

Faulks Bros. success not set just in stone

by Lisa Sumter
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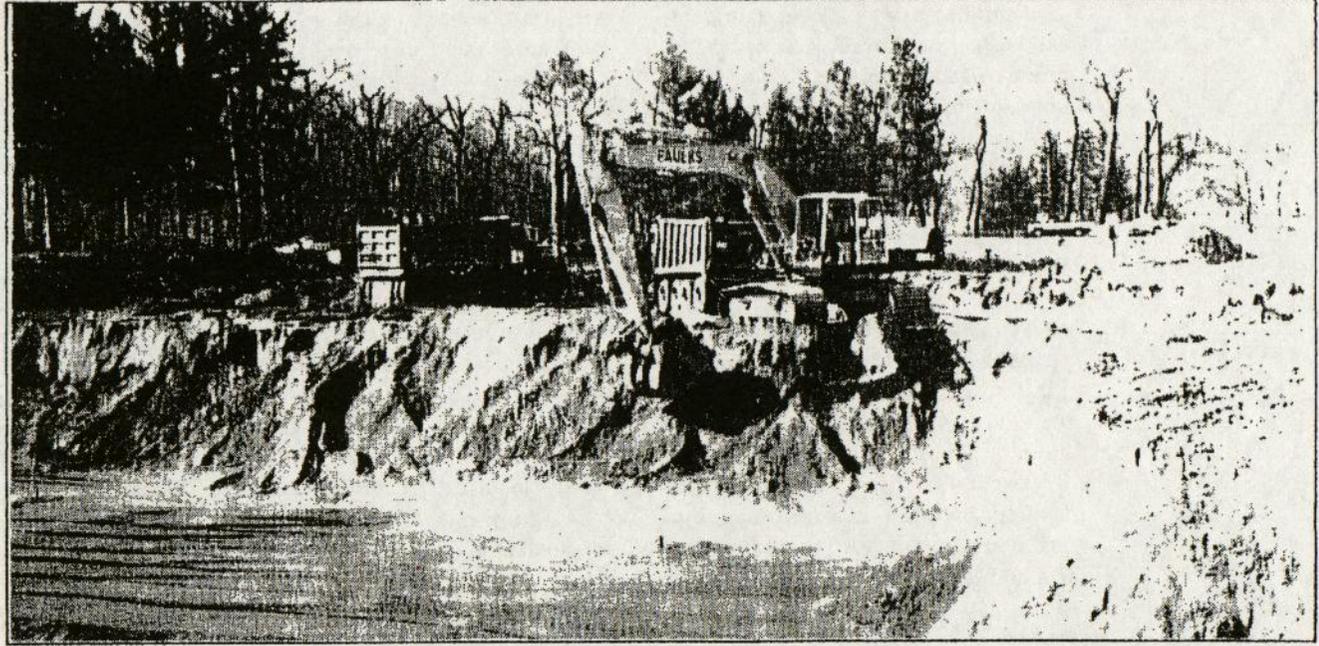
A solid base of soil, sand, stone, and gravel has proven fertile ground for Faulks Bros. Construction Inc.

Based in Waupaca since 1946, the family-owned firm has grown from a two-man sand and gravel business to a highly diversified construction materials company that employs more than 100. Today the company is using the tools of its trade to successfully build enterprises in sand and gravel, ready mixed concrete, general excavating, industrial sand, soil and organic materials and soil blending for golf course greens.

About 50 percent of Faulks Bros.' business involves jobs within a 50-mile radius of Waupaca. Another 25 percent is in the Midwest and the remaining 25 percent is in other national and international business.

A keen eye for new market opportunities and a willingness to take risks is key to the success of Faulks Bros. Randy Faulks, who runs the business with his brother, Bob, says development of new markets that complement existing services is crucial.

"If you stand still and try to keep doing what you've been doing for years



Faulks Bros. crews do excavation and site work at the Wisconsin Veterans Home in King

you will not survive," he says.

That doesn't mean jumping blindly into new ventures.

"We are calculated risk takers," says Randy. "We minimize the risk by really analyzing the marketplace ahead of time, the customers, the potential for that business 10 to 15 years ahead."

Christine Faulks, who heads up the Greensmix division – one of the company's newest and most dynamic – adds that flash-in-the-pan proposi-

tions that promise a quick return usually carry an unacceptably high level of risk.

"We really don't want to be in anything short term, quick in, quick out," she says.

Faulks Bros.' controlled expansion has spawned eight separate divisions since the business was started 46 years ago by Bob and Randy's father, Syd, and their uncle, Oliver. Syd bought out Oliver's share of the company in 1980 and in recent years

has passed control of the day-to-day operations to his sons. Retired now, Syd still holds the position of company president.

While the concrete business remains an important revenue source at Faulks Bros., other divisions are taking on increasingly significant roles and present the greatest potential for future growth. Greensmix is a soil blending business that caters primarily to the golf course and athletic stadium markets. Waupaca

Materials Stone and Organics Group sells packaged products such as peat, potting soil and decorative stone under names including Rocky Top and Good Earth to Wal-Mart, Fleet Farm, Menards and Pamida stores throughout the Midwest.

These three divisions each represent from 20 to 25 percent of Faulks Bros.' yearly revenue, Randy and Christine agree.

The company's newest division, Northwoods Organics, opened just over a month ago in Duluth, Minn.

Christine says the diverse product line, coupled with the balanced revenue base, provide fiscal security for the company and job security for its employees.

"We're not totally dependent on any one area of our company to carry the rest," she says.

Faulks Bros. also will take on specialized projects such as landfill closure and development, demolition and site development, Randy said. The company is in charge of site development for the addition to the Veterans Home in King.

In the past four years, revenue has grown about 25 percent at Faulks Bros., according to Randy. Correspondingly, the number of employees has increased about 20 percent. The company recently purchased 20 acres in the Waupaca Industrial Park and is in the process of moving its stone and organics division there. The site will have rail siding service with a 12-car capacity, greatly reducing the cost of transporting and handling stone and other materials that currently have to be shipped by rail part of the way and then trucked to

Waupaca.

While market strategy plays a crucial role in the company's success, Randy says an equally important part of the equation is the employees.

"The markets are there, the opportunities are there, but (growth) has come in the aggressiveness of our people" in pursuing new markets and expanding sales in existing ones, he says.

Another emphasis is customer satisfaction, Randy says. Keeping turnaround time on orders down helps ensure repeat customers.

Randy and Christine also heap praise on Syd Faulks, saying his foresight and fortitude, his positive and progressive thinking, built the base on which his sons have expanded.

