

Enterprise



PETER LEE, RECORD STAFF

Brad and Shona Thomson have guided W. H. Reynolds (Cambridge) Ltd. to a position of recognition in the sale of bleachers, picnic tables, player benches and associated products.

# 'Bleacherguys' finds its niche in many a field of dreams

W.H. Reynolds (Cambridge) Ltd. had one of its busiest years ever in 2009

By Chuck Howitt, Record staff

**CAMBRIDGE** — It has bleachers north of the Arctic Circle in Inuvik, in the Queen Charlotte Islands off the coast of B.C. and in Port aux Basques, N.L.

The company came to the rescue of the University of Waterloo in 2008, manufacturing and installing seating for 1,100 in only 65 days, when the university needed bleachers in a hurry for its new football facility.

W.H. Reynolds (Cambridge) Ltd., known as bleacherguys.com on the internet, has been in business since the 1960s, but had one of its busiest years ever in 2009 and shows no signs of slowing down.

Ninety per cent of the company's business is selling bleachers, player benches and picnic tables to municipalities across Canada, says Brad Thomson, who owns the business with his wife, Shona.

"They own the real estate that requires our product."

W.H. Reynolds sells bleachers in all sizes. They can seat anywhere from 12 to 12,000 people, all cut, welded and assembled at its 10,000-square-foot plant on Cowansview Road on the city's east side. It also sells bleachers on wheels, indoor models and "fold and go" bleachers that can be set up temporarily. When the Lisboa Bakery & Grill in the Williamsburg Town Centre in Kitchener needed bleachers for the World Cup of Soccer in June, it turned to Reynolds.

Made of aluminum and wood, its picnic tables are bought by the hundreds by

## W. H. Reynolds (Cambridge) Ltd.

Address: 58 Cowansview Rd., Cambridge  
No. of employees: 7  
Website: www.bleacherguys.com  
Phone: 519-653-9721

conservation authorities, says Brad, and it also distributes football, soccer and other goals for Scoremaster.

The company's origins date back to the early 1960s when Bill Reynolds began selling gill pulverizers, used by farmers to break up soil, out of a house on Elgin Street North in Cambridge. The gills were made in North Carolina where a relative of Reynolds worked.

The gills were also used to groom ball diamonds and playing fields, so Reynolds began selling bleachers, benches and picnic tables as well. Brad Thomson's father, Alex "Aj" Thomson, joined the company as a salesperson in the mid-1960s and bought the business 10 years later when Reynolds retired. Brand and Shona took over when Aj retired about five years ago.

In the mid-1970s, the company moved to rented facilities on Laurel Street in Cambridge, but finally purchased a much-needed larger home on Cowansview Road, where it moved in January. It allows Reynolds to make bleachers by the hundreds so it can store them for quick delivery.

The company built its name in the

pre-internet area by banging on doors and attending trade shows, says Brad, who started working at Reynolds while still in high school. But nowadays, its main marketing vehicle is the internet, where it pays for prominent placement during searches for bleachers.

"We are not a low-bid company," he stresses, adding that the company emphasizes quality and service and refuses to buy an inferior raw material offshore to maintain competitiveness. Among its suppliers is Gerdau Ameristeel in Cambridge.

The company has seven full-time employees, but can go as low as three or as high as 20, depending on order volume. It assembles bleachers coast to coast, either with its own crew or hired workers if the site is far away.

Its biggest job to date was installing 8,000 bleachers at T.D. Waterhouse football stadium in London, Ont., in 1999. Brad and crew members lived in a rented house in London for two months while working on that job.

With governments distributing stimulus cash, the recession has been good for business, says Brad. He has a tender due this week for bleachers in St. Johns, N.L., and 40 projects in production or undergoing installation across the country.

It has no desire to expand into the U.S. because that market is already saturated, he said. If anything, a key challenge now is to "control the growth while still being profitable," he said. "I've seen so many companies get too big, too fast."

chowitt@therecord.com

# Central bank hikes interest rate

The ¼-point increase is second in two months

By Julian Beltrame

**OTTAWA** — The Bank of Canada scaled back expectations for economic growth Tuesday while going further out on the interest rate limb with its second quarter-point hike in as many months.

The central bank issued what economists called a "dovish" statement on the global and Canadian growth, but maintained the domestic economy was sufficiently healthy to withstand raising the trendsetting rate to 0.75 per cent.

The Canadian dollar jumped 0.91 of a cent to 95.71 cents US.

The rate hike will have an impact on variable-rate loans as the big commercial banks began raising their prime rates by a quarter point shortly after the announcement.

