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Southwest Rock Products

Join us as we revisit Southwest Rock Products' Queen Creek Plant, winner of our online Top Op contest, to see how things have changed since our initial visit.

As a part of *Aggregates Manager's* 20th Anniversary celebration, we held an online contest to allow our readers to vote for their favorite plant profile from the past 10+ years. More than 1,000 votes were cast in the Top Op contest, and many were surprised by the outcome, but no one was more surprised than Chris Reinesch, Sr., managing part-

ner of the winning operation – Southwest Rock Products' Queen Creek Plant in Arizona.

"It's an honor to receive the award," Reinesch says. "We take a lot of pride in our operations, and it's nice to get some positive attention for our company."

Reinesch was amazed and humbled by the support he received from his customers, vendors, and associates, and

by how many knew the Queen Creek site had won the contest. This became apparent during a recent visit to the Arizona State Land Department when a couple of the agents congratulated him on winning the contest. "We asked how they knew about the contest and that we had won, and, interestingly enough, they said they go to the *Aggregates Manager* website all the time," Reinesch says.

Southwest Rock Products' Queen Creek Plant in Arizona was voted the Top Op of the last 10+ years by our readers.



The operation

When we made our first visit to the Queen Creek operation in late 2009, Southwest Rock Products was a fairly small family-owned and operated company. It's still owned and operated by Reinesch and his partner/nephew, Steven Hood, but it has grown quite a bit over the last few years through an aggressive business model.

The downturn in the economy was a struggle for the company, as it was for everyone, but as the economy stabilized, it opened up the door for expansion. "It was time to go out and acquire additional mineable properties," Reinesch explains. "Some were locations that were previously mined to some degree. It was a great opportunity for our company."

The Queen Creek facility has been

in operation for approximately 14 years. Reinesch purchased the 86-acre property back in 2000. "I thought, if I got 40 feet of mineable material out of this site, I'd have my return on the investment," he says. "We're much deeper than that now, and the deeper we go, the better the quality of the aggregate. We've probably only consumed half of the reserves that are here, so it has proven to be a good investment."

The alluvial deposit is part of the Queen Creek Wash, which is a mix of sand, gravel, and some clay. It isn't the best deposit in the state, but Reinesch has been successful in making it into a quality product. It's impossible to mine just one layer of material, so a dozer rips up the ground, shaves off a mixture of all of the layers, and pushes it down the

slope. By the time everything reaches the bottom, it's a workable blend of material.

Unlike many larger aggregate companies, Southwest Rock Products has only portable equipment. "Nothing we do is with stationary equipment," Reinesch explains. "If you build plants on what I call iron sticks, when and if the economy slows down, you're stuck there and have to wait for a reason to start the plant back up. We can put together nine different portable crushing and screening plants, which can go to any site, make a stockpile of material, and move on to the next site. It's not good for employees or a company when the equipment isn't in operation."

Having portable equipment helped the company during the economic



A bird's eye view of Southwest Rock Products' Queen Creek Plant in Arizona.



A belly-dump truck unloads material through a grizzly into the storage area of one of the ready-mix companies located on site at the Queen Creek operation.

area, so all of the equipment is now in Arizona. In addition to mining newly purchased properties and leased properties, the company does the sand and gravel production for some of the largest companies in the industry and does a large amount of custom crushing for projects all over the Southwest.

The material

Approximately 50 percent of the aggregate produced at the Queen Creek facility is used as base material. The rest is used by two independent ready-mix companies, which are located on site. Material supplied to the ready-mix plants is transported by belly-dump trailers and dumped through grizzlies into storage areas.

Queen Creek is what you might call an old school operation. In an industry that is fast becoming high tech, this can present problems, but Reinesch says one thing that helps him stay competitive with other companies is the quality of his loader operators, which he says are some of the best. The buckets on the loaders have been enlarged so that a truck can be filled in two passes. There are no bucket scales on the loaders, however. Reinesch says that, in his experience, bucket scales have proven to be unreliable and can hinder the loader operators from developing their skills.

"We have several good loader operators, some that have been with our company since almost the beginning," Reinesch notes. "The trucking industry has noticed, and they appreciate our quick cycle times."

Leftover concrete from the ready-mix companies is used to make large blocks that are used as retaining walls and perimeter safety fencing. Return concrete and waste from the ready-mix plants are recycled back through the crushing plant, so nothing goes to waste.

"Once we get to the bottom of the pit and all the way to the back of the property, we'll move our processing equipment to lower levels," Reinesch says. "Then we'll mine where the plant once was."

The Queen Creek site is the central hub for repair and maintenance for all of

downturn. When work died out in town, they took the equipment and did custom crushing for companies in Arizona and surrounding states. They even found work at some of the larger copper mines in the state. All of this allowed the company to survive.

"It comes back to a company culture of strong work ethic and determination,"

Reinesch explains. "Whenever things are down, you can find a way. We were early to modify the business plan by pursuing other opportunities such as recycling material. We've tried to grow this company in a lot of ways. I don't want to have any of our equipment sitting idle."

