Dennis' Dirtworx LTD.

Founded in 2009 by Dennis Overweg, Dennis' Dirtworx Ltd. has grown from humble beginnings into one of Southern Alberta's largest excavation operations.



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Dennis' Dirtworx Ltd. started with one mini excavator purchased at an auction and a handful of small jobs around Coaldale. From digging basements to building lasting relationships, word spread and the calls kept coming. As the work grew, Dennis began bringing on subcontracted workers to help keep up with demand. What started as a small operation soon grew into something much bigger. Word of mouth carried the company from there. "Little by little he grew," says Kaley Van Der Meer, the company's HR and payroll manager, who has watched much of that growth from the inside. When she joined in June 2020, Dennis Dirtworx stood at roughly 120 people. Earlier this year it was around 250. Today it is upwards of 300. The one-man operation has become a full-spectrum excavation contractor working across agricultural, commercial, industrial, and civil scopes, with demolition capability alongside, throughout southern Alberta.

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TWO SEASONS, ONE WORKFORCE

The company's year is built around a deliberate rhythm. Spring, summer, and fall carry the bulk of the civil and agricultural work, feedlot construction and work for Hutterite colonies across the region, with the civil side focused on subdivision, demolition, and commercial development. Winters are anchored by irrigation pipeline installations for the irrigation districts in and around southern Alberta. The structure is not accidental.

It keeps crews employed year round in an industry where seasonal layoffs are the norm. “We love our winter projects as they allow us to provide consistent work and keep our dedicated crews employed year-round” Van Der Meer says. “We don't have a huge layoff turnover.”

FEEDLOTS AT SCALE

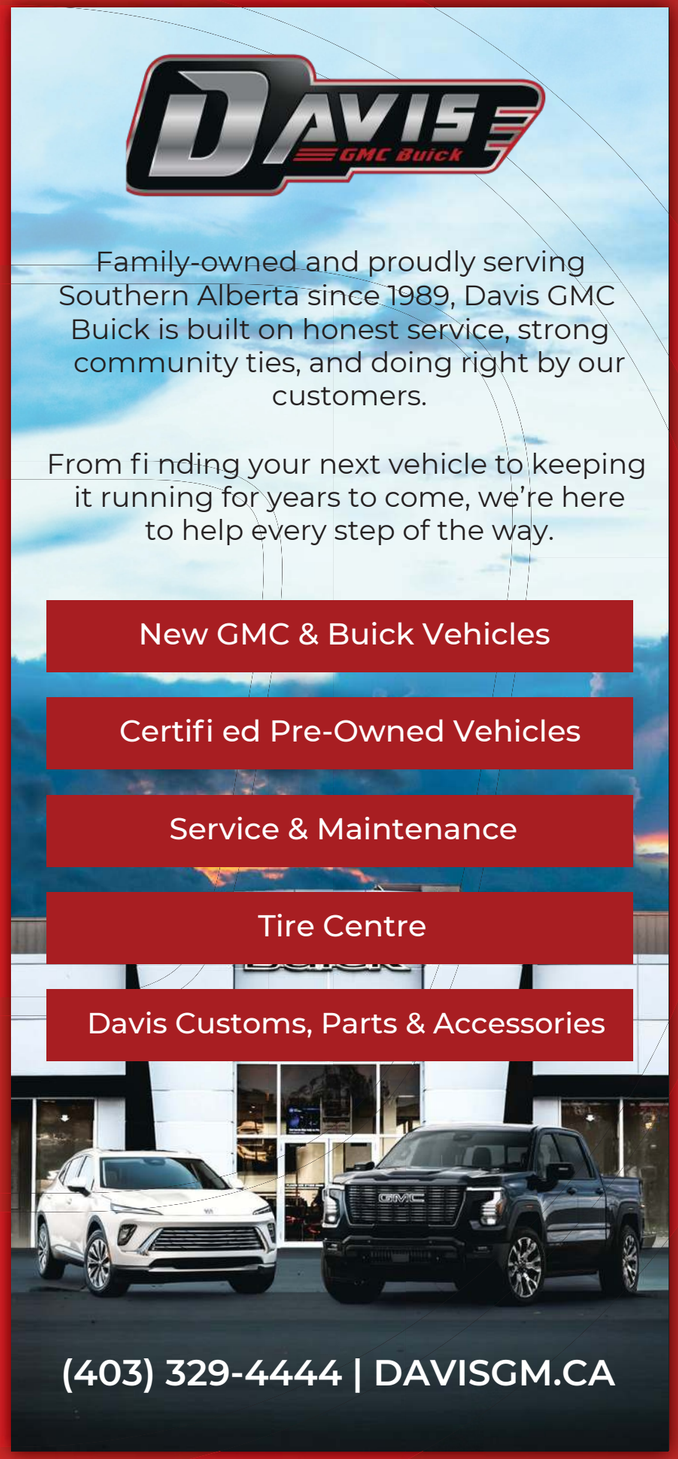
Feedlot development has become some of the largest work Dennis Dirtworx takes on, and the projects run for years at a time. A major feedlot build draws on nearly every crew the company fields: dirt crews, a dedicated pipeline crew, and a roller compacted concrete (RCC) crew, with subcontractors brought in for scopes the company does not self-perform, such as conventional concrete work. A project manager oversees a project from start to finish. The company has delivered both ground-up feedlot construction and major expansions and upgrades of existing operations across southern Alberta. “It's a few years of work that goes into these projects,” Van Der Meer says. Most feedlot projects are designed in house, making Dennis Dirtworx, in Van Der Meer's words, a one stop shop.


