



TUTKA LLC

By RACHAEL KVAPIL

MEMBER PROFILE

Award-winning general contractor keeps focus on growth, evolution

The mission statement of Amie and John Sommer's general contracting company is reflected in their name — Tutka LLC. Many people assume the company is named after Tutka Bay near Homer where they have a family cabin, but Amie Sommer said that's only part of the story. "Tutka" is a Finnish word that translates to "radar" in English, and it adequately sums up their business philosophy from Day 1.

"This name seems fitting as we are always looking at what's next on our 'radar,'" says Amie Sommer, co-owner of Tutka. "It's not a crystal ball, but it is imperative that we continue to look at the economy, measure up our staff and resources, track trends and strive to be at the forefront of the industry."

Tutka has embraced change from the start. Amie Sommer started the company with her sister in 1999, branding it as an environmental and instrumentation company. Early on, the sisters ran a smart business, filing for the State of Alaska Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program. Amie Sommer said the company has benefited monetarily from the program by getting funds for training, taxes, marketing and bonding costs each year. Likewise, it has also opened doors to new customers and further

certification by the Department of Transportation as a Women's Business Enterprise/Disadvantaged Business Enterprise.

"Many people don't know how beneficial this certification is," she said. "It's cumbersome initially, but the annual renewals are simple. We would encourage any woman-owned business to apply for the program."

After Amie and John Sommer married and he became co-owner, Tutka evolved into an environmental and heavy civil construction company. Amie Sommer jokes that the husband-and-wife dynamic can be challenging at times when one is a licensed civil engineer and the other is an environmental scientist. Yet, there is no denying that it has made for a successful team, resulting in the company tagline: "Where Engineering Meets the Environment."

"Not only did this evolution work for us professionally," Amie Sommer said, "it allowed us to have the personal life needed for two kids."

To accomplish growth, Tutka continually focuses on niche services such as bridge construction. Amie Sommer said Alaska's bridge infrastructure is old and compromised; due to recent bridges collapsing in the Lower 48, states are repairing or replacing bridges as funding becomes available.

One of the bridges Tutka recently replaced was the Roche Moutonnee Creek Bridge at MP 265 of the Dalton Highway. The project required a roadway diversion and temporary stream crossing constructed alongside the existing bridge, followed by demolition of the existing 40-foot-long wood structure, allowing for streambank modification, driving H-pile and rock lining. Tutka successfully completed the final 120-foot long concrete bulb-tee girder bridge, including on-site mixing of concrete for the substructure, by careful planning and effective use of nearby resources. The company received a 2017 AGC Excellence in Construction Award for the project.

Not that growth hasn't come with challenges. Amie Sommer said environmental work has been lucrative in the past, with higher profit margins than civil construction. However, the projects are generally smaller and hit-or-miss contracts for a company their size. Federal work procured under larger



PHOTO COURTESY TUTKA LLC

Amie and John Sommer merged their backgrounds in civil engineering and environmental science to produce niche services for their customers.

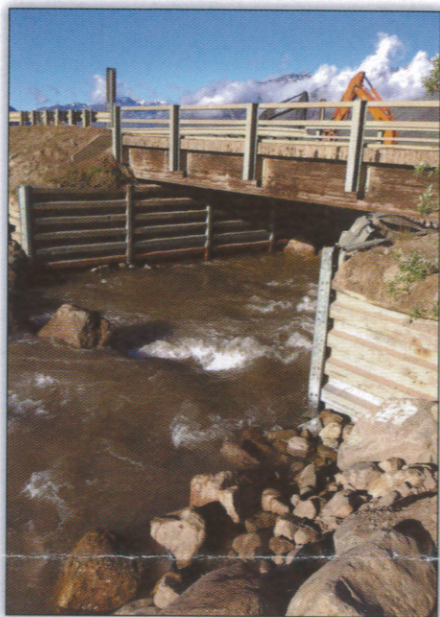


PHOTO COURTESY TUTKA LLC

Tutka recently replaced the Roche Moutonnee Creek Bridge at MP 265 of the Dalton Highway, a challenging project that required a roadway diversion and temporary stream crossing alongside the existing bridge, followed by demolition of the existing 40-foot-long wood structure before building the new bridge.

