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**MIKE HOOKS INC.
KEEPING LOUISIANA AFLOAT**

THE MAGAZINE FOR CONSTRUCTION EXECUTIVES

Keeping Louisiana Afloat

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Mike Hooks was a classic, do-it-yourself kind of handyman. He worked long hours in his shop and treated each customer like they were his top priority. With the sugary Southern kindness that is commonplace with most Louisianans, Hooks transformed his business, Mike Hooks Inc. (MHI), from a small-class company into one of the Gulf Coast's largest, heavy-duty dredgers.

MHI became a reality during August of 1957, when Hooks realized he had a propensity for the shipping and construction industries and decided to use his skill to support his budding family. Today, Hooks' son-in-law, Mike McMahon, acts as the company's president and his daughter Ashley Kerns serves as its vice president. Family involvement is a defining characteristic of the company.



“The first and most important thing about our company is that it’s family-owned and operated,” says Mike Kerns, a dredging superintendent that’s been with MHI for four years.

All employees, not just blood kin, are highly invested in the business, which has grown tremendously over 50 years. Today, MHI works in a large five-state area along the Gulf Coast – from Corpus Christi, Texas, to New Orleans, La., to Panama City, Fla. – performing heavy-duty maintenance dredging and marsh restoration. With a full complement of welders, fabricators, yard laborers and equipment operators, the company has 300 employees, all of whom receive competitive pay and comprehensive benefits.

Together, family and employees work hard to maintain the level of quality and success achieved by MHI.

Coastal Customers

Customers of MHI are primarily the state and federal government, specifically the Army Corps of Engineers, and much of the work involves creating marsh lands for the quickly eroding Louisiana shore and keeping U.S. ship channels clear of material, so that shipping traffic can get in and out of ports safely and efficiently.

Big jobs, such as these for the Army Corps of Engineers, require big equipment. Four heavy-class dredges – three 27-inch and one 24-inch – make up MHI’s



dredging gear. Hooks even constructed the heavy-duty dredges. "They were built right here in the yard," said Mike, in wonderment of Hooks' dynamic versatility and self-made success.

These heavy-duty dredges are irreplaceable in the company's efforts to keep the Gulf Coast in good shape. Mike explains the difficulties that the company faces in this task: "The Louisiana coastline is eroding at about two football fields a day, and without the marshes there is very little protection from any kind of storms [and] hurricanes: Katrina-type disasters." The urgency of the situation is clear given the intensity in Mike's description. "It's one of our goals, working with the Corps, to restore the marshes of Louisiana and recreate that [barrier] between the population and the Gulf; that's one of the biggest challenges this year and will be going forward."

Since 1930, Louisiana has lost 1,900 square miles of coastline. Though this number is only 30 percent of the mainland's coastal marsh, it accounts for 90 percent

of the U.S.'s total wetland loss. In the last century, between 1900 and 2000, there was a loss of 24 square miles of wetland each day, which is a little less than one football field lost every 38 minutes, according to the state's Office of Coastal Management. This figure is even more severe than the one Mike espouses.

As the dire situation has come to light, there have been hundreds of restoration and vegetation-planting programs over the past few decades. MHI in particular has been at the forefront, having joined forces with the government and become a major contributor trying to negate the negative effects of marsh erosion.

"It's something that the public doesn't get to see very often; they [should] be aware of what we do and what we can do to positively impact our shorelines," shares Ashley Kerns, discussing the coastal erosion and its threats to humanity.


Meaningful Everyday Dredging

Though the company has become a major player in water-based environmental restoration, 75 percent of its business comes from maintenance dredging at shipping ports. MHI works with government-selected engineers to clear debris and maintain the ports. The firm works mainly in Mobile, Ala., New Orleans, La., and Galveston, Texas, ports.

MHI worked with the Galveston district of Texas and the Corps to restore the mouth of the San Bernard River, which had slowly closed over the years from vegetation and debris. This project required careful coordination not only with the U.S. Army, but with many members of the San Bernard Township, an interaction Ashley found unique and rewarding.

"This project we're particularly proud of because most of our projects involve the Army Corps of Engineers or large industrial companies, and with this project we had an opportunity to work with the community to restore the river," explains Ashley. "So it was a nice change from the ordinary."


Working as Louisiana's go-to dredging contractor, performing projects in the entire Gulf Coast area, MHI makes more than \$50 million a year. And Ashley says



ENCO Dredging is pleased and privileged to be one of Mike Hooks, Inc. strategic partners.

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that her company likes the position that they are in now, and is not looking toward expansion.

Instead of attempting unstable growth, MHI is focusing on maintaining what it does best: heavy-duty dredging and marsh restoration, with the possibility of expanding on this established division as need continues to grow. And MHI has several projects lined up to commence as the new decade continues. Mike Hooks Inc. does its namesake proud. ■

COMPANY AT A GLANCE

ESTABLISHED : 1957

PRESIDENT : MIKE MCMAHON

ANNUAL REVENUE : \$50 MILLION

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