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Roller compacted concrete (RCC), a stiff, low-moisture concrete placed and compacted with rollers rather than poured and finished conventionally, has become a significant line of work, driven almost entirely by feedlot demand in southern Alberta.

The material is strong under compression, more economical than conventional concrete paving, and better suited to livestock than a simple clay base. “It's more durable for the cattle and it's easier on the cattle too,” Van Der Meer says. The company's RCC crews are among its most specialized, and demand for the product runs high from spring through fall.

IRRIGATION AND THE DISTRICTS

Dennis’ Dirtworx Ltd.’s civil division specializes in subdivision development, commercial excavation, and demolition, supported by strong, longstanding relationships with developers throughout Southern Alberta. The company has also established a solid reputation working with irrigation districts and Alberta Transportation on major projects, including pipeline installations, ponds, and gabion walls.

“Our success comes from the trust we’ve built, the quality of our work, and the dedication of our crews,” says Van Der Meer. “We take pride in challenging ourselves, and the skill and capabilities within our team continue to impress us.”

Supporting these operations is an in-house survey and design team equipped with advanced GPS and UAV technology, allowing the company to deliver projects with precision and efficiency.




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RUNNING THE FLEET

Van Der Meer puts the equipment count at upwards of 180 pieces, deployed simultaneously across agricultural, commercial, industrial, and demolition projects. Coordination runs through a project management team overseen by an operations manager, working alongside dispatch to move machines where they are needed, when they are needed. Morning meetings keep the management team on the same page as weather and site conditions shift, and a dedicated heavy hauler crew handles the constant movement of iron between sites. “Our teams are based on trust, and reliability and dedication,” Van Der Meer says. “When everybody is on the same page, it does work pretty seamlessly.”

HIRING FROM THE SHOVEL UP

Hiring is handled by Van Der Meer and the operations manager, and the philosophy is explicit: promote from within. “If we can hire labourers who are willing to train and learn and start with a shovel in their hand, those are the ones that sometimes make the best operators,” she says. The company hires outside only when a skill level demands it. The approach shows in retention. Turnover runs lower than the construction industry would predict, and the proof walks the sites: one labourer who started with a shovel and a rake when Van Der Meer joined is now a lead hand running crews and one of the company's main RCC men. “If you put in the hard work and dedication, you're going to go somewhere.”

Overweg himself sets the tone. Van Der Meer has described the founder as a go-getter and a smart businessman, and the operation he built reflects it: a management team with long tenure, crews that work together across seasons, and a company that would rather open doors internally than fill them from outside.

