

All in the Family at Coblaco

Steve Davis, President, Coblaco Services Co., Continues His Father's Painting Legacy

Steve Davis is the President of Coblaco Services, Inc., a second-generation family-owned company specializing in industrial surface preparation and coating application. Based in Henderson, Colorado, the company has been in business for more than 42 years, after its founding by Steve's father, Phil.



PaintSquare Press recently caught up with the younger Davis to discuss the company's history, some prolific past projects the company has been involved in, current challenges the company faces and its overall goals for the future.

PSP: Can you talk a bit about the company's history, starting with its founding by your father, and how the company progressed from there?

SD: In 1978, after working in several other service-related businesses, my father, Phil Davis, realized a need for a company that specialized in the refurbishment of construction equipment. With rented equipment, material suppliers who were willing to take a chance, and two employees, Colorado Blasting and Painting was established. Operating on the principles of integrity, quality, keeping schedule commitments and safety, the company quickly grew.

In 1984, Phil began to diversify and service new customers. There was a growing concern to shore up environmental regulations, and employee safety was now a measurable marker for the industry. Continuing to try and stay ahead of the curve, Phil focused on obtaining permits from the EPA, and establishing solid working relationships with organizations like OSHA and local agencies to ensure the company was best in class. The same year, Phil applied for and secured EPA permits to perform industrial coating work, becoming the first company owner in the region to do so. Phil also purchased 40 acres of land in Henderson, Colorado, and installed three climate-controlled paint huts, as well as a 20,000-square-foot paint shop, to allow the company to perform work on large pieces year-round. In 1996, the company name was changed to Coblaco Services to better identify itself with the different scopes of work they were completing—industrial cleaning, media blasting, painting and ultra-high-pressure water blasting.

The next several years brought even greater opportunities, and with some strategic acquisitions, including American Pipeline Services in 2006, the company continued to grow. The acquisition of American Pipeline Services enabled the company to foray into pipeline maintenance services, broadening the scope of services Coblaco would be able to offer. That year was also the year Phil retired and left the company's operations to me. I currently own and preside over the organization.

PSP: Can you outline the services you provide, and the types of structures and facilities you work on?

SD: As an industrial services contractor, Coblaco performs all aspects of surface preparation and high-performance coatings/linings application. We have a diverse footprint within the industrial vertical market and work on a variety of structures such as water treatment plants, filter basins, clarifiers and digesters. Some of the structures we've worked on include stadiums, bridges, oil and gas assets, reservoir and dam infrastructure, structural steel, mining infrastructure and equipment, water tanks, energy and power infrastructure and large equipment. We also specialize in internal pipeline coatings, as well as joint bonding for large-diameter water transmission pipe and penstocks.

PSP: Going off of that—what are some noteworthy projects that you've been involved with?



Noteworthy painting projects completed by Coblaco crews include (from top): a ground storage tank in Copper Mountain, Colorado; liquefied petroleum gas tanks at a Kinder Morgan-owned facility in Altamont, Utah; and processing equipment at the Reuter-Hess Reservoir in Castle Rock, Colorado. PHOTOS COURTESY OF COBLACO SERVICES, INC.



Coblaco workers perform abrasive blast-cleaning simultaneously on a hot asphalt plant.



A Coblaco inspector performing thickness readings on the interior of a newly coated pipeline.



A view of Coblaco's main facility in Henderson, Colorado.

SD: Being in business for 42 years means we have been fortunate to have worked on some noteworthy projects, including Mile High Stadium, the home of the Denver Broncos; and Coors Field, the Colorado Rockies' baseball stadium. We have also performed rehabilitation on the Jim Creek siphon, a large water transmission pipeline; joint bonding work at Lake Texoma; and work on a Kinder Morgan-owned tank farm, penstocks at the Flatiron reservoir, and the 150-mile-long Vista Ridge water transmission pipeline in Texas—the largest of its kind in the state.

PSP: What have you found to be the keys to running a successful coating contracting business? Any advice you can share with the industry?

SD: The key starts with the people. My father created a culture of compassion that I have strived to carry forward. This helps with collaboration, because employees trust each other and care about each other. We always look to continuously improve our processes and develop our workers. This approach creates for a problem-solving mentality that is regularly demonstrated on the jobsite. Every employee is expected to work with relentless effort from the top down. We own our work—the wins and the losses. All of our company values translate into providing the absolute best customer experience for engineers, owners and general contractors.

PSP: What are some of the challenges you face in being successful? These can be field challenges or business/office challenges.

SD: As is the case for most construction related businesses, it is hard to find skilled labor. This must be a strategic initiative for all of us. The challenges we face with work are usually schedule-based, which we may solve with more staff. I would also say that increasing regulatory pressure is a concern, because the hard and soft costs associated with these regulations must be passed on to customers.

PSP: How has your company been handling work during the COVID-19 pandemic? Have you seen a dip in productivity, or have you been able to stay busy through following guidelines?

SD: We have been fortunate through this pandemic. First, we take safety seriously and immediately implemented a senior leadership monitoring program to ensure that we were staying on top of the daily changes with the CDC and local government requirements. This has helped keep our employees safe at work, and, I have to believe, even at home. The result: No dip in production and projects completed on time and on budget.

Our schedule has stayed full. We have good project start dates through the fall. We are slightly concerned about the winter, however, as we hear that municipal work might slow down significantly.

PSP: What are your goals for the company as you move forward into the future?

SD: COVID-19 has us focused on getting through the next 12 months in a fluid and dynamic way. With that said, we do have a strategic plan with long-term goals that we are keeping a pulse on. In general, we have cross-functional strategic initiatives from business development, to sales and estimating, to operations and regulatory compliance, to finance. Our senior leadership team is engaged and focused on both short-term realities and the future of the company. **PSP**