

A Half Century of Shattering Rock



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Controlled blasting for 135,000 yards of mass rock and 60,000 sqft of line drilling/presplit to make way for the construction of a new Cadet Barracks at West Point Military Academy Campus, NY. The more modern Barracks and Campus structures had rooflines below eye level during most of the work creating additional exposure level for the throw of the blasts. MD&B implemented state-of-the-art electronic detonation systems to have precise controls on the charges.

Maine Drilling & Blasting has set standards of safety and professionalism in the construction industry's most closely scrutinized segment.

By Paul Fournier



Back left to right: Ted Purington, Jr., Executive Vice President; Bill Purington, Chairman and CEO; Front left to right: Mitchell Green, Senior Vice President; Dan Werner, President; John Capasso, MD President; Tim Maynard, CFO; Todd Barrett, Regional Vice President

Maine Drilling & Blasting has shattered millions of cubic yards of rock throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region over the past 50 years, doing so prosperously in what is arguably the most scrutinized and regulated segment of the construction industry.

Drilling and blasting rock is a sophisticated subset of construction, an art form as well as an engineering discipline that demands extraordinary skill and attention to detail. Blasters don't have to get it right most of the time – they have to get it right all of the time. They can't quietly and routinely correct a bad shot, because flyrock or excessive shaking of structures or even more harmful results are usually spectacular public events. So it is remarkable that a company engaged in activities so potentially fraught with danger has not only survived for a half-century, it has become one of the largest and most successful providers of drilling, blasting and related services in the U.S.

The company was launched in March 1966 by Ted Purington Sr. and wife Judy in their Gardiner, Maine, kitchen. Early on, Ted stressed attention to details as core company policy, especially with regard to employee and public safety.

"Dad had been a drill sergeant in the Army and he brought that kind of discipline and commitment to his new company," said Bill Purington, Company Chairman and CEO.

"When he told his customers what he was going to do that's all he thought about until it got done. He believed in working hard, being honest and delivering high quality service, and he raised his children to think and work the same way," said Bill.

In the early days, when the company was operating out of the kitchen headquarters, project management consisted of MD&B blasters setting up job sites under the supervision of Ted Sr. At the end of the day, he would grill them with questions on drill productions, patterns, powder factors and quantities. This was referred to by blasters as Ted's "50 Questions," and eventually they formed the basis for the company's "Operating Standards."

Years later, when the company had grown to the point that it had several Operating Divisions, even Divisional Managers were subject to Ted's "50 Questions."

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From the Start, Attention to Details

Highest Operating Standards

Ted Purington, Jr., Executive Vice President, commented on the company's operating standards:

"Some of Maine Drilling's very first projects were highway construction, which honed our performance ethic. There was a mentality that went along with highway construction; its operations were very precise, streamlined and dialed in to be most efficient. The expectations of MD&B were high, which in turn demanded our performance to be at the highest operating standard and treated with a strong sense of urgency in order to meet our customers' needs. This flowed naturally from the principles on which Dad started the company: hard work, honesty, quality of service, and operating with a sense of urgency.

"That same set of operating standards has been upheld and matured over the years. We do what we tell the customer we're going to do and meet their schedules no matter the degree of difficulty.

"Our foundation for operating at a high level was put in place in our early years and is maintained today by a broader group that exhibits that same sense of urgency, commitment to safety, meeting customers' expectations, getting the job done well and on time," Ted Jr., said.

Overcoming Setbacks

CEO Bill Purington pointed out that abiding by the simple principles of hard work, honesty and quality service led to consistently safe and productive performance on local construction projects, quickly establishing the company's credentials as a professional organization.

"Those principles helped the company grow and expand over the years, but also got it through hard times," Bill noted.

"One of the toughest times for the company occurred during construction of the Berlin sewage treatment plant in the late '70s. The company lost a lot of money trying to provide longer-term work for its employees. The bank called in the company loan, and company was strapped for cash and operating capital."

