

Kraft Curing Systems GmbH, 49699 Lindern, Germany

## LibertyStone in search of innovations from Germany

In mid-December 2013, a three-member delegation from Liberty Stone Hardscaping Systems in the USA travelled to Germany. Their purpose was to gain first-hand information about actual trends, concrete products and concrete processing technology as their company is currently contemplating investment in new production systems. Liberty Stone, who has been successfully operating a vapor curing system from Kraft Curing Systems for over 10 years, turned to Michael Kraft who was extremely helpful in organising a tour of several well-known machine manufacturers and other producers in Germany for the team from Liberty Stone.



*Not to be missed on a visit to Cologne – a short sightseeing tour to the world famous Cologne cathedral, a UNESCO World heritage Site  
In the picture from left to right: Michael Kraft (Kraft Curing Systems), Mike Kapuscinski, David Lewis, Nate Keisling (all three from LibertyStone) and Gerhard Klöckner (publisher CPI - Concrete Plant International)*

Liberty Stone is located in Scranton, Pennsylvania, where the company can look back on a history of 100 years. In the course of this lengthy time, Liberty Stone has created a very good reputation manufacturing high-end products for gardening and landscaping work. Their range of products mainly comprises concrete paving blocks and retaining wall units to high architectural standards. Each of these products is supplied in numerous variations.

This broadly diversified product line has been part of the formula for success that has helped Liberty Stone through crisis years. In addition, Liberty Stone possesses its own gravel pit and thus any constraints in accessing raw materials are simplified in comparison with competitors – an enormous advantage in times of crisis.

Liberty Stone has had to overcome a prolonged lean period due to weak construction activity in the USA but has been experiencing a definite upwards trend since the 3rd quarter of 2013. The aim is to bolster this positive development still further by an expansion of production focussing on high-quality concrete products. The company has been seeking inspiration, particularly in Germany, as to which direction this should take.

David Lewis (Sales Manager), Nate Keisling (Finance Director) and Mike Kapuscinski (Operations Manager) from Liberty Stone, together with Michael Kraft, arranged appointments at concrete production facilities as well as at suppliers of machinery, systems and accessories throughout Germany. The group travelled to KBH, Kobra, Masa and SR-Schindler to gain in-depth knowledge about the latest innovations and ideas for everyday production

issues from the machine and system manufacturing sector, including mould engineers.

The group was impressed with the expertise shown by the production facilities along with their many different products, finishing processes and excellent quality. They formed a positive opinion of the high quality of the raw materials utilised to manufacture concrete products in the facilities visited. They also gained a very favourable impression of the working atmosphere and professionalism in these factories.

Many parallels to production in the States were also noticed. Although the weighting of product groups in the USA cannot be directly compared with the situation in Germany (e.g. appreciably more masonry products in the USA than Germany), there is also a trend towards more colours, textures and larger-sized formats, for example.

The market structures in both countries also exhibit parallels. "Our impression is that the market in Germany is also becoming concentrated on bigger groups. The market in the States has been developing in the same way for years," said David Lewis. He added, "The market in Germany is hotly contested but at the same time the quantities sold in Germany are larger than in the USA." One of the reasons for this could be better marketing for concrete goods in Germany.

The trip to Germany was very interesting and profitable for Liberty Stone. As only a few hours were available for each visit, the gentlemen were not able to dedicate the time that they would otherwise have liked for all the systems and products. This is why they are planning another visit in the summer of 2014 in order to build upon the knowledge they have gathered up to now.

David Lewis, Nate Keisling and Mike Kapuscinski, together with Michael Kraft, also made a stop-off at CPI in Cologne. After all, the trade journal is a very important source of information for LibertyStone. "CPI is a great magazine for the trade. Every couple of months, we can find a large amount of very good information and technical advice in it that helps us go on in our daily work. To put it in a nutshell - the whole concept with CPI is simply very well thought-out," was the comment from David Lewis. ■

#### FURTHER INFORMATION



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