

■ Pretech Corp., Kansas City, USA

The success of Pretech Corporation is based on the factors Chance, Risk Analysis, and state-of-the-art Technology

Though opportunities arise daily in industry, grasping one is rare. Due to circumstances outside of one's control, timing and the need of a little luck, the number of opportunities that succeed are small. For a small business in the pre-cast concrete industry, opportunities to succeed quickly in

a competitive market dominated by large transnational corporations are even more rare. Business owners of today must know when to seize opportunities with measured risk that can be quickly turned into profitable applications.

When opportunity for a new precast concrete pipe and manhole plant appeared in the Kansas City area, a success story was launched, based on experience, loyal clients, and Schlüsselbauer technology.

Recently, cities and industry across America are implementing Best Management Practices to meet increasingly stricter Environmental Protection Act requirements for storm water quality. As a result of these changes, an opportunity arose in the Kansas City, Kansas market to provide high quality pre-cast concrete pipe and manholes coupled with a high degree of service.

This venture started in 2000, when the National Precast Concrete Association held its annual convention in Kansas City in conjunction with the MCX trade show. Schlüsselbauer Technology GmbH & Co KG was exhibiting its equipment at the show and attracted the attention of Pretech's owners who recognized an opportunity to be a major player in the local market using robotic manufacturing technology. Based on what was observed at the MCX trade show and discussions and visits with producers who were already using the Exact 2500 equipment in America the decision was made to pur-



EXACT 2500 Pipe and Manhole production machine



Spigot end of a pipe

chase the equipment. A tour of Schlüsselbauer headquarters in Austria followed the decision.

Consistent and continual quality was extremely important in Pretech's decision making process and the Exact 2500 plant allows production flexibility with uniform quality and dimensional precision. In addition, the unique vibration system on the Exact 2500 and a semi-robotic plant custom designed by Schlüsselbauer engineers set it apart from competitors. Trouble-shooting is assisted by an on-line hotline to Schlüsselbauer engineers and technicians located in Austria. A satellite dish at the plant facilitates Internet communications along with a mobile camera that can be focused on any aspect of production in real time.

The plant was designed so that when market forces and client needs dictate expansion additional equipment could be incorporated into the layout without major disruption to production or modification to the physical structure. The layout also provides for a high production rate while affording the operator the ability to fine-

tune the manufacturing process. Construction began in July 2004 with the arrival of the first shipment of equipment and by September 23, 2004, Pretech was producing its first reinforced drycast concrete pipe from its Exact 2500. Local contractors (Kissick Construction Company, McCorkendale Construction Company, Inc., and Al Huber Construction, Inc.) renovated an existing building to accommodate the Exact 2500. A 16-foot deep pit had to be dug for the mold core and floor-level automated mould assembly; the excavation was similar to installing a caisson. The pit includes an accessible sub-chamber that houses the machine's

