

LES MILLS

Les Mills got his first taste of highway construction in Arkansas in 1957; a student at Arkansas Tech University Les got a summer job with Ben Hogan Construction as a laborer. An experienced truck driver told Les that summer, "If you can ever make it to the position of blade operator, then you got it made boy." His response was "Looks like the man who tells the blade operator what to do is the one who has it made."

The following year Les returned to Hogan for summer employment and was given an opportunity to work in a field office as a bookkeeper. Les was fond of saying, "Road construction gets in your blood" and it had definitely gotten inside of his.

In the summer of 1959, following his junior year at Arkansas Tech, Les was given the opportunity to lead a construction crew. The experience of working that summer as a foreman and witnessing the fruits of his labor solidified in his mind that highway construction was the career he wanted to pursue.

Les never returned to college. He poured himself into his career, hungry to learn as much about the industry as possible. As a result of his efforts, Les was the youngest man ever promoted to the position of superintendent with Ben Hogan Construction and in the early sixties he was given the responsibility of overseeing the construction of five separate sections of the new Interstate between Texarkana and Little Rock.

Les was a general superintendent for Hogan until March of 1985 and during that time he worked in every AHTD district in the state. He worked on projects ranging from Interstate construction to Interstate reconstruction and from concrete projects to asphalt projects and large dirt projects to small rest areas.

His responsibilities were not restricted to highway jobs as he also supervised several major airport reconstruction projects, several state park projects for the Corp of Engineers and a host of commercial projects. During his years with Hogan Les was also very active in the Associated General Contractors, serving on the highway committee off and on for fifteen years.

In 1985 Les was hired by Sam Clark to manage the operations of Mid-State Construction which included the construction, paving, asphalt plants and the newly opened Jones Mill Quarry. Two years later Mr. Clark decided that "hands off" retirement was not what he had expected and decided to sell Mid-State to Evered Bardon, a United Kingdom holding company specializing in quarry operations who then later sold Mid-State to Nova Materials.

In 1998 Mid-State was once again sold, this time to aggregate giant, Martin Marietta, the second largest aggregate producer in the U.S. This was the first venture into asphalt construction for Martin Marietta Materials. When Les was asked by division president Don Ross to explain why he liked asphalt so much Les simply replied, "It smells like money."

Safety in the workplace was always important to Les. During the seventies and eighties his crews boasted runs of up to six years with no lost time. At Mid-State, his plants and construction crews went from 1990 to 1996 without a lost time or reportable accident.

From the late nineties to the first few years of the new millennium Les was responsible for operations on six different projects reconstructing Interstate 30. It was during this time that he began to prepare for retirement, passing the torch to younger men who considered him an icon. To this day these men still tell stories about the memorable times and learning experiences he gave them which has resulted in many conversations on highway projects to begin with the words, "I remember one time when Les Mills..."