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Turner Concrete Products Continues Growing

For some precast concrete business owners, three locations, 35 employees, and a state-of-the-art, 30,000-square-foot (2787-square-meter) production facility would be enough to keep them busy. That's not the case for Steve Turner, president of Turner Vault Company, though. "We're still hungry for growth," he said. That growth mindset was instilled in Turner from the beginning of his involvement with his family's business. When he joined the company in 1991 his father Ronald Turner told him: "We need you to grow the business." The most recent exemplification of that hunger for growth is Turner Concrete Products—the precast concrete construction division of Turner Vault Company—expanding their licensing territory beyond Northwest Ohio to manufacture Redi-Rock and Pole Base in the Cleveland, Ohio region, too.

Expanding beyond the burial vault business

"Back in the day, grandpa started making burial vaults and he said, 'We can make one burial vault a day and sell one a day; then the company will run,'" said Turner. "Well, that was in 1929."

Over the years and through the generations since Steve's grandfather Virgil Turner started the family's vault business

with his father-in-law Benjamin Baxter, Turner Vault Company has grown into a thriving, family-owned business capable of producing much more than one burial vault a day.

"They have a long term vision," said Redi-Rock business consultant Scott Mathie. "They're looking at planning for the future and trying to identify ways that they can grow."

Part of that plan for growth was the recognition at the turn of the century that they would need to move to a new facility.

"We ran out of space at our old facility," said Turner. "If we were going to continue the growth, then we were going to have to move to a new facility because we were landlocked."

As a Wilbert Burial Vault licensee since 1947, Turner leaned on the network for examples of success. After traveling around the country to other Wilbert manufacturers' facilities, he returned to Toledo and designed a building with his father, who had the vision to say: "This business has been good to me, I will reinvest and make sure it's good for another 50 to 80 years."

That reinvestment created a new facility on the outskirts of Toledo, Ohio in 2001. The 12-acre (5-hectare) site solved the



Turner Vault Company's 30,000-square-foot (2787-square-meter) facility is located in Northwood, Ohio. Steve Turner relocated the family-owned company to the 12-acre (5-hectare) site on the outskirts of Toledo in 2001 as part of the plan for future growth.

problem of being landlocked, allowing for an expansion of the building in the mid-part of 2017. At 30,000 square feet (2782 square meters), about half of the building is allocated to production, while the other half hosts offices and the burial services side of the business.

Simply having more space wasn't the only aspect of the new facility that positioned the company for growth according to Turner Concrete Products operations manager Bryan Martin. The willingness to jump through some hoops to become a National Precast Concrete Association (NPCA) Certified Plant and an Ohio Department of Transportation approved plant has paid off.

"If you want to be NPCA certified you have a lot of stipulations and paperwork," said Martin. "But it's a really good designation." Turner agreed, "Once you jump through those hoops, there's a lot of stuff that comes to you without having to go looking for it."

As Mathie said, "They're doing this from a quality control standpoint, as well as to have access to higher profile jobs within transportation and municipal."

Enter Redi-Rock and Pole Base into the business

With a new facility and already capturing the vertical diversification throughout the funeral services industry, including burial and cremation services, as well as pet cremation as Paws and Remember, Turner was looking for horizontal diversification to continue growth.

At the time, Turner Concrete Products was producing sign bases, splash blocks, parking curbs, light pole foundations, and custom concrete solutions, but Turner was thinking bigger, which is where Redi-Rock entered the business model in 2005.

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Turner Vault Company manufactures Wilbert burial vaults beside Redi-Rock retaining walls in their NPCA Certified Plant. The production of large, precast, modular blocks helped the family-owned company diversify their business model beyond the funeral services industry in 2005. In addition to being NPCA certified, Turner Concrete Products is an Ohio Department of Transportation approved plant.

precast production processes, manufacturing large block retaining walls is simple. Concrete is poured into steel forms that contain rubber molds to give finished blocks a natural stone appearance. The blocks are then cured, stripped, and sent to inventory or a job site. The efficiency of the Redi-Rock system means that manufacturers can double or triple pour forms in a single day.

"We can turn our Redi-Rock forms twice a day," said Turner. "Burial vaults you just can't pour twice a day."

