

# Future looks bright for J&E Construction

By Mark Sherry

The future—both short-term and long-term—looks bright for J&E Construction of Stockbridge.

Office Manager Sandie Ecker said the family-owned company stayed very busy in the past year despite the pandemic. She added that the schedule for the year ahead looks good as well.

In addition, Sandie said J&E Construction has a good mix of young workers to join and learn from the longtime leaders and employees of the company.

Jim and Eunice Ecker started the company in the 1960s and it has remained in the Ecker family for the last half century. Four of the children of Jim and Eunice remain among the ownership team of J&E Construction. Bob Ecker and Rick Ecker manage J&E Construction and oversee the shop. Dave Ecker oversees Jim Ecker Farms, and Margie Woelfel—daughter of Jim and Eunice—continues to help steer the company as well. The late Don Ecker's son Doug is part of the ownership team too.

## The next generation

Sandie said the family is trying to set the company up well for the next generation to take over someday, and that process is already under way. As an example, Bob's sons Jake Ecker, 15, and Will Ecker, 18, are working in the business. Sawyer Ludwig, a nephew, has also joined the team. Will and Sawyer completed high school through the Quest program.

Sandie said the Chilton School District was instrumental in helping connect Will with Fox Valley Technical College and

the Quest program. She credited Sally Thiede of Fox Valley Tech with helping Will to graduate from high school early with his degree and with skills he can and wants to use in his job. Sawyer was a year ahead of Will in the same program.

J&E Construction is returning the favor by working with local high schools to employ youths in school-to-work programs. Sandie said they are helping to get young people to think about construction as a career. "We've been training a lot of these kids," she said. "They've been working out well. It makes me hopeful that there are kids who want to get out and work in the construction field. There is a path besides college. This path can be very successful. The rewards of driving around and being able to say, 'I put that subdivision in where all these people now make it their home. I dug those footings and graded the parking lot where that school is now standing and all those kids are learning. Long after I am gone, these places will still be here.'"

And there is plenty of work to be done around J&E Construction as Sandie said orders for the stone the company provides—along with its other services—have been brisk. New subdivisions have been popping up in the region and they are calling on J&E Construction's services. The company also is finishing up its duties on a large warehouse project in Chilton. Low interest rates are encouraging developers to build more condominiums, and J&E has been the beneficiary of some of that work.

J&E is a multi-faceted company which



J&E Construction of Stockbridge has the big equipment and the operators to handle them, moving dirt and delivering stone wherever needed.



# J&E

has its own local quarries and produces its own aggregate, including limestone. It owns and operates a fleet of dump trucks delivering aggregate to contractors, farmers, homeowners, and others who need it. The company has added two Volvo haul trucks to help the dirt crew move many cubic yards of dirt. Two new dump trucks help with the stone demands. "But best of all, we are leasing a larger loader to feed the crusher in the pit," Sandie said. "To help in the day to day work, we have added a new track skid steer and a couple new company pickup trucks."

J&E also owns semis which it primarily uses to haul its own equipment to wherever it is needed, and it has the operators to handle that heavy equipment.

People are ordering aggregate from J&E all the time. Parking lot and other lot preparation is something J&E does a lot of, including big jobs like the Country Visions Coop properties in Wrightstown and Plymouth. No matter the size of the job, however, Sandie said J&E Construction works to treat all its customers fairly. "We don't gouge them," she added.

J&E has done jobs within a 100-mile radius of Stockbridge, including having some loyal customers who had a cabin in the Weyauwega area.

## Agriculture work as well

J&E also has done a lot of work for area farmers over the years including such things as manure pits and leach pads. With the recent economic challenges in agriculture, however, J&E Ag Services has diverted much of its efforts into shuttling trailers around for compa-

nies such as Kaytee.

Jim Ecker Farms, meanwhile, is primarily a cash crop operation but has some cattle. Dave's son Mitch Ecker is a huge asset to the farms. "It is great to have the third generation work in the family business," Sandie said.

Sandie said she believes there are some key reasons for the success of J&E. "We are family owned," she said. "J&E has a lot to be thankful for in its success. We have dedicated employees who are not only very talented at what they do, but are diverse in those talents. The pit crew—Jim Wickersheim, Josh Ingalls and Roman Sauter—work many long hours to get ahead on making our stone products; to the dirt crew that put in long hours to keep projects on track. The supervisors, like Jimmy Schmitting, Lee Schmitting, Joey Schad, and Brian Ecker that are on all of our projects, not only do they run equipment on those projects, but they also have to relate with customers and make sure all their needs are met, read plans to figure out the game plan or in many cases the plan does not work for what the customer wants, so these guys will come up with something that will work."

"The truck drivers all work so hard to deliver our products safely to job sites and home owners," Sandie added. "They have to deal with traffic, people who tailgate them, pull out in front of them, all the stresses of making a decision in a split second—and all with a smile on their face. They do an amazing job with delivering in a timely manner, but also in working with the customers to get their stone in the exact spot they want."

"They are led by Larry 'Giddy' Goeser. He coordinates orders. He will go the extra mile to get you your stone. Giddy goes to jobs ahead of time to talk to customers to advise in what type of stone they need and how and where to place it. He is an amazing asset to us. He promotes this company and works endlessly to help put this company on top.

"Behind the scenes are the shop crew.

They keep the equipment and trucks running. The diversity comes into play here as the shop crew and the operators/drivers help to fix and maintain our fleet and our equipment."

She added that applications are always being taken by J&E Construction for additional workers to help the company handle the busy times ahead—both now and down the road.