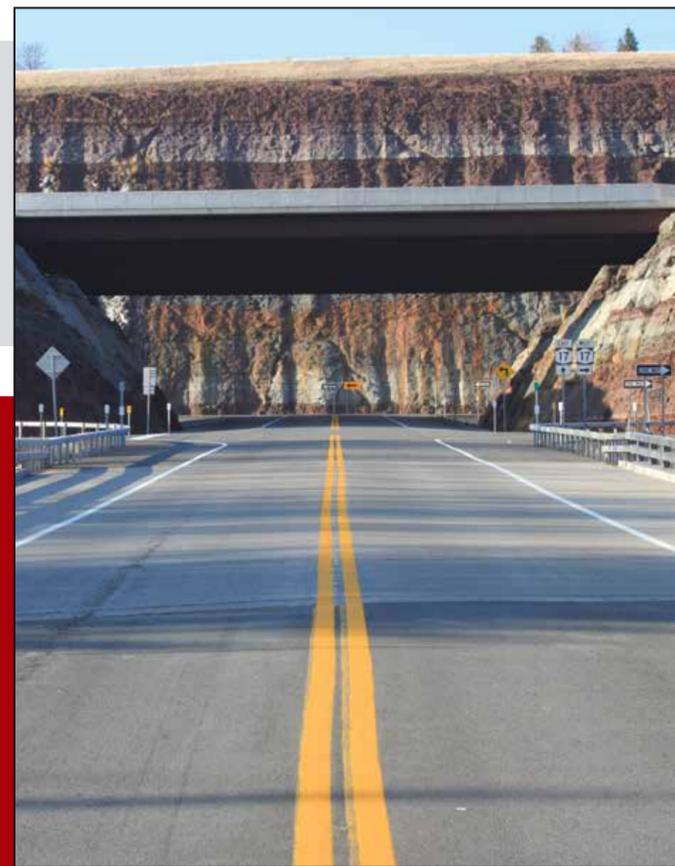
More hard times followed, but the company survived the deep economic crises of the '80s and '90s, the Savings and Loan failures, and the deep recession following the 2008 financial collapse.

"While we have had setbacks, we've learned from every one of them, and we have continued to grow and expand. For example, MD&B has acquired nine drilling and blasting companies throughout the Northeast, supports more than 200 quarries and has performed more than 2 million controlled blasts. We have also pioneered bulk emulsion technology and drilling technology, and currently operate approximately 100 modern hydraulic drills," Bill said.

Strategic Focus on Local Service

As MD&B acquired other drilling and blasting companies, it gained their physical assets, contacts with local customers, and skilled drillers and blasters. These experienced drillers and blasters were thoroughly familiar with the geology of their own regions, and thus contributed to the accumulating expertise of the company. The acquisitions dovetailed with MD&B's strategic focus on local service.

"We've always worked to grow regional markets with local people," explained Bill. "This means local employees and resources for operations. We've made it a point to commit to a local presence wherever we go. That's how we started; that's how we operate today."



Route 17, Liberty, NY, NYDOT: MD&B designed and produced the radius presplit intersections leaving a stable, eye-catching, rock intersection.

Maine Drilling & Blasting

Some of Maine Drilling's very first projects were highway construction, which honed our performance ethic.

Still a Family Business

At present, MD&B employs nearly 400 people, has six construction divisions and four quarry divisions, and is registered to do business in the six New England states, plus New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and West Virginia.

During this half-century of evolution from a tiny startup in Maine to an internationally recognized specialist in rock blasting, MD&B has remained a family business. Long before Ted Sr. and Judy retired in 1996, their sons, Ted, Jr., Jim and Tom had become involved with the company in different capacities, and they were followed by son, Bill, joining the company as General Manager in 1982 to help guide the company's reorganization.

Jim and Tom retired in 2006 and 2007, respectively. And third generation William Purington II, is now the company's Eastern Division Manager.

Personal Stakes Boost Performance

Many employees have joined the family business participating in the MD&B's stock ownership plan established by the company in 2004, which gives them a stake in the company at no cost to them. MD&B's Employee Stock Ownership Plan not only benefits employees, it enhances individual accountability and service as well. Having a personal investment in the success of the company encourages employees to take responsibility for performing their own job in the safest and most professional manner possible.

According to Dan Werner, Senior Vice President, employee ownership yields benefits for not only employees but the company and customers as well:

"Maine Drilling & Blasting is its people. Good, hard-working people who have committed their lives, focus, and energy day in and day out to getting the job done safely and efficiently. We don't shy away from a challenge.

"Our team is made up of the most disciplined, experienced and talented craft and management people in the industry. And we're owners in the company, from laborers to executives. We come to work every day working like owners. We look to use our resources and our teammates to find better, smarter, safer ways to do things because it's in our customers' best interests and in our own best interests. The more efficient you are, the more you care, the more you do, the more you bring value to your customer, the company, and ultimately to yourself.

"That's very inspiring, very motivating. Our current generation truly acts in an ownership capacity, and everybody benefits," Werner said.

9/11 Inspires Stiffer Regulations

Employee Ownership motivation helps trim operating costs and boost profits, but more importantly, it is key to corporate survival in an environment of complex governmental safety regulations placed on the drilling and blasting industry, especially in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Maine Drilling & Blasting Service Areas

MD&B is currently registered to do business in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and West Virginia.

