

## WEEKLY MUTUAL FUND SURVEY A13-A15

# Born to the business

*Arthur Theriault began work at his father's boatyard as soon as he could walk. Now, 65 years later, the Meteghan River yard still bustles with activity.*

By Tom Peters  
Business Reporter

Meteghan River  
**A**RTHUR THERIAULT'S education in boatbuilding and ship repair began at a tender age, working at his father's boatyard in Meteghan River.

"I was involved, like the rest of my brothers, as soon as I could walk. We were here on Saturdays. We would clean boats and help clean buildings or we would come in the evening with father. We were more or less born here, we only lived a few miles away," he says.

Three of the four brothers remain in the business. Arthur handles the company administration, Russell is vice-president and oversees new construction, Larry is secretary/treasurer and controls stock and Ernest is retired.

A.F. Theriault & Son Ltd. has been a landmark company in Meteghan River since Augustin and Elizabeth Theriault, Arthur's parents, started the business in 1938.

Today it is a beehive of activity with a number of new boats under construction in various on-site shops and a number of boat repair jobs being carried out on two slips.

The senior Theriault learned his craft in the Boston area when he ventured there to find work.

Work was scarce in the Meteghan area in the 1930s and going to look for work in the U.S. was not uncommon.

"Basically he went to the States to get work. There was nothing here. He took the boat from Yarmouth to Boston," says Arthur.

His father did what he could, washed dishes and worked in a restaurant until he landed a job in a boatyard. It was the start of his career.

"He took courses at night. He enjoyed it," says Arthur.

Augustin returned to Nova Scotia and started up his boatbuilding business, which today is one of the largest in the area.

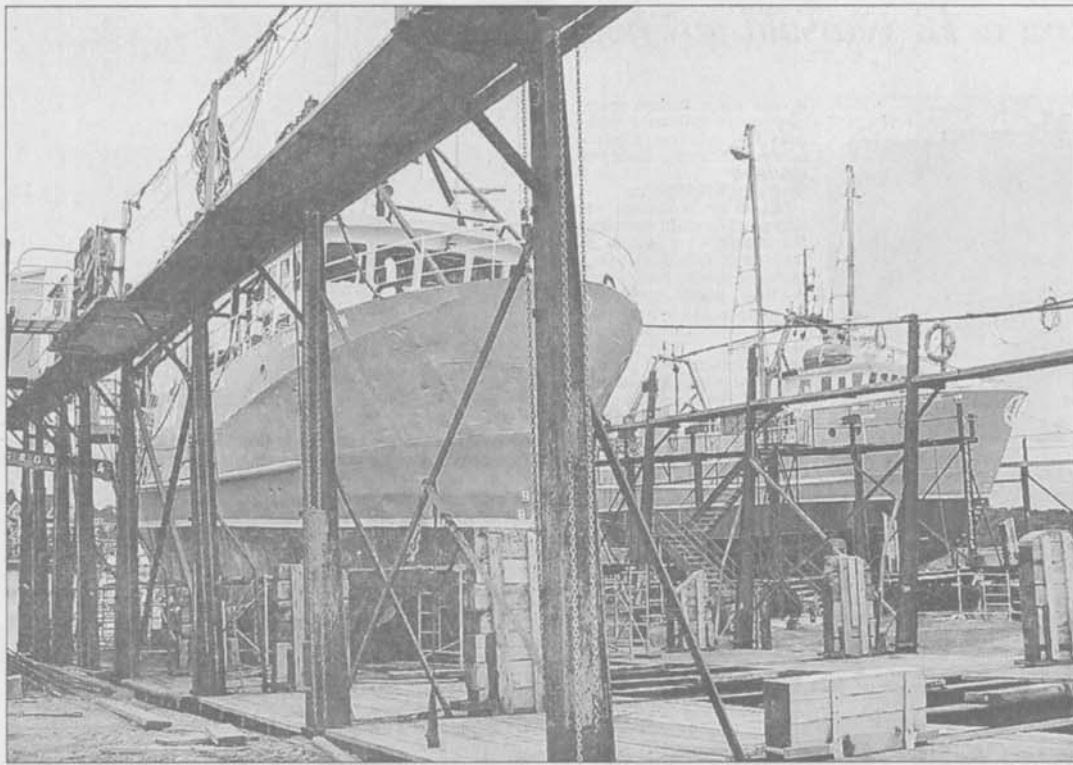
He was involved in every facet of construction. He cut the logs, milled them at his own sawmill and then designed and built the vessel.

