

Graniterock: One of the best places to work

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Most people want a job they love doing, and most want a place to do it where it's a pleasure to be there. For the past four years, Graniterock Company has been selected as one of those places.

Fortune magazine recently completed its fourth annual evaluation of America's workplaces, again naming Graniterock to the list of the top "100 Best Places to Work in America." Graniterock has made the list all four years and moved from 19th place last year to 17th place this year.

We don't lose a lot of people, said Mark Treanor, Watsonville branch manager. "Most people stay until they retire."

According to "Fortune," the top 100 companies don't make the list by accident, "...they work diligently to build these great places to work."

So, what is the recipe Graniterock uses to make it appear so high on the list?

Well, it starts with more than a



Kelly Elliott/Register-Pajaronian

Concrete mixer driver Ervin Crews recently celebrated his 25th year on the job at Graniterock and says he's loved every minute of it. The company recently placed 17th on 'Fortune' magazine's top 100 Best Places to Work in America list.

century of principles, including hiring policies, promotions, compensation and recognition, then continues with the company's Individual Professional Development Plan, highlighted with training and career advancement programs. According to "Fortune," 96 percent of Graniterock employees said they are offered training to further themselves both professionally and personally.

The Graniterock Company was incorporated February 14, 1900. In the beginning, quarry operations were tough, but the company still made some provisions for its employees. Back then, 15 men used sledge hammers, picks, shovels and wheelbarrows to break and load broken rock onto horse-drawn wagons for the trip to the railroad line. Workers were paid \$1.75 per 10-hour day to produce 12 tons of broken rock. The men were provided with a bunkhouse and ate at the on-site cookhouse.

Some relief came three years later when the quarry was auto-

mated with a steam-powered crusher that could produce 20 tons of crushed rock per hour and business increased enough to add nine more employees.

Although incorporated in 1900, the company's story began more than 200 million years ago, when a great mass of molten granite began to push up from the depths of the earth through limestone, sandstone and clay on the bed of an ancient ocean. As the North American continent drifted by the Pacific Plate, the cooled, contracted and cracked granite was slowly uplifted. Through millions of years of this action, the granite was folded, broken and crushed. Since the granite laid directly upon the San Andreas Fault, the mining process was eased because nature provided pre-fractured rock.

In 1906, three years after the quarry put to use its new rock crusher, disaster struck. The fault that had created the quarry destroyed all

that stood in its path, including the new crusher. Train rails were twisted, rail cars were overturned and the quarry operation was generally devastated.

But with the bad came the good as the devastation created a new demand for construction. It didn't take long to get things up and running again.

As automobiles began replacing the horse and buggy, street paving became a necessity and in 1915, Graniterock received its first road improvement contract. Then as a result of the California State Legislature's "Get Out of the Mud" act, the streets of Santa Cruz and Salinas were paved with Graniterock concrete.

Although freight costs soared during World War I, construction was booming throughout California, and Graniterock expanded with the state's growing needs.

In 1909, a steam shovel was purchased to further mechanize quarry operations and in 1911, horse-drawn carts were replaced with a steam locomotive to haul the rock to the crusher. Using the steam shovel, the rock was loaded into

dumping rail cars.

The company thrived, as well as its employees, until the Great Depression took a heavy toll on American businesses. Graniterock was no exception. Work was so scarce at the quarry that a whistle was blown to call men in when as little as one car of rock was ordered.

Although resources were scarce, Graniterock still made provisions for its employees. The company's board of directors obtained permission from the Federal Reserve Bank to give out Christmas bonuses. Unable to offer regular employment, the company made interest-free loans to its employees to cover medical bills. Struggling to keep Graniterock afloat and to provide for its employees, the construction portion of the company was sold, as well as the South San Francisco, the San Jose and the San Luis Obispo supply branches.

However, some progress did take place in the 1930s as the company opened its first asphalt concrete plant in Aromas, which marked the beginning of delivery of pre-mixed concrete.

The 1940s and World War II brought new activity at Graniterock. Materials were needed to build Fort Ord, Camp McQuaide and the Navel airstrip in Watsonville. Since many men were away serving in the armed forces and working in war plants, workers came from Jamaica to fill their jobs and for the

first time, a woman was employed at the quarry.

With the tremendous growth of Monterey and the San Francisco Bay area in the 1960s and 1970s, Graniterock continued to expand, and in step with the times, installed its first computer system.

In the 1980s, the company undertook a major investment by completely modernizing the quarry. A mobile crusher was designed and built — the world's largest of its kind. Conveyers were installed to carry rock from the primary crusher to a new wash plant and secondary crusher. And, a state-of-the-art, computer-controlled, automated truck and rail car loading system was unveiled. All were designed to move the quarry operation into the 21st century.

By 1990, Graniterock employed more than 400 people in twelve locations stretching from South San Francisco to Monterey. Throughout the company's century-long history, it has maintained the values of quality, integrity and community responsibility that were first established by the company's founder, A.R. Wilson.

"It's a kind of family environment at work that's focused on winning in the marketplace," said Graniterock President and CEO Bruce Woolpert.

Along with the Individual Professional Development Plan, regular recognition and promotions are an

important part of building a staff of responsible employees, according to Treanor.

"I love it here," said building materials driver Jorge Garcia, who has been employed at Graniterock for more than four years. "I wish I had been working here throughout my career. They treat the employees really well; couldn't ask for any more from a company. And, we look after each other. It's like one big family."

Graniterock has received many awards throughout its history, including the gold medal for crushed rock at the San Francisco World's Fair in 1915, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award and the Governor's Golden State Quality Award.

The company also just rolled passed the 4 million-mile mark without a traffic accident. This extraordinary safety accomplishment was made by more than 20 drivers who are dedicated to road safety and who travel daily on some of the most congested highways throughout central and southern California.

"The bottom line is people feel that they can and are making a difference," said Woolpert. "Some people summarize this by saying a business is an 'empowering culture,' but I think it can be more simply said that everyone is a member of a single team with each person owning responsibility for overall company results."