Achieving growth with Redi-Rock influenced Turner Concrete Products to turn to Pole Base, another brand of Redi-Rock International, for an innovative solution to enhance their light pole base production. Turner Concrete Products had partnered with Toledo Edison back in the '70s, so Turner saw the potential of the product line.

"But, there needed to be a better way than we were doing it, and Redi-Rock figured that out," he said.

Pole Base is a steel forming system that uses heavy duty magnets to attach conduit to the forms, allowing for custom light pole foundations with each and every pour. Previously, Turner would cut, weld, and grind his steel forms when custom requests came up, which was very labor intensive. In addition to easily providing various conduit placements, bolt patterns, and sizes, rubber molds can be switched out in the forms to offer multiple textures for the finished product.

Turner sees the benefit of adding the product for manufacturers familiar with producing burial vaults. "It's similar in prof-

itability. It's similar in sales," he said. "Once you sell these guys then that's kind of a no-brainer. They're going to come back to you because you're a quick fix for them."

One of the electrical contractors that would definitely go back to Turner Concrete Products for his quick fix is Travis Atkin of Laibe Electric / Technology. Having used 100 Pole Bases on the work he's supervising at the ProMedica Toledo Hospital expansion, he said: "It looks better than any poured-in-place pole that I've ever seen."

In addition to looks, Atkin touted the simplicity of installation of Pole Base. "You don't have the concrete trucks, you don't have the framing. You go out dig a hole, you drop your base, your pipe to it, and there you go...set it and forget it."

Senior civil engineer Robert Bailey, PE, with DGL Consulting Engineers, LLC, who has designed Redi-Rock projects finds that the customer service skills honed in the funeral service industry have translated to all aspects of the business.

"They know the products well, and Bryan, especially, knows what needs to be done with them," said Bailey. "We're constantly working together trying to improve and make things better and providing each other feedback on what we can do."

Future growth of Turner Concrete Products

When the opportunity was presented to expand their licensing territory for both Redi-Rock and Pole Base into the Cleveland area, which has a more varied topography than Northwest Ohio and is a growing market, they seized it.



The days of cutting, welding, and grinding steel forms are over because Turner Concrete Product now uses Pole Base to create their custom, precast solutions for site lighting foundations. Having partnered with Toledo Edison back in the 1970s, Turner saw the benefits of the product but knew there needed to be a better way to manufacture them.

"We know with the growth of Cleveland, with the size of Cleveland, that that's the direction we wanted to go, and we really didn't want anyone else to have that territory, so we jumped on that," said Turner.

The work in the territory has already begun as the company aims to network and build relationships. Martin and Mathie recently paired up to hold a dozen Lunch & Learn presentations in a three day stint, bringing awareness about Redi-Rock to the new market.

Turner Concrete Products also attended The Electro Expo trade show in Cleveland, where Pole Base business consultant Zach Tabor helped them introduce the system to over 4,000 attendees. "We went to this trade show to gain exposure, meet new people, network with the guys he's worked with in the past," said Tabor. "They're making the right business moves to go in the right direction."



With the design of a series of Redi-Rock retaining walls, senior civil engineer Robert Bailey, PE, provides access to a pondside patio and a future building site for a barn. The design has been used as the framework for other residential and municipal projects in conjunction with Turner Concrete Products.

While at The Electro Expo, Turner multi-tasked by looking at real estate options for a new plant. In addition to the plant, he hopes to bring more staff on board by late 2018 to assist Martin, who tends to set some pretty lofty sales goals for himself.

"I just try to grow the business as much as I can," said Martin. "I ended up doubling [sales] every year that I've been here from the Redi-Rock to the Pole Base side, so it's almost been a little driver for me. In my head, that's where I'm going."



A LedgeStone texture Pole Base welcomes visitors to Atwood Lake Park in the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District. Turner Concrete Products provided the precast light pole bases that were stained a custom color and paired with wooden light poles to match the architectural details of the park's new Welcome Center.

That hunger for growth evident in Turner's staff and instilled in him in his early days with the company has led to their success. But, Turner's vision is broad enough to recognize what uncontrolled growth looks like. "Growth is tough at times because you're not always cash starved, but the faster you grow, the more cash starved you are," he said. "So, we try to grow at a pretty good pace without hurting ourselves." ■

FURTHER INFORMATION



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