

Mid South Drilling Has a Blast with Concord Mills Job Site

By: Giles Lambertson

[Buzz up!](#) on Yahoo!

Jeff Seaford started the 1990s driving a low-boy truck for a contractor. He ended the decade as general manager of a rock removal firm owned and operated by himself, his father and his brother.

Now the new century is beginning as brightly as the old one ended: Mid South Drilling has a year's work already lined up.

"It's all about service," Seaford said in explaining the success of the company that turned two years old in late January. Company offices are in Mocksville, NC, just southwest of Winston-Salem, NC.

A couple of weeks into his low-boy stint, Seaford began to help the company's drill-and-blast man. He eventually worked full-time at that task for a couple of different companies before deciding that he knew enough about the skill of exploding rock to go to work for himself.

He and his father, Jack, and younger brother, Scotty, kicked around some names to hang on the new company. Seaco (Seaford Company) and Mid State Drilling were two of the names considered.

However, because Seaford was licensed to work in Virginia and South Carolina, as well as in Georgia and North Carolina, the family decided to go with a regional identity. Mid South Drilling it would be, they agreed, and business has been booming ever since.

One of the contracts Mid South executed in 1999 may illustrate why it is experiencing such success as a startup company.

A Charlotte earthmoving and utilities contractor, F.T. Williams, subbed out a job just north of the city to Mid South. At that location, Williams was preparing a large parcel of acreage adjacent to a sprawling shopping mall, Concord Mills, that had sprung up in the country on the edge of Interstate 85.

To say the area is "country" slightly misstates the matter: On the other side of I-85 is a Winston Cup Series NASCAR speedway at Concord that attracts tens of thousands of stock car racing fans on weekends.

Williams had been called in by a developer to prepare the land for sale, land that lay next to the paved roadway connecting the mall and the speedway. The earthmoving company soon discovered that a granite shelf coursed through approximately 30.4 hectares (75 acres) of it.

“When the rock started being a situation on the site, we called Mid South,” said Craig Lowery, a superintendent with F.T. Williams.

Jeff Seaford determined that the granite there was “not real hard, not consistent,” which made it super for blasting. Softer sand rock doesn’t shatter as desirably, which Seaford admits is a less than satisfying experience.

“I’m a blaster at heart,” he said.

A team of four men went to work on the rock. Using Tamrock 550 “Tiger” and Tamrock 700 “Ranger” drill rigs, the men drilled 200 10-centimeter (4 in.) holes in a grid, spacing them about 270 centimeters (9 ft.) apart. Using ammonium nitrate as the explosive agent, Seaford set off 14 separate explosions over three weeks of work.

“You could really go in there and shoot that rock, he said, noting that traffic along the connecting roadway was stopped as needed. What the auditory impact was on shoppers in the mall across the road is unknown.

With the rock shattered, Williams brought in an assortment of excavators and loaders, including Cat 345, [Komatsu](#) 400 and [Kobelco](#) machinery. The rock was distributed on site using Cat 300 and [Volvo](#) haulers.

“That job ran smoother than what I anticipated,” Lowery said. In all, some 45,600 cubic meters (60,000 cu. yds.) of rock were moved.

The Williams superintendent thought the rock removal went remarkably fast.

“Jeff [Seaford] was a big key on that site,” said Lowery. “He moved it extremely quick. We started hauling rock right behind him and moved that rock, but I was never able to catch him. I never caught that man.”

Lowery said that, typically, rock hauling and removal work must grind to a halt periodically while blasters prepare to loosen more rock. Not on this job.

“Jeff got on it. He shot it. I was very pleased at his efficiency,” said Lowery. “He did a great job.”

That level of satisfaction pays dividends for young companies and explains why Mid South has work already assured through 2000. One of the jobs awaiting them is a project along the outer

loop at Charlotte. Some 304,000 cubic meters (400,000 cu. yds.) of granite awaits breaking and moving.

Mid South acquired its Tamrock drills from a Charlotte firm, J.W. Burrell. The company since has bought an Ingersoll-Rand 635 from the Charlotte office of Mitchell Distributing. Seaford is a fan of both makes of drilling equipment, calling the Ingersoll-Rand "a drilling dude."

He said his brother, Scotty, "never saw a drill till two years ago" but is becoming familiar with the various makes and their idiosyncrasies.

In two years, the company has grown from one man and one drill to nine employees and six drills. The future seems built on service that is as solid as the rock it blasts.

Which is apt, since the Mid South Drilling company motto is, "Rock is our business."