GMS Piling Products Grows with Allison Swindell at the Helm

GMS Piling Products in Hanover Township, Pennsylvania, gives voice to the well-known proverb, “Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.” Founded in 2009 by Gene Swindell, the deep foundation industry products company has become a major manufacturer and supplier of materials and tooling for drilling and piledriving contractors. Its ever-expanding product line includes micropile casing, pipe piling, sheet piling, DTH hammers and bits, overburden drill systems, duplex and flange adapters, rotary casing, drill rods, tooling and fabrication. That’s a pretty extensive list for a company that started with a limited range of products in a small plant in central Pennsylvania.

In 2015, Allison Swindell took the reins at GMS while husband, Gene, began to focus on his new company, Piling Solutions. As is often the case with a family-style business that grows exponentially, the founders never lose sight of how it all began, often over a kitchen table. In many cases with kiddos “being kids” in the background.

The Backstory
From its relatively humble beginnings, GMS started growing and “outgrowing”… For a variety of reasons including market proximity, product diversification and the growth of its customer base, GMS made several physical moves. Four years after starting the business in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 2013, Gene moved the company to Mountain Top, Pennsylvania, and ultimately in 2019, to its current “home” in Hanover Township. The last move resulted in a quadrupling of the firm’s office space and a doubling of its yard. The new location provides direct rail access as well as close proximity to major highways, all of which facilitate meeting the demands of this burgeoning business. Marketing consultant Geordie Compton, who represents GMS, tells us that it is interesting to note that, “Ten years ago, Allison was working in Harrisburg for the Pennsylvania State Senate as a budget analyst, while Gene was supplying micropile casing to projects in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.” Piling Solutions was servicing an ever-expanding customer base. As the demands became greater and greater a transition occurred, and not just in the size of the physical plant. Gene “stepped down” from his involvement in GMS in order to handle the growth of Piling Solutions. Allison “stepped up” to the challenge of leading GMS, becoming its president. She reflects on those times, “Those were long days. They are still long days.” Today those long days include providing materials for projects across the U.S. and Canada — projects that range from the construction of a small roadway bridge replacement to handling the demands of a major construction project at MetLife Stadium, home of the National Football League’s New York Giants and New York Jets. GMS is also providing materials for a new performing arts center adjacent to Fenway Park, home of the Boston Red Sox. These are a sample of the large- footprint projects in which GMS is currently engaged. It’s been an interesting transition, Allison notes, from juggling orders at the family’s kitchen table to where GMS finds itself today.

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What Makes It All Work

At GMS, customer service is key to the company’s success. As Allison tells us, “We recently tooled up a new customer with everything from flanges and tricones to drill rods and a new hammer bit. He said it was the perfect set up for the job and allowed him to finish the project ahead of schedule. We like that.” She continues, “I enjoy the fast nature of the industry: working with clients and customers for very specific needs that change from job to job. Our reputation is built on service. We work with our customers from the design phase through delivery — and ultimately to project completion. We know that our customers’ success is our success.”

Andrew Peterson, president of Peterson Geotech, agrees. “We recently completed a complex support-of-excavation (SOE) project in New York City using the revolutionary Giken Press-In Sheet Pile Method,” Peterson says. “GMS was an integral part of our project team, providing great value in steel sheet pile materials as well as delivery and logistical support. GMS’ outstanding service helped make this a successful project.”

Allison’s awareness of how it all comes together is reflected in her comments, “We’ve earned a rapport with many of our customers where they feel comfortable coming to us early on and asking, ‘This is what I was thinking: pipe size, tooling and other materials, what do you think?’ GMS takes particular pride in assisting customers in working through the entire spectrum of materials they might need in terms of the work load, delivery schedule and other factors. In essence, they become part of the planning team. “Having discussions with customers in early phases helps us identify challenges prior to decisions on materials being made,” Allison adds. “Ultimately, this only helps the customer in the successful completion of the project.”

Jay McGlone, P.E., Posillico’s drilling project manager, concurs. “At Posillico, we experience a high level of involvement from GMS. From the design stages to challenges in the field, GMS anticipates and reacts to our changing needs throughout each job.”

Those are impressive endorsements from companies that understand what makes for a successful project.

DFI Membership Opportunities

While juggling the demands of managing the growing business and tending to “Mom duties” associated with parenting two young children, 7-year-old Sadie and 5-year-old Declan, Allison still finds time to be active in DFI. She attends meetings of the Women in Deep Foundations Committee, as well as the Micropile and Driven Pile Committees. She feels that the interactions she has with drilling experts across the entire spectrum of the deep foundations industry afforded by DFI are invaluable. In addition, she is a strong supporter of the DFI Educational Trust and its initiatives.

From There to Here

It is obvious that Allison’s well-honed organizational and communication skills are put to use every day. It may be a long way from the Pennsylvania State Senate to the GMS production line in Hanover Township, but for Allison and Gene, developing a thriving business and enjoying an active family life all comes naturally.