

THE DIEHARD DOZEN



PAI uses limestone in their precast concrete mixes, rather than gravel, giving it unique character and strength. The concrete stone used in PAI precast products is Louisiana DOTD approved.

Southern Louisiana — with its joie-de-vivre Cajun culture and cuisine, warm hospitality, and even warmer, humid subtropical weather so thick you can cut it with a knife — is utterly unique. Geographically, it is a fascinating intermingling of swamps, bayous, lakes, rivers, and areas of dry land that barely perch above sea level.

Despite the abundance of waterways, few are navigable to the Gulf Coast. So the Intracoastal Waterway spans the southern end of the state, connecting all those bayous and rivers to major ports. A bit further inland, Interstate 10 also bisects the state. Between the two, area industries have a huge and rather unique advantage — the ability to move product by water or truck.

Port Aggregates, Inc. (PAI) takes advantage of both forms of transportation. Based in the city of Lake Charles (southwestern corner of the state), but with operations dotted all over southern and central Louisiana, it's not surprising that some of the company's sites are located near water. For example, their oldest facility currently leases 7.7 acres of waterfront property in the Mermentau River Harbor and Terminal District, retailing an average 100,000 tons of aggregates a year.

PAI's specialty is concrete and concrete products. Whether limestone, ready-mix, or precast concrete curbs, barriers, bridges, oil-rig platforms, wharfs, or walkways, PAI has supplied not only the oil and natural-gas

industries, but also coke-fueled power plants, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD), U.S. Corp of Engineers, U.S. Forestry Service, and other governmental and private entities.

"Port Aggregates was started as a way to supply Guinn Brothers, our family's construction company," explains Tim Guinn, Executive Vice President and General Manager. "We'd been working with a small limestone supplier and they just couldn't meet our needs. So we found some property across the river from them and started quarrying our own. Eventually the three Guinn brothers spun PAI off to expand retail sales of aggregate."

That proved to be a wise decision, because several years later, PAI was able to form a relationship with Vulcan Materials, distributing product from that company's Mexican quarry. Nicknamed bluewater material, as it arrives via ship, it is offloaded at PAI's own custom-built receiving dock at the Port of Lake Charles. They also receive River Rock from a Vulcan quarry in Kentucky.

"The Vulcan relationship has been so good, we have a contract with them through the year 2035," says Guinn. "They presented a silver plaque to us, thanking us for being the first customer to receive 10 million tons out of the Mexican quarry. We work hard to achieve long-term relationships with our suppliers."



Present to honor the receipt of the 12 loaders are Mark Witt, Regional Sales Manager, KCMA Corporation; Ed Theriot, Sales, Port Aggregates; John Roseberry, Regional Director of Sales, KCMA Corporation; Floyd Degueyter, President, CLM Equipment; Dennis Hardy Jr., Site Manager, Port Aggregates; and Chris Guinn, Corporate, Port Aggregates.



Tim Guinn, Executive V.P. & GM of Port Aggregates; Brandon Cormier, Equipment Operator, Port Aggregates; and John Roseberry, Regional Director of Sales, KCMA Corporation.

Two brand-spanking new Kawasaki 85ZV-2s, first day on the job at PAI's Westlake location.





Some of PAI's 12 new ZV-2s lined up, ready to be delivered to one of several PAI locations.



Kawasaki 80ZV-2 loader charges a hopper at the company's Lake Charles ready-mix plant. Note the white PAI concrete mixing trucks.



The company has its own delivery trucks plus the facilities to load limestone on barges for distribution throughout Southwestern Louisiana.

VENTURING INTO READY MIX AND PRECAST

Beyond stone, PAI also has 26 ready-mix plants. "We try to keep our plants established around our stone facilities so it is economically feasible to feed our own plants with our own stone," explains Guinn. "Our customer base is statewide, so we are taking our ring of operations and moving it outward.

"Surprisingly, our customers like a one-stop shop. It's less complicated for them. They like to deal with one company to get as many materials as possible. They buy stone, concrete, and precast. And we like that a customer will buy most of their products from us. We supply them good service, and we pride ourselves in being on time with our ready-mix operations. Because we have a construction mentality, we know what they are looking for."

Interestingly enough, the precast side of the business was established before they got into ready mix. When the ready-mix supplier stopped buying PAI's rock for use in PAI's mixes, the company decided to set up their own. Now that they have total control over what goes into their precast products, they can easily create custom mixes to meet customer specs, as well as create their own special products.

"Precast products are poured concrete we can ship anywhere," says Guinn. "It allows

us to sell ready-mix in the hard state at a distance that wouldn't be possible any other way. Our biggest manufacturing and fabrication is for bridges. Thanks to our construction background, we've all been in the bridge-building business. We've had new contractors come along that don't have that experience, and they're bidding these jobs to keep their employees busy and to diversify. Since we've all done it, we can guide them through the process. That's a comfort to the contractor.

"And we have the same situation with our stone. Our sales people have a very good understanding of the stone, the uses, the gradations. So we pride ourselves on the educational side of it, and our customers appreciate that it isn't just a product to us."

Guinn also explains there are several plants that buy their limestone just for the chemical makeup. For example, a power plant burns a coke-type material. By crushing the stone, which is high in calcium, and spraying it into their system, it captures the sulfur that is generated, reducing the amount released into the air.

"We look for challenges. Most supply companies are leery of just grabbing a job and running with it, because you have to meet whatever mix design comes in from the customer. But we're not afraid! We'll even see if we can tweak it and make it better."

KAWASAKI MEETS THE CHALLENGE

Because the company was expanding the number of sites, plus factoring in the aging of their existing Kawasaki fleet, PAI ordered 12 new ZV-2s: eight 70s, one 80, and three 85s. So how are the new ZV-2s surviving the brutal heat, humidity, and dusty jobsite conditions?

“Loaders are the heartbeat of our business,” states Guinn. “When they go down, you’re down.”

“The machines have been pretty good for us,” answers Kirk Trahan, Vice President, Operations. “We’ve been running Kawasaki for about 10 to 12 years now. We had a little 65 with 16,000 hours on it. We called it the little Kawasaki that could. It had to climb a ramp to dump, and it worked at our most

productive concrete plant. We’ve just put in a new 80ZV-2 there to replace it, to better match the size of the hoppers.

“All the operators had smiles on their faces when we delivered the new machines. Some went from 65s to 70s and they were extremely happy. The transition went smoothly. Those Kawasakis are nice to run. There are some days our operators loaded over 10,000 tons with just two loaders. That’s a pretty good day!

“Kawasaki puts out a good product, and I’m not blowing smoke because you guys are in here, I mean we wouldn’t have bought them for the 14 years that we have. And CLM Equipment (the local Kawasaki dealer) tends to us. We’re adamant about service. We run a limestone operation. If the loader goes down, I can’t load rock; I have no income.”

Despite the country’s overall sluggish economy, PAI is sitting pretty — thanks to specialization in products that are in high demand, strategic growth, and the reliability of Kawasaki wheel loaders.

“We have been blessed to have good relationships and a good business, even through hard times,” concludes Guinn. “We have a great customer base. Like I say, we make it more personal. Customers like the personal touch.”

As the Cajuns would say, “Laissez les bon temps roulez!” — Let the good times roll!

Port Aggregates, Inc. is served by CLM Equipment throughout Louisiana.

