

Fauquier Times-Democrat

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192ND YEAR ... No. 14

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2010

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MEN AT WORK: Smith-Midland workers, left, spread concrete for sound walls at the company's Midland plant. Will Guevera, center, adds the finishing touch. Quinton Noakes, right, works the controls of the cement mixer.

Times-Democrat Staff Photos/Steve Campbell

Smith-Midland marks 50-year anniversary

Diversification keeps company on solid footing

BY STEVE CAMPBELL
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

The exterior concrete skin of some of the tallest buildings in Virginia and skyscrapers in New York, Montreal and Monterrey, Mexico, as well as miles of Jersey walls lining the nation's highways, all hail from the same place — Midland, Va.

Their creator, Smith-Midland Corp., turns 50 this year.

In an industry marked by a 25 percent drop in business during the current economic slowdown, Smith-Midland last year posted its best year ever, with \$30 million in sales.

The company, which began in 1960, as Smith Cattleguard Co., attributes its strength to the diversity of its product mix.

When the commercial building market tanked last year, that diversity enabled Smith-Midland to fill the void in its architectural panel business with an increase in highway sound barriers and similar products.

"We put a lot of emphasis on keeping the company diversified," said Rodney Smith, chief executive officer of the company.

"That's the thing that has enabled us to turn in the best year in the history of the company last year, when the precast industry was really in trouble," he said.

Smith-Midland makes concrete buildings, exterior architectural panels, underground utility vaults, sound barriers and Jersey walls, and a wide array of custom precast products at its



BIG 5-0: The Smith family, from left, Jeremy, Matthew, Rodney, Roderick and Ashley mark 50 years at the Smith-Midland plant in Midland.

22-acre facility sandwiched between Route 28 and the Norfolk & Southern rail line in southern Fauquier County.

Smith is the son of company founder David Smith, a dairy farmer who made concrete cattle guards as a way to supplement his farm's income.

The elder Smith's cattle guards were an improvement over the home-

made steel pipe or wood ones made by farmers at the time.

The company, under the younger Smith's sales leadership, branched out to concrete utility vaults and other structures.

Smith-Midland's patented J-hook design vastly improved the safety of the ubiquitous Jersey barriers lining

the nation's highways and made it easier and faster to set the three-ton barriers in place. More than three dozen companies around the country manufacture the barriers under licensing agreements with the Virginia firm.

As the company heads into its second

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U.S. 50 park slated

BY ALEXANDRA BOGDANOVIC
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

The scenery varies greatly along U.S. 50 (John S. Mosby Highway). Driving east through Loudoun, the rural landscape morphs into suburban sprawl.

The creation of a new regional park at Gilberts Corner — where U.S. 15 and U.S. 50 meet — provides some relief from that.

"When you travel east on Route 50, there's a point where all you can see is rooftops," said Mike Kane, the Piedmont Environmental Council's

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Nyhous: 'Leaving options'

BY DON DEL ROSSO
Times-Democrat Staff Writer

A new connector road linking U.S. 17 and 211 could be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on where you live in Warrenton.

Fauquier's supervisors on Thursday will hold a 6:30 p.m. public hearing in the Fauquier High School auditorium at 705 Waterloo Road., Warrenton, on a proposed road corridor that would link U.S. 17 and 211 along the town's western edge.

Board Chairman Terry Nyhous (Center District) initiated an amendment to reserve a corridor for the road in the county comprehensive plan.

If the board eventually approves the proposed change, it could be 20 to 25 years before a road would be built, Nyhous and others say.

At most, he envisions a "local-scale street" like Walker Drive.

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SMITH

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half-century, Smith, 71, hands over the reins to his four sons.

Ashley, 47, is president and chief operating officer. Matthew, 43, is vice president of sales and marketing. Roderick, 45, is the batch plant manager, and Jeremy, 41, is deputy director of the company's subsidiary EASIS-SET.

The sons have worked for the company since they were small boys, doing odd jobs for grandfather Smith.

Ashley was about 8 or 9 years old when he started working at the Midland plant. "Granddad had me watering all the shrubs out front. That was my job," Ashley said.

Matthew's first job was picking up spent welding rods when he was about 5 years old.

"I guess I was about 8 and was painting," Matthew said.

"Dad came to get me and I grabbed a basketball to take a shot. He told me I couldn't do that until after I punched out," he said. "So he instilled in us a work ethic when we were young."

The five Smiths were reluctant to talk about the family dynamic of so many brothers and a father all working togeth-



Photo Courtesy Smith-Midland

50TH ANNIVERSARY: Company founder David Smith with one of his concrete cattle guards in the early 1960s.

er. But senior Smith said, "I've never seen five people who work together as well as we do."

"We all know stories of when things didn't go well," he said. "Here it seems all these brothers have a lot of respect for each other."

Ashley concurred, saying, "We're kind of spread out, and that helps, as well."

Rodney Smith plans to spend more time working on research and development, always an important component

of the company's success, while the sons focus on growing the company.

Smith-Midland developed a unique shoreline protection system known as Beach Prisms, which not only slows the erosion of beach-front properties, but also can actually help restore shorelines.

The company's concrete panels feature sound-deadening fibers which dampen sound by 80 percent. In addition to lining highways such as the Capital

Beltway and the Inter County Connector in Maryland, the sound walls deaden noise at substations and airports.

"When you look at all the new products coming out, we're one of the strongest companies in the country for research and development of pre-cast concrete," Ashley said.

Smith-Midland provided the exterior concrete panels covering the tallest structure in Virginia, the Westin Hotel in Virginia Beach.

The company's been called upon to provide security barriers for the White House and inaugural events, too.

The Washington Beltway is dotted with buildings featuring Smith-Midland's wide variety of architectural styles, from the Jefferson at Inigo's Crossing in Bethesda, Md., to luxury apartments at Thomas Circle in Washington, D.C.

The company's work can be seen at 3120 Fairview Park in Fairfax County, and at Tycon Towers, also known as "the shopping bag," in Tysons Corner.

Their first building project, however, was right here at home, the Liberty Bank building, now Wachovia, on Broadview Avenue in Warrenton.

The company employs 165 workers at its Midland plant.



Times-Democrat Staff Photos/Steve Campbell

WORKING IT: Smith-Midland workers prepare a concrete form.



JERSEY WALL: Matthew Smith stands next to the company's Jersey walls at the Midland plant.