



n o t h i n g

Ventured

n o t h i n g

Gained

A positive attitude and hard work has turned adversity into one of Atlas Copco's largest dealers

Venture Drilling Supply, headquartered out of Tahlequah, OK, recently acquired Rock Drilling Supply of Georgetown, TX, to become Atlas Copco's sole deep hole and water well product distributor for the south-central USA as well as the large blast hole and SDE product distributor for Texas and Oklahoma.

Wayne McCarthy started Venture Drilling Company with a couple of partners in 1977 much as many businesses get their start. It was three guys sitting around a table with a simple and ambitious strategy following the old proverb: nothing ventured, nothing gained. We can only wonder what Wayne would think of his company today. Wayne was killed in a racing accident in 1994, leaving his young wife, three children and a core of committed people behind to keep the business going. Today, Wayne's widow, Michele McCarthy, continues to build the company with her children Colt and Nocona, (a third son, 16-year old Ace, is still in school), and many good people with positive attitudes.

THE EARLY YEARS

A few years after starting the contract drilling business, Wayne bought out his partners and for the next 17 years the company grew from a blast hole drilling company to include a service, sales and supply company for drills, parts and consumables.

Wayne started the supply business out of necessity in 1984. He needed parts and consumable inventory for his drilling business, but he also committed to support other drillers in the area when a machine

was down or a part was needed. "The supply business started with four hammers and several bits," recalls Michele with a smile. "We took the hammers and bits out of the boxes and set them and empty boxes out and took a picture for marketing. It made it look like we had twice as much inventory."

Many small business owners – especially drilling contractors – can probably relate to the early years at Venture. Long hours and a total family commitment went into getting the job done. Michele worked in the office managing the books while Wayne and his top people like Jack Green and Danny Freehill (both employed for 25 year) worked in the field building the business. George Gummere, along with Wayne's experience, helped to turn the Supply Company into what it is today.

Together, Green and Freehill, along with numerous loyal employees, have built the drilling side of the business into more than 2 dozen rigs doing quarry blast holes and specialty drilling work.

"I believe our supply business benefits greatly from the experience and knowledge of the drilling company," says Michele who credits the fact that they know what it means to be broken down or stuck in the hole.

"We committed to customers and

suppliers right off that we would not use our supplier relationships to compete for drilling business and the respect for those relationships has made us a stronger business today," says Michele. "Team work benefits everyone".

STARTING OVER

Any time someone starts a business there are hurdles to overcome, but when Wayne died in June of 1994, there were a com-



Michele McCarthy with daughter Nocona and sons Ace and Colt.



Venture Drilling Supply General Manager George Gummere listens intently to comments from customer Chris Ryan while discussing the features on a new drill.



In 1984, Wayne McCarthy started Venture Drilling Supply with his first order of hammers and bits. Celebrating this moment with his dad was son, Colt, who is now the manager of the Texas office.

pletely different set of challenges. “On the day of Wayne’s funeral, I made a commitment to the employees to keep things going and they made a commitment to me to work together,” remembers Michele.

“Wayne was the business in the early years,” says Michele. “Banks and customers saw him as the person behind the business and did business with us because of his personality and trust in him as an individual,” recalls Michele. When he died, Michele had to start fresh building that trust.

The day after burying Wayne, Michele was in the office calling quarries and suppliers. Some people didn’t appreciate that and thought there should be a mourning time. Michele knew her healing process, and out of respect for Wayne’s memory, that meant picking up where he left off. It takes a lifetime to build relationships and customers, and a minute or one mistake to lose them.

Michele’s situation was more than challenging in those years. She sold many of the personal assets (men toys) they had acquired over the years to make the business work: the helicopter, airplane, race cars, etc. that were a big part of Wayne’s life. “He was an adventurous and charismatic person who lived dangerously – a real adrenaline junkie – and people loved that about him,” says Michele.

When Wayne needed money, the bankers loaned it to him on the collateral of the purchase and his word. When Michele took over, the banks wanted the net worth, life insurance and equipment as collateral. “The bankers required double from me than they would have from a man

in the same situation. Generally speaking, drilling is a Man’s World,” said Michele. For three years, the business didn’t change much; Michele was conservative and smart about growth and paid off the banks.

After that, the business began growing and hasn’t looked back since. Today Michele says there is real trust and loyalty with everyone in the business. “I manage finances and working relationships. Each employee has their own responsibilities,” says Michele.

George Gummere is the point man and Vice President of Venture Drilling Supply today. Since the acquisition of Rock Drilling Supply, the company has regionalized day-to-day responsibilities with Colt McCarthy managing the Georgetown, Texas office, Robert Baughman managing the Tahlequah office, and Nocona McCarthy doing marketing and advertising for all divisions.

“Supply wise, we know drills,” says Gummere pointing out the years of experience in his service and sales personnel. “I would put our field service techs up against anyone in the business, and with the parts distribution center in our backyard, we have that as an added advantage.”

Timing hasn’t always been on Michele McCarthy’s side, but this time it was. Johnny Armstrong approached Michele in August 2006 and the deal to purchase Rock Drilling Supply was completed January 2007. “Johnny’s business fit well with ours and the two companies merged well,” Gummere pointed out.

He credits their relationship with At-

las Copco’s distributor representatives as another key component in making the transition move smoothly. “We’ve had great support from Atlas Copco over the years from Scott Slater to Derrick Anderson, and each new contact has helped our business in its next stage of growth,” says Gummere.

Gummere also cites his personal relationship with Atlas Copco’s consumable salesman, and former Venture employee Jeff Harris as another part of that success. “I don’t know for sure, but I’ll bet Jeff is Atlas Copco’s number one salesman in the world for more than one particular product.” Gummere cites Harris’ commitment to each customer and his outstanding sales record, which included doubling Venture’s steel business in just the last couple of years.

Michele McCarthy and her dedicated team have built Venture Drilling Supply into one of Atlas Copco’s top dealerships in the US, but it wasn’t an easy road. She says it came down to sink or swim 13 years ago, and they chose to swim.

When Wayne started this venture 30 years ago he had no idea where it would go, but it’s Michele who has taken that simple principle and made it her own. She is a humble person who says that she’s ‘just a country gal in blue jeans’, but it’s her compassion and strong leadership skills that her people have entrusted to guide them. She says, “As Christians, The Lord promises not to give us more than we can handle,” but looking at what she continues to build, it looks like she can handle more than most.