

# Davenport cement facility steps into computer age

By KEN MCLAUGHLIN

Heralded as one of the world's most ecologically oriented and energy-efficient cement plants, Lone Star Industries' new Davenport plant was officially dedicated Friday at a brief ceremony and lavish reception.

Completion of the new facility — constructed amidst the old plant's rusty buildings, covered inches deep with cement dust — followed five years of planning and construction. Costing more than \$100 million, it was the most expensive construction project in Santa Cruz County history.

Attending the dedication were about 300 people: construction officials from central and northern California, Lone Star stockholders, customers and local government officials. They were told by Lone Star's burly, feisty chairman and chief executive officer, James E. Stewart, that cement — which he called "gray-colored, foul-smelling stuff" — has been one of the keys to progress in the American West, the nation and the world.

"Where would civilization be without cement?" asked Stewart, who noted that the Davenport plant had provided the cement for the Golden Gate Bridge, BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), San Francisco Airport, Folsom Dam, the California Aqueduct, the Bay Bridge, Pearl Harbor, the Oakland Coliseum and "a good part of the present San Francisco Skyline."

Lone Star made the decision to modernize the plant in 1976. According to Stewart, it took three years just to get the necessary permits for the plant, which required the approval of 33 regulatory agencies.

Construction began in early 1978. The project included installation of a new grinding mill, a new coal-fired kiln and preheater system (replacing three oil-fired kilns), new precipitators, two new "finish grinding" mills and a \$1 million Honeywell computer to control production. The entire operation of the plant is monitored in a central control room, equipped with color video-display terminals.

Most of the plant's old buildings, now used for storage, still remain. Essentially, however, the plant is brand new.

While the new plant was being constructed, Lone Star continued to use the old one. Even during the period when Lone Star employees learned how to handle the state-of-the-art technology in the new plant, production continued at the old facility.

During the transition period, according to plant manager Dave Maars, the number of employees increased from 210 to 225. Within the next year, however, that number will decrease to about 155, mainly through attrition.

Despite the reduction in



Photo by Sam Vestal

## New cement plant was built amid the old one

employees, the new plant will produce about 775,000 tons of cement annually, about double the production of the old plant.

"The new plant processes raw materials in 30 minutes that took 3½ hours in the old facilities," Maars said. "We use and reuse heat from plant operations, reducing our overall energy consumption by a third."

The company says it would have been economically unfeasible to adapt the old plant to the present technology for controlling air pollution. In addition, the skyrocketing costs of oil and national policy during the '70s dictated the conversion from oil to coal.

Company officials say the new plant uses its raw materials — high-grade limestone, shale, silica sand and iron ore — more efficiently, which will help extend the life of the nearby Bonny Doon quarry.

Guests at the dedication, who were taken on a tour of the new plant, were amazed at the lack of dust, often associated with cement plants — and, in particular, the old Davenport plant.

The new plant, which Lone Star officials said was operating at 100 percent capacity Friday, was so

clean that the guests were able to sit down to a gourmet lunch (in a carpeted tent) without having to wash their hands after the hourlong tour.

Providing entertainment at Friday's dedication ceremony was the award-winning Aptos High Band, which received a \$500 donation from the company. A bronze plaque was unveiled that dedicated the plant to the "Future of the American West."

Santa Cruz Portland Cement Co. began construction on the Davenport plant in 1905. It was rushed into production to help rebuild San Francisco following the devastating 1906 earthquake.

The local cement company was bought by Pacific Coast Aggregates (later known as Pacific Cement and Aggregates) in 1956, and Lone Star purchased the plant in 1965.

The plant had been upgraded during the 1940s, when three new kilns were installed.

Lone Star is the largest manufacturer and supplier of cement in the Western Hemisphere, with annual sales of more than \$900 million. The corporation has 13 cement plants in the U.S. and seven in South America.

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