturer of specialised equipment for aluminium smelters, and will definitely benefit our clients as well.

**How did Mecfor begin and eventually become so well known in the aluminium industry? I remember meeting you and frequently seeing you at TMS shows in the USA.**

Mecfor started by responding to the very specific needs of our local North American smelters. Being located within 600 km of 12 primary smelters/casthouses, we had plenty of creative and highly involved clients with whom to develop new equipment. From the early very customised projects, we moved into a series of more standard products such as anode and

crucible haulers, casthouse vehicles and anode grooving machines (to name a few) over the years. We rapidly gained an excellent reputation by designing and manufacturing sturdy and reliable equipment for the harsh working environment of aluminium smelters. Above all, the fact that Mecfor stands behind its equipment and keeps its word is what has made Mecfor known in the industry. We never let down a client, so over time, we have gained trust from our customers.

Mecfor is also known for listening to its customers' needs and being very creative in its approach. Until the customer's challenge is resolved, Mecfor is there with them, standing by at every step. Our main purpose is to help our customers to perform their operations efficiently, safely and at the lowest possible cost without compromising quality.

Of course we have attended tradeshows and have bought advertisements, but I trust that what distinguishes Mecfor is the reputation I just spoke about, and our dedication to our clients. It makes our team proud. They are proud of our products and of our attitude towards our clientele. Each of our team is also very focused on innovation, as we want to propose to our customers the best of the industry. For example, automation is an area where we work hard because we know that it brings a lot of direct value to the smelters.

**Can you advise of your background in the aluminium industry and rise to your current position as President of Mecfor?**

Mecfor was a very small business that served a limited number of clients in our region when I joined in 1999. I had just finished a mechanical engineering degree coupled with a bachelor of business management, and my father asked me to take the technical representative job for this new addition to our group of family companies (comprising Cegertec WorleyParsons – engineering, Cegerco – construction, Cegerdev – real estate development, and Mecfor – equipment manufacturing). I occupied many sales and development related positions within Mecfor over the years, but was highly involved in all aspects of the business. I spent much of my time travelling the world and visiting smelters, talking to clients and sitting back with our engineering team trying to find solutions for those same clients. I accepted the President position because we have a very strong and capable VP General Manager who manages every aspect of the business. I get involved in strategic projects such as the Brochot IP acquisition, but running the company on a day to day basis is left to André Martel and his management team.

**The company is based in Saguenay in Quebec. How many people do you employ? Is it difficult to attract the qualified staff that you need? What facilities do you have in Quebec? What staff changes will the purchase of Brochot products bring to the company?**

At the present time, Mecfor employs about 100 people in two manufacturing plants and a head office in Saguenay, the heart of the Aluminium Valley. Being located in a remote region certainly brings some challenges, such as finding bilingual and highly mobile staff, but it also has its upside. We operate in a community where aluminium is a second nature to most citizens! Everyone works, knows someone that works or that has worked in an aluminium smelter in our city!

Mecfor has gained a great maturity and I feel that we are now on the edge of a new era with an excellent management team in place. This team has the competency to take on new challenges such as the integration of the Brochot IP and products into our portfolio. Our systems, procedures and processes are also well established, and that will allow a smooth and seamless integration of Brochot and then growth of the business. We now have a physical presence in France (close to Lille and Paris) and have hired some of the most knowledgeable individuals that used to work for Brochot to ensure an efficient transition.

**With the acquisition of Brochot products, will Mecfor maintain any facilities in France and Europe? Is this an opportunity for Mecfor products to further establish a European foothold?**

Our presence in France, through an office and warehouse for parts and services, allows us to quickly and efficiently respond to requests from clients worldwide regarding their existing Brochot equipment. We have set rapid growth targets for this new division. The services that are offered from this office could be expanded, if it makes sense for our customers.

**Which two Mecfor products would you like to bring to our readers attention? Could you add a third from the Brochot range too?**

*Mecfor*

With eleven (11) Anode Slot Cutting Machines in operation since 2003, two (2) under installation and four (4) others to be delivered in 2015-2016, Mecfor maintains its leading position in the market as the supplier of choice for such equipment.

As for our mobile equipment offer, customers are coming back to Mecfor and re-ordering their equipment at the end of their vehicles' life. A customer that keeps on coming back speaks for itself! We are very proud to have made our vehicles evolve technically year after year while managing important cost reduction simultaneously through clever engineering practices and partnership with our suppliers.

*Brochot*

The pot ramming machine, co-developed with Pechiney, is today recognised worldwide. There are more than one hundred and thirty (130) pot ramming machines in sixty (60) smelters worldwide. The last ones were delivered to RTA



The Mecfor shop and manufacturing of haulers for the aluminium industry.

## Here are some of my favourite things...

### **Favourite food:**

I love Italian food but then again I love food in general!

### **Favourite drink:**

Wine, but good wine

### **The last film I saw was:**

The Avengers 2 (didn't I say I have four kids!)

### **Holiday this year will be to:**

Ireland with my husband, staying in a castle, and a Caribbean cruise with the family.

