

MAKING THE RIGHT CUT

Concrete Cutting & Breaking Co. takes on the toughest projects—by design

👤 Melinda Guravich



From left to right: Enzo DelPizzo, fleet & facility manager; Rick Olson, general manager; Mike Kitchner, estimator; and Scott Palmer, operations manager, with a new concrete cutting machine.



Slab sawing in Texas with a 92-inch-diameter blade.

Concrete Cutting & Breaking Co. (CCB) is celebrating 45 years in business. The company name succinctly describes one of the niche services it provides: “We cut concrete. Any location, any type, any thickness,” says Rick Olson, general manager.

CCB was founded by Daniel Vander Mey in 1974 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The business is his life’s work; he has served as the sole president for its entire existence.

The company has worked on some of the biggest projects in the country, such as cutting concrete 50 feet underwater at a fresh water reservoir and cutting launch pads at Cape Canaveral, Florida.

CCB serves the civil, commercial, industrial and residential construction markets. The company has operations in 10 locations in Michigan, Indiana, Florida, New York and Ohio. It has completed thousands of jobs and worked in all 50 states and outside the United States.

Custom Equipment Design and Fabrication

CCB is known by general contractors as the go-to company for custom tooling and exceptional service. The company designs and builds job-specific tools in its fabrication shop in Grand Rapids, Michigan. It has tooling and fabrication capabilities to handle all degrees of difficulty.

Operations manager Scott Palmer compares the equipment fabrication process to building a race car. “We build equipment for specific jobs and custom applications. For example, we designed and built tools to cut huge sections from the walls of the Soo Locks in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan,” he says. Projects vary by industry and size, from residential projects to nuclear plants; custom equipment ranges from very small tools to some of the biggest in use.

“This capability separates us in the industry,” Rick says. “Our own equipment typically has a greater capacity and horsepower than the tools available in the marketplace.”

CCB has built and sold equipment to customers and competitors as well throughout the years.

Wire-Sawing Expertise

Wire sawing is a technique used to segment and cut large concrete structures.

The wire is a cable impregnated with diamond beads and locked into place. It is then wire-wrapped around structures; the cable spins, pulling the wire through concrete. Using wire of less than a half-inch in diameter, technicians can work in tight areas. Because it is a smooth cutting process, there is no vibration.

CCB has spent many years developing and improving its equipment.

Scott recalls a memorable project: a decommissioned, 100-year-old electric drawbridge in New Hampshire with 310-foot span lifts. The entire bridge and its two, million-pound counterweight systems needed to be replaced. The concrete was 7 feet thick, 40 feet high and 35 feet wide. CCB wire-sawed the pieces into manageable sizes so that they could be lifted with a crane system set up on a barge.

Core Drilling

CCB has the ability to core drill widths from a half-inch to 84 inches in diameter, at any depth.

This past summer in Midland, Michigan, CCB core drilled test holes 4 inches in diameter by 85 feet deep. The concrete was retrieved and turned over to a testing company that verified it met specifications.

Handling the Most Challenging Jobs

CCB is often called upon to help on particularly challenging jobs, sometimes working with competitors to complete projects.

The company successfully removed the dry dock slab at an oil drilling rig assembly yard near Corpus Christi, Texas. “We were called in to take care of a very difficult situation,” Rick says.

The original contractor planned to cut the slab using large-diameter blades. However, water pressure below the platform had lifted the slab by 4 feet and bowed the steel. No longer solidly in place, the steel was likely to move around and recoil during cutting, stopping a blade in its tracks.

CCB changed the plan to cutting with wire. “This was one of largest wire-sawing projects in the country,” recalls Scott, who organized and ran the job. “We mobilized six remote-controlled-track wire saws at the project site. A plan was created to allow all of the saws to operate simultaneously.” CCB was on-site for the three-month job—during a record Texas heat wave—until successful completion.

People and Training

CCB has approximately 100 employees. While each location operates independently, employees are deployed across divisions as needed. Company resources are pooled for large projects. This approach means employees develop a breadth of experience working on jobs across the country.

“We typically bring in technicians who are new to this industry and train them from the ground up. We believe our approach creates strong, safe employees,” says Rick. “We’ve had great people join us from diverse backgrounds, from cleaning tanker trucks to installing car stereos.”

New hires spend their first few weeks observing operators on job sites. “Before they handle equipment, we first want them to observe how we work and our focus on safety,” says Scott. He then spends significant training time with them in the field, exposing them to scenarios that all require different approaches.

“In this business, we don’t go a day without learning something new or seeing something different. It’s critical to understand the entirety of the contractor’s desired outcome, look at the job and decide on the approach,” Scott adds.

Commitment to Safety

Safety is a key operational strength for CCB. Its established safety and training programs protect and educate its field technicians, supervisors and customers.

The company’s safety programs emphasize driver safety and job site safety. CCB has its own online training program and requires monthly participation from employees. “That helps instill our safety culture on and off the job site,” Scott says.

The company is involved in industry safety programs and participates on Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) panels. All CCB technicians complete the OSHA 10-Hour Construction training course; some have completed the 30-Hour Construction training course. CCB maintains certifications through national organizations that supply safety services to general contractors. “All CCB equipment is built to satisfy OSHA silica standards,” Rick notes.

Critical Communication with Contractors

Technicians need to communicate well with contractors on the job site, understand their needs and perform the work safely.

“Communication is a critical skill. Typically, contractors conduct a 20- to 30-minute walk-through with our technician, explaining what they want. Then, they’re gone,” Scott says. “Technicians must be able to think on their feet and ask pertinent questions while the contractor is still on-site. Contractors do not want to receive multiple calls and spend time reviewing instructions after they leave the site.”

That means CCB employees need to understand a contractor’s expectations—or ask questions to receive clarification. “Without a clear understanding of the outcome needed, a job site with curb lines and a few marks on the ground is a puzzle with missing pieces,” Scott explains.

Culture of Common Sense and Hard

CCB thrives on individual leadership. Usually, there is only one technician on a job site. “We look for individual leaders who can manage their operation and think on their feet. While CCB support is always just a phone call away, it’s important to be able to think their way through the job,” Scott says.

Success requires common sense, a desire to work hard and not worrying about getting dirty, Scott says. “We’re proud of the work they do. At the end of the day, each of our employees can say, ‘I did a good job.’”



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MELINDA GURAVICH

Freelance reporter Melinda Guravich writes about AEC firms, business owners and technology and is the marketing director for the Women Texas Film Festival.

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Contributors



Jason Philyaw

Jason Philyaw is a writer and editor who has covered equities and bond markets, real estate, high school football and the Dallas comedy scene.



Vicki Speed

Educated as an aerospace engineer, Vicki Speed is one of the most prolific and engaging writers in the industry.

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