

# Stampede Drilling about to head out of the gates

□ **By Brian Zinchuk**

*Estevan* – A new drilling company is coming together in Estevan, with two rigs under construction. Stampede Drilling is set to launch operations this October with Rig 1, which is under assembly at Do-All Metal Fabricating's Estevan location. Rig 2 is on its way for the end of the year. Their rigs will be identifiable by their metallic silver paint and metallic red trim. The operating area is expected to be southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba.

The company is managed by Darrin MacKay, Bill Devins and Jackie White. "There are a number of local shareholders involved," White said. "It's broadly spread." "We started building the middle of July." MacKay acts as president, and handles sales out of Calgary. Devins is in somewhat of a CEO role, White said, and he's essentially quarterbacking the operation. "He wants to be called a roughneck," she said. White's role is secretary/treasurer, safety co-ordinator and office manager. "Everybody's roles are overlapping," she said.

The ownership is Saskatchewan-based. Both MacKay and Devins are originally from Saltcoats, White noted. Asked whose idea it was to form the company, White said, "We all kind of threw it out there. It was joking around, 'We should do this.' "We were approached by other people who are now shareholders who said, 'Why don't you?' So we jumped in up to our necks. In June the decision was made to go ahead.

"Darrin, Bill and I have made a good team over the years. We're all very different, but have a common goal." The rigs are being built by Do-All. "They have a good product, and are local. We are really trying to stay local," said White. The rig manager's shack is coming from Demby Trailer Ltd. of Weyburn. The engine packages are from Rouse Industries/Southern Industrial, also of Weyburn. "We're running Cats on everything," White said of the power package choices.

Each rig will have two mud pumps powered by Caterpillar C32 engines and a single-speed Rouse MPD1 gearbox. There will also be two Cat C15 450 kilowatt gen-sets per rig. The draw-works will have a Caterpillar C18 engine paired with a Cat CX35 transmission. This is only the second time such a pairing has been supplied by Rouse Industries. It's a fully electronic transmission with advanced electrical features. Having redundant mud pump and gen set systems provides peace of mind, according to White. "If one goes down, you're sitting," she said of rigs working with just one unit. "Companies don't want that. "Our goal is to lead the industry in equipment, safety and productivity."

Asked why they would fire up with two rigs from the get-go, White said, "Financially, it's a better decision to go with two. We feel we will not have any problems finding employees for two. "You go off the same pattern when you do them at the same time," she said. What is implemented on one rig is quickly done on the second, because you don't have to try to remember how that was accomplished the first time.

With approximately 30 fewer rigs working in Saskatchewan compared to the same time last year, there's not nearly as much pressure to find staff as the industry saw in 2011, when an active drilling rig record was set in August. Stampede has people coming to them from all over. "We've got resumes from Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba. We're just starting to get employees now," White said. "We have a big pool of good workers out there." Having a large pool to pick from is "definitely an advantage for us," she said. Once fired up with both rigs, the staff will be around 45 to 50. "You have to look within. Those first two rigs should man the rest of the company," she said, referring to the practice of developing staff and promoting from within. "We want to spend a lot of time with our guys, training, mentoring, passing down knowledge," White said.

By the first week of September, they were just getting their rig managers and drillers in place. “The training process is lengthy, and it should be lengthy. We, the industry, missed that the last few years. “We learn from the young guys,” White added. “They have different ideas. They’ve seen what works, what doesn’t.”

Rig 1 was coming together in September, with the substructure and derrick coming up from Glenburn, North Dakota, and the boiler also on its way from Alberta. “The rest of buildings are all being built in Estevan,” she said. Some of the recent rigs built by Do-All have had a slide-out in the doghouse, allowing the driller to work indoors. That’s a design philosophy Stampede chose not to take. White said with the driller on the floor, they have better vision, and better eye contact with the other hands. They will have a heater under the driller’s station and another for the roughnecks. It’s not a common thing to have one for the roughnecks, but she said they are going to try it.

“It’s not a cookie-cutter rig,” White said. “Our walkways around the buildings will be made of fibreglass instead of metal. They will all be light.” Everything is API, following CSA standards. Everything is (at that level) and above. There’s no iron roughneck, but there is an hydraulic catwalk.

Stampede will have their own loaders, bins and tanks. Management will not have their own rentals. Rig 1 is expected to go to work in mid- to late-October. Rig 2 is slated for December. “We’re hoping to get a hole or two in before Christmas,” White said. “We will be having an open house for shareholders and anyone interested before it goes out,” White said.

The company is eventually looking at a shop near Estevan. “We’re not building anything yet ourselves. It will come,” she said. “We’re planning to expand, absolutely. “Let’s see what the industry is doing, and where we’re at. We want to be a happy place to work, and treat our guys well.”

They intend on operating with eight-hour shifts, like most of the southeast Saskatchewan-based rigs. That means four crews per rig, each working three weeks on and one week off. “You’ve got to have a home life away from work,” White said about the choice not to go with 12-hour shifts. “Fatigue is hard on people. You end up killing someone on the road on the way home. “If you know you’re getting a week off, fun stuff can be planned for when you are off. They need a life. “A swing crew means guys can switch shifts when they need a day off for things like a wedding or banking.

“I’ve often heard you’ve got to like the guys you’re working with because you spend more time with them than your wife,” White said. To that end, the company intends on having leadership training and mentoring. “It takes special people to do it. “What makes a rig work? Iron is iron. It’s the guys – the motormen, the rig managers, the drillers, the derrick hands, the roughnecks. They make the rig work. “Don’t get me wrong. We’re proud of what we’re building. But we’ll be prouder of the men that make it work.”

Regarding the future of the industry, White said, “Right now it’s slow, I know that. But I don’t think it will be slow much longer. My crystal ball broke yesterday, so I only have today. “I think we’ll definitely be competitive. It’s the guys. If your guys are working for you, you’ll work.”