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A GUIDE TO THE GREATER FORT MYERS BUSINESS INDUSTRY

# Family business is recipe for success

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Don Chisum knows how to move hunks of bulky concrete and building materials around with a crane.

He also knows a thing or two about how to keep a crane business afloat — even during a downturn in the housing market.

The owner of Gulf Coast Crane Rental Incorporated is pushing hard to keep his seven-year construction business running. A business that has worked on such prominent projects as the construction of Ave Maria University in Naples.

Though the 15-employee Fort Myers based business has been in operation for some solid years, Chisum has worked with large machinery in Florida since 1986. He got his start in the oil fields of Texas and has since managed and operated construction equipment companies.

The business uses hydraulic and crawler cranes to help construct homes and commercial projects.

The family-run company began

## Gulf Coast Crane projects:

- ▶ Ave Maria University in Naples
- ▶ TECO Arena
- ▶ Hauled heavy objects out of water, including a restored older boat that had sunk
- ▶ The company helped Fort Myers ring in 2007 by lowering the New Year's Eve ball downtown



COURTESY PHOTOS

Above, Gulf Coast Crane uses a 75-ton Link-Belt hydraulic crane to lift gasoline tanks into place. Below, a similar crane places a dredge on a trailer for transport.

downsizing its once 20-crane fleet last October after the orders for building new homes halted. The business which just last year reported sales earnings at around \$4 million is now operating with 10 cranes.

“It was scary when it first happened,” said Cathy Chisum. “it was just an immediate drop.”

Though Don Chisum, 46, and his wife Cathy, 43, are wary about their trimmed-down business, they are hopeful about the future. They have been able to diversify into commercial projects such as building warehouses and find work outside of their predominantly residential work, Chisum said.

“Things will turn around,” he said.

## Basic hydraulic crane equipment:

- ▶ Boom - The large arm mainly responsible for lifting. It's the most recognizable part of any crane. This is the steel arm of the crane that holds the load. Rising up from just behind the operator's cab, the boom is the essential piece of a crane, allowing the machine to raise loads to heights of several dozen feet.
- ▶ Counterweights - Multi-ton weights placed on the back of the cab to prevent the crane from tipping during lifts
- ▶ Two-gear pump - Hydraulic pump system that uses two rotating gears to pressurize oil
- ▶ Jib - Lattice structure that extends out of the boom
- ▶ Outriggers - Supports that keep the crane balanced
- ▶ Rotex gear - Large gear under the cab that allows the boom to be rotated
- ▶ Load Moment Indicator - Array of lights located in the cab just above the operator's eye level; flashes if crane's lifting limits are reached

Source: www.howstuffworks.com



## How a hydraulic crane works:

- ▶ Hydraulic truck cranes are used to lift heavy loads to tall heights, and it's important that the truck be completely stable during the lifting operation.
- ▶ Hydraulic cranes are very simple by design but can perform Herculean tasks that would otherwise seem impossible. In a matter of minutes, these machines are able to raise multi-ton bridge beams on highways, heavy equipment in factories and even lift beachfront houses onto pilings. Hydraulic truck cranes are also used to lift killer whales like Shamu out of water tanks.
- ▶ The hydraulic crane is based on a simple concept — the transmission of forces from point to point through a fluid. Most hydraulic machines use some sort of incompressible fluid, a fluid that is at its maximum density. Oil is the most commonly used incompressible fluid for hydraulic machines, including hydraulic cranes. In a simple hydraulic system, when a piston pushes down on the oil, the oil transmits all of the original force to another piston, which is driven up.

Source: www.howstuffworks.com

Cathy Chisum who does the books remains confident that the market will turn around.

“It's a hard time for us,” she said. “But we're holding steady. Were just waiting to pick it up again.”

Instead of putting up roof trusses

on homes, the company takes jobs on new shopping centers, schools and warehouses.

The Chisums' not only attributes the company's staying power to being able to liquidate and diversify but also the strength of their family.

A number of the large family which includes seven children have jobs in the business. Aubrey, an Florida Gulf Coast University student works as the business's dispatcher and Cathy does billing and data entry. And Don Chisum — the business man makes deals for the company.

Cathy Chisum sites each family members individual talents as a recipe for success and endurance during the leaner times.

“It has brought us all closer together,” she said. “We all have something in common.” ■