

1955 - 2005

Burke-Parsons-Bowlby Corp. Looks Back At Successful 50 Years

By Doris Rhodes

The story of Burke-Parsons-Bowlby Corp. (BPB) began as a venture of three college classmates—Harold “Hal” Burke, Fletcher “Fletch” Parsons and Richard “Dick” Bowlby—who graduated from the West Virginia University School of Forestry in 1950. While they went their separate ways after graduation, they eventually reunited in 1955 to form the company that is celebrating 50 years in operation this year.

BPB was incorporated in the state of West Virginia on Nov. 19, 1955, and opened its first plant facility near Spencer, W.Va. Though it has undergone numerous expansions and improvements to adapt to the changing needs of the company’s customers and environmental requirements, the facility is still in operation today.

BPB began its venture into the railroad industry by providing ties to rail lines that were owned by the country’s steel industry. The word soon spread that BPB could provide crossties and switch ties with better service than the more established suppliers, and the company quickly captured additional business from larger shortline railroads.

Over the next 17 years, BPB experienced the ups and downs of the industry in the fluctuation of the economy and railroad mergers and consolidations. However, aided by the strong support of dedicated employees,

many with forestry backgrounds, the company managed to continue to grow and add more manufacturing facilities. The company purchased a plant in Goshen, Va., in 1966 and a plant in Stanton, Ky., in 1970. But, in 1972, the company built a plant from the ground up in DuBois, Pa.

BPB’s latest venture has been the construction of a plant in Yumbel, Chile, that operates as Mardones-BPB Creosote Treaters S.A., in which BPB holds a minority interest in the operation.

BPB’s total sales for its first year of production was \$178,000. BPB has grown this figure steadily by serving Class 1, shortline railroads, transits and railroad contractors. Reported total sales for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005, exceeded \$64 million. This growth can largely be attributed the company’s drive to provide quality products and services to meet customers’ needs. Further adding to BPB’s success is its achievement of ISO 9001:2000 certification, AAR Quality Assurance Program certification and STAR Safety Program certification.

Since 1976, six BPB employees have served as RTA president: G. Titus, 1976-77; R. Bowlby, 1982-83; A. Miller, 1988-89; T. Chambers, 1993-94; F. Bowlby, 1999-2000; and M. Neidert, 2004-05. BPB partic-

ipates in various trade associations and supports its employees in their work on numerous committees that are dedicated to promote and improve the tie industry.

BPB continues to look for innovative ways to improve the treated wood crosstie while adding value to the product for its customers. BPB is currently producing borate/creosote dual-treated crossties to extend the life of the crosstie in high-decay areas. It also is a treating partner with TrusJoist, a Weyerhaeuser Company, supplying Parallam ties and timbers in long lengths and large cross-sections to the railroad industry with superior treatment.

Though only one of the original three partners, Dick Bowlby, remains active in the company today, he has the support of two sons, Rick and Floyd, along with a number of long-term, skilled management personnel who are more than capable of continuing the success of the company. BPB can depend on these individuals to share their knowledge with those who are following in their footsteps. The company is optimistically looking forward to the next 50 years. §

Doris Rhodes, Burke-Parsons-Bowlby’s executive secretary and historian, has been with the company eight years.



Above, Harry Bressler, Dick Bowlby, Jeff Morrell, Floyd Bowlby, Jim Watt and Buddy Downey celebrate BPB’s 50th anniversary. Right, ties, bridge timbers and new equipment at BPB’s DuBois location.

