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YUKON PROSPECTORS' ASSOCIATION SALUTES ARCHER CATHRO by Jane Gaffin

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The geological consulting and mineral exploration firm of Archer Cathro has an excellent track record dating back 37 years in the Yukon.

During that span, the veteran firm has gained a treasure chest of geological knowledge while expending an immense amount of energy and capital on a myriad of worthy projects that has economically benefitted Yukoners.

It would be hard to name a Yukon mineral property Archer Cathro hasn't touched directly or been involved with through one of its associates. The Vancouver-based company, which only keeps its Whitehorse office open seasonally since industry suffered a slump, has been a vanguard on many fronts.

Long before information was touted as the wave of the future, Archer Cathro was data-gathering.

It also was way ahead of regulatory law in issuing a strict set of wilderness-conduct guidelines for all employees to practice and cover its footprints before "reclamation" became a household word.

While maintaining a persistent and strongly-active presence since inception, Archer Cathro has always shown an unwavering faith in the independent prospectors and their visions.

In appreciation of those virtues, the Yukon Prospectors' Association has chosen to induct Archer Cathro into the Hall of Fame honor roll that bestows recognition on a select few who have helped the prospector along the way.

YPA presentations are traditionally awarded during the annual Geoscience Forum banquet in November. The ambitious Hall of Fame project, started in 1988, was capped with a several-ton metal statement about mineral prospecting in the form of a bronze prospector and his dog.

The sculpture, which epitomizes people who have the courage to follow their dreams, watches over Whitehorse from the flagstone courtyard at Main Street and Third Avenue. The Hall of Fame's purpose is to pay tribute to the Yukon prospector, who has struggled against seemingly impossible odds while searching for minerals in this territory, and to recognize those special ones who helped the prospector's dreams come to fruition.

Back in 1962, Alan Archer was employed as chief geologist with United Keno Hill Mines in the Mayo mining district. The company decision-makers opted for a major underground and surface exploration program to find new ore reserves to feed the 500-ton-a-day concentrator. The crash program required extra heads and hands.

One of the four exploration geologists Archer hired was Robert Cathro. He was destined to join Archer as a partner in a consulting practice three years hence. Another new hire was Mike Phillips. He would be employed by the new syndicate come 1968.

Over the years, Archer and Cathro have launched countless geology and prospecting careers. Fresh high school graduates would hire on as enthusiastic dirt baggers and be trained into good field assistants. Intuitive assistants knew coming back to camp each evening with a big bag of pretty rocks would keep any project geologist happy. Then they could expect a job the next field season, and the next, until they were hooked.

But Archer and Cathro wouldn't let individuals with potential fritter away life. The summer students who showed mettle were taken under the wing and nurtured by the company principals who coaxed, taught and encouraged the youths to earn degrees in geoscience disciplines.

One protege was a 1983 graduate of F.H. Collins Secondary School. Bill Wengzynowski grew up in a bush setting and liked the lifestyle. He had a natural bush radar but no geology experience. In those days, when exploration jobs were at a premium, he was resigned to work in town and save to enroll at the University of British Columbia.

Through the grapevine, he fortuitously learned Archer Cathro had an immediate opening. He hurried to the office on Third Avenue, where the Java Connection is today. Bob Cathro tagged the interview with the dreaded "we'll get back to you" spiel.

Cathro was true to his word, though. An hour later, Wengzynowski was packing his bags and heading off with a few trailmates on a month's adventure to the Cassiar country in northern British Columbia.

Wengzynowski listened to his mentors and earned a geological engineering degree from UBC. But he is and always will be a prospector. Over the past 10 years, the valuable employee is sometimes contracted out to an Archer Cathro affiliate. Thus was the case in 1998.

Wengzynowski was working under the banner of Expatriate Resources out in the Finlayson Lake area. The crew was following up soil-sampling targets for volcanogenic massive sulphides (VMS), which denotes a poly-metallic deposit containing a combination of lead, zinc, copper, gold and silver. Instead of a base or precious metal find, he discovered exotic emeralds.

