

A SALUTE TO AN



CUSTOMER

VALLEY CONSTRUCTION CO., INC.

This family-owned Quad Cities heavy highway contractor has an 80-year history of success



Greg Hass,
manager

One of the most well-recognized and honored names in the highway construction business in the Quad Cities area is Valley Construction Co., Inc.

Started 82 years ago in Rock Island, Ill., by Arthur J. Hass, the company today is still run by Hass family members. The management team includes second-generation members John Hass, Jim Hass, and Bill Hass, as well as Greg Hass and Michael Hass, members of the third generation. Greg handles some of the day-to-day operations and oversees field operations and equipment as well as purchasing. Michael Hass is the industrial division manager.

"We're a heavy highway contractor that does highway asphalt and concrete paving, underground utilities, earthmoving, excavation and commercial and industrial site work," said Greg Hass, who has been with Valley Construction for about 10 years.

His grandfather started the business in his teens, said Hass, and gradually built the company up from small alley and sidewalk jobs to the major contracting work it does today. Generally, half of the company's work is for private customers, the other half is public work.

During the busy season, from 200 to 250 employees work on projects that are all within

about 100 miles of the Quad Cities. "We actively have probably 20 large to medium-size projects going on at any one time," said Hass. "We'll have a city street here, a county asphalt job there, or a new housing area. Twenty or 30 crews every day are working on different jobs in different areas."

According to Hass, crews are also usually working on four or five new subdivisions in the area, contracted to do the earthwork, the paving or the underground utilities. "In some cases we're partners with the developers, and with some we're just hired to do the work," he said.

Rock River project

A project crews started working on late last fall is called the Rock River Beltway project. "It is one of our biggest jobs ever," Hass pointed out. "It is all new construction and amounts to building a couple of bridges over a couple of Interstates, probably 400,000 to 500,000 yards of dirt and a lot of concrete paving. It is a whole new corridor that will cross the Rock River and go from Milan, Illinois, into Moline."

The two-year project initially involved a fairly substantial amount of wetlands mitigation, according to Hass. Valley Construction crews won the contract to complete all the work on the south side of the river, paving right up to the Rock River bridge. The work on the north side of the bridge will be let in the spring.

Other recent projects included constructing the weigh-in-motion scale system on I-280 eastbound and westbound; building the outdoor concrete storage bunkers for spent nuclear rods at the Cordova nuclear generating station in Cordova as well as a similar one in Palo, Iowa; the demolition of Duck Creek Mall in Bettendorf, Iowa; and the rebuilding of Locust Street in Davenport, Iowa.

Valley Construction is expanding the Rock River Beltway in Milan, Ill., from two to four lanes, which includes new interchanges and the realignment of Airport Road.





Operator Tim Brandt uses Valley Construction's Komatsu PC400LC-6 excavator to install 4,500 feet of sanitary sewer lines at the Rapids City housing development.

Key personnel

Key to getting jobs like these done successfully is having the right people to manage the work, Hass noted. One of the people he counts on is Don Kopf, underground division manager and longtime Valley Construction employee.

"Because of our underground crews, we're pretty much the premier underground contractor in the area," said Hass. "We do about 60 percent of the underground water and sewer work in the area. We also do emergency repair work for different cities and for the Rock Island Arsenal. We're basically on call 24 hours a day, year around."

The right equipment

Having the right equipment to do the work is also vital, said Hass, and they have looked to Road Machinery & Supplies in Milan, Ill., and sales representative Gary Kosman for much of their heavy equipment in recent years. They buy both new and used machines, but for high-production pieces, they generally buy new, Hass said.

"When we're buying a new piece of heavy equipment, we try to get a consensus from the people in the field and from supervisors," he noted. "We demo the machines and add in the price factor."



Valley Construction also put its Komatsu PC200LC-7 excavator to work at the Rapids City sewer line project.



A Valley Construction operator uses a Komatsu PC200LC-6 excavator on a residential utilities job.

An accomplished operator himself, Hass jumps at the opportunity to demo machines. A few years ago he even won a machine "rodeo" at Komatsu Field Days in Chattanooga. The timed competition involved performing specific tasks with a loader backhoe, excavator and a wheel loader.

"But beyond machine performance, one of the main points we look at when purchasing is after-sales support — someone who will stand by the machine who can actually fix it or work on it after you buy it. RMS has been great in that respect."

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Reputation for quality work retains customers

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Ken Kopf,
underground foreman

New purchases have included eight Komatsu excavators (three PC400s, four PC300s and three PC200s) as well as a Komatsu D39 dozer and a D41 dozer and eight major Gomaco paving machines. The company also rents equipment from RMS.

"Our excavators are great and the dozers are very dependable," Hass asserted. "We just send them out in the spring and bring them back in the fall. We don't do much to them in between. Our whole Gomaco paving fleet has come from RMS in about the last 10 years," he added.

Ken Kopf was recently overseeing the underground work for a new subdivision project where Valley Construction crews were using a new Komatsu PC200-7. Kopf said he likes the way the excavator works. "It's a great machine. It has the horsepower and it's light. It stands up in this mud."

Regular maintenance, safety priority

Kopf has operated equipment for more than 20 years. "I've run them all, and you can't beat Komatsu. They're balanced and we haven't had many problems with them. Basically, if you take care of them and do regular maintenance, they last forever."

The company follows a basic maintenance program, according to Hass, with 200-hour service intervals and oil sampling. "We also rely on feedback from our operators, and we always do winter maintenance," he reported.

Valley Construction has six mechanics on its payroll but also uses RMS service technicians.

"The RMS guys are very good," stated Hass. "If we need a part, we'll usually get it by the next morning if they don't have it in stock."

While good maintenance is important to production, it's also a factor in safety. "We have an intense safety program," explained Hass. "We have a full-time safety manager, Shawn Meier, and we have one of the lowest EMR ratings in the Midwest, which is how insurance companies judge you for your insurance rating. We always do pre-job hazard analyses, make sure safety equipment is always available and we do lots of safety training. We have received several awards for being one of the safest contractors in the state of Illinois."

2002 Contractor of the Year

Dealing with tight completion times and the weather can be some of their biggest challenges, according to Hass, as well as making sure customers are satisfied. That customer satisfaction is a big reason why much of the company's work is based on their reputation for quality. In fact, Valley Construction was named by the state of Illinois as Illinois Contractor of the Year for 2002. It's an honor that Hass says belongs to his crews as well as to management.

"We have excellent employees," he acknowledged. "We always try to hire quality people to run the jobs as well as work on the jobs and we try to instill quality into their design and work ethic so they produce a quality project. Many of our customers have very tight quality control for standards and specs in their work, and we won't leave the job until they're happy."

Although they face many challenges in the industry, Hass looks forward to the challenges and enjoys the company's successes. "It's something different every day, and it's always neat to see a job start, then see the end result, the finished product.

"We're fortunate to have high-quality employees and high-quality supervision as well as an ability as a company to diversify," he added. "During the years that private work might be slow, we can fall back on doing municipal and state work. We can adapt. And we've been able to grow through the hard work of our employees. We work as a team and we all have a common goal of being successful," Hass concluded. ■

This paving job on a city street is just one of 20 or 30 projects underway at one time by Valley Construction crews.

