

# INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

## UP AND COMER: JAKE BELL

Bricklayer Jake Bell represents Winnipeg on the World Stage. *By Twila Driedger*

Q & A

**W**e tracked down Winnipegger and Euro-Can Enterprises employee Jake Bell straight off the plane from Germany after the brilliant bricklayer was awarded a Medallion for Excellence at the 2013 WorldSkills Competition in Leipzig. Twenty-one-year-old Bell earned the opportunity to represent Team Canada at the competition after garnering gold medals at the Skills Manitoba Competition, held in Winnipeg on April 12, 2012, and the Skills Canada National Competition held in Edmonton, AB, on May 13-16, 2012.

**UPWORD:** When and why did you decide to compete in Skills Manitoba?

**JAKE BELL:** The real reason I became involved in the Skills program was due to my instructor, Brian Gebhardt, at Red River College. He has always been a big advocate for the Skills program and was the one to give me my first opportunity to compete at the provincial level and has been a huge hand in my success ever since.

**U:** What's it like to participate in these competitions? Have you always been competitive?

**JB:** The competitions themselves are very intense. In the beginning, it was not always easy to tune out the crowd and the events happening around me, but having competed in a total of seven competitions, I have learned different tricks and techniques to keep focused and stay calm. I am a very competitive person and have been since I can remember.



Bell stands beside his mini replica of the Brandenburg Gate, one of his two brick masonry test projects

Bell puts the finishing touches on his Bundesadler project

**U:** What did the brick masonry test projects consist of?

**JB:** The test projects are very different from one competition to another. One major difference is the length of competition. For example, provincials were a one-day event, nationals were two days and the WorldSkills test projects were spread over [three and a half] days and a total of 22 hours. Overall the biggest difference is the difficulty of the test projects. Typically the test projects are locally inspired. This year, with WorldSkills being held in Germany, one module was designed to be a scaled down version of Brandenburg Gate and another was the coat of arms of Germany, Bundesadler.

**U:** How did you prepare for WorldSkills?

**JB:** I had about 13 months between Skills Canada in Edmonton and the start of the WorldSkills event in Germany. In that time, I trained approximately 500 hours, most of which was with my instructor Brian Gebhardt at RRC. That time was spread over some evenings and weekends, but the bulk of it was spent during regular working hours, which was made possible by Brian, the local bricklayers' union and the Manitoba Masonry Contractors Association. Also, in that time, I had the opportunity to travel to Perth, Australia, for the Global Skills Challenge, which is basically a practice version of WorldSkills.

**U:** What makes you a good bricklayer?

**JB:** My ability to really dissect the blueprints of the test project and identify problematic situations before they arise.

**U:** Have you always wanted to be a bricklayer? What made you go into the trade?

**JB:** I can't say that bricklaying has always been a goal. To be honest, I didn't have a clue what it was until I started in the trade. I got into the trade like a lot of others; I knew someone working in the industry making a good living and enjoying it, so that was enough to pull me in.

**U:** What is making you stay in the trade?

**JB:** Certainly my success in the Skills competitions has contributed to me staying in the trade, but on top of that, I think there are great future opportunities and earnings to be made.

**U:** Euro-Can has always been committed to investing in apprentices. How has your employer been influential in your successes?

**JB:** Euro-Can has always given young people a fair opportunity to succeed in the trade. I think a mix between patience and fair management along with quality journeypeople and foremen, is a recipe for developing strong apprentices.

# EMPLOYER CORNER

## INVESTING IN APPRENTICES: Euro-Can Enterprises Ltd.

By Twila Driedger

**W**hen Mark Laarveld, co-owner of Euro-Can Enterprises Ltd., hired 17-year-old Jacob Bell in 2009 as a mason tender, he had no idea that in four short years he would have a national champion and world-class bricklayer working for him. But after learning the ropes, Bell quickly developed an ease and skill to lay bricks with the best of them.

"We start everyone as a mason tender - that's always been Euro-Can's process of finding an apprentice applicant," Laarveld explains. "We prefer they spend anywhere from six months to a year as a helper learning the industry."

Employing apprentices isn't anything new for Euro-Can. The masonry company founded in 1983, has a strong commitment to training through the apprenticeship program, offering on-the-job training under the supervision of dedicated

trainers as well as technical training at Red River College.

"We find that it's better for [our employees] to learn from the bottom up and understand what every position has to do around them. And obviously, it shows what kind of work ethic they have and if it's worth us putting the time and money into training them."

According to Laarveld, Bell's work ethic is what sets him apart from the pack, yet also pushes those around him to achieve the same level of skill.

"He has a good work ethic. He wants quality. He's competitive, so he's always competing with the guy next to him, which helps drive everyone a little bit and push them a bit faster. And some people just have a natural talent, and he's one of them," says Laarveld.

Euro-Can's investment in apprentices has had a significant return, with not one, but two gold medal winners in the national trade competitions sponsored by Skills Canada.

"Training apprentices is everything for our business," details Laarveld. "It's important to develop a crew and a staff that will last as long or hopefully outlast ownership, and always be viable and productive."

For all the benefits that training apprentices has brought to his business, Laarveld is stumped as to why other companies aren't investing in the industry by hiring apprentices.

"They're missing out on supporting their industry," Laarveld says.



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