Operating Divisions

Local crews operate throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic with 10 operating divisions:

Construction Divisions:

- Eastern (Maine)
- Central (New Hampshire)
- South (Connecticut/Southern Massachusetts/Western Rhode Island, Southeast New York)
- North (Massachusetts/Rhode Island/Eastern Connecticut)
- Western (Vermont/Eastern New York)
- Mid Atlantic (Western New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and West Virginia)

Quarry Mine Divisions:

- New England Quarry North (serving Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont)
- New England Quarry South (serving Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island)
- Mid Atlantic Quarry (serving Pennsylvania)
- Western Quarry (serving New York)

Local Offices

- Local offices support the regional operations:
- The company's operating hub is in Auburn, New Hampshire, which houses the Central Construction Division, and New England Quarry North Division, as well as Equipment Services, Purchasing and Engineering Departments
 - The Western Construction and Quarry Divisions are headquartered in Argyle, New York, with a satellite office in New Haven, Vermont
 - The South Division is headquartered in Bloomfield, Connecticut
 - The North Construction and New England Quarry South Divisions are headquartered in Milford, Massachusetts
 - The Mid Atlantic Construction and Quarry Divisions operate out of a new facility in Bethel, Pennsylvania
 - The Eastern Division and Corporate Office are located in Gardiner, Maine



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These regulations are so stringent that failure to comply can cost a drilling and blasting company not just stiff fines but even its very existence through the loss of its operating license. Rather than opposing government regulations, MD&B responded by creating comprehensive in-house training programs that provide personnel even more information than necessary to comply with the mandates.

It is not surprising that 9/11 led to the imposition of even stricter rules on the drilling and blasting industry, in light of the enormous forces controlled by the industry during its day-to-day operations. Despite the magnitude of responsibility this implies, the role of the industry seems simple enough – to shatter rock to make aggregates, or so it can be removed by others to make way for a sewer, highway, bridge, dam, building or other project.

At first glance, the actual process of shattering rock seems elementary. Holes are drilled in rock, explosives are loaded into the holes, and the explosives are detonated, breaking up the rock. However, doing this safely, predictably, efficiently, economically and within a specific job timeframe takes extensive planning for each project.

It is a particularly complex process. The number of parameters that have to be taken into consideration when designing a blast plan for a project is noteworthy. And this means, like Murphy's Law, things that could go wrong would go wrong, if not for the exhaustive attention to detail exercised by engineers, drillers and blasters performing this work.

Training MD&B's Third Generation

Maintaining high levels of performance in the drilling and blasting industry requires people of the highest caliber and a training program set at the highest standards, according to Mitch Green, Senior Vice President. "We look at training as being vital to organizational development and to our sustainability as a company. What's more, we train people not only in skills and trades but also in becoming culturally aligned with the company," Green said.

"Some 95 percent of our training programs are developed in house, with teams of trainers comprised of highly experienced field employees provided by four groups, Equipment Services, Product Services, Technical Services, and the Engineering Department.

"For example, Equipment Services provides training for drillers, lead drillers and driller mentors, while Product Services teams conduct bulk truck driver and operator training. Our Technical Services Group provides blaster training for construction and blaster training for quarries, as well as instruction in math and advanced concepts. Furthermore, basic engineering, engineering plan reading and project management training are taught by teams from the Engineering Department. In order to achieve sustainability as a company we are actively seeking young people to train in these and other skills," he said.

Green said they have targeted college students at job fairs and used other recruiting strategies to reach these young people, who will be the company's third generation of employees. In the last three years, company recruiters have interviewed almost 120 students, made job offers to more than 50, and actually hired about 35 of them.

He also stated that military veterans are high on their recruiting radar. "We welcome vets because they are organized, disciplined and process driven, and we can refocus their skills into our business.

"And we're now seeing some interest in drilling and blasting careers from women, something we really welcome," Green said.

Developing Leaders From Within

Green explained that training is not confined to new hires, and that in fact, their best managers have come up through the ranks at MD&B.

To facilitate this advancement from within, the company established a Leadership Development Program that incorporates several levels of training. The in-house program includes: superintendent training, which cultivates high potential operational staff into project and regional superintendent positions; futures leadership development for high potential individuals with ability to advance into division management or other positions; and the highest level of training, the development of senior company leaders.

Green said the Leadership Development Program has been underway for 15 years and in the past four years has lowered the average age of company executives from 54 to 49, and managers from 48 to 41.



Ted Purington, Sr. and his crew at a safe distance in the early days, late 1960s.

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Quarry development and stripping project for the Essroc quarry in Martinsburg, WV.

Maine Drilling & Blasting

Investing in Education

Recruiting young people also extends to offering college scholarships to qualifying students, across the company's service geography.

"Our success depends on employing and training the best people in the drilling and blasting industry, in order to continue MD&B's high performance culture," said Ted Purington, Jr. "That means investing in the educations and futures of local, young men and women, all around us. While we have numerous in-house training programs to help our employees develop and hone their crafts, assisting students enrolled in construction management or civil engineering technology programs is a great leg up for them."

