

Allan Block

Always Better Wall of Fame

June 2017



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Charlie and Al make up the dynamic duo that are part of the back bone of production in Western Canada with Expocrete an Oldcastle Company. Charlie will celebrate 44 years of service this year with Al hitting 146 years. Excuse me Al really only has 46 years in but he has outlived seven changes of ownership so it seems like more than it really has been. The two are very much alike and in the beginning, they were not the typical hard headed production types that never wanted to change and only wanting to run CMUs. They understood if



Charlie Black
Expocrete - an Oldcastle Co.
Edmonton, AB Canada

they were going to keep their production team busy they had to do two things, make the best quality product at all times and be able to adapt and figure out how to run new value added products. The Expocrete production facilities are approaching their 100,000,000th Allan Block. This is an unbelievable accomplishment and one that could not have been met without the hard work and ingenuity of Charlie and Al.



Al Bonin
Expocrete - an Oldcastle Co.
Winnipeg, MB Canada

Both gentlemen have great people skills as evidenced by Charlie's present from the ladies in his office when he marked his 43rd anniversary. He proudly pointed out the new block plant that he received on this special day. Not what you would expect for Charlie's type of block plant, but an indicator of the type of relationship he has fostered with his fellow team mates. Charlie's personal block plant was just that, a potted plant in a block.

Charlie and Al have been instrumental in taking the crazy blocks coming out of the Allan Block office and figuring how to make the product run efficiently on their machines. Tim Bott has relied heavily on their expertise in working out the details dating back to the advent of the Allan Block product lines. Al was instrumental in the development of the AB Fieldstone, working in plants from Albany, New York to Vancouver, British Columbia while also proving he could run the product on his machine in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Charlie helped pioneer the AB Fence from his plant in Edmonton, Alberta, adding an in-line turn table after the

depalleter to streamline the cubing process. Charlie also leverage the engineering team at Besser to take his simple concept of removing a conveyor roller to lay the multiple units down and then reconfiguring the splitter blades to be able to split eight sets of AB Border Block or 16 units per block machine cycle.

When Oldcastle first acquired Expocrete, Wade Ficklin, President of Oldcastle Canada and West Coast, was asking questions to get a feel for the people in their new company. When it came to Al and Charlie, he said he knew right away what kind of treasure they had with these two. Wade understands that the business they had just acquired was more than the equipment and the buildings, it was the people behind it making everything work.



Plant people from all over North America are always asking how Al and Charlie are doing. One day while Al was recovering from a hernia surgery (do you wonder how that happened) he was working with us at Zappala Block on the AB Fieldstone. His doctor had told him to take it easy, but that did not stop him from flying to Albany, New York to join in on the fun. Making sure he did not miss any of the action in the plant, but trying to take it easy, he was caught by Tommy Viola, the VP and Plant Manager of Zappala Block in an uncharacteristic position. Tommy looked up from adjusting the block machine and saw Al leaning on a broom. Tommy yelled that there would be no leaning on brooms in his plant and told Al that if you had enough strength to hold on to a broom, Al had enough strength to push it. Tommy immediately followed his reprimand of Al with a belly laugh heard throughout the plant.

Al reflects back on first making Allan Block. “We borrowed some Columbia style molds from Bemidji, MN, and I had Robert in the plant use scrap parts to make molds for our Besser machine. It only cost \$2,100 to assemble two or three molds and we were in the Allan Block business. I think the introduction of the $\frac{3}{4}$ sq. ft. Allan Block was one of Expocrete’s biggest success stories.” We all started somewhere and we are fortunate to have Al working with us, starting clear back in the last century.

Charlie and Al both capture the best of the concrete block manufacturing side of our business, they work hard, they love to share what they have learned over the years with others, and they love the challenge of making something new.

From all of us at Allan Block thank you for the contributions that you have made over and over again to make *Allan Block – Always Better.*