The first boat was a passenger ferry which operated between Meteghan and Freeport on Long Island. That vessel was followed by a variety of wooden boats, many for the fishing industry.

During the Second World War the yard worked with a yard in Weymouth on a government contract to build minesweepers.

"The biggest boat he ever built was a 165-foot freighter," says Arthur.

As years past, wooden boats were replaced by fiberglass, fiberglass composites, steel and aluminum and A.J. Theriault diversified to offer boat construction in all materials. In the



The A. F. Theriault & Son boatyard in Meteghan River.

Brian Medel

early '70s the yard moved into fiberglass as the demand for wooden boats died out. The yard trained its staff to work with this material and began producing sail boats and leisure craft.

In the '80s the company expanded into steel. "The steel didn't grow quite as fast as we thought, so we went into aluminum," Arthur said.

The type of material used to construct different types of vessels depends on the individual, he says. But having the facilities to build various types of boats using various materials has meant developing separate shops and separate staffs.

However, Arthur says the yard is fortunate in that the staff is flexible and can help out in other areas if required.

But getting skilled tradespeople for the industry can be difficult, especially in a rural area. "You pretty much have to train them yourself," he says, noting the province's vocational schools and community colleges do not have the appropriate programs.

However, Arthur says, there is a move to have that changed.

In the past four or five years the yard has been busy with both new construction and boat repair, which is about 50 per cent

of the business. The workforce has been steady at about 155 people.

New construction has been in various types of fishing boats — still the mainstay of the industry — ferries and a variety of pleasure craft, including some large yachts.

Recently the yard won a contract to build a \$3-million, 20-metre high-speed patrol vessel for the RCMP.

The yard's biggest market for smaller boats is New England and just about anywhere for the larger boats. "Distance is not a problem; we get business from all over the States."

The yard has facilities to build a craft up to 185 feet in length.

Industry competition is stiff and Mr. Theriault says "some of our biggest competition now is around China for pleasure boats in the 65- to 80-foot range. For fishing boats, Quebec is one of our biggest competitors. The province subsidizes their industry but there is a move to have that changed."

Mr. Theriault is also concerned about American-built boats coming into Canada. American builders have "found a way of shipping boats into Canada through NAFTA without paying duty, but we are not

allowed to ship to the U.S."

A.F. Theriault hasn't kept its diversification to just the boat business. The company has developed houses made of fiberglass composite with foam inside. It also has a sawmill that deals mainly in hardwood and employs about 15 people.

The houses are innovative. "We have been working on small housing for underdeveloped countries," Mr. Theriault says, and the work has received recognition from the Research Council of Canada. The houses, which are about 18 feet by 14 feet can be erected by unskilled workers in about half a day.

However, one of the unexpected problems the company has faced is large-volume production.

Countries weren't talking about a few houses, but "were looking for like 1,000," Mr. Theriault said.

There is a definite market for the product, which can also be adapted to cold weather, but it would take a large investment in manufacturing infrastructure at the Meteghan River site to get set up. Getting the money is not that easy.

Mr. Theriault says government used to give guarantees on bank loans, but not anymore, so

getting financing is difficult.

Mr. Theriault says the company is always looking for new ideas and projects. He likes to adhere to his father's philosophy of reinvesting in the company.

"You put your money where you can see it, so if you lose, you can't blame anyone else. We have tried to do that, put back into infrastructure and diversify but it is expensive to do so."

Mr. Theriault also has his own thoughts on running a successful business.

"I think in every business that is successful you have to know your past and you have to look at your future. Knowing your past helps you realize where you have come from, what you have accomplished... what you knew 10 years ago and what you know now. That means you have that much more to learn in the next 10 years," he says.

Mr. Theriault says it is difficult to predict the industry's future because of many factors.

But one thing that is likely to occur is the Theriault family will stay involved. Arthur has a son in the business and Ernest two sons. "They are showing interest in it. I think there is definitely something there," he says.

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