Showtime for Stringless

Treasure State, Inc. Partners with GOMACO, Topcon and RDO for 3-D Paving Roadshow

By Larry Trojak

In late-June, a serious case for 3-D concrete paving was made. Just west of Bozeman, 130 visitors from the construction, engineering, government, survey and academic realms, attended a two-day demonstration of Millimeter GPS paving and the benefits it can provide. The "informational roadshow," a collaborative effort between Topcon Positioning Systems, GOMACO Corporation, RDO Integrated Controls, and host concrete paving company Treasure State, Inc. spotlighted the cutting-edge technology in both curb and gutter and mainline paving applications.

Treasure in Montana

Founded about a decade ago by Barrett Haugan, Belgrade, Montana-based Treasure State, Inc. has steadily grown to become one of the area's busiest concrete contractors. According to Haugan, the company specializes in infrastructure-related work – curb and gutter, airport paving, sidewalks, median curbs, etc.

"I'm a native of Montana, but came to Bozeman to finish my degree after two years of community college," he said. "I landed a summer job working for a company that became part of the Knife River organization, and at age 22 they gave me a foreman's position. Three years later, I was a superintendent and a year after that I decided to dump all of my savings into the purchase of a GOMACO Commander III paving machine and head out on my own as Treasure State, Inc."

Haugan and Treasure State survived the tumultuous years of the "Great Recession", largely by keeping overhead down and quality up.

"I've always believed that maintaining the highest level of quality is key," he said. "And I tell my guys that as well – many of whom I've known since my days at the previous company. I say that, if you take pride in your work, my phone will always ring and you will always have a job."

Haugan added key personnel along the way, including, most recently, Ty Giffin, a close friend and Professional Engineer with site utility experience, who is currently the company's General Manager.

"I had worked with several larger contractors in the area over the years and whenever possible, chose Treasure State to handle the concrete facet of our jobs," said Giffin. "I liked Barrett's positive attitude and focus on providing a quality product to his customers, so when he offered me a position with his company, I knew it was the right move to make."

Stringless in Focus

Treasure State's involvement in the 3-D paving demo was largely driven by Haugan's belief in the technology and the impact it can have on regional concrete paving as a whole. At a time when curb and gutter paving prices in their area are the lowest he can recall, he feels a better understanding of what can be done and how well it can be done can be invaluable.

"Adding Topcon Millimeter GPS to our Commander III pavers is a tremendous solution for us," he said. "I wanted some of those we invited: developers, engineers, inspectors, contractors, surveyors – even some of our competition – to see its capabilities. I also wanted them to know that, tapping into that solution, anyone can deliver a product exactly as drawn, the first time, every time, without stringline."

Proof is in the Paving

The event, held at a property owned by Haugan and his brother near Treasure State's Belgrade location, offered attendees a chance to see a range of paving options and available technology at work, and bring contractors to what Topcon is calling the "Intersection of Infrastructure and Technology" – the meeting point where construction productivity is improved by applying advanced positioning technology.

The Bozeman branch of RDO Integrated Controls had personnel on hand to answer questions regarding the use of Topcon base and rover systems for, among other tasks, grade checking in concrete paving applications. RDO also covered the workflow needed to turn paper plans into the digital model that essentially powers the 3-D paver. Topcon had its own sales engineers on site to offer insight into the use of its Millimeter GPS solution and the key role it plays in bringing stringless technology to the job site. And representatives from GOMACO were also available to show how its pavers – running Millimeter GPS – can dramatically improve anyone's operation.

"There is no doubt that this technology has changed the way we operate," said Haugan. "We recently had a project that involved about 20,000 linear feet of curb and gutter on which we decided to debut the Topcon Millimeter GPS with our GOMACO paver. When we came on site, the contractor demanded that we set stringline. I said I would, if he would put in blue tops, to which he replied, 'We don't have to, we have GPS.' I told him that we did as well, and if my job was not right, I would tear it out and eat the loss until it was right."

Haugan said they did all 20,000 feet – without any string – and, at the end of the project, the once-doubtful supervisor had definitely become a stringless convert.

"He came over to me and said that it was the first time in his 30 years that he had gotten exactly what they'd asked for," said Haugan. "That's always good to hear and it gave us satisfaction in knowing we made the right decision.

Timing is Everything

According to Giffin, the 2.5-acre lot at which the show took place will soon be home to a small coffee shop they own which they are relocating – with an eye on additional future development. In addition to classroom-type demonstrations and informational presentations, the company turned the new site's concrete needs into a literal teaching moment, pouring curb and gutter using the GOMACO Commander III Xtreme and then slab using their stringless solution with a four-track Commander III mainline paver.

According to Topcon's Lingobardo, because there is no substitute for seeing a piece of equipment or a system in action, this was really the section the attendees were waiting for. "On these two days, folks got to see the stringless solution up close and personal," he said. "They saw everything from the job plan shown on the paver operator's GX-60 screen (mounted for this job at a level convenient to the guests), to post-pour grade checking using a Topcon HiPer V Rover, to the pours themselves."

Haugan felt that the seminar achieved its goals and hopes those who attended will be as positively impacted by 3-D paving as Treasure State has been.

"I haven't set a stringline up for two seasons now. It was a bit of an adjustment, but it's incredible what Topcon and GOMACO have done – I truly feel like they've perfected the art of stringless paving."