



OCA Wall of Honour

Rizzieri & Antonio Bellai

Bellai Brothers Construction



Rizzieri and Antonio Bellai were pillars of the Ottawa-Gatineau construction community for more than 50 years.

As brothers of Italian descent, they brought with them a rich heritage of craftsmanship, resilience and an unwavering commitment to quality. Together, they founded and nurtured Bellai Brothers, transforming it from humble beginnings in 1954 into a cornerstone of Ottawa's formwork and masonry industry.

Their legacy is etched into the very fabric of our city. It is visible in the countless structures that stand as a testament to their skill, integrity and dedication. Beyond their technical expertise,

Rizzieri and Antonio were known for their hard work and generosity, mentoring generations of tradespeople and fostering a spirit of camaraderie and respect within their teams and other trades.

Through decades of change and challenge, the brothers remained steadfast in their values: hard work, honesty and a deep sense of responsibility to their clients, their employees and their community. Their leadership built not only enduring structures but also lasting relationships, earning them a reputation for excellence that continues to inspire today. Over the years, the brothers won countless awards for concrete and masonry structures.

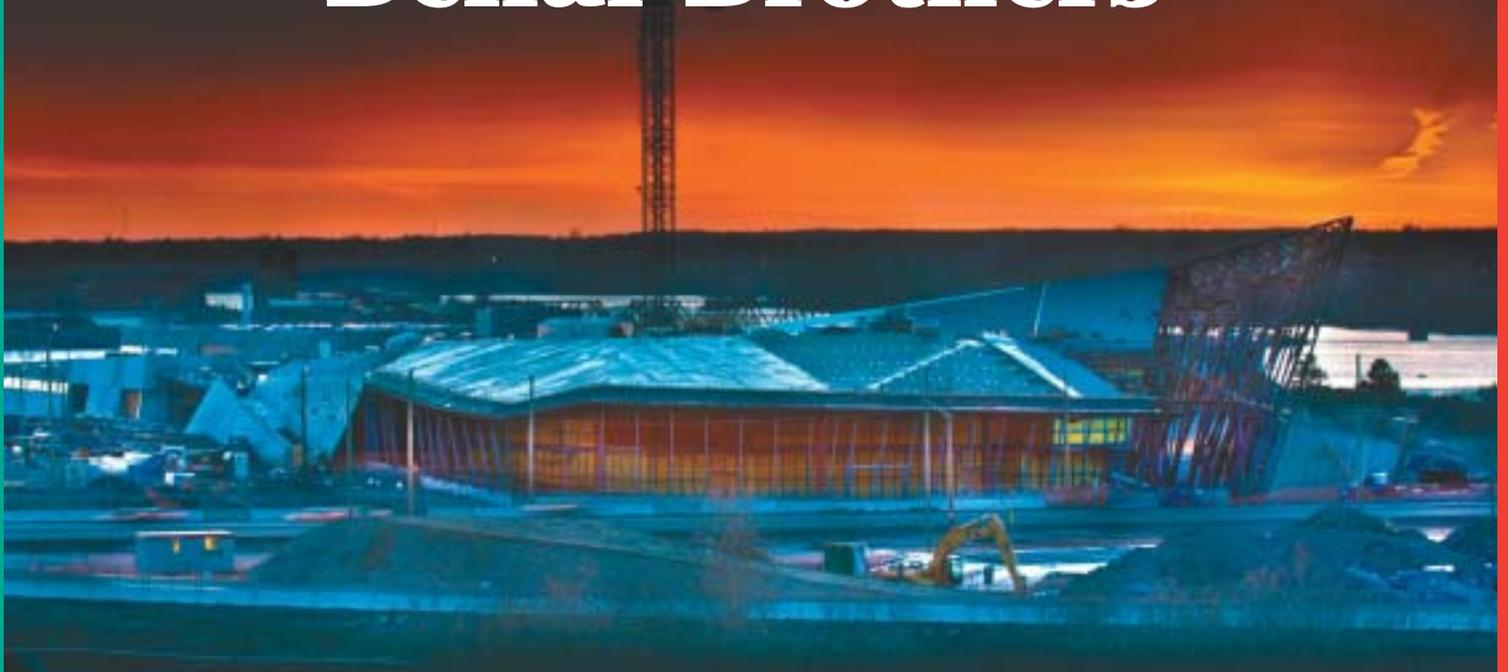
Together, Rizzieri and Antonio not only contributed decades of leadership and excellence in Ottawa's construction industry, but they also set an inspiring standard for community service and philanthropy. Their belief was that success in business carries with it a responsibility to give back—and they lived that principle fully.