The prime rate increased to 2.75 per cent from 2.5 per cent, increasing the cost of consumer and car loans and variable mortgages tied to prime.

For example, a quarter-point increase in mortgage rates will add about \$46 a month, or \$550 a year, for a homeowner who has a \$340,000 mortgage for a 35-year term.

It's about \$90 per month higher than six months ago when interest rates were half a point lower.

But Laura Parsons, a mortgage expert at Bank of Montreal, noted that borrowing costs remain at near historic lows.

"It's a buyers' market and the rates are still really good. That's the problem, we've forgotten what a bad rate looks like," she said.

And while variable rates rose, there was evidence longer-term interest rates might slide moderately because of the central bank's gloomier outlook, said CIBC chief economist Avery Shenfeld.

The vast majority of economists had predicted the rate move — while a few speculated bank governor Mark Carney might hold back if he felt economic growth was slowing.

Carney's governing council scaled back the bank's previous call on growth by two-tenths of a point to 3.5 per cent this year and 2.9 per cent next.

But that didn't stop the central bank from following through on the hike, although it cast new doubts about the pace of monetary tightening in future announcements.

The key, said economists, is the bank's new estimate that will take until the end of 2011 for the economy to reach potential, two quarters later than previously projected.

BMO Capital Markets economist Michael Gregory said Carney gave himself an extra six months to return rates to normal levels, which he said would be in the two-to-three per cent range.

Gregory agreed with the bank that a modest hike now was appropriate.

"There are risks posed by rates being too low for too long and I believe those risks are beginning to crystallize.

"When credit is cheap, people consume more of it than perhaps is optimal over the long haul," he said.

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# Black set to be released on bail by Chicago judge

Bail conditions expected to confine disgraced former media mogul to U.S.

By Lee-Anne Goodman

**CHICAGO** — Conrad Black's six-year prison sentence could come to an early end today, exactly where it was handed down — in a courtroom in the U.S. city where the disgraced Canadian-born media mogul was convicted of fraud and obstruction of justice three years ago.

A U.S. district court judge, the same one who presided over Black's trial and sentenced him to a six-and-a-half year sentence in 2007, will outline Black's bail conditions, which are expected to confine the former newspaper baron to the United States.

But it's very possible that Black's days as an inmate are over, said Jacob Frenkel, a former federal prosecutor and an expert in white-collar crime.

"It is reasonable to expect that Mr. Black will walk out of the U.S.

penitentiary some time on Wednesday and possibly never return," Frenkel said.

It remained unclear Tuesday where Black would be when Judge Amy St. Eve makes her pronouncement; it's likely he will remain behind bars in Coleman, Fla., until St. Eve sets bond and bail conditions, and not appear in Chicago, appeal lawyer Miguel Estrada said in an email.

The 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals granted Black's motion for bail Monday, weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court weakened the "honest services" law that was central to his fraud conviction and kicked his case back to a lower court. The justices left it up to the lower court to decide whether the conviction should be overturned. That decision has not yet been made.

Black also was convicted of obstruction of justice after jurors



M. SPENCER GREEN, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, FILE

Conrad Black is to learn the conditions of his bail today.

saw a video of him carrying boxes of documents out of his offices, loading them into his car and driving off with them. The documents were sought by government investigators. The high court's

## IN QUOTES | CONRAD BLACK FORMER NEWSPAPER TYCOON

Going to prison "was a little like going back to boarding school."

ruling didn't affect the obstruction of justice count.

It's possible he's already served enough time to cover that charge, said Frenkel.

"Even if the obstruction of justice conviction survives, as most expect, the length of time he has served already is considered by most federal judges to be reasonable for such a conviction."

Black has, by all accounts, been a model prisoner at Coleman, where he's been one of 1,000 criminals, most of them convicted of drug or weapons offences.

The former Canadian citizen, convicted of defrauding Hollinger Inc. of more than \$6 million, was born into a life of luxury. He's a renowned historian known for an

expansive vocabulary. And yet for more than two years, he's been Prisoner 18330-424, eating his meals in the prison mess hall, teaching English to his Hispanic fellow inmates, and learning how to play the piano.

The one-time conservative also took up an unexpected cause while behind bars, urging an end to America's war on drugs.

"The U.S. is now a carceral state that imprisons eight to 12 times more people (2.5 million) per capita than the U.K., Canada, Australia, France, Germany or Japan," Black wrote in a letter to the Sunday Times of London in November 2008.

"U.S. justice has become a command economy based on the avarice of private prison companies, a gigantic prison service industry and politically influential correctional officers' unions." Black also described his fellow inmates as "quite interesting and affable, often in a Damon Runyon way."

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