

Living Legend

Success lies in people and courage to evolve in ever-changing industry

By Heather Hudson

In 1950, Tommy Parker, owner of Parker Marine Contracting in Charleston, S.C., started out with a drop hammer “that you picked up and dropped.” Today, his company boasts ten cranes, 12 hammers and 12 acres of waterfront property, barges to carry the cranes, their own prestressed concrete plant and “best of all, some very good people.”

If that’s not a success story, we’re not sure what is.

He says the secret to his accomplishments in the industry is simple: “You have to be fair and just with everybody. And you have to surround yourself with employees who have initiative and a desire to do bigger and better things.”

Of course, high-quality pile driving has something to do with it, too. Parker’s first job was building residential wood docks in the Charleston area before branching out to timber pile driving work. It being the 1950s, all of their pile driving work was carried out with 25-ton Lima cranes and drop hammers or small steam-driven Vulcan hammers. The Charleston area is littered with structures still standing strong on some of the composite foundation piles they began using around 1955.

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said, noting that he was in heavy competition with Raymond Concrete Pile Incorporated for many years before the latter went out of business.

In the 1960s, they were invited to bid a large pressed concrete pile job for a pier for the Georgia Port Authority. When they got the job they built the prestressed concrete pile plant in Savannah, Ga. and officially entered the prestressed business.

“When we successfully performed a 100-ton static load test at a huge expansion project at the Georgetown paper mill, we greatly opened up market acceptance of prestressed concrete pile in the area,” he said. “Previous to that, many design professionals weren’t convinced that this type of pile could economically handle the still increasing loads required.”

Other highlights of their years in business is the introduction of the first diesel hammer to the area with Link-Belt Speeder 520. With it, the scope of their work

expanded to include bridges, large concrete piers for the Navy, marine ender systems for the DOT and utilities for regional power companies.

In 1988, Tommy’s son, John T. Parker Jr., returned to the business, joining a cluster of employees, many of whom are still there today.

“The majority of our employees have been here for 25 years. We wouldn’t have been able to grow like we have without them. My son and I get along extremely well together. He is learning the business and he thinks he’s running it and I haven’t told him any different. He does what needs to be done and I look over his shoulder,” he said.

Though mostly pleased with the advances in equipment over the years, Parker says hydraulic hammers “have too many working parts.”

He may or may not be right, but who’s going to argue with a living legend? ▼