bundled contracts (infinite delivery/infinite quantity or ID/IQ, hazardous, toxic and radioactive waste or HTRW, environmental remediation service or ERS, etc.) are difficult for smaller, local companies to win, as owners either want engineering companies or companies with larger capacities to reduce owner risk. Another obstacle is getting bonding and insurance to write environmental cleanup policies in Alaska. This limits their options and is costly.

However, Tutka still provides turn-key environmental services such as hazardous-waste cleanups, site remediations, Phase I/Phase II environmental site assessments, project planning documents, on-site sampling, storm water pollution prevention plans/hazardous materials control plans and more. With the construction side of the business, they can perform the dirt and structures work as well as the environmental work on jobs. For example, Tutka performed a site remediation project and removed contamination under a crumbling foundation. They were able to save the structure and put a new foundation in to achieve "no further action" from the Alaska Department

of Environmental Conservation.

Key partnerships with other businesses have also fostered growth. When Tutka started, the Alaska economy was struggling. Interest rates on small business loans were 12.75 percent, and the price of oil was less than \$20 per barrel. Amie Sommer said it took close alliances with mentors and financial partners to ensure adequate capital for operations. While capital is always an issue for small business, it has become easier to obtain after 19 years of success. Given their start in "hard times," Amie Sommer said it has made them cautious business owners who have the experience to survive the current flat economy.

"We are lean, keep our overhead low and don't get over-extended," Amie Sommer said. "We track our costs closely, bid wisely and perform every job with pride in craftsmanship. When issues arise, we, as owners, step in and work with our staff as a team member to ensure the project is a success for owners and clients."

Bob Walden, PE, civil engineer/project manager for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, said Tutka has provided quality work since the borough started collaborating with the company five years ago. He describes Tutka as proactive in identifying potential problems and providing solutions.

"This allows them to be incredibly efficient and get work done — and

right the first time," Walden said.

Tony Sprague, PE, Construction Group Chief for the Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, agrees that, "They have always completed projects on time and to specifications."

Tutka has been an AGC member since 2016. Amie Sommer said she sees membership as an investment into her business as well as an investment into other businesses. She said AGC keeps Tutka abreast of the changing federal, state and local regulations; politics; and economic trends in Alaska. Likewise, she believes AGC goes to bat for contractors and the construction workforce and provides numerous discounted or free training events and networking opportunities.

As for the future, Tutka will celebrate a major milestone next year. Amie Sommer said a huge party is in the works as they celebrate 20 years in business.

"We have many blessings to celebrate. We are healthy and happy. We have a great group of skilled people that keep our company going. We have a beautiful new office building, a fleet of equipment and full-time, year-round work for our staff. We see Tutka continuing to grow despite the economic outlook," she said. 🍔

Rachael Kvapil is a freelance writer and photographer living in Fairbanks.

