

DIXIE CONTRACTOR



**Precision Blasting Forges a
Path to Success, Promoting
Growth and New Opportunities**

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Volume 98 Number 1

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© 2024 Associated Construction Publications, LLC
Subscriptions: U.S., \$100.00 1 year; Canada, \$120.00 1 year; International, \$150.00 1 year. Single copies: U.S., \$10.00; All International, \$15.00. Buyers' Guide: U.S., \$35.00; All International, \$45.00.

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At Home in a Different Place

I'd like to introduce (or maybe reintroduce) myself. I've been writing for Associated Construction Publications since 2009 (and other industry publications before that). I've enjoyed talking to many of you, learning about your hard work and ingenuity, and translating that into project stories for these magazines.

In fact, I enjoyed it so much that when ACP's former editor moved on to a different position, I jumped at the opportunity to take on this role.

When I first started writing for these magazines, I heard John White, one of ACP's owners, say that to succeed in the construction industry you need to be a nice person and operate with integrity. So much of your business depends on word-of-mouth that if you don't do things the right way, your business will likely fail. Then I experienced that myself. I interviewed so many wonderful people through the years. Now I look forward to working with you in my new role as I gather the stories we share in print and online.

I know I have big shoes to fill. I worked with Britt Davis during all of her 11 years at ACP as she helped elevate the magazines to where they are today. But I joined a fabulous team of people who keep everything running smoothly. Like all of you, they genuinely care about providing the best work and making a positive impact on the industry.

As you'll see through the stories in our national section this month,

the construction industry faces both opportunities and challenges in the year ahead. I know you've heard that before.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act was signed into law over two years ago. According to a review of federal data conducted by the American Road & Transportation Builders Association, states have committed federal funds to support more than 56,000 eligible transportation improvements in all 50 states during the last two years, spanning nearly every U.S. county. In addition, ARTBA found that state departments of transportation are increasing capital spending by 13 percent. Most segments of the construction industry will continue to grow.

With that growth comes an increasing challenge in finding workers – and sometimes materials – to get jobs done. In our 2024 forecast article starting on page N1, economists share how interest rates and other economic conditions are affecting the construction industry, with insights on how to plan for the challenges ahead.

In this issue, you'll also find ideas for effectively managing the risks inherent in your business while protecting profitability. That includes the use of AI to streamline contract review and negotiation, while enabling new levels of compliance and success at the project level. Minimizing risk also helps keep the workers you have productive and attract new hires. (Stay tuned next month for more stories

on innovative training programs and other strategies to mitigate the labor shortage.)

Overcoming challenges is nothing new. You do that every day as you build the projects that keep us all safer, get us where we need to go, preserve natural resources, provide water and power to growing or underserved areas, and make our communities better.

I look forward to continuing to share stories in my new role and to meeting more of you at industry events. If you're working on a unique project or solving a problem in a new way, please let me know.

I hope the New Year brings good things for your work, your family, and our industry.



Julie Devine
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In This Issue

- 04** Feature: Explosive Growth: Precision Blasting Expands its Service Offerings and Employee Development
- N1** What to Expect in 2024 and Beyond
- N6** Winter Productivity
- N8** Combating Interest Rates, Labor Shortages, and Extreme Weather
- N10** AI Supplement to Legal Expertise
- N12** Idle Mitigation Technology
- N14** Go Small or Go Home
- N16** New Compact Excavator, Model Changes



Crews drill a hole using one of five Epiroc T40 Drill Rigs added to the Precision Blasting fleet in 2023. (Photo courtesy of Precision Blasting)

EXPLOSIVE GROWTH

Precision Blasting Expands its Service Offerings and Employee Development *By Debra Wood*

Aiming to grow his Douglasville, Georgia-based business to the next level, Precision Blasting Founder and Divisional President Shane Martin is embarking on a new journey with MD&B Company, enabling the Atlanta-area firm to offer key value-add services, such as engineering, safety, technical blasting support, and employee development and advancement opportunities. Since the partnership began over a year ago, Martin said that Precision has become “bigger, stronger, and more advanced than ever.”

The partnership has provided Precision Blasting with additional resources and services for projects like the \$25 million Villa Rica North Loop Bypass project for the Georgia Department of Transportation. Precision currently has crews drilling and blasting rock on the project, which is proposed to improve mobility in the area. The approximately 2-mile-long bypass will move most trucks and other through traffic away from downtown Villa Rica, providing a safer route around the city. The loop passes through former farmland.

