

Building his own story



Five Rivers Distribution expands bulk material storage capacity with Legacy fabric buildings

Marty Shell isn't one to simply sit back and enjoy success. As with many second-generation operators of family-owned businesses, there's a point of pride in not only continuing what the first generation established, but also making it bigger and better — and Shell certainly fits that mould.

His father, the late Buck Shell, started in the port/terminal business in 1969 as manager of the Pine Bluff Fort before quickly moving up the Arkansas River in 1970 to start the Fort of Port Smith. In 1982, he was named vice president of Pine Bluff Warehouse Company, where he oversaw seven Arkansas ports. And then in 1996, Buck ventured out to found his own company.

Five Rivers Distribution was established as an intermodal warehouse facility with locations in Van Buren and Fort Smith, Arkansas. Conveniently positioned for the Arkansas River System, the company today has a total of five handling docks for unloading barges, and is also served by the Union Pacific and A&M Railroads.

Within close proximity of Interstates 40 and 540, Five Rivers also runs its own trucking company, completing a trifecta of transportation options coming into and going out of its US Customs bonded warehouse. All totalled, the operation stakes claim to about 300,000ft² of storage space for warehousing and bulk materials.

Marty Shell has been anything but a complacent president as the company enters its third decade of operation. A few years ago, the need for additional warehouse space — along with a desire to invest in capital improvements that would enhance Five Rivers as a whole — prompted Shell to add a 10,000ft² fabric building right near an existing 16,000ft² tension fabric structure at the Van Buren site that had been constructed about six years previously.

Due to the natural corrosion resistance of the fabric material, the buildings are primarily used for storage of salt and other corrosive materials, but are also housing any and all other commodities.

“Before we got the first one, the idea of a fabric warehouse sacred me to death,” said Shell. “But they've stood the test of time against wind, snow, hail, sunlight. I'm a believer now that it's clearly the right building material for the application.”

It wasn't long before Shell was again looking to add a new fabric structure. Satisfied with his prior purchases but also curious about other options, he consulted with friends upriver at the Port of Catoosa in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where a massive fabric salt storage building had been installed a couple years earlier by Legacy Building Solutions.

“They were very pleased with the Legacy building,” said Shell.

“And I knew they had really done their homework before deciding to go with them. I trust their knowledge, so I took the recommendation and gave Legacy a call.”

Having already purchased two fabric structures in the past, Shell was familiar with the construction process and knew he would be acting as a general contractor, subbing out the dirt work and concrete himself. All that was left was to establish a comfort level with the building manufacturer that had been suggested.

“I spoke to Paul Smith at Legacy, and he was a very nice, knowledgeable man,” said Shell. “He really sold his company well. We obviously had contracts, but the overall feel was kind of like the olden days, where you felt you could just take somebody at their word. Everything that Legacy said they were going to do, they did.”

While the business relationship may have made Shell nostalgic for the old days of handshake deals, he knew the product he was buying was undoubtedly a step toward the future. While his two existing tension fabric structures were traditional hoop-shaped buildings with web truss framing, Legacy buildings instead use an innovative solid beam engineering concept where the fabric roof attaches to structural steel I-beams.

“Price is a major factor in any purchase decision,” said Shell. “But we didn’t blink at having to pay a little more for the Legacy structure. Sometimes you have to spend more to get a higher quality building.”

The completed building measures 75ft by 200ft with over 30ft of clearance at the peak. The 15,000ft² is enough to contain about 3,000 tonnes (or 140 truckloads) of bulk material. The structure is clad in white 15-ounce polyethylene fabric with blue trim to match the other fabric buildings at Five Rivers, which had been supplied by Cover-All and ClearSpan.

The structure sits atop a concrete-in-place foundation seven feet above grade, and is engineered withstand a 90mph wind load. It also holds snow loads of 10 pounds per square foot and is designed to meet seismic zone ‘C’ design codes. A framed and wrapped doorway measures 16ft by 16ft, and all steel members are hot dip galvanized to protect against corrosive elements.

“The installation was very smooth,” said Shell. “Legacy’s in-house crew worked in cold winter conditions, and they erected the building within five days. They were a very professional group, and I’d highly recommend them.”

Shell was equally impressed with the building itself once it became fully operational. The rigid-frame design, in particular, immediately stood out to crew members working inside.

“We like the side columns going straight up instead of curving down like in our hoop buildings,” said Shell. “First off, we can put more product in there. And our front end loaders can get much closer to the walls and drive straight down the sides. It gives us more working room and increases our efficiency.”

Five Rivers also observed better air movement through the building, thanks to ten Schaefer RV-3000 ridge vents and 18-inch overhangs with additional mesh vents. “The ventilation systems on the sides draw air through nicely,” said Shell. “And the vents at the top definitely perform better than the sidewall louvers on our older fabric structures. When you’re handling bulk products,



that really does help. In the long run I think it will be a building that requires less maintenance.”

After hearing from customers who were interested in his new storage space, Shell wasted almost no time in making plans to build yet another fabric structure to add even more bulk storage capacity in Van Buren.

“Legacy was so outstanding to work with that I didn’t even bother looking at pricing elsewhere,” said Shell. “We had a few months to see that the building was exceeding our expectations, so we went straight back to them.”

The contract for the next building was nearly identical to the first Legacy building, with all the same construction and accessory features. The only difference was an extra 4,200ft². The latest building measures 120ft by 160ft, in order to capture the largest possible footprint permitted by the city and to avoid wasting space in that section of the site, where all four fabric buildings are lined up in close proximity.

“I wanted to put all of these buildings close together, so we have all our bulk products in one area,” said Shell. “That way we’re not running manpower and equipment across the property to move from one warehouse to the next. We may have to add more fabric storage elsewhere down the road, but for now it’s very convenient going door to door.”

Five Rivers Distribution has always been about convenience. Its first fabric buildings were doing the trick to a certain extent, but by proactively investing in higher quality storage facilities, Marty Shell is doing more than adding space for bulk material. He is taking some important steps toward building a better future for his company.