

Concrete infocus

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**Concrete Doesn't Just Come
in Vanilla Anymore**

**Succession Planning for the
Ready Mixed Concrete Industry**



All in the Family

Home-grown Minnesota Producer Thrives Under Becken Ownership

by Frank Cavaliere



With globalization entrenched in the ready mixed concrete industry and key decisions sometimes made oceans away from the batch plant, there remains some companies where shop talk can occur just as easily during Sunday dinner as in the corporate boardroom. In Mendota Heights, MN, between Minneapolis and St. Paul, longtime NRMCA pro-

ducer member Cemstone Products is one such operation, where the latest generation of Beckens operates a thriving, diversified construction materials company known throughout Minnesota, Western Wisconsin and Iowa.

Celebrating 80 years of excellence in 2007, Cemstone – like many companies in the North Central region – was started by

a hard working Norwegian immigrant who arrived in the United States early in the 20th century. Hammon T. Becken founded the Cemstone concrete block company in 1927. Today, well into the 21st century, the company is still privately owned and now operated by a fourth generation of Beckens who preside over a company that owns and operates numerous concrete batch plants, a





fleet of vehicles, concrete placing equipment, aggregate mines, quarries and portable washing and crushing facilities, and contractor supply stores. In addition, Cemstone's subsidiary companies include packaging plants and the national SPEC-MIX® brand of factory blended mortar, stucco, grout, shotcrete and silo delivery systems.

How the company arrived at such a state of continued prosperity in an industry that has seen more than its share of takeovers, failures and tough business climates has everything to do with a sense of familial mission, the vision to diversify and the ability to weather the inevitable business downturns.

Cemstone supplies sand, gravel and other aggregate products while having a hand in almost everything connected with con-



crete and aggregates, ranging from concrete pumping and ready mix to insulating concrete forms, decorative concrete and proprietary high-performance mixes. Its network of contractor supply stores features more than 10,000 professional grade concrete and masonry items that are available online and through 16 locations in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Northern Iowa.

Cemstone is a nationally recognized leader in sustainable concrete technologies and recently hosted more than 1,500 contractors, builders, architects and other industry professionals for a series of seminars on construction materials and building techniques using the increasingly popular Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System®. The company and its LEED Certified professionals assist its customers in the construction of high performance green buildings.

The company also strongly believes in giving back to the communities in which it lives. Its people contribute their time, money and skills to community programs, including The American Cancer Society Hope Lodge, Habitat for Humanity, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN, as well as many other local community organizations.

Hammon Becken started the business by manufacturing concrete blocks for residential construction. Becken later added sand and gravel production and got into the homebuilding industry himself along with other ventures. The second generation of Beckens arrived shortly afterward, in 1932, when Hammon's son Thorwald joined the business, which continued to build homes in the summer and haul coal in the winter. Entry into the ready mixed concrete market occurred in the early 1940s when Cemstone worked on a naval depot project in Nebraska.

Another growth spurt occurred in 1957 when Cemstone entered the packaged concrete business. The new division, which operated out of the firm's Lakeland, MN, facility, packaged sand, mortar and concrete mixes that were a forerunner of today's Quikrete brand. Further expansion continued throughout the '70s and '80s with numerous other acquisitions and continues to grow throughout Minnesota and Iowa.

And with all the growth and technological advances across the years, Cemstone's upper management remains Becken to its core. The current lineup lists Hammon T.

Becken, chief executive officer, Thor Becken, president and Steve Becken, vice president of Cemstone Ready Mix, Inc. Tim Becken is the senior vice president of operations and Kyle Becken the area manager.

Each of the Beckens also remain committed to participating in NRMCA activities, whether it be chairing various committees, participating in seminars, attending the annual convention or sending numerous employees through the association's numerous education and training offerings. Hammon (Tom),

Thor and Tim have all participated on the NRMCA Board of Directors, and five of the Becken's have been past presidents of the Aggregate Ready Mix Association (ARM) of Minnesota. Currently, Thor Becken is the president of ARM. The family's commitment to continued improvement undoubtedly ensures that the steady stream of Beckens who enter corporate headquarters won't stop anytime soon. ■

More information on Cemstone can be found at www.cemstone.com.




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