Precision crews are breaking up approximately 70,000 cubic yards of rock for this project for Astra Group of Atlanta. Construction began about a year ago. Astra crews plan on having the blasted rock crushed and used as a base for the new roadway.

“At Villa Rica, it’s a good-sized job, and they are doing well,” said Jay Mayo, Vice President of Astra, the contractor for the project.

Precision has worked with Astra for more than a decade. “We have a long history with Precision, and they have done good work,” Mayo said. “Blasting has a lot of risk — not just flying debris — and they have been safe.”

Precision Blasting has introduced blasting mats on the Villa Rica North Loop Bypass project to contain the blast to the job site, ensuring nearby residences are not affected by the company’s work. Additionally, these save time when covering the blast versus the traditional way of using earth for cover.

The Spark that Ignited a Career

How does someone envision a career blowing things up? It all started during Martin’s childhood, when his stepfather would take him to job sites.

“I have been around explosives since I was 6 years old,” Martin said. “My stepdad would let me blow the air horns before the blast took place. I was absolutely fascinated with what was going on.”

Around 1983, he started working full time for

his stepdad’s company. “He showed me all of the ropes and ins and outs,” Martin said. “Then he cut me loose, and I started blasting on my own.”

That launched his lifelong blasting career. He tried bricklaying, with his biological father, but it did not hold the same allure as safely working with explosives.

“My heart was in the blasting business,” Martin said.

From Pick-up Truck to Booming Business

Martin began Precision Blasting in 1989, alone with a pick-up truck. When he secured a blasting job, he would buy some powder and rent an air compressor to power a hand drill for small projects, including basements, waterline, and underground power trenching. Steady work was scarce in those early days, so he would help his father lay bricks to keep some money coming in. Despite facing challenges, Martin continued to move forward toward his dream. Construction was in his blood.

“It was challenging getting started, as most businesses are,” Martin said.

That stage did not last long. By providing superior customer service and prioritizing safety and quality, Precision grew. Although the Atlanta area has kept the company busy during the last few years, Precision also works in Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, and North and South Carolina.

“We had grown into a good-sized company,” Martin said.

Before teaming up with MD&B of Maine, Precision Blasting blossomed, with workload and sales improving on an annual basis. But Martin wanted more.

“The company just felt stalled out somewhat,” he said. “We had lost some of the excitement that we had once had, and it felt like we were at our peak.”

Not content to let that happen, Martin sought other options.



■ **Blasting mats are used to add another level of safety when executing blasts.**

Expanding with a New Partner

In June 2022, Precision Blasting joined with MD&B by mutual design and decision, retaining key Precision management and operations personnel: Martin; his wife and Office Manager, Laura Martin; Divisional Manager, Jeff Cole, who has worked for Precision since 1998; and most of the employees. A few left, but the opportunity to stay was an option for all of them during the acquisition.

“There were many factors that came into play for me and my wife, Laura, in making this decision,” said Martin, adding that the opportunity for employees to advance their careers, receive better benefits, and become employee-owners played an important role in their thinking. MD&B is a majority employee-owned company.

MD&B also has a leadership track to train people to grow within the company.

“The structure for growth and advancement throughout the company is now in place,” Martin said. “Laborers are becoming drillers, drillers are becoming blasters, blasters becoming division superintendents, and so forth.”

As a prime example, Precision hired a young man as a driver, but with the number of jobs increasing, the company needed an additional blaster. The young man was ready for the challenge and accepted the education opportunities now available to the company. Currently, he serves as a trainee, with plans to become a Level 3 blaster, so he will be able to work more independently. Additional training to move up in the organization is still available.

“He’s been phenomenal; he’s picking up on everything,” Martin said. “I’ve witnessed his ability to learn and progress.”

Opportunities for Growth

While Precision Blasting always prioritized safety, it now has more resources available and systems in place, including a team of in-house safety professionals, daily safety meetings, job analyses, and a zero-tolerance policy for critical unsafe practices.

“There is a renewed emphasis on safety,” Cole said. “Safety is more structured now, but we were never an unsafe drilling and blasting company. You do not stay in business for over 30 years unless you are safe in this industry.”

Precision Blasting and MD&B have prioritized ensuring power lines are not disturbed by contact with drills’ vertical masts. For instance, on the Villa Rica job, Precision has developed written plans to avoid contact with power lines, addressing moving under the lines and placing the drills

in specific directions, along with placing warning signs in areas where lines are present.

