

THOMAS J. CLEMENS SELECTED MVP HONOREE

by Traci Read ■ Senior Editor

Thomas J. Clemens, president of American Commercial Inc., earned the Gulf Coast Trenchless Association and *Underground Construction* magazine's 2007 Most Valuable Professional award. He was honored at a special luncheon hosted by the GCTA and *Underground Construction* magazine at the Underground Construction Technology International Convention & Exhibition on Jan. 30. The award was given to Clemens honoring his career in the trenchless construction industry.

Clemens brings a wealth of knowledge to his role as president with American Commercial. After graduation from Westminster College in New Wilmington, PA, in 1970, where he earned a degree in political science/business, Clemens began his career with Commercial Shearing Inc., Youngstown, OH, working as a sales coordinator for the Underground Supports Division. The company evolved over the years and was sold to various companies until 1996 when it merged to become American Commercial. Clemens served in various managerial positions, eventually being named president. He was elected to the board of directors in 2005.

American Commercial Inc. had its beginnings in the 1920s eventually offering a selection of ground control solutions beginning with steel liner plates installed in the Gratiot Avenue sewer system in Detroit, MI. Today, the company is a leading designer and manufacturer of underground steel supports in North America. The first solid, square-cornered tunnel liner plates were designed and patented by Commercial in 1926 for use in the pioneer bore of the Moffat Tunnel in Colorado.

The company's underground supports are designed specifically to meet each project specification. Geological conditions dictate the type of support needed to control ground areas after excavation. Therefore, supports are designed in an endless variety of configurations to control various conditions.

Clemens was instrumental in working on several major projects with American Commercial, including: the Houston Waste Water Program (Houston, TX); Tunnel & Reservoir Plan (Chicago, IL); Water Tunnel (New York City, NY); Los Angeles County Sanitation District (Los Angeles, CA); and The Big Dig and Ocean Outfall (Boston, MA) to name a few.

During his acceptance speech, Clemens credited the jobs and the people he worked with in the Gulf Coast area as having influenced his career. "I've been in this business for 37 years," said Clemens. "It's amazing

when I look back on my career and how much this area of the country [Gulf Coast] has meant in my development and in learning about the industry, as well as what commercial products are used in the trenchless industry including shaft and tunnel construction, in general."

Clemens went on to explain that after working for a few years at Commercial Shearing he traveled to Houston to a job site where he met an interesting character who worked for BorTunCo.

"My boss said, 'I want you to go to Houston and meet F.T. Jones who works for BorTunCo. He's going to show you around for a few days,'" explained Clemens. "Jones was a rather strange fellow with a perverse sense

of humor and after three days of mucking around in wood box tunnels, liner plate tunnels, and bore pits full of mud – typical Houston ground conditions – I sort of wondered what I'd done to make my boss inflict this punishment on me! But I learned a lot, I survived, and it meant a lot to me over the years when I look back and realize how much I learned about working in difficult ground conditions and how our particular products or other products and equipment can be used to complete a project.

"Some of the major work Houston has undertaken has been very difficult, and in my opinion, are in some of the most difficult ground conditions. But the city has also discovered some of the most unique solutions. Some of them include the Westheimer Extension, Clinton Drive Program, Northside Relief Program, the Coastal Water Authority and many others our company has been involved with."

Clemens went on to describe how his travels recently took him to Santiago, Chile where he was able to put his knowledge of tried and true products and for difficult soil conditions to the test. "The contractor was trying to use inefficient products to build a shaft in dry soil and cobbles, but I was able to convince him to use products that we've been using in the U.S. for the past 40 years with success," said Clemens. "I've discovered that if it can be built in Houston with the products I know of, it can be built anywhere."

In commenting on Clemens' recent MVP award, Dale Kornegay, president and CEO

Thomas Clemens, president of American Commercial Inc., accepted the annual GCTA/*Underground Construction* magazine Most Valuable Professional Award during the GCTA Luncheon attended by 150 people at UCT.



Accepting this year's GCTA/*Underground Construction* magazine MVP award was Thomas Clemens (center), president of American Commercial. Presenting the award were Dale Kornegay, president/CEO of BorTunCo (left) and Russ Ford, business development manager, LAN, and president of GCTA.



of BorTunCo said: "Tom's honesty and integrity are what set him apart. I've never known Tom to give anyone an unfair advantage. He believes that what's good for the industry, is what is good for everyone. When asked, he will do anything to promote what is good for the trenchless industry. Tom and his company are behind the scenes of most products to do with tunneling or shaft work that are used today. This is not only in the U.S., but around the world."

Russ Ford, business development manager for LAN and president of GCTA, concurs that he's one of the pivotal background players in the industry. "Both Rafael Ortega and Tony Boyd at LAN have known him for many years. He's one of the initial players in the industry. Houston has some of the most difficult soil conditions in the country combined with the fact that it is also one of the first places in the United States to use microtunneling. Tom was a major player who helped to not only design systems for our access pits to work properly, but to also keep our workers safe. He was a major contributor in helping us understand how to do the trenchless market by being an educator and teacher," said Ford. ■