William Purington, II, who has become the third generation Purington engaged in the business, commented on the scholarship program: "We want to help grow the next generation, my generation and those coming after me. Being local means connecting on a local level to make a difference. And, these scholarships will, hopefully, make a difference in some local lives. It's a fresh twist on support to go along with our usual corporate contributions to local causes and events," said Purington, who holds a bachelor's degree in construction management technology from the University of Maine, and was recently promoted to Manager of the company's Eastern Division.

Current Operations

MD&B today has professional operations throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, to include 13 States, with six regional offices, nine distribution facilities, more than 25 remote storage locations, and a fleet of 85 heavy delivery vehicles that handle nearly 50 million pounds of explosives each year. The company has continued to grow its quarry operations, helping to plan and develop over 200 quarries and offering drilling and blasting as well as 100 percent crushable turnkey packages.

The company also offers such special services for quarry and construction markets as rock anchors, hoe ramming, engineering, pre-blast surveys and distribution of packaged and bulk explosives.

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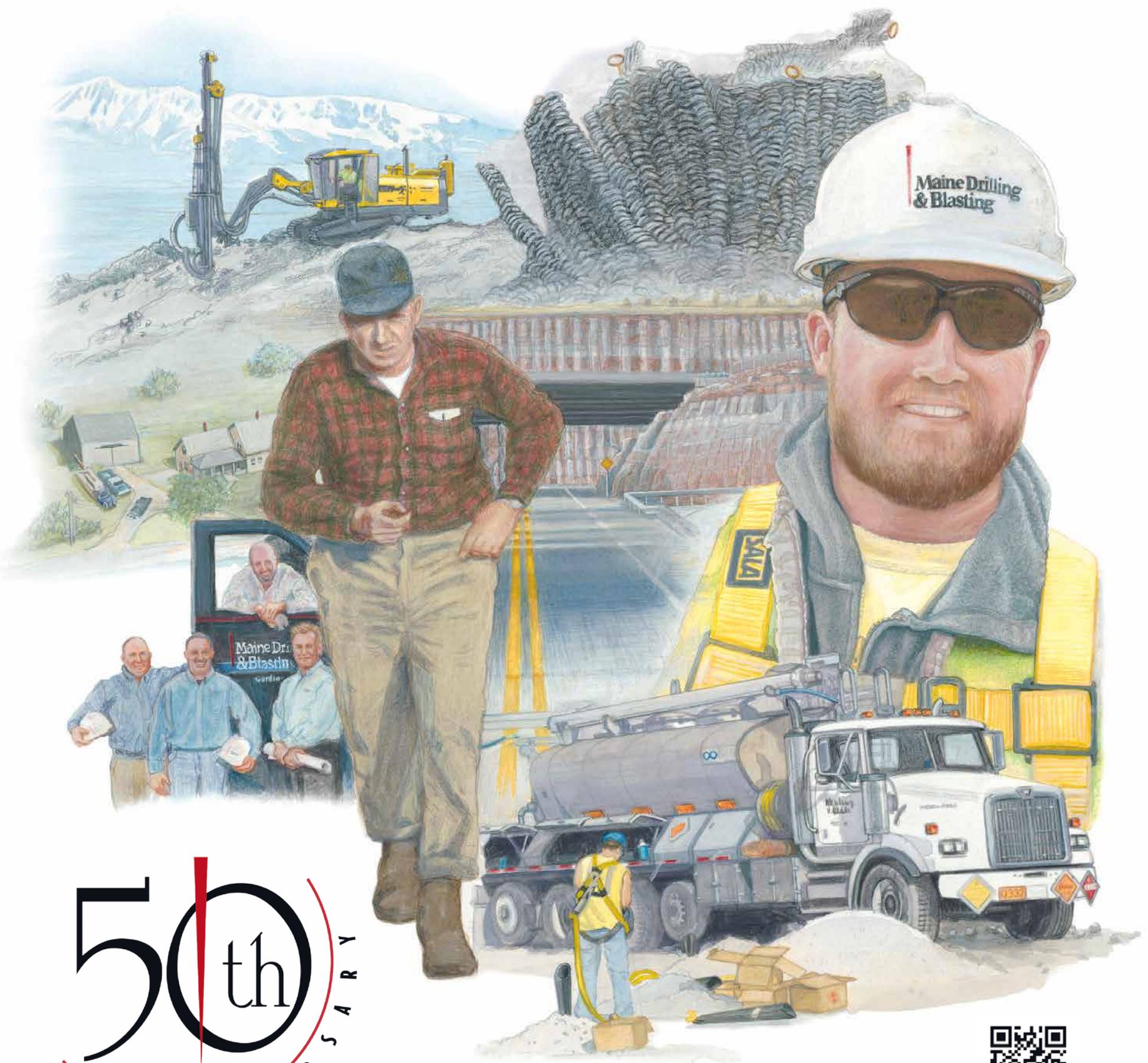
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