

"It's Just Paint" - The Enbridge Mural Restoration Project

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I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone say to me "It's just paint. What's the big deal?" As a NACE International CIP-3 Certified Coating Inspector, that's frustrating for me to hear because paint is an important way of protecting an asset from corrosion. Painting is its own trade and there is a highly technical aspect to it as well. In the case of the Enbridge Tank 79 Mural, it's also a very beautiful way of covering nearly 11,000 square feet of a 150 diameter tank, holding 150,000 barrels of oil. There is more to this story than just a coat of paint.

So how does an Electrical Engineering Technologist get to be the project manager on an iconic painting project? I graduated from the Saskatchewan Technical Institute in Moose Jaw in 1984 and worked in Estevan SK in the cathodic protection and corrosion control industry. This gave me experience in the oil and gas, mining, water, waste water, power, and infrastructure industries. Eventually I got a job as a Corrosion Technician with Interprovincial Pipe Line and moved to Regina, where cathodic protection and pipeline integrity was my major focus. Over the years my job evolved, and while supporting the regional engineers on tanks, I gained NACE certifications in both cathodic protection, and coating inspection.

In 1998, Interprovincial Pipe Line rebranded itself as Enbridge Pipelines Inc. and that is where the story of the mural begins. What a better way to make a big splash than to create a large mural on a major roadway and to display your new logo? I was the technical operations liaison for that project and my job was to ensure the project was technically correct, 4 artists were safe in an industrial setting, and it was completed on time. I was told failure was not an option. One senior artist and three junior artists, industrial painters from Commercial Sand Blasting & Painting, and a support team completed the original mural in 20 days in September of 1998. The mural was only supposed to last 8 - 10 years but I maintained it over the years by washing it and applying a clear protective coating to prolong its life.

In 2015, I started working for Commercial Sand Blasting and Painting and remained based in Regina. I witnessed the mural slowly degrading. Our company completed a technical assessment on the mural in 2017 and restoration was approved in 2019 as well as industrial painting of the tank shell and the floating roof under the geodesic dome. I had come full circle 21 years later but not in any way I could have imagined. This time around I was responsible for project management and support, quality control, and documentation. Marty Fisher, who had painted the original background colours on the mural in 1998, was now the project supervisor and Walter Reich, the owner of the Benjamin Moore/Colorburst store in Regina, was still there to supply us with the same paint we used on the original mural.

We started the project in July with a visual inspection and assessment. The sky was falling. The top part of the mural above the stiffening rail with blue sky paint was falling off, leaving only the original red primer showing. Other parts of the mural had lost their detail because the paint had oxidized and chalked causing the paint thin over time due to sunlight exposure. Surface preparation is key to a successful coating application and much preparation was required before we could even think of starting the artistic part of the project.

We sanded the entire mural area, washed it with chemical, to aid cleaning and improve adhesion, power washed, sanded rough edges again, tested paint compatibility and colour matching, primed the sky area, and applied the industrial epoxy-urethane paint system above the mural. We then applied the background colours to the entire mural area.

The artists started painting the mural in September; history was repeating itself again. Fortunately, Grant McLaughlin, our lead artist, had been an art teacher in Moose Jaw and had painted or restored the Moose Jaw murals for decades. His knowledge, skills, and energy were amazing. Three junior artists split up the work load into cat tails/vegetation, grass, bushes, background, while Grant worked on the major features of the deer, and the piping plover, and horizon. Our industrial painters also helped paint the vegetation and our most senior painter, Kevin Moe, was tasked with doing clouds, recreating the Enbridge logo, and slogan. Finally, a water based urethane clear coating was applied to the mural to protect it from the sunlight and prolong its life.

There were some significant challenges that were overcome to be able to get this mural completed including rain, fog, heat, cold, wind, hundreds of lady bugs that stuck to the fresh paint, equipment issues, schedule, and fatigue. Commercial Sand Blasting was also completing the industrial painting at the same time as the mural on the other side of the tank. At our peak, we had 15 people and 6 aerial work platforms working on the tank, which took a lot of coordination. Further challenges included the strict safety and quality control requirements and a significant amount of documentation. At the end of the project we had generated three binders of safety and one binder of quality control documentation, plus the regular accounting paperwork. In addition, the high profile of this project led to several interviews with media and a high level scrutiny from Enbridge and the public, all of which took time and effort.

The project was completed by the first week in October and the mural looks spectacular and for the second time in my life, I have been able to do the coolest thing in my career. Yes, "it's just paint" but there is a lot more to it than you think.

Many sincere thanks to our industrial painters and the artists, for your talents, work ethic, and tenacity, to the numerous businesses that supplied equipment and materials, and to Enbridge for approving this mural restoration project and the gift of this piece of art to the City of Regina and Province of Saskatchewan for years to come.



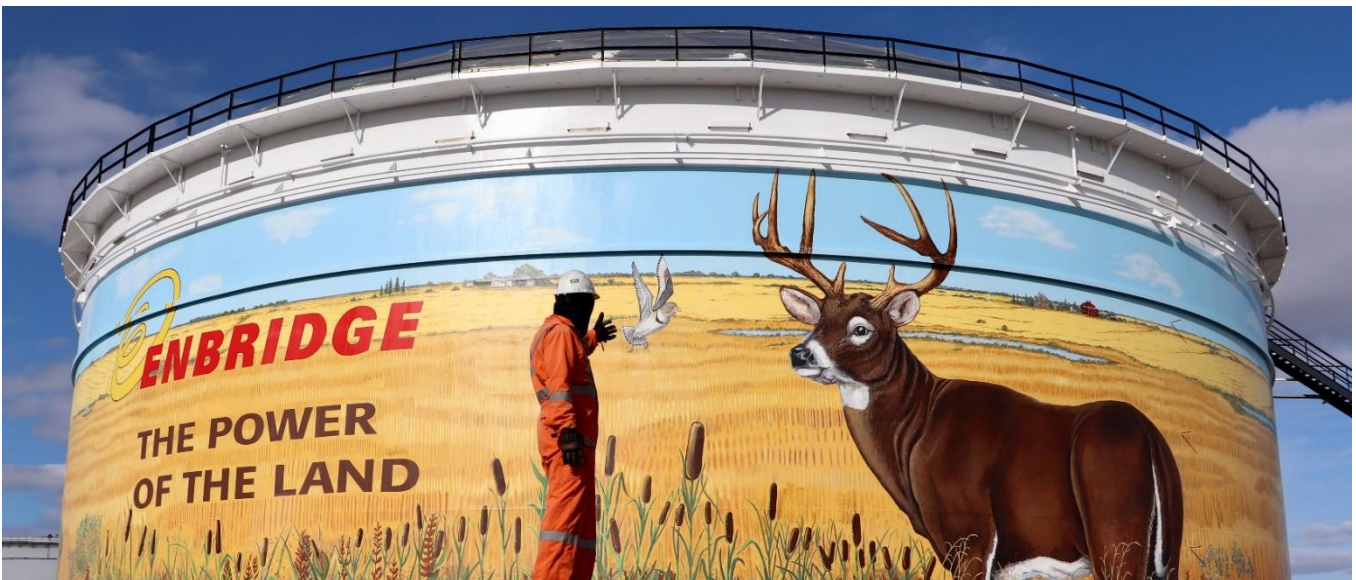
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