CONCRETE PUMPING: The Market is There

In five years, Denver’s Rich O’Brien has built up a successful new business

When the international association of Wall and Ceiling Contractors held its convention in Las Vegas in 1970, Denver plastering contractor Rich O’Brien was there, looking for diversification opportunities to complement his lathing and plastering business.

At the convention, too, were representatives of the Thomsen Division, Royal Industries, and they extolled the benefits of concrete pumping as a specialty.

Before the convention ended, O’Brien had made arrangements for a pair of Thomsen 740 boom pumps and the three companies in Denver who were already providing concrete pumping services suddenly had a new competitor.

That O’Brien had the business and promotional skills was quickly evident. In the first year, his new company, O’Brien Concrete Pumping, Inc., of Denver, added two more pumps, and has been adding at the rate of about four new pumps a year.

The recent addition of two Thomsen 2001, 120 foot boom pumps has helped them further to improve the art in pumping concrete.

In the first three months they have had the two new long reach pumps, the O’Brien organization has pumped 15,000 cubic yards through one and 13,000 cubic yards through the other.

Variety of Jobs

This 28,000 cubic yards of concrete has been placed on a wide variety of jobs under many different conditions. Yet each pump has been able to average 250 cubic yards a day.

Today, the concrete pumping accounts for some 25 percent of the more than $4,000,000 annual business volume done by Rich’s organization. Lathing, plastering and drywall make up the balance.

“It seemed a natural business to get into,” Rich explained, “We were already accustomed to pumping these materials and to working with general contractors.

“As for the marketing, we had also established a good reputation among general contractors for service and competence so when we announced that we were in the business it started off well and picked up fairly fast.”

O’Brien sees a bright future for concrete pumping in the Denver area—as well as elsewhere. “I see it continuing to increase. As the cost of labor gets higher priced, pumping will become even more attractive.

“It has already replaced the old crane and buggy.”

Using the long reach of the 2001s, the Denver contractor has demonstrated the versatility of these units by using them to pour sewage basins and large water tanks at a sewage treatment plant; below level on the
foundation of a 24-story commercial building; slabs at an industrial research complex which will take four months to pour; the floors of a 3-story college building; the substructure of a police administration building; slabs and decks of a multi-story brewery warehouse, pumping concrete up 120 feet; and two foot-thick grade slab floors, two foot thick walls and a one foot thick roof for a water reservoir . . . and many other jobs.

**Continuous Pour**

On four separate occasions, the company sent pumps on a 400-mile trip to a Wyoming coal mine to make a continuous pour of from 1,000 to 1,200 cubic yards of concrete for the huge slab and the walls of a massive coal dumping station.

The two new boom pumps are placed on the job with a pro-rated per yard and rental rate of $75 per hour plus $1.25 per yard at ground level and 25¢ per yard additional for each elevated floor above ground level.

Any pours outside the Denver area are charged mileage and driver’s time.

With a fleet that now numbers 21 concrete pumps, the company has averaged pumping a total of 160,000 cubic yards of concrete each year, operating in Colorado, Montana, Nevada and Wyoming.

The concrete pumping operation is housed in a new 50,000 square foot shop and office headquarters building. Occupied in December, 1974, it also serves as the nerve center for the Richard O’Brien Plastering Company.

Heading up the concrete pumping side of the business is general manager Dale Bone, an 11-year veteran of concrete pumping. A total of more than 100 man-years of concrete pumping experience is present with the 25 pump operators and four pump mechanical specialists employed by the company.

**Radio Controlled**

Fleet control is coordinated by Dispatcher Bob Browning who keeps in touch with pump operators via a central radio station and maintains the maximum mobility and use of pumps during the working day.

Under manager Bud Dugan, the modern shop has a seven stall working area, with a well stocked parts department.

Maintenance is performed with the latest equipment to speed up the repair and general service work required to keep 21 pieces of equipment in top working condition.

Pump operators have a 15,000 square foot parking area equipped with steam cleaners, fuel pumps and water. All concrete delivery systems are stored in racks, in this area, for fast loading. A modern lunch and rest area, with showers, is provided.

A company incentive program for pump operators, rewarding them for proper maintenance and appearance of equipment, can mean $100 and a 3-day vacation in Las Vegas. The incentive program is an obvious success with every truck as clean as a pin as pump operators strive for the “Pumper of the Month” award.

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