

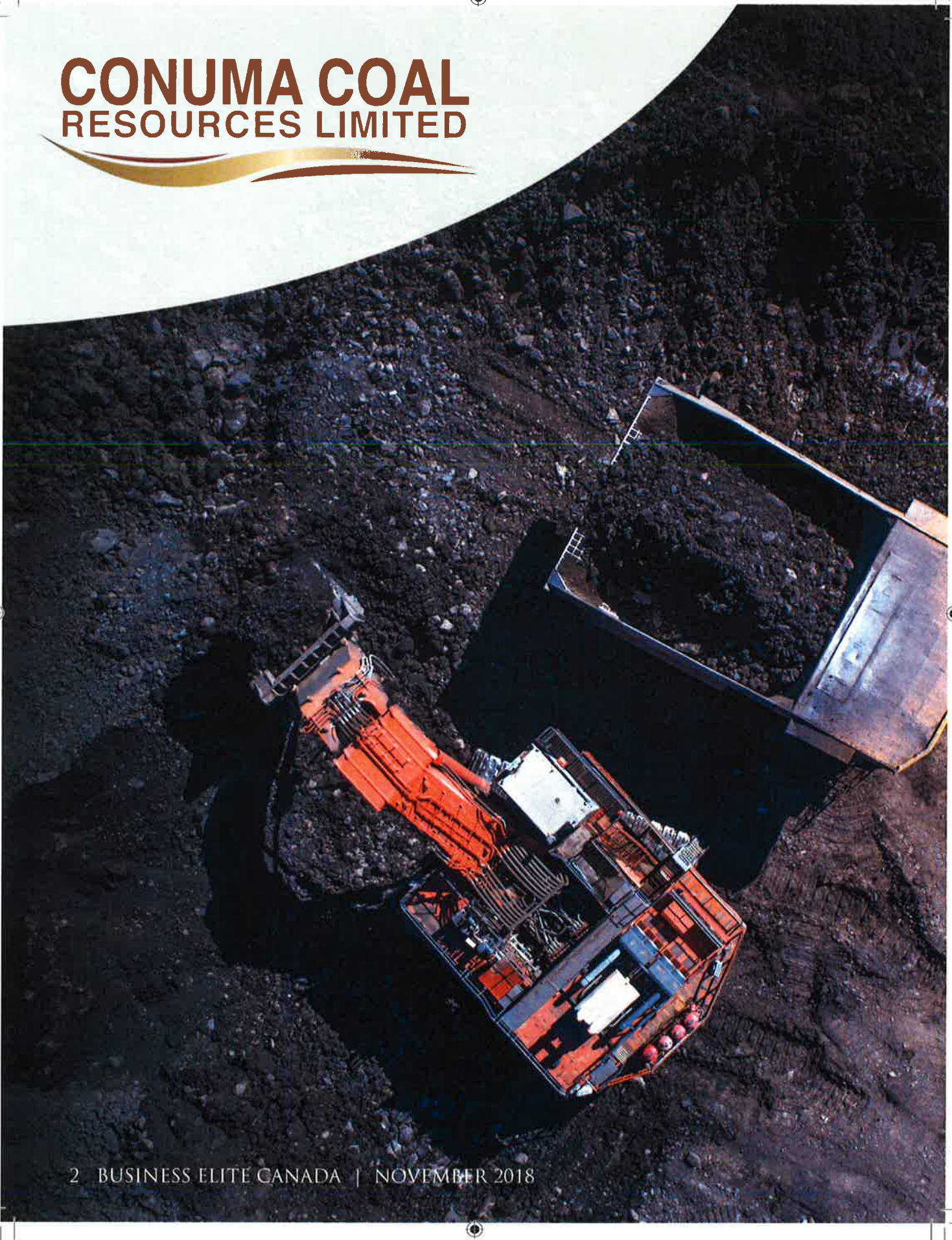


**CONUMA COAL
RESOURCES LIMITED**



DOING THINGS THE RIGHT WAY

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By Anna Guy

For Mark Bartkoski, mining is more than a career. It's a chosen vehicle through which he fulfills his quest, as he calls it, to add value to families. Through his 40 years in mining, Bartkoski has both the insight and hindsight to positively affect the communities in which he operates, and with his latest venture, Conuma Coal, he's doing just that.

"First and foremost, I consider myself a builder," Bartkoski tells *Business Elite Canada*, "and to be able to be a part of building something that has long lasting security for our community and partners is an honour."

The vision was there from Conuma's inception. "Conuma Coal Resources was founded to be a contributor, positive influence and supporter to our community. We are committed to earning security for all of our partners,



and to unifying resources and people to build a “first class” organization recognized for character and true integrity,” says the mission statement. Based in the Peace River coal field in Northeastern B.C., the project consists of three operations: the Brule Mine (which became Conuma Coal’s first operational mine in September 2016), Willow Creek Mine, and Wolverine Mine.

