

## He brings world of experience to bridge project

Peter Sanderson, the project manager for the new I-35W bridge, has played major roles in projects from Canada to India.

By **Jim Foti**, Star Tribune

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Peter Sanderson

### **Elizabeth Flores**

Peter Sanderson spends most of his long workdays in an office near the Mississippi River, but he'd rather be outside, wearing his dark safety glasses and his white hard hat, checking on the noisy work at the water's edge.

As the project manager for the new Interstate 35W bridge, the British-born Sanderson brings a global perspective to the closely watched project. A version of his résumé, posted on the Minnesota Department of Transportation

### **SIDEWALK TOURS**

BRIDGE PROJECT MANAGERS ARE GIVING "SIDEWALK SUPERINTENDENT TALKS" ABOUT THE PROJECT EVERY SATURDAY. THE FREE TOURS START AT 11 A.M. AT THE GRANDMA'S SALOON PARKING LOT IN THE SEVEN CORNERS AREA AND GO ACROSS THE 10TH AVENUE BRIDGE ADJACENT TO THE CONSTRUCTION SITE.

website, says, "He knows what it takes to get the job done and has no learning curve."

But as he faces reams of contract requirements, a high-speed, high-pressure schedule and seemingly endless surprises at the construction site, Sanderson is continually learning what it will take to get this bridge built.

MnDOT officials say they're pleased with his work so far and add that Flatiron Constructors has a way of getting things done that's an improvement on what they've seen in the past.

Sanderson, 60, grew up in a household where it was normal to travel around the world to build things. His father took his family to places such the Netherlands, Australia and Iraq while working on power plants, railways and bridges.

After college in Western Australia, Sanderson resumed globe-trotting -- Britain, Nigeria, Canada. In the early 1980s, he was the project manager for Vancouver's Alex Fraser Bridge, which at the time was the world's largest cable-stayed bridge.

Sanderson said the 35W bridge differs from his previous projects in several ways -- most notably, the challenge of designing and building a bridge in just over a year.

The complicated site is yielding the unexpected, such as artesian water in the bottom of a 100-foot test shaft, or rock showing up close to the surface in an area where piles were going to be driven.

"There are so many physical problems out there ... we've had to move piers, shorten them," said Sanderson, now a U.S. citizen. "We've had to make an awful lot of changes."

The contract says it's "all our responsibility, whatever we find out there, or almost everything that we find out there," he said. "And it's up to us to handle it all" -- without charging the government more money.

### **Lots of attention**

Also different with this project: the level of public attention. "It's very unusual that there's the amount of interest in construction that there is here," he said.

This isn't just another project, not after the Aug. 1 catastrophe that killed 13 and injured dozens. The collapse put MnDOT under scrutiny, as did the way in which Flatiron got this job.

Using a bidding formula that included more than just cost, the state chose Flatiron even though its \$234 million bid was \$57 million more than the lowest bid.

MnDOT officials have repeatedly defended the process and say the Flatiron team is giving the public what it's paying for: a high-quality bridge, built quickly and safely.

### **Working together**

Sanderson said he probably talks with Jon Chiglo, MnDOT's project manager for the bridge, eight times a day. "Their approach has been very proactive," Chiglo said. Because the project is design-build, MnDOT's role is mainly to oversee and advise.

"On a traditional job, when there's issues out in the field, typically the contractor comes to MnDOT and says, 'What do you want us to do?'" said Terry Ward, MnDOT's deputy manager for construction of the bridge. "On this job, when issues come up, we get together in a room and we talk about it -- from the construction side, from the design, from our side -- and we resolve it."

## **Aiming for bonuses**

MnDOT isn't the only entity with a keen interest in Sanderson's performance. If the Flatiron team finishes the bridge by Dec. 24, 2008, it's eligible for a \$7 million bonus. That's in addition to the \$200,000 it could earn for each day it finishes early.

Sanderson remains confident, saying he has great people working for him.

One task he's trying not to delegate is the "Sidewalk Superintendent Talks," which are held every Saturday morning and give the public a chance to see what's happening at the construction site.

Communicating with the public is part of his job, he said, and he wants to make sure the message is consistent.

"I decided to do every one that I'm here for, which should be most Saturdays," he said.

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