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PANHANDLE GRADING & PAVING, INC.

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has built a reputation for quality
for more than 30 years

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Johnny Long's motto has always been, "If we do good work, we'll have repeat work, and repeat work is going to keep us in business." That approach has been more than successful for Long and his asphalt-paving business, Panhandle Grading & Paving, Inc.

Based in Pensacola, Fla., Johnny originally started Gulf Coast Paving & Grading in 1967. In 1979, he sold Gulf Coast and decided to form a new company with his sons Jerry and Donald. They named the company Panhandle Grading & Paving. As president of the new company, Johnny had no idea how successful the company would become. "When we started the company, we hoped to have a maximum of 15 employees. Today, we have around 140 on staff. It seems like everything we're doing puts us about one or two steps ahead of everyone else," he noted. "We definitely know what we're doing when it comes to paving."

That knowledge and decades of experience are two keys to his long-term success, along with the flexibility to change direction if needed. Recently, a move from private work to more governmental work has kept the company strong during tough economic times. "Everything's been tight this year. But we've been able to pick up paving bids to keep us busy. The state of Florida got

its federal stimulus money just at the time we needed the work."

Many of Panhandle Grading & Paving's current projects are backed by stimulus funds. "Right now, the company has 15 projects underway within a 50-mile radius of Pensacola," pointed out Jerry Long, who serves as a company vice president along with his brother Donald. "As a DOT-certified contractor, we were the low bidder on seven road-resurfacing projects when Escambia County accepted bids for a total of eight stimulus-funded projects. Most are 'mill and fill' contracts. One stimulus-money-backed reconstruction job that we are working on for Santa Rosa County requires us to convert Avalon Boulevard in Milton from a two-lane road to a four-lane road. It's my understanding that this was the first stimulus-funded project for the state of Florida," Jerry continued.

Asphalt plants and recycling

To supply those projects and others with a steady flow of paving material, Panhandle Grading & Paving relies on a sister company, Group 3 Asphalt, which produces asphalt at two plants in Pensacola and Milton. Owned by Johnny, Jerry and Donald Long, Group 3 Asphalt sells asphalt to other paving contractors as well. The plants operate five to six days a week according to product demand.

"We like being able to accommodate our customers in any way possible," Jerry explained. "For night paving, it's ideal having two plants so we can run one in the day and the other at night. We produce whatever mix customers request and we can run Superpave material at both plants.

"We also crush material to recycle and put back into the asphalt mix and we produce fractionated rap," he continued. "We can make specialized mixes with polymers, rubber and even fibrous material."

A truck unloads asphalt into Panhandle Grading & Paving's Vögele 5203-2 paver. It's the first Vögele paver sold by TEC since the company began distributing the machines.





Panhandle Paving Supervisor Ernest Millender, who has 50 years of paving experience, checks the controls on the Vögele 5203-2. "This machine does things other pavers could never do," he said.



In addition, all of Panhandle's milled material goes right back to the asphalt plants where it's recycled into the new asphalt mix they produce. "We also allow other contractors to bring in their milled material for recycling along with chunk asphalt, which we can crush and use in our asphalt production," said Jerry. The company also recycles concrete it takes off its jobs and uses it to create road base at other jobs.

With all the work in progress keeping both Group 3 and Panhandle Grading & Paving busy, the Longs realized they also needed to add some new paving and milling equipment to their fleet. That's when they turned to Chad Stracener at Tractor & Equipment Company in Pensacola, the distributor of the Wirtgen Group line of paving equipment, which includes Wirtgen milling machines, Hamm compactors, Klemmann crushers and Vögele pavers.

New paver smooths the way

Jerry and Donald Long wanted a productive, reliable paver that would meet the company's needs for many years to come. That's why they decided on the Vögele 5203-2, with input from their paving supervisor, Ernest Millender, who's been in the paving business for 50 years, 25 of them with Panhandle. "We value Ernest's opinion," acknowledged Donald. "He's working on repaving some Panhandle roads for the third time.

"When we were considering Vögele, TEC brought the machine to us and paved for us for a couple days," recalled Donald. "We were sold." It was the first Vögele paver TEC sold after taking on the equipment line.

Something both Millender and the Longs really appreciate is the extensive amount of time Vögele representatives spent with Panhandle Grading & Paving when the paver first went into service.



A Panhandle Grading & Paving operator uses the company's Wirtgen W2200, equipped with a 12-foot, six-inch drum. Panhandle purchased its first full-lane milling machine from TEC in November 2009.