With the economy on the upswing now, work has greatly picked up in the

the company's equipment. After completing a job, the equipment is brought in for maintenance before it goes to the next job. This includes mechanical maintenance, welding, fabrication, and painting.

A little more than a year ago, Reinesch entered into a partnership with a friend who set up a painting/sandblasting operation on site. "He's just getting started, but he's already extremely busy and had to add two additional employees," Reinesch notes. "In addition to work for our company, he does work for a multitude of other industries."

Safety and the environment

"We're top notch in making safety a priority at our company because of our managers, supervisors, and our environmental/safety director," Hood says. "This is the best team this company has ever had, and they have taken us to a new level of employee safety and environmental compliance."

Southwest Rock Products is big on conservation and shrinking its envi-

ronmental footprint. The wash plant at the Queen Creek operation uses a large amount of water from an onsite well each year to wash aggregates for use in the ready-mix operations.

To decrease the burden on the aquifer for this operation, a recycling system was developed to reclaim and reuse water. Dirty water from the washing process enters a tank where an environmentally friendly polymer is added to allow the mud in the water to sink. This separation allows the mud to be placed in a pond and the cleaner water to be reused.

One challenge faced by Southwest Rock Products is protecting its employees and the environment from excess nuisance dust. "We have numerous operations in Maricopa County, which has some of the most strict dust-control regulations in the United States," Reinesch says. "To comply with these regulations, we frequently conduct dust sampling at each one of our sites. We train our operators on personal protective equipment and how to fine tune

our water spray bars to reduce nuisance dust while maintaining a quality product."

Dealing with the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) can be challenging. Reinesch meets with the MSHA supervisor of Arizona, on occasion, in order to build a positive relationship with the agency and discuss any issues.

"MSHA knows we're trying to do what's right to keep our employees safe and to be in compliance with federal regulations," Hood says, explaining that the goal is to have zero lost-time accidents and get zero citations during MSHA inspections.

"In the last few years, our safety/environmental director has made great improvements in our company's safety and environmental compliance," Reinesch notes. "He goes out and performs frequent safety audits at each of our locations, and our employees participate, because they know we're serious."



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A new shop allows mechanics to stay out of the hot Arizona sun while performing maintenance and repair on equipment, which is important since the Queen Creek operation handles the maintenance for all of its operations.



Material is pushed down the slope by a dozer, loaded into a crusher by a loader, and then carried up a conveyor system to the processing plant.

The team

There are approximately 70 employees working for the company, counting all of its locations. "We're pretty proud of the fact that during the economic downturn, we didn't lay anybody off," Hood says. "There was some attrition during that period, but the last thing we wanted was to have to lay off good employees."

The Queen Creek operation runs two 12-hour shifts. "We expect a tremendous amount out of our employees," Reinesch explains. "Our employees enjoy being able to earn extra money by working overtime, and I don't mind paying it. That little incremental cost is nothing compared to the consistency and the dependability of the person running that crusher or wash plant. When you have quality people, you don't have problems. You get better production and better maintenance of the equipment."

The production manager and supervisors who work for Southwest Rock Products have an average of eight years of experience with the company, as some have been at the company since the beginning. Many of the supervisors have gained great insight into the industry, having been trained directly by Reinesch and Hood, who have 72 years of experience in the industry and know it takes dedication and a solid work ethic to be a supervisor at the company.

Those supervisors pass that knowledge along to every employee. "We wouldn't be where we are today without them," Reinesch says.

All of the buildings and improvements at the operation have been constructed by the employees. Reinesch says it helps keep the employees busy, expands their skills, makes them a more versatile employee, and saves the company money. A large maintenance shop was recently built at the facility, which allows the mechanics to work on equipment without being exposed to the extremely hot sun

in summer, which can be a miserable 122 degrees at times.

Reinesch and Hood understand that employees are the lifeblood of any company. "Finding and retaining quality employees has been a priority for our company," Reinesch says. "We have been lucky enough to employ some of the best in the industry and strive to make Southwest Rock Products a place where people want to work. Recognition from this article is a reflection of their efforts to make this a company to be proud of." **AM**

Equipment List

- Caterpillar 988K loader
- Caterpillar 988H loader
- Caterpillar 980K loader
- Caterpillar 980H loader
- Caterpillar D8T dozer
- Caterpillar 140G motor grader
- Caterpillar 735 haul truck
- Caterpillar TL943 forklift
- Grove RT750 crane
- Caterpillar water truck
- Caterpillar 322 excavator with hammer
- Kenworth heavy-haul transport truck
- Svedala vibrating grizzly feeder (2)
- Cedarapids 6x20 screen
- Svedala 26x36 jaw crusher
- Pioneer FT2650 track jaw
- JCI 6x20 screen
- Svedala H4000 cone crusher
- KPI-JCI FT4250 track impact crusher
- Fisher Industries 36x18 log washer
- Eagle 36x18 coarse material washers (2)
- Pioneer 6x16 screen
- Trio 36-inch twin screws
- Cedarapids 4x14 screen
- Krebs cyclone
- Westec thickener
- Fisher trommel