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Soehrlen Brothers Sand and Gravel increases production with clamshell dredge



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Soehnlén Brothers Sand and Gravel increases production with clamshell dredge

by Jon M. Casey



Soehnlén's Supreme, 8-yard clamshell dredge has increased production by helping to more effectively handle the larger, undesirable rocks.

From the moment you cross the railroad tracks and head down the curved driveway to Soehnlén Brothers Sand and Gravel operation, you get the feeling that you are stopping by to see an old friend as much as you are heading to a family owned mining operation. Soehnlén Brothers (pronounced "Sun-lun"), in business since 1958, specializes in high quality masonry and concrete sand and washed river gravel. Together, these products are in high demand in the Akron/Canton/Massillon area a primary market for this Beach City, Ohio operation.

Nicholas Soehnlén who retired in 1981 founded the 150 acre operation. Then, sons Nick, Jr. and Frank together ran the business until 2008, when Nick, Jr. retired and Frank acquired ownership. Today, the operation is under the care of Frank, his wife Peggy, their son Brian, his wife Stacy, their daughter Barbara and perhaps one day, her 2-1/2 year old son, Chance. Soehnlén's daughter Cathy does the company billing, and they have another daughter Theresa.



Frank Soehnlén heads up the daily operations at Soehnlén Brothers Sand and Gravel near Beach City, Ohio.

In all, Soehnlén employs six full time people including Dale Schott, their dredge operator. Schott currently enjoys operating the controls of the company's recently acquired Supreme Clamshell dredge, an 8-yard bucket model built in 2002. Now at home at the Soehnlén's operation, the dredge was purchased used in late 2012, from a producer near Cincinnati whose stone deposit had depleted a year or so before.

"We completed the paper work on the dredge in December 2012," says Frank. "Neil Hoobler of Supreme Manufacturing, Inc., was instrumental in



Mined material is conveyed overland to the primary screen plant on the right. From there, material moves on to the McLanahan Lites-Out classifier in the distance on the left.

negotiating the terms of the agreement. The Clamshell Dredge was exactly what we needed."

"Once the transaction was completed, they began disassembling the dredge at the former site, in January 2013," he says. "They moved it here in the dead of winter. There were about 30 loads. The pit was not covered in ice, so that wasn't a problem. We assembled here and started it up in April this year."

Because the Supreme dredge begins the dewatering process at the time of excavation, Soehnlén said that they had to convert their processing plant from a wet configuration to a dry one. "We installed 600 feet of overland conveyance that takes the material from the 300 feet of floating conveyors, and moves it to a three deck Deister screen," he says. "From there, it goes through an Eagle Iron Works twin 36-inch screw,



Soehnlén Brothers Sand and Gravel serves northeastern Ohio with quality products.

then off to our McLanahan Lites-Out™ classifier. There, the lignite is removed from the sand. Since we are on the edge of coal country, this deposit has some fine lignite mixed in with it. By being able to remove the lignite, we are able to produce a much higher quality sand."

With the addition of the clamshell dredge, they are able to mine material that contains larger rock than they were with the previous model. Large rocks now do not stop the mining operation but instead are deposited back into the pit. Oversized, material that comes ashore, is stockpiled until they have enough larger rock to crush it in their crusher.

"We don't do a lot of crushing," says Frank. "Our market is mostly for sand and decorative stone. We do not sell much crushed aggregate."

Soehnlén says that in today's business environment in northeastern Ohio, the increased activity in the shale gas drilling industry, combined with the added commercial and residential business that this increase in jobs brings with it, is good for business. His company has a continuous demand for sand and the landscaping gravel that comes from this "outwash" mineral deposit. "We can't make sand fast

enough," he says.

More importantly, Frank says Soehnlens Brothers will sell material to customers large or small. "We will load a pickup truck or an Amish buggy just as readily as we will a tractor trailer load," he said. "We also work on Saturdays. It is because of our 'old fashioned' customer service that we have been able to do business during a time when many quarry operations have had to scale back. Because of our size and customer base, I guess you could say we have a niche market."

"We produce concrete and masonry sand, asphalt sand and fill sand," he says. "Our number 2's are crushed or stockpiled if there is a demand for them. With the way the new dredge operates, we have a lot more material to work with and a lot less maintenance. The larger rocks are no longer a problem either."

Soehnlens says that he and his family is excited about the future of their business since acquiring the new dredge. With the added mining capability, they have the assurance of being able to mine much more of the permitted land under which their mineral deposits lie.

"We no longer have the depth considerations that we once did," he says. "We are rated down to 200 feet, but for now, we are still mining at 50 to 90-feet. Now we have the ability to mine for many years to come. With 100 acres permitted for mining, we will be able to open up the new land beyond the current pit, when those deposits diminish. The next generation looks to have an excellent opportunity here."

As we concluded our time together, I commented on how satisfying it must be for a family quarry business like this one, to be able to thrive among the larger, higher producing operations that serve the construction and transportation industry. "We serve a different kind of market," he said, nodding in agreement.

"When my father first started the business, he farmed raising hogs and worked in the steel mills. He began with a shovel and a slip scraper. He served local people and did some farming as well. He was eager to serve our customers."

"Today, it's still much the same," he says. "We still do some farming in addition to operating the sand and gravel plant. We produce some hay and white faced beef cattle. Oh, and my mother Odile, who is 99, still bakes pies for the family once a week," he says with a smile. Meanwhile, Frank's grandsons Chance, Dillon and Lewey play with tractors and dump trucks in the scale house/office area as they train for their future in the sand and gravel industry. For more information on Supreme Manufacturing products, visit the company website at supremefg.net or give them a call at 724-376-4110.



Material from the dredge passes through a triple deck Deister screen before going through an Eagle Iron Works log washer.



The next generation gets training from Grandma. Chance Swihart, Peggy Soehnlens's 2-1/2 year old grandson, is "on the job" and ready for action, outfitted in his company logo t-shirt and work boots.



Soehnlens's McLanahan Lites-Out classifier has greatly improved the quality of the company's sand products.



Larger material is set aside to be crushed when there is a sufficient quantity to run a batch of material.



A load of sand heads out across the scale.



Electrical power for the dredge is supplied by this CAT portable power unit.