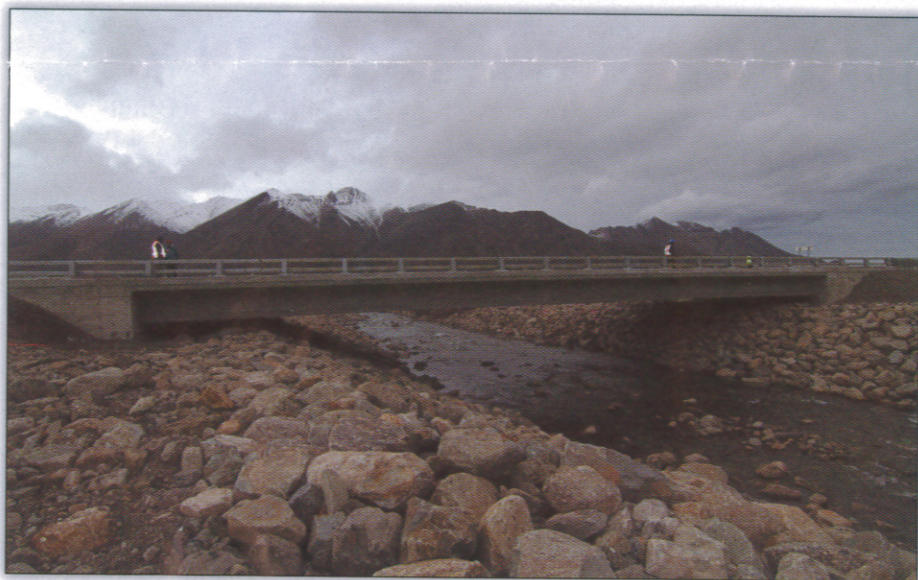


PHOTO COURTESY TUTKA LLC

Tutka successfully completed the final Roche Moutonnee Creek Bridge in 2017, winning a 2017 AGC Excellence in Construction Award for the project.

COMPANY	TOP EXECUTIVE	YEAR FOUNDED / ESTABLISHED IN ALASKA	WORLDWIDE / ALASKA EMPLOYEES	SOCIAL MEDIA CONTACTS & BUSINESS DESCRIPTION
Alborn Construction 118 E. International Airport Rd. Anchorage, AK 99518 Phone: 907-276-4400	Adam Alborn, Pres.	2001 2001	7 7	albornconstruction.com info@albornconstruction.com Full service commercial and residential general contracting. Specializing in tenant improvements, building modifications, home additions, and renovations.
Arctic Solar Ventures 745 W. Fourth Ave., Suite 101 Anchorage, AK 99501 Phone: 907-268-4188	Jackie Savina, VP	2015 2015	8 8	Arctic Solar Ventures is Alaska's premium solar provider, specializing in grid-direct solar photovoltaic systems and solid-state battery storage. Whether for home, business, or utility-scale, ASV designs and engineers projects to exacting specifications to last more than thirty years.
Audio Video Installation & Design 4021 Iona Cir. Anchorage, AK 99507 Phone: 907-561-9473	Dan Siira, Owner	1993 1993	5 5	avidalaska.com dan@avidalaska.com Smart home automation, home theater design and installation, speakers, business conference rooms, lighting and blinds.
BC Excavating 2251 Cinnabar Lp. Anchorage, AK 99507 Phone: 907-344-4492	Gordon Bartel, Pres.	1982 1982	35 35	bcxllc.net Complete hauling and excavation services, environmental, water, sewer and storm utilities, site work, hydro excavation, GPS site mapping and fabrication.
Bristol Construction Services 111 W. 16th Ave., Third Floor Anchorage, AK 99501 Phone: 907-563-0013	Travis Woods, CEO/Pres.	2003 2003	12 2	bristol-companies.com Heavy and civil construction, site restoration/development, highway, street and bridge construction.
Bristol Design Build Services 111 W. 16th Ave., Third Floor Anchorage, AK 99501 Phone: 907-563-0013	Mark Morgan, GM	2004 2004	8 2	bristol-companies.com We provide professional design build management and vertical construction services. We offer clients a unique approach to efficiently and effectively manage complex projects from concept to completion. A full suite of capabilities enables us to successfully construct a wide array of building types.
CDF General Contractors 4235 Morphy Ct. Anchorage, AK 99508 Phone: 907-227-1102	Gary Murphy, Pres.	1983 1983	3 3	cdfincak.com cdfincak@gmail.com Tenant improvements, commercial, residential, renovation, and repair of damaged buildings, new construction, commercial, elevator installation, and general contracting. Focused on green building practices. Another service we offer is construction consulting.
ChemTrack Alaska 11711 S. Gambell St. Anchorage, AK 99515 Phone: 907-349-2511	Carrie Jokiel, Pres.	1973 1973	15-20 15-20	chemtrack.net Please check out our Statement of Qualifications at chemtrack.net/about_us.htm .



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