

BUSINESS OF THE MONTH

HALLCO Manufacturing Company, Inc.

First with Live Floors

An ancient civilization built the wheel, but it was ours that built the moving slat floor conveyor system. The responsibility for this revolutionary innovation is held by Ole Hallstrom, founder and CEO of HALLCO Mfg. Co., Inc. (HALLCO), located in Oregon. Live floor systems have made it possible for many diverse industries to work more quickly, effectively and safely. They are literally capable of walking the hauler's load off a trailer with no human effort.

It was a dairy farm in the Pacific Northwest that provided fertile ground for young Hallstrom's ingenuity to take root. Years ago, he observed his father creatively spread gravel by moving boards on a flat bed, and he transformed the idea from there. Based on the same engineering principles his father had used, Hallstrom devised a mechanical flooring system to move other agricultural products on the farm. It was just a matter of time until he became aware of the need for this device in other industries. In a joint effort with Robert Snellman, he developed and marketed the forerunner of today's hydraulically-driven live floors. Since then, there have been other advancements such as a two-way variable speed feature which allows for the precise loading and unloading of almost any material.

Expansion for Hallstrom's invention occurred quickly when interest came from not only agricultural companies, but also from the wood products, and eventually, the solid waste industries. HALLCO's General Manager Russ Halvorsen attributes this strong industry crossover to the versatility of the HALLCO patented design. "We can unload a 45-foot trailer in about eight minutes," he says. "In fact," Halvorsen adds, "our floors have unloaded just about everything from bagged dry freight, cardboard and carrots to chopped alfalfa."

HALLCO live floors not only assist in hauling, but also prove valuable in stationary applications such as recycling, co-generation, papermaking and food processing. With less than 3/64th of an inch between slats, HALLCO floors have been approved as one of the safest ways of handling recyclables.

Although HALLCO manufactures a "basic" live floor, it puts a great deal of effort into custom building systems to the specifications of the company or government agency ordering its product. Central to the HALLCO live floor is its hydraulic system which powers the floor system and moves it back and forth to unload material off a trailer or conveyor. There are always variables in the floor design, however, which require precision engineering and installation. "We feel we are in a partnership with our customers," says Halvorsen. "They tell us what they need, and we build it."

HALLCO takes pride in its service both before and after the sale. Halvorsen says, "We are there at the beginning to assist the engineers with design specs, and we stay with them and their project throughout the life of the floor system." He adds that sometimes early efforts do not lead to a sale for three to five years, but

that it is this attention to the detailed needs of the customer which provides mutual benefits in the end. Even with the installation of standard equipment, informed decision-making is essential and is facilitated by the HALLCO support team. The proper choice of deck width, for example, eliminates any 'dead' area where material can be left along the inside walls. The type of drive or hydraulic unit also must be considered and chosen to fit the application.

Due to its dramatic growth, HALLCO can now boast of producing more than 1,000 of its live floor systems per year with sales worldwide. The company has a facility in Concord, North Carolina which functions as a warehouse to facilitate delivery on the east coast. It also has salespeople throughout North America, with growing representation around the world. With this broad base, which also includes service representatives at the company's Oregon manufacturing plant, timely and qualified assistance can be provided to customers. Halvorsen says, "We have a policy of going on site for startups and instruction. We set up fleets and give an instruction school on how to operate and maintain the units because we feel it is this type of service that separates us from others."

At HALLCO, research and development get considerable attention, too, since they are what drive a company into the future. Halvorsen notes that HALLCO has new projects underway at its Oregon test facility all of the time. By doing continual field research, the company has been able to streamline its floors by minimizing unit weight and deck height while assuring dependability in all climates. HALLCO's research has also enabled it to construct units such as its new "Double Ridge"TM floor, specifically being marketed to the waste industry because of its ability to endure the direct impact of dumping.

This year marks 20 years since HALLCO's incorporation and a quarter century since its first floor was produced. In that time, HALLCO has developed and solidified a niche for itself. The company maintains its position by focusing efforts on both technological advancement and on customers' satisfaction. It has a strong dealer network tied to North America's major manufacturers and is steadily expanding to meet an increasing international demand.

By installing live floors in trailers, haulers are able to unload virtually anywhere with fewer personnel. By installing them as in-plant conveyor systems, customers can move and store material, also with less physical labor requirements and with fewer safety and maintenance concerns. For many industries, the invention of live floors provided the same increase in efficiency which the wheel provided during the period of its inception. Similar longevity seems imminent. ★

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