A few years after the region faced economic hardship following a 2014

downturn that closed the district’s last metallurgical fuel operations, Bartkoski and a syndicated team developed a plan to take over the operations and, with the backing of AMCI, one of the foremost international coal brokers, Conuma was launched. The opportunity to produce three excellent steel-making quality coals while riding an upswing in the markets and a global downturn in supply made fiduciary sense. But that wasn’t the only impetus.



DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

“We saw an opportunity to do things differently,” says Bartkoski. Integral to the Conuma Group’s offer was a commitment to social and environmental stewardship. Part of that was a promise to hire 200 employees right away – they ended up hiring double that in the first few months.

“Yes, we feel like the market is going to continue to mature over the next

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five to ten years, and there is going to be a shortage on the supply side,” says Bartkoski. “We also saw an opportunity where we could build a one-stop-metallurgical-shop where we could sell three types of product. To strengthen our supply chain route and dependability, we have built a unique alliance with the CN Railroad and Ridley Terminals. This partnership and travel corridor have garnered our exported product with a huge advantage to the Asian steel producers.”

Conuma has very aggressively rebuilt

the properties. Conuma got all three sites up and running in around six months each, almost half the time of a traditional operation. “We felt the quicker we could come up to speed, the quicker we could get market presence. Was it tough? Was it difficult on the whole team here? The answer is yes it was. We knew the opportunist window was open and thus the growth timing was now. The key was responsible balanced growth, without cutting corners on safety or the environmental or social responsibility. Conuma safety results have been



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stellar and their injury rates are among the lowest in all of Canada and the U.S.”

Bartkoski lives his commitment by residing in the midst of the operation in the community of Tumbler Ridge, B.C. He’s always done this as a way to gauge a ground level view of the direction and morale of the operation. It aids in gaining input and commitment from everyone. “I believe in living in the town we are affecting. You have to have the heart beat of the community and people; you have to look them

in the eye every day. For an effective leadership team to unite and incorporate all the co-owners—our employees, you have to stay connected.”

And the consensus on the ground level? The commitment is overwhelming and surging, the empowerment and engagement is sincere. At the time of our conversation, Conuma was employing 830 families—Bartkoski measures their size by the number of families; projected to reach 930 by year end, and 3000 indirect jobs.



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Mark Bartkoski President of Conuma Coal accepting the Coal Association of Canada Community Champion Award.

HEALTHY FAMILIES

To facilitate the healthy family and community growth concept, Conuma has focused on hiring and training the local and First Nations residents. Bartkoski expounds, “It costs us more in initial training costs, but we are building long lasting relationships and commitments. Our employees appreciate they do not have to drive out to labour camps where they are away from their family for weeks at a time. The positive atmosphere and

aggressive attitude toward earning long term security is infectious. It’s not only rewarding to enjoy the fruits of our labour now when the market is strong, but it’s also that if the market does slide back, our families will be ok.”

In short, Conuma Coal is operated by taking the multi-front approach where the operating focus is loss prevention, integrity processes is the management system, and maximizing opportunity is the drive on individual

projects, all while working toward a pay-it-forward concept.

PAY IT FORWARD

“Pay It Forward” extends beyond the borders of the communities we live. The program was launched as a means of motivating active involvement in the schools, partnering with First Nation communities, local charities, and supporting environmental programs. It is not only company funds, but in many cases the

employees also sow their time and monies. In the words of the Tumbler Ridge Chamber of Commerce, when presenting the team with their 2017 Walk the Talk award, “Conuma has set the bar high and are an example of a true Community Responsible Business.” Recently, Conuma has also been decorated with the CAC Community Champion Award and the local Chamber’s Employer of the Year Award.


Conuma has set bench marks for social responsibility and environmentalism.



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“Morally, we don’t have a choice,” says Bartkoski, who goes on to say that the whole industry must continue to strive for improvement in those two areas.

“I don’t think the mining industry has done as much as they should on educating the public in the progress we’ve made environmentally, nor have some been as proactive as they should be on reclamation topics, concerns of First Nations, the environmental realm or the social side. The future can be a win-win across all fronts.”

Creativity engineering and responsible stewardship can rewrite history. Progressive reclamation and water treatment improvements are the forefronts. Bio Chemical Reactors (BCRs) used to treat mining-influenced water (MIW) by using microorganisms to transform contaminants and to increase pH in the treated water have been successfully introduced, despite challenges associated with the winter climate. “It has been the most successful Selenium reduction system and we are continuing to forge forward with it. Conuma has also been forthright with other mining companies to share the technology,” says Bartkoski. “It’s the right thing to do.”



“I think that Conuma has been a shot across the bow of all industry on how to approach engagement with the community,” says Bartkoski. “Even if treating people right, and caring for the environment wasn’t economically rewarding, and we believe it is, there is a moral obligation to integrity we will serve. When you do the right thing, you can truly build a win-win that brings security to everyone.”

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