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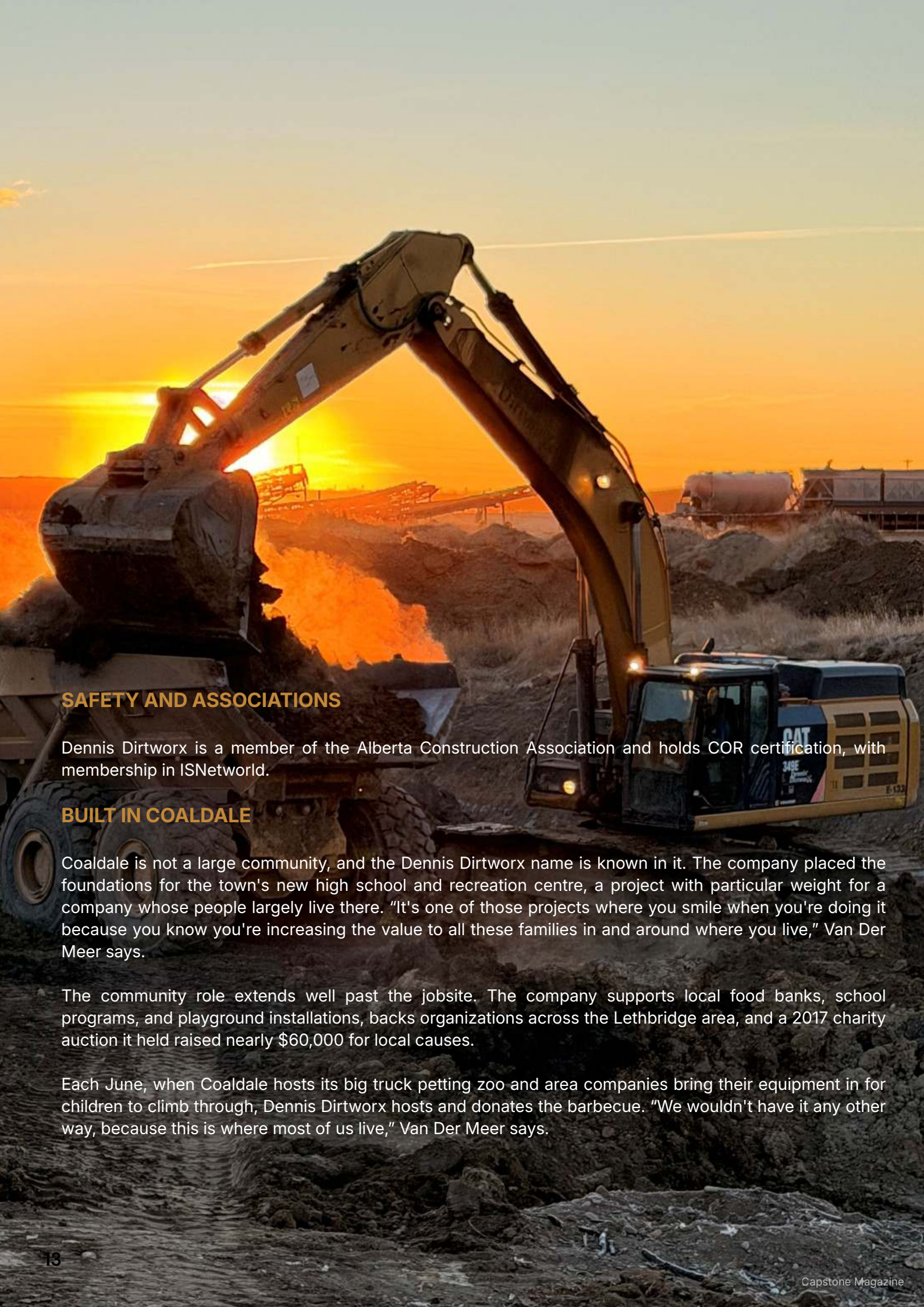
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SAFETY AND ASSOCIATIONS

Dennis Dirtworx is a member of the Alberta Construction Association and holds COR certification, with membership in ISNetworld.

BUILT IN COALDALE

Coaldale is not a large community, and the Dennis Dirtworx name is known in it. The company placed the foundations for the town's new high school and recreation centre, a project with particular weight for a company whose people largely live there. “It's one of those projects where you smile when you're doing it because you know you're increasing the value to all these families in and around where you live,” Van Der Meer says.

The community role extends well past the jobsite. The company supports local food banks, school programs, and playground installations, backs organizations across the Lethbridge area, and a 2017 charity auction it held raised nearly $60,000 for local causes.

Each June, when Coaldale hosts its big truck petting zoo and area companies bring their equipment in for children to climb through, Dennis Dirtworx hosts and donates the barbecue. “We wouldn't have it any other way, because this is where most of us live,” Van Der Meer says.



THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Asked where the company goes from here, Van Der Meer's answer starts with a correction of premise: Dennis Dirtworx is not out looking. “Honestly, the work comes to us,” she says. Agricultural work has taken off over the past four to five years and now forms a major share of the book, while the civil side keeps pulling the company toward new technologies and new engineering. The focus now is expanding what the company knows how to do, taking on new innovations and new ways of working as they cross the desk, and the growth curve suggests the strategy is working.

The goal, as the company puts it, is to continue doing what it does best: building relationships, providing employment opportunities, and executing projects to a standard second to none. Seventeen years from a mini hoe, the company Dennis Overweg built shows no sign of slowing.

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