



Enduring Work

DFP Foundation Products turns 30 and still going strong

By Heather Hudson

If the success of a company is measured in years, DFP Foundation Products, LLC was built to last.

Jack Dougherty founded the company in 1984 in response to the growing need for pile points and splices in the pile driving industry. Their marquis product came right out of the gate: the TAPERTUBE™ pile, a popular friction pile widely used in the northeastern states by public agencies and private owners.

Jack's signature style for product innovation was born out of the desire to serve the pile driver. And he didn't always go about it the conventional way.

"Our chief engineer said to me a long time ago, 'It's good that you never went to engineering school. You're not constrained by all that we learned,'" said Jack. "He was right: I would find a solution to a problem and just do it. I had a lot of luck."

DFP's product line has grown to include pipe splices, H-pile splices, cast steel galvanized UP-LIFT anchors and cast steel points for timber piles. They make a timber pile UP-LIFT anchor that is popular all over the country, particularly in New Orleans.

Located in Franklin Lakes, N.J., DFP is staffed by Jack and his son John

Dougherty, just one of 12 Dougherty children and the sole offspring to take a lasting interest in the business. Their late wife and mother Barbara was also integral to the operation before she passed away in 2008.

"Everybody loved her," said Jack. "She just had that personality. She was a delight."

DFP's manufacturing facility is located in Alabama and they have warehouse facilities in Michigan and Indiana. Back in the home office, Jack handles the TAPERTUBE end of the business while John does the casting and other products.

From the beginning

In 1965, Jack Dougherty got his start in the industry as a sales manager with Associated Pile and Fitting Corporation. Proving to be a quick study, he went from rudimentary knowledge of piling ("I knew what a pile was. That's about it.") to eventually becoming part owner and executive vice president.

His ascent at that company was due in no small part to a number of informative, customer-oriented brochures. He also organized and produced annual seminars for pile drivers that emphasized the practical side of the industry.

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– Jack Dougherty, Owner,
DFP Foundations Products



John Dougherty works closely with his father, Jack, to ensure DFP Foundation Products is successful long into the future



Jack Dougherty, who started DFP Foundation Products in 1984



TAPTUBE PILES in use for the JFK Light Rail project being installed at NYC Van Wyck Expressway

to talk to your customer. The engineer is not your customer, but all communications were geared to them. I decided to make literature and gear it towards the contractor. We had to give them a reason to use our products. They're the ones that paid our bills."

With this approach, Jack worked sales up to five million dollars in the span of a few years before he resigned and began his own company.

Ingenuity during lean years

Ask any business with longevity and they'll tell you about the hard times. The 1990s presented its challenges for the entire pile driving industry and DFP was not immune.

"Several of our customers filed for bankruptcy and walked away with our profit as well as the cost of the material," said Jack.

To tide them over until the orders started rolling in again, the two Doughertys

set to work in their shop constructing wood cushion blocks for pile drivers and unique uplift anchors for pipe piles, designed by Jack.

"We had a redesign for an uplift anchor for pipe piles. The engineer wanted to weld an oversize plate with vertical rebars on top of the pile. If it's already driven to grade, how could you possibly weld a plate on? I made a drawing that showed that we'd machine a hole in the plate and weld the thing from the top and accomplish what he wanted. He approved. We fabricated it right in our shop."

They also built unique wooden boxes in which to stack products in a manufacturing plant. Projects like these kept the business afloat until a turn in the economy.

Year after year

Being in business for 30 years means bearing witness to a multitude of changes in

the industry. Jack says when he got into the business, most people were driving piles with a lift crane and either swinging or fixed leads. Today, he marvels at the hydraulic rigs in most competitive markets.

While he's seen a lot of progress, there are some things that have not improved with time.

"There's so much cutting and pasting in specifications now. Nobody bothers to write them from scratch anymore. I reviewed one this morning and on one page it said the piles will be nine-gauge, but when you turn the page it says they'll be a minimum of a quarter-inch. How do you justify that?"

When it comes to the future, Jack says the business is in his son John's hands. But he has no plans to retire anytime soon. "As soon as they put the first nail in the coffin, I'll have to retire," he joked.

Before joining PDCA, Jack was the founder of the Deep Foundations Institute, organizing the steering committee and serving as first president in 1976. He was a member of the Board of Trustees until 1996 and received the DFI Distinguished Service Award in 1997.

Jack joined PDCA after realizing that the DFI was moving away from driven piles and no longer followed his vision as a driven pile organization.

Today, you'll find the two Doughertys in their office absorbed in what they've proven to do best: stand the test of time. ▼



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