"I'm the one who starts the fire," explained Wengzynowski, celebrated as the YPA's 2000 Prospector of the Year for his incredible feat. "Somebody else takes care of the fire while I go start another one."

The spectacular "fire", heralded as Canada's first significant emerald discovery, is the envy of other jurisdictions and currently under development by True North Gems Inc.

Other jurisdictions are envious of the Yukon for other reasons, too. The Yukon offers a

mineral-inventory database, plus maps, available on CD-ROM. And it's only \$30, thanks to the foresight of Archer Cathro.

To understand the geology and mineral showings of a property, a researcher needs the historic material, too. The MIN File has become an invaluable reference tool from which large amounts of hardcore data can be retrieved with the least amount of effort.

Compiling and updating a database is maybe not a glamorous job but is as essential as breathing. The database is a living thing that has to be continually fed information. Otherwise, it will die. In 1992, the Northern Affairs geology and exploration department took over the responsibility of feeding Archer Cathro's 20-year-old brainchild.

The monumental task began in the winter of 1972, before personal computers were affordable. The materials were contained in ringed binders and updated on manual typewriters.

Mike Phillips' tedious task was to read mining recorders' microfiche files. His initial search began with the history of claims, 1899 Dawson onwards. He checked claim histories, the names of claimstakers, who had transferred the claims to whom, who optioned them and had to trace name-changes of companies. Phillips recalled making about 500 phone calls that first winter.

Meanwhile, Cathro was in the Vancouver office reading piles of academic theses and George Cross Newsletters. Anything was a potential source for information. Phillips and Cathro contacted government agencies, mining companies, made personal contacts, interviewed prospectors, read assessment reports and prospectus reports filed with stock exchanges.

New information was constantly uncovered from Phillips' eight-hours-a-day searches. The first year's work had to be revised 50 per cent. Customers, mostly private companies, began subscribing to the service. The government refused to subscribe, assuming wrongly that it could assemble its own database within a couple of years.

Later, Archer Cathro computerized the file index and was able to cross-reference to properties containing specific minerals. But the hours spent searching and updating were costing more than the money returned from the subscribers.

After several years of negotiations, the government saw the wisdom of purchasing the already-assembled material for \$160,000. The archival collection has been a veritable cornucopia of information to geologists, prospectors, mining companies, media, government agencies, land-use planners, first nations, environmentalists and anybody who does any kind of Yukon research.

Another one of Archer Cathro's unsung contributions to society was to recognize the unique scenic value of the Tombstone Mountain area, best viewed from the Dempster Highway. The area hosts remarkable pinnacles, spires, cliffs, cirques and house-sized boulders.

Mother Nature spent millions of years troweling the spectacular granite monolith and sculpting smooth, virtually-vertical cliffs that reach hundreds of metres high. Ironically, the same granite that created the scenery which attracts wilderness buffs also created the mineralization that attracts miners.

According to the MIN File, the south flank of Tombstone Mountain is concentrated with a low-grade, bulk-tonnage, oval-shaped body of uranium-laced rocks exposed at surface. It is the largest uranium discovery known in the Yukon.

Eldorado Nuclear, a federal representative, partnered in the late 1970s with the then Whitehorse-based Archer Cathro & Associates. Ukon Joint Venture identified over 20 high-grade uranium showings in the area. The price crashed around 1980 and uranium exploration ceased.

Archer Cathro returned to examine a belt of 92-million-year-old rocks for gold potential. Then the Yukon government, eye-ing the "viewscape" since 1974, was making overtures about preserving the area as a park.

In the spirit of creating a territorial park, Archer Cathro voluntarily forfeited its Tombstone and Teta properties on the proviso that nobody could restake the mineralization.

The few accounts registered herewithin are but a few indicators of why the Yukon Prospectors' Association has chosen to salute Archer Cathro in the year 2002.