Panhandle operators use a Komatsu PC220 to feed concrete into a crusher, and a Komatsu WA400 to remove dirt that has been screened before the crushing process.

"The Vögele paver has so many options that other machines out there don't have," observed Millender. "The guys at Tractor & Equipment and Vögele have been helpful in teaching us how to operate it." Todd Dice, TEC's Wirtgen and Vögele machine specialist, was on the jobsite for the better part of a week, along with Vögele's Boo Meredith and Mike Burris, who spent several days each working with the paving crew.

The Vögele representatives provided some lessons on using the new Vögele 5203-2 that made quite an impression. "One day, we had to wait 46 minutes for the next truck of asphalt to come," Millender recalled. "Once the truck came with the asphalt and we resumed paving, there was no sign that the machine had been sitting in one spot for 46 minutes. I was amazed. Most times, if a paver that size sits for just 15 minutes, it will 'settle' and leave a crease. That didn't happen with the Vögele."

After putting it to work on the job, Millender has been very pleased with the new Vögele paver. "We've only had it for a short time, but I like it better every day. The Vögele 5203-2 does some things that other pavers we've had could never do. Once we set it the way we want, we don't have to mess with it anymore. It holds a really good mat."

Continued ...

Productive equipment, experienced workers

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"We're happy so far," agreed Donald Long. "We've had the Vögele on the job for several weeks now. Asphalt mix designs differ from one region to another, so the machine simply needed a bit of fine tuning to match the mix that we produce. The Vögele paver has some newer features that I'm making sure we use in order to get the most out of our investment.

"There are only a couple pavers we would consider putting out on the road, and Vögele is now one of them," Donald continued. "Now that we have a dealer in our back yard that can fully support the machine, we knew it was time to buy. The Vögele machine is advanced in many areas of technology, and having the dealer here in the area to help us if we have any problems is what really sealed the deal. We take a lot of pride in our equipment and try to put the best resources and equipment out on our projects. I think that's one of the reasons we're where we are at today. Overall, the Vögele machine has been a good investment, and we're happy."

The first job where Panhandle Grading & Paving put the new machine to work was on a 22-mile stretch of Highway 97 in Escambia County. The two-lane road required widening, new turn lanes, safety upgrades, and a paved

shoulder. However, before putting its new paver on this job, Panhandle first milled the road surface to a depth of 1.5 inches using its Wirtgen W2200 milling machine, also recently purchased from TEC.

Milling machine adds versatility

"It's our very first full-lane milling machine," noted Donald. "For the type of jobs we do, we think it's the right machine. It's extremely fast and efficient. Our whole emphasis is daily production and finding ways to speed production without having problems in the process. We're not really a milling company per se, but we're looking at equipment from an investment standpoint.

"Traditionally, we use the Wirtgen machine for a maximum two-inch mill but we have a job coming up where we'll need to mill through subgrade up to 10 inches," Donald explained. "Although we have a half-lane machine for residential projects, we purposely bought the Wirtgen W2200 for full-lane milling."

Donald further noted that the water system on the machine works very well, so they get a lot of footage on a set of teeth. "We haven't had any problems with this milling machine. The folks from Wirtgen come down and check on the machine from time to time. The electronics and grade controls on the Wirtgen W2200 are better than other machines we have and our field people seem to like that. It delivers on everything the manufacturer claims. We're very pleased with the machine. Part of the reason we purchased the Wirtgen machine was because of its quality."

Along with quality equipment, Panhandle Grading & Paving is also fortunate to have quality people, according to Johnny Long. "Probably 60 percent of our work force has been with us for more than 10 years, and five employees have been here more than 25 years. They are definitely another key to our success. Our work force turnover is very low, and even through the down times we've never laid anyone off. We like to treat our employees the way we would like to be treated. I just hope we keep moving forward," he concluded.

With its commitment to quality, an experienced work force and efficient, productive equipment, the future of Panhandle Grading & Paving appears to be assured. ■

(At right) Panhandle Grading & Paving President Jerry Long (left) visits with TEC Pensacola Branch Manager Chad Stracener at one of Panhandle's jobsites. "Having TEC in our back yard to fully support our equipment is important," said Long. (Below) Panhandle Grading & Paving's sister company, Group 3 Asphalt, operates two asphalt plants that supply material for Panhandle's jobs and sell to other contractors as well.