Equally significant was their dedication to supporting immigrant communities in Ottawa. They played active roles in both the Italian and Portuguese communities, providing mentorship, guidance and opportunities for newcomers to build better lives in Canada. Their efforts reflected not only their pride in their heritage but also their commitment to building a welcoming, inclusive city.

Rizzieri and Antonio embodied the values of hard work, generosity and community spirit that the Ottawa Construction Association Wall of Honour represents. Their professional achievements, alongside their lifelong dedication to giving back, make them truly deserving of this recognition.



Bellai Brothers



celebrates 50 years



Doubtless anyone involved in construction in Ottawa knows the Bellai family name. For 50 years, brothers Tony and Rizzieri – and with them, their sons and daughters – have been associated with some of the biggest projects in and around Ottawa and have worked with some of the local building industry’s most famous names.

From the formwork on the Corel Centre down to the most precise masonry detail on one of Minto’s homes, the Bellai Brothers, and the business that today still bears their name, have been associated with all manner projects in this city. It should hardly come as a surprise, then, to hear that when the firm threw a party to commemorate its 50th anniversary in late July, more than 500 people turned up.

Jokes Romeo Bellai – one of the new generation of the family and a past chair of the Ottawa Construction Association – “it’s a good thing we held the party on a long weekend, or we might really have been in trouble!”

Growth of the business

In many ways, the story of the Bellai Brothers’ business is a fairly typical one. The two men arrived in



Canada from Italy at a tender age and settled in Ottawa, just as this town looked set to kick off the largest building boom to that point in its history. Both skilled tradesmen, Tony and Rizzieri founded Bellai Brothers Construction in 1954.

The early days of the business were characterized by a good deal of work in the residential sector. The brothers sought out work from a number of dif-

ferent sources and found a niche for themselves working on a multitude of smaller contracts. It wasn’t long before the business grew to the point where Bellai Brothers Construction was able to take on a crew of labourers. From there, things took off.

“We started the business the same year I was married,” says Tony. “We started the business and things were so busy that, two weeks later, we had a crew of 50 men. After three months, we’d worked on 150 houses. We were busy.”

At approximately the same time as the Bellai Brothers were carving out their niche in the residential construction industry, another set of brothers set about doing the same. In 1955, the Greenberg family launched a new home construction business, and over the next 50 years, Minto Developments – as it’s known today – would grow to become one of the largest developers in the city.

It wasn’t long before the Greenberg and Bellai families crossed paths, to their mutual benefit. Rizzieri recalls first meeting Irving Greenberg at the Minto offices on Bank Street and





Heron Road and, with his brother, agreeing to work on a few houses for the fledgling builder.

“A lot of people look back on Irving and describe him as a very flamboyant man. To us, he was always very respectful and treated us well. We really enjoyed working for Minto.”

“Minto was really our big start,” says Tony. “And at a time, in 1955, when a lot of other businesses were going bankrupt, we were fortunate to work with Minto.”

During the next decade or so, the Bellai brothers completed a good deal of work for Minto across the growing city of Ottawa, in areas of town like Chapel Hill, Fisher Road, Baseline Road and Woodroffe Avenue. And, as Minto’s building scope expanded, so too did the Bellai brothers’ skill set. By 1960, Bellai Brothers Construction began work in the light commercial construction industry, thanks in large part to the Hambro Joist building systems which provided for light concrete block construction on smaller commercial projects.