In addition, Precision Blasting now offers engineering services to its customers, whereas before, the company had to outsource evaluations of customers’ geotechnical reports, which could take a week or longer. Now, Precision has direct access to employee engineers and software that can deliver quantities within a day.

“That’s a big time saver, so we can stay focused on the operations,” Cole said.

Additionally, with engineering now in-house, Precision now does not hesitate to accept “lump-sum” jobs. Cole said that he thinks MD&B’s engineering has benefited Precision and its customers tremendously, especially with quantity takeoffs and the overall bidding process.

“The technology we have now in-house allows us to perform some of these tough projects,” Martin said. “The resources we have now lets us put a better plan together.”

The acquisition also gives Precision Blasting access to additional heavy equipment, such as the five Epiroc SmartROC and FlexiROC T40 Drill Rigs, featuring the operator/driller in a cab. Currently being used on the Villa Rica project, the equipment is a flexible top-hammer drill rig, with a long-reach boom and low center of gravity.

“We have added resources,” Cole said. “We take on a big job, we know we have a bigger company behind us now. It’s a bigger team.”

Most of Precision Blasting’s 16 drill rigs have insulated cabs to spare the operator exposures to rock dust and noise. The company has access to 160 drill rigs from MD&B locations up and down the East Coast.

Precision Blasting also can now utilize electronic initiation systems while blasting to keep vibration level down when needed to complete a job. The company can take on larger projects with a better bonding rate than they could as a solo firm.

“We are still Precision Blasting, dedicated to our long-term customers as we have always been, being able to provide the best service for our clients’ drilling and blasting needs,” Martin said. “There still is no job too big or small that Precision’s capabilities cannot handle. I am fired up. Precision Blasting and its employees are fired up. This journey has begun. The vision I had is happening, and we are ready.”

Photos courtesy of Precision Blasting



■ Left to right: Shane Martin, Divisional President, and Jeff Cole, Divisional Manager, bring over 30 years of leadership to Precision Blasting.



■ The Precision Blasting crew works together on the Villa Rica North Loop Bypass job site in Georgia.

■ Safety, quality, and production are prioritized by the Precision team on the Villa Rica North Loop Bypass project.



Coming into our prime at 35

... and proud of it!

Precision Blasting has been serving the Southeast for 35 years with top-notch drilling and blasting services for projects large and small. Founded in 1989 with a single truck, small air compressor and a hand drill, we've grown into an industry leader guided by our founding principles of commitment to service and quality.

Precision has consistently proven itself resulting in strong, positive working relationships with homeowners and many types of contractors ... from utility to roadway and bridge, from commercial development to residential contractors.

We're proud of those relationships and what we've helped build in the multiple southeastern states we serve ... but prouder still of the resources and capabilities we've recently added. For those of you who know us well, our brand of full service will take on a whole new meaning.

Precision Blasting's evolution signals better service and cost efficiencies for our Customers.

EQUIPMENT INFUSION

Additional heavy equipment supports Precision's already robust equipment fleet of drills and explosives trucks to better service our Customers' needs and schedules.

ENGINEERING

In-house engineering services means faster quantity take-offs and more accurate bids for our Customers.

TECHNICAL BLASTING

Technical blasting support resolves challenges to keep our Customers' projects on track. Our introduction of electronic detonation to the Southeast market is a game changer for our Customers' projects when scopes, access and budgets are tight.

SAFETY STRENGTH

An in-house team of safety professionals and systems ensures the success of our Customers' projects, and protects their investments and reputations.

EMPLOYEE INFUSION

Employee development and advancement opportunities have drawn local new hires to our doors, and have resulted in well-trained and ultra-competent Precision personnel on our Customers' sites.

EMPLOYEE OWNERS

Our employees are now Employee Owners. Each of us is personally invested in the outcome of our Customers' projects, working harder and smarter to bring it in on time and under budget to benefit our Customers' bottom line, and in doing so, our own.

Precision Blasting. We Progress. You Profit.

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Jeff Cole, Divisional Manager

With over 20 years with Precision, Jeff's management experience and responsibilities include scheduling, coordination with Customers, project layout, shot design, DOT and AGL blast plan submittals, overseeing compliance with multiple state and federal blasting regulations, and project estimating.

Shane Martin, Divisional President

Founder and the man behind the vision. Shane is a licensed blaster with over 35 years in the drilling and blasting industry. With extensive experience managing drilling and blasting operations, his strategic and hands-on focus is improving the overall performance of Precision to ensure excellent customer service.



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