Behind the Scenes at the G8

It took many skilled trades people working cooperatively to create a successful environment to host the recent G8 (Group of Eight) summit. Just ask Steve Hibbert from Digital Electric Inc. in Burlington. (see www.digital-electricinc.com for more information)

By the time the G8 leaders posed in front of picturesque Sunset Bay at the Deerhurst Resort near Huntsville, journey people and apprentices had been working intensely from June 15th to lockdown on the 20th of June to ensure this special event came together.

“There was very little time to do a lot of work”, Steve observes, “with lots of problem solving on the go.”

Digital Electric worked primarily with Toromont Cat of Concord Ontario on this project, putting to use all the experience they gained over the years through special event installations at the Athens, Torino and Beijing Olympics.

Steve has learned to prioritize: with 6,000 RCMP, 2,000 Army and 2,000 OPP personnel arriving on site, the first priority had to be getting the catering tent powered up and functioning. Attention to detail also paid off: when a warming tray full of water was dropped, it hit two breakers in the tent, tripping them, but Digital had installed GFI plugs so there were no issues. Safety was a major concern throughout the installation.

Local Fire Inspectors checked and double-checked all the power installations to ensure that there was proper connection and grounding.
Steve’s crew helped install and test the 14 diesel generators brought on site, plus generator transfer switches in the main pavilion, generator distribution cabling for television, and cabling connectors to the truck and media centre. In addition, skilled trades people hooked up air conditioning, light receptacles, separate panels for lighting, power, audio as well as erecting and powering up all the tents.

Two skilled trades people built the maple table on site in the main pavilion where the G8 leaders would sit, and also installed the maple panelling on the surrounding meeting room walls.

Special lighting was installed in the ceiling of the central meeting room. Landscapers and gardeners put the finishing touches on the grounds, and one person was assigned flag installation duty.

**Security**

The contractors and sub-contractors working at the G8 summit were hired through Public Works Canada, and as expected, security was front and centre from the start. Steve was approached about the opportunity to work at the G8 in early May, and submitted names of the people who would be working on his crew along with their documents.

Screening interviews were scheduled and ultimately 3 journey people and 5 apprentices from Digital Electric were cleared and accredited for specific time periods, and granted unescorted access to most of the summit site with the exception of the red zone.
Tools that would be used and stored on site at the portable trailer were checked by security and given an RCMP seal. On days when vehicles were used to access the site, sniffer dogs jumped through the vehicle while security completed their checks. Phone calls were monitored, and once the site was in lockdown, cell phone transmissions were jammed. Text messages could be sent within the site after lockdown, but not outside it. With snipers stationed on rooftops, helicopters in the air at all times, a 5 man mini-sub, Sea-Doos and Zodiacs patrolling nearby waters, there were still some surprises.

While Steve and his crew were almost finished installing a lighting tower that illuminated the path where the G8 leaders would walk, a member of the military carrying a machine gun and wearing full camouflage stepped out of the surrounding bushes. Fortunately he was on his way to the catering tent.
The Challenges

In addition to the tight deadlines, heat, humidity, deer flies, mosquitoes at dusk and the occasional rain shower, there were downstream technical glitches to resolve, right up to Tuesday afternoon. With many members of the media arriving (the Japanese alone brought 230 reporters with them), demands for more air conditioning and more power began. A few curve balls were thrown as tasks that couldn't get done were tossed to others on the fly. However, as Steve points out, by the end of their meetings, they would always have a game plan.

Work days were long, beginning with breakfast at 6AM, dinner at 8PM frequently interrupted with emergency calls, often not ending until 10PM or later at night. Steve’s crew worked 12 hour overlapping shifts: 8 hours on site, 4 on call, and as lockdown approached, crew staff were reduced from eight to three: Steve, 1 journey person and 1 apprentice remained. By Sunday the 27th of June, the full crew had returned to tear down, rip out, roll up, inventory and return materials used during the event.

Heavy equipment mechanics who knew their way around engines, journeymen electricians, carpenters, lighting experts, plumbers, drywallers, landscapers, cooks and all their apprentices worked cooperatively throughout 15 very intense days to get the job done. A cold beer – finally – and a toast to their hard work and success at the Contractors Appreciation dinner capped off this unique experience behind the scenes at the G8.

Written by Dianne Seed