

Graniterock celebrates a century of quality service

By KELLY ALTSHULER

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WATSONVILLE — The walls of the Granite Rock Company corporate headquarters in Watsonville are strewn with plaques and certificates honoring the business with awards in overall excellence, school-business partnerships, technical achievements and cutting-edge approaches to high performance business results. It also takes the number 19 slot on the 2000 Fortune magazine list of the "100 Best Places to Work in America."

Distinguished as California's oldest — and one of its largest — construction material suppliers and contractors, with 695 team members and locations in Watsonville, Salinas, Gilroy, Hollister, Aromas, Felton, San Jose, Redwood City, Santa Cruz, Seaside and South San Francisco, Graniterock purchased its first piece of land near Aromas in December 1899 with plans to open a quarry.

Now, 100 years after its Feb. 14 1900 incorporation, Graniterock celebrates its centennial anniversary in San Francisco Sunday and Monday, marked with a speech by former President George Bush on the "Challenges of the Next American Century."

"Having become familiar with the company's history, I think it's the people that have carried Graniterock successfully throughout the past century," says Graniterock Marketing Services Manager Keith Severson. "A.R. Wilson, the company's founder, was a man of vi-



supported by technological innovation. His values are very much alive today in Graniterock: concern that customers receive a quality product, that communities benefit and prosper as the company grows, and that Graniterock people always be respected as friends and family."

In addition to the Wilson-Woolpert family, many others have their histories woven throughout the quarry and the company itself, Severson says. "It's great to see people take ownership of their jobs."

Constructing a history

Graniterock's quarry, a deposit of high quality granite along the



Photos courtesy of Graniterock

President George H. W. Bush, above left, presents the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award to Graniterock president & CEO Bruce W. Woolpert as Secretary of Commerce Barbara Franklin looks on. Photo at left: Graniterock's Pavex Construction Division building Stanford University's main entrance roadway, Palm Drive. The Stanford project was completed in record short time and received landscaping awards for its finished appearance. Photo below: 1900 mining with sledgehammers and picks.



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sion, and his grandson, (current Graniterock president and CEO) Bruce Woolpert, is a man of vision.

According to a written statement from Woolpert, "A.R. Wilson was an extraordinarily intelligent and achievement-driven man. He pushed Graniterock and the industry toward higher quality products

Pajaro River east of Watsonville, was established in December 1899 and first catered to the Southern Pacific Railroad, which needed ballast — rock bedding for rail ties and track — to expand the railroad. Early workers made \$1.75 per ten hours of shattering rocks

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with 18- and 20-pound sledgehammers and picks, shoveling the rock into flat cars and pushing the cars to the main rail line. They generated 175 tons of rock by hand each day.

After the 1906 earthquake devastated the Central Coast, Graniterock crews built the still-standing San Francisco Wells Fargo building and Gilroy City Hall. In 1907, the company paved roads for the city of Watsonville. Its greatest project of the decade was constructing a railroad to Southern California's Doheny oil fields. Other projects at this time included building roads and creating two new corporations, Granite Construction company and Central Supply company, which gave Graniterock a complete chain of service from materials to finished construction.

Also during its early years, Graniterock installed the state's first ready-mix concrete plant and hot mix asphalt plants.

During the days of the Great Depression and the two World Wars, "all parts of what went on in society eventually made their way to the West Coast," Severson says, "and eventually to the Central Coast — here, to Watsonville and Aromas."

With the development of UC-Santa Cruz in the 1960s, Graniterock supplied 100 percent of the concrete. Continued university expansion kept the company busy through the seventies, at which time its quarry was installed with the world's largest mobile crusher, equipped with a conveyor system that replaced six 50-foot rear-dump trucks, that long ago replaced the hammer-and-hand work of the early laborers.

Graniterock's first quarry location, now called the A.R. Wilson Quarry after the company's founding father, is equipped with the most advanced equipment available worldwide.

Pavex Construction Division, the company's construction arm, was created in the 1980s and began business in March 1989 with two employees. Pavex projects included the reconstruction of one of San Francisco International Airport's major take-off runways. Pavex employees currently exceed 200.

In 1992, Graniterock received the acclaimed Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, one of its greatest achievements of the 20th century, according to Severson. The award, established by Congress and named for the late Secretary of Commerce, raises awareness about quality management practices and recognizes companies with state-of-the-art approaches to high performance business results.

"The award recognizes all aspects of the company, including products, service, quality, people, environment," Severson says. "It's a great tribute."

Paving the roads into the next century

As Graniterock pushes into 2000, it envisions continued progression and achievements at Pavex.

"They're really starting to add some great projects," Severson says, including one upcoming at the San Jose International Airport, which, once completed, will have given the division experience working at all the major airports in the area.

The company projects the continued success of extracting good quality rock from the Aromas quarry as well as modernizing and rebuilding the foundations of much of its property.

"We're getting to the point where we deal with technology every day," Severson says. "I think that's going to provide us with tremendous opportunities in the future."