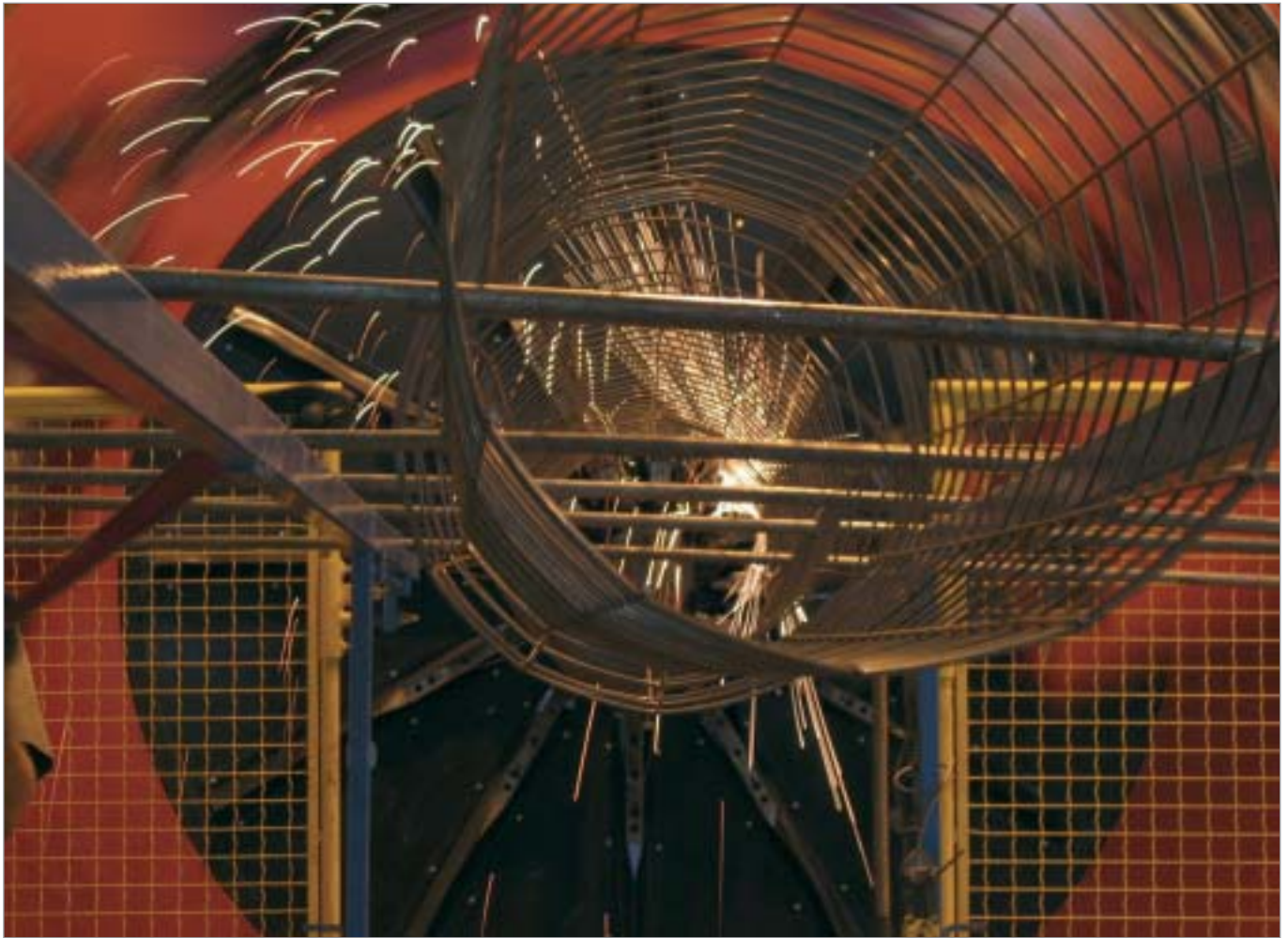
hydraulics and allows for easy maintenance and access safety. In addition, the roof over the production station was raised over 12 feet to accommodate the superstructure of the machine.

While small by conventional pipe plant standards, the 22,500 square-foot (150' x 150') floor area provides ample room for the Exact 2500 and associated support machinery. Four relatively light overhead cranes (largest is 10-ton), an automated batch and mixer system, a "Clean Master" machine that automatically cleans and oils the pallets for immediate re-use, a Zueblin cage-welding machine, two electronically controlled curing kilns, header and pallet storage area and a mold storage area all fit easily in the foot print of the existing building. Due to the quick change over features of the Exact 2500, the plant can operate to provide clients with products as required, therefore the reducing yard storage area required. Pretech's Exact 2500 can produce pre-cast concrete pipe ranging from 15" to 60" in diameter in standard 8-foot lengths and manholes in sizes of 48" and 60" in diameter in standard lengths. Depending on production order, the plant operates with a staff of two to five.

The Zueblin cage-welding machine, although not a Schlüsselbauer machine, is compatible and capable of high levels of productivity that is required of an automated production plant. This special addition to the plant took only eight days to install and satisfied Pretech's need for a wire-fabricating machine. The Zueblin machine requires only one operator and is able to make cages from 12" to 60" in diameter. It requires no hand welding and can be modified to make square and elliptical cages in addition to the traditional round. Fast changeover between sizes and the



Bill Bundschuh,
president of Pretech Corporation in Kansas City



The ZÜBLIN cage welding machine

capability to take green rod equals cost savings in high volume steel supplies and is characteristic of Zueblin machines.

Client relations as well as its ability to recognize and act upon opportunities are

the keys to Pretech's success. Preference for high quality concrete pipe by contractors in the Kansas City region influenced Pretech's decision to expand and offer new products and services. The high quality product line that Pretech offers is

essentially a load-rated ASTM C-76 pipe that is a structure unto itself. This is what sets precast concrete pipe apart from competing flexible products that require an engineered soil to transform the thin walled conduit into a structure.

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Pretech's rapid growth is a result of using precast concrete technology to turn ideas into products where quality is cast in stone. The Schlüsselbauer equipment Pretech selected can easily accommodate plant expansions to meet customer demands and changing market forces. The harmony of technology and business is clearly evident in the Pretech plant. Established in 1993, Pretech is a local success story built on opportunity, measured risk and new-age technology. ■

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