

Energy & Mining International

Flexibility is key for Washington Rotating Control Heads Inc.

Article by Chris Peterson

3/1/14



When thinking about drilling through thousands of feet of earth and rock, the word “flexible” isn’t normally the first that comes to mind. However, flexibility is one of the most important words for Pennsylvania-based Washington Rotating Control Heads Inc. as the company serves the oil and gas industry with a leading line of rotating control devices, diverters and related products for drilling rigs.

As Business Development and Technical Director Rick McKinney explains, the flexibility Washington Rotating provides for its customers has been one of the primary elements of its success over the years. As oil and gas exploration firms locate and develop new resources with variable conditions, they require equipment that can meet their specific needs, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach. McKinney says Washington Rotating is a leader in providing equipment that can serve virtually any need an operator might have.

Along with “flexibility,” McKinney says the other most important word for Washington Rotating is “family.” The company was founded by Bob Johnston in 1976, and his children have taken over the leadership position since then. By remaining a small, close-knit, family run organization, Washington Rotating has the strength and cooperation it needs to maintain its position in the marketplace for many years to come.

ONE FOR ALL

Washington Rotating’s most obvious strength lies in its product line, which McKinney says is known for its durability and reliability. The company’s ability to service that equipment also has a good reputation in the oil and gas sector, but above all else is the company’s capacity for customization.

The emergence of shale plays as growing areas of exploration have required different modes of thinking because of the unique nature of those reserves. As rig operators try to find new ways to reach the oil and gas in these plays, they need equipment that can deliver specialized performance, and off-the-shelf equipment designed for other conditions doesn’t always provide that.

Washington Rotating's ability to customize its rotating control devices to fit the circumstances for each customer has made it a highly sought-after partner for operators globally.

"There's so much out there that's non-standard that customers from all over the world call us and ask us to develop equipment for them," McKinney says. "We're able to encompass a much larger clientele by being able to do that."

CERTIFIED SUCCESS

The changing demands of the industry mean operators require more from their suppliers than before, and that includes accountability. To provide customers with peace of mind, Washington Rotating is undergoing Q1 certification from the American Petroleum Institute (API). McKinney says the API Q1 certification will provide customers with the assurance that the rotating control devices made by Washington Rotating were made to the highest standards in the industry. McKinney says the certification should also make Washington Rotating more marketable with major energy companies that prefer to work with API Q1-certified suppliers.

Converting the company's facilities to meet the API Q1 standards has meant scaling up for Washington. McKinney says the company has grown from about 15 employees to 28 in the last 18 months, which includes in-house engineers to convert the company's old mechanical drawings to digital systems for greater efficiency and accuracy. "The challenges of the API portion of it are just in educating all of the employees here," McKinney says. "We now have to follow stringent rules for traceability."

A GROWING FAMILY

One of the most important things keeping Washington Rotating on track and focused even as it undergoes such substantial change is the company's culture, McKinney says.

The family atmosphere inside Washington Rotating goes a long way toward keeping everyone on task and making sure every employee feels appreciated and valued. This means the company's staff tends to stick with it for the long haul. "It makes you feel like you are a part of the business, they make everyone here feel like that," according to McKinney. "You're not a number, like at a large corporation."

Growth is expected to be in the forecast for Washington Rotating well into the future, and not just in terms of volume. The company is working on establishing stronger footholds in international markets it already serves, including Russia and Australia.

McKinney adds that the changes going on at Washington Rotating are putting the company in a good position to succeed in the future.

“With the new products that we’re coming out with, the new API quality management system that we’re putting in place and a lot of new team players, I think we stand a good chance of surviving in this market,” he says.