

CONCRETE SURGEONS

Two brothers have a prescription for success
at *CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc.*

by Steve Freeman



Brothers Tommy Cliggett (right) and Todd Cliggett, co-owners of CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc., take delight in their reputation of being “concrete surgeons.”

Not far from the “City of Brotherly Love,” two brothers say they have cut out a thriving business among contractors by providing expert concrete, masonry and asphalt cutting and drilling services.


Tommy and Todd Cliggett are co-owners of *CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc.*, operating out of Malvern, Pennsylvania, and New Castle, Delaware. Malvern is in Chester County, where CHESCO got its name.

Together, the siblings have built their company with high-profile projects, many in Philadelphia, like the two Comcast skyscrapers, the tallest buildings in the state; the Philadelphia International Airport; and the Philadelphia Museum of Art as well as numerous other projects, including bridges, utility installments or modifications and demolitions. Also, CHESCO has done work at the Wells Fargo Center, home of the Philadelphia Flyers hockey team, and Lincoln Financial Field, home of the Philadelphia Eagles football team.

“We extracted about 12 million pounds of concrete out of the Eagles stadium,” Tommy says.

The company’s project list also includes health care facilities, manufacturing plants, retail stores, power plants, military bases, residential homes and even underwater construction.

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A construction worker, T.J. Cliggett, is shown in profile, wearing a grey hard hat with a logo, safety glasses, and a high-visibility orange shirt. He is kneeling and operating a large, red and black wire saw machine that is cutting through a concrete structure. The background features a city skyline with several tall buildings under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The concrete structure he is working on has some graffiti on it.

Employee T.J. Cliggett, son of owner Tommy Cliggett, performs core drilling prep work for the wire saw cutting that comes next as a part of CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc.'s demolition of the old Walnut Street Bridge in Philadelphia.

"It's hard work. It's dirty work, and we often work around the clock, but we get the job done."

Todd Cliggett, Co-Owner, CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc.

Tommy started the company in 1987 after having entered the construction business six years earlier when he took over his father's sales of construction fasteners after his death. Early on, a building owner asked him to do some coring and cutting, and so Tommy found the necessary equipment and got to work.

"The man needed some coring done and asked me if I knew how to do it. I told him I would figure it out and cored 50 holes through the second floor of a renovation job for \$5,000," Tommy says. The holes would allow for installing new electrical wires in the structure. "The guy was so impressed with the work that he gave me all of his business from then on." Soon, Tommy made the switch completely to coring and cutting, sensing more success was possible in this line of work.

Todd, who is five years younger than his brother, joined Tommy after college in 1994. Operating from Tommy's garage and basement, they continued their father's business, CHESCO Construction Fasteners, before switching to coring and cutting. Since then, they've grown to serve customers in Pennsylvania and beyond to include New Jersey, Delaware, New York, Maryland and Virginia.

"My brother and I work well together; we're a lot alike, we balance each other out," says Todd. They split the office and field work responsibilities.

The brothers incorporated the business in 1997, and currently employ a staff of 50.

CHESCO is a true family business. The name CHESCO originated with

their father. Tommy's wife, Gina, put on her boots and used to help him at nights and weekends. Todd joined up with him and has been "the best partner that anyone could ask for," Tommy says.

"We trust each other and have each other's backs. Mom helped do the books and run the office as we grew. My three sons and two daughters have worked with us over the years. Three of the five work full time: Mike runs the GPR division, TJ is running work cutting concrete and Savannah is helping in the office," he says. "We have nieces, nephews, cousins and friends who have contributed as well. We are very blessed that God has made our journey a very special one. We are lucky to be working with our loved ones and also some exceptional people who have contributed significantly to help with our success over the years."

AT ITS CORE

The company offers a full range of services for coring and cutting, including highway and airport pavement alterations, utility cuts for electricity and plumbing, and demolition work. The large jobs entail making important modifications to the shells of buildings already built in concrete, a common sequence of work for concrete buildings. CHESCO is called in to cut openings for stairwells, elevator shafts, windows and doors.

"We come in after the fact and help with the changes. We also do many additions and renovation jobs," Tommy says.

Besides possessing the experience, knowledge and workers to do the jobs, CHESCO maintains all the



Derrick Boaman of CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc. tackles the 30th Street Bridge, an elevated roadway by the 30th Street (Train) Station in Philadelphia.



CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc. uses a saw cutter and crane to remove large concrete pieces from the structure at Cokesbury Village retirement community in Hockessin, Delaware. The project involved cutting and removal of balcony walls around a nine-story building.

necessary equipment and machinery to do the jobs *right*. The company performs professional precision cutting using electric, including high cycle electric, gas, diesel, propane and hydraulic-powered equipment. The use of diamond blades and bits serve to create exact openings in concrete floors and walls for building expansion, new plumbing, electrical conduits and HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) installations.

This advanced equipment ensures quality slab and wall sawing, core and dowel drilling, and grinding to achieve a desired surface area. CHESCO can work on concrete, stone, masonry and brick configurations.

Using the saw and other equipment on structures requiring demolition has real advantages over hammering concrete, according to Tommy. “When they get into demolition work,

many contractors want to hammer stuff for removal instead of cutting it out, but due to the structure’s reinforced nature, including rebar, it is more efficient to cut it. I like to call us concrete surgeons.” he says.

Another service CHESCO performs—which is used in demolition and other work—is ground-penetrating radar (GPR). With GPR, crew members can locate embedded targets, such as reinforcement bar, post-tension cables, conduits, voids and other existing utilities in concrete structures, roadways and natural materials. CHESCO provides accurate, high-resolution information in real time to aid work related to plumbing, electrical, site development and engineering. CHESCO’s GPR equipment can locate embedded targets between 1 and 10 feet in concrete structures, slabs and natural materials.

DOING IT RIGHT

CHESCO prioritizes ongoing training for its crew members as a way to ensure quality work, efficiency and safety. CHESCO trains all employees in-house.

All of its equipment operators receive an orientation in standards set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). CHESCO also trains its workers through courses provided by the Concrete Sawing & Drilling Association (CSDA). Those courses can include the basics of slab sawing, core drilling, wall and hand sawing and wire sawing, as well as sessions on fall prevention and safe operations in environments with the potential of airborne crystalline silica.

Additionally, CHESCO holds safety meetings every three weeks called “Toolbox Talks,” followed by a cookout.

Constant learning, Tommy says, aids in the understanding that coring and drilling services involve engineering to some degree.

“Thinking ahead and engineering jobs enables us to be efficient and safe. People may not realize it, but there is some real engineering required in concrete cutting. ...How to support that piece when it’s loose, how to remove the cut pieces safely out of the building, or how to ensure debris doesn’t get all over the structure. We protect the job surroundings for safety and efficiency.”

The work can produce dust and even slurry when water is used to cut or grind concrete. The CHESCO crew is experienced in containing the wet or dry residue, which is especially important in sensitive areas, such as



Bridge demolition work involves CHESCO Coring & Cutting Inc.'s Rith Chan using wire-cutting equipment on the parapets.

offices with computers or other technology, hospitals and even retail establishments that remain open and busy on work days. This importance separates CHESCO from all demo companies.

These trainings are another way the company delivers on its mission of dependability to its customers. By ensuring quality performance, the company also takes the time to build relationships with its customers and contractors.

"We leave our jobs cleaner than when we arrived, and the customers appreciate that effort," Tommy says.

PROOF POSITIVE

Serving as proof of CHESCO's unique abilities—regardless of the project or client needs—is the company's assistance on an "otherworldly" project televised for the cable channel Investigation Discovery (ID).

CHESCO was tasked with cutting through concrete encasing a coffin suspected of holding the remains of infamous serial killer H.H. Holmes, executed for his crimes by hanging and buried nearly 125 years earlier. The archaeological dig was led by two scientists from the University of Pennsylvania to determine if the corpse—whose entire life and death was the subject of numerous tales, not always factual—really was Holmes.

The company worked for 12 hours on the disinterment at Holy Cross Cemetery in Yeadon, Pennsylvania. It took three days to excavate the coffin, buried 10 feet deep, and masterfully saw open the concrete-covered casket.

Lab tests revealed the corpse was indeed Holmes. The network aired the documentary "American Ripper" in October 2017. It revealed that the descendants of Holmes who pursued the exhuming were relieved their great-great-grandfather did not, as rumors persisted, escape his hanging, flee to England and continue his massacre as that country's own "Jack the Ripper," whose crimes occurred shortly after Holmes was reportedly dead and buried.

"While obviously a variation from our usual work, the Holmes excavation showed our ability to perform expert concrete cutting services, even in unusual circumstances," Todd says.

CHESCO has shown time and time again that it goes the distance to do the job.

"It's hard work. It's dirty work, and we often work around the clock, but we get the job done," he adds. 🐼

As a communications professor and a reporter and editor for decades, Steve Freeman enjoys telling the stories of fascinating companies.