### **The book I am reading now is:**

Game of Thrones (again!)

### **My favourite TV programme now is:**

The Borgias

### **Best gadget I have is:**

My iphone of course

### **The car I drive is:**

An Audi Q5 because it has the best towing capacity of its category and I have to transport my horses around in a nice "aluminium" trailer.

### **My favourite sport is:**

Horseback riding and boxing

### **The person I would like or would have liked, to have dinner with is:**

My grandmother, whom I never had the chance to know. I hear she was the one with the business sense in the family...

products will benefit from the high quality standards of Mecfor.

**The primary aluminium sector has seen many changes over the past few years. Would you like to comment on your view as to how the primary sector might develop over the next five years and how this might fit with your strategy within the company?**

With the constant pressure on operating costs, existing smelters must become innovative and creative in the way they operate. Mecfor has developed on average two (2) new products per year, every year, for the past fifteen (15) years. Our engineering team works hand in hand with our clients to come up with new custom equipment that will meet that challenge of reducing operating costs. We also choose to invest in R&D to offer new technologies that will show an important return on investment (ROI) for our clients in their various sectors of activity.

**Also, can you advise whether your equipment can assist the secondary sector?**

The "Mecfor Casthouse Solution" currently serves the secondary sector well. We have sold this concept to important secondary plants both in the Americas and in Europe. The "Mecfor Casthouse Solution" streamlines the fleet of mobile equipment in operation. It brings many advantages, as it:

- Fully integrates to the process work cycle
- Provides access to a variety of tools for furnace tending, cleaning and charging but also for towing, rodding and handling
- Increases production and productivity in a safe manner
- Increases furnace refractory life
- Reduces the number of required vehicles.

**How does Mecfor keep up to date with the latest technology and product improvements?**

Mecfor has Product Advisors in charge of specific equipment. Each of them has the mandate to keep their industry/technology knowledge up to date. We have also developed a strong working relationship with our key suppliers and we involve them in our thought process during the design of equipment. They always have plenty of ideas and new technologies to introduce to our team. We integrate operators and maintenance crew

AP60 and Kitimat. Their main characteristics are reliability and sturdiness. We will certainly continue to improve and bring innovation to this leading product.

In addition, with the acquisition of Brochot IP, we are now able to provide fully equipped rodding shops by supplying either on a turnkey basis or individual machines. The same applies for the anode handling equipment. These

members from our clients' operations into our design workshop and take into consideration their views and ideas as well.

**Are there research and development facilities within the company or do you have use of other out-of-house resources?**

All design and conceptualisation of R&D is made internally. Depending of the nature of the project, we conclude partnerships with customers for testing the technology in a real working environment.

**Do you travel a lot? Where have you just come back from and where to next? How do you manage the company?**

I did an awful lot of travelling during the first ten years of my career with Mecfor when I was heading the Sales Department. Since I became President of Mecfor, I also took an active role as VP Corporate Development of the Holding company Groupe Ceger (majority shareholder of Mecfor). This dual role, paired with the fact that we have a strong sales team within the company and a great General Manager, André Martel, means that our clients and partners are very well covered by them and that I can concentrate only on specific strategic projects for Mecfor.

**Are you good at delegating?**

Yes, I need to... being a mother of four (4) and

overseeing the four (4) companies of Le Groupe Ceger. I have learned to delegate quickly in my career and was lucky being surrounded by very competent colleagues. There is an African saying that I appreciate much: "If you want to travel fast, walk alone; if you want to travel far, walk together." Together is the key word and relies on trust, loyalty and respect, all of which we share and feel for each other at Mecfor. There is a bright side to delegating – it helps to keep the organisation alive by challenging ideas and strategies.

**How do you bring sales, design and engineering together?**

Sales, designs and engineering are tied together. Sales work closely with engineering and vice versa. Design is everywhere: it is the results of human genius. Mecfor is still a small enough business that the relationship between the various departments comes naturally. It is one big family trying to meet one objective – client satisfaction.

**The solutions which Mecfor provides for clients include training and after care service. Can you expand on the importance of these extras?**

For me, training and after-sale service are not extras, they are part of Mecfor's offer. I cannot

imagine offering specialised equipment without these two elements.

**Thank you for answering the questions. May I just ask one more question? The market in North America appears to be more buoyant than the previous ten years. Would you mention one reference of contract winning which really pleased you and benefited the company?**

We won the largest contract of Mecfor's short history with Alcoa Canada at the end of 2014 it was considered the largest both in the dollar amount and the number of vehicles. The contract was the supply of 18 anode and metal haulers for the Bécancour and the Deschambault smelters in Quebec. The competitiveness and stability over time of energy rates negotiated with the Quebec government has enabled Alcoa to see a good future for its Quebec installations and invest in new fleets.

This type of contract, where there are a large number of repeated vehicles fabricated, has allowed Mecfor's team to clearly get a feel for what larger volume production can bring in terms of productivity and cost savings. That knowledge will be of great help when bidding on future large mandates.

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