“We started to get involved with small commercial projects during the early 1960s,” says Rizzieri. “We did a few parking garages for Minto and a lot of other buildings using the Hambro Joist Systems.”

After completing work on the Bayshore Shopping Centre – a four-year job that was by far the firm’s biggest to that point – in the late 1960’s, the Bellai brothers again looked to diversify their business base, this time by tapping into the formwork industry.

The decision proved to be a good one, as the company was rewarded with a number of high-profile projects across the city, beginning with the Terraces de la Chaudière and encompassing other works including Bronson Place Apartments, the office tower at 99 Metcalfe Street, and a number of high-rise apartment buildings in the city, which at the time was a growing market. Over the years, that list grew to encompass the National Gallery of Canada, Constitution Square, Minto Place, the new Canadian War Museum and the World Exchange Plaza, among others.



"The job at Terraces de la Chaudière was an interesting one for us," says Rizzieri. "A lot of people told us we'd go bankrupt on it. They said there was no way we could get all that formwork done on time."

Of course, Bellai Brothers did deliver that job on time, thanks to what can probably best be characterized as sheer dogged determination; a commitment to see the project through to completion, no matter what.

"That was the biggest job we had ever done at that time. The formwork contract was worth \$7 million," says Tony.

"My father and my uncle knew they could do that job at Terraces de la Chaudière," says Romeo, "and that was what made the difference. They knew their reputations, their business and their livelihood was on the line and they made sure they managed that job so that it couldn't possibly fail. Because they knew they couldn't afford to fail."

Today, almost 30 years removed from the Terraces de la Chaudière project, the Bellai commitment to detail on every project remains. Each job, no matter how small, is treated as the firm's number-one priority and at 73



and 80, respectively, Tony and Rizzieri make a point to get out to each of the firm's job sites every day to make sure everything is running smoothly.

"My father and my uncle are very hands-on men," says Romeo. "They're out at the job sites at 6 in the morning to make sure there aren't any problems. Failure's not an option for them, which is what's helped make this company strong over the past 50 years."

Bellai at 50

Today, Bellai Brothers Ltd. is a very different company from its predecessor of 50 years ago. The firm offers a range of services for the residential and commercial industries, from masonry repair and restoration to formwork to pumping services and even equipment rental. By diversifying their services, they're well positioned to cope with the cyclical nature of the construction industry and above all, they love working on jobs that require the team to think outside the box.

"We love those jobs that look next to impossible to complete," says Romeo. "Our strength is our ability to come together to look at a problem from different angles and to find a solution that works."

In terms of personnel, the firm has grown tremendously as well. Today, Bellai Brothers employs more than 350 people and peaks annually at over 500. A family affair throughout, Tony and

Rizzieri's sons and daughters now form the backbone of the business as Romeo, Pietro, Gianni, Nadia, Sonia and Mirella all play an active role in the every day operations of their fathers' business.

And are the founding Bellai brothers considering retirement anytime soon? Not a chance, says Rizzieri, who, in the winter months, still makes a point to skate the length of the canal and bikes during the summer. When the time is right, he says he will step aside and let the new generation of Bellai's take the reins, but for the time being, he and his brother love the business too much to leave.

"It's a wonderful thing to reach 50 years in business and I don't think we ever thought we would get this far," says Rizzieri, "but we worked hard and were serious about our work and hired quality people. And now we're very proud of what we've accomplished."

For his part, Tony remains just as committed to the business, and says that his day's not complete if he's not in the office and visiting job sites.

And after 50 years in business, neither brother has any regrets.

"We're really happy to be celebrating 50 years. Not many companies are around that long," says Tony. "It hasn't been easy for us, but my brother and I have a great relationship. We're very dedicated people. You have to be if you want to make a business work."

