

Port Terminal Reopens

WEST PLAINS LLC REFURBISHES PORT OF BROWNSVILLE ELEVATOR



West Plains LLC
Kansas City, MO • 816-270-4000

Founded: 1989
Storage capacity: 35 million bushels at 25 locations
Annual volume: 100+ million bushels
Annual sales: \$700 million
Number of employees: 90
Crops handled: Corn, soybeans, hard red winter and spring wheat, sunflowers, millet, sorghum, distillers dried grains, canola meal, cottonseed meal
Services: Grain handling and merchandising, trucking

Key personnel:

- Mike Rowan, president
- Darin Hanson, vice president-business development
- Paul Johnson, director of operations
- Javier Saldivar, Brownsville superintendent

Supplier List

- Catwalks** LeMar Industries Corp.
- Contractor**in-house
- Conveyors**Hi Roller Conveyors, Schlager Inc.
- Dust collection**Donaldson Torit
- Engineering (civil/structural)**..... AgriMech Consulting LLC, NOHR Wortmann Engineering
- Hazard monitoring**.. Electro-Sensors Inc.
- Millwrights**Perez Construction Inc., Pitcock Supply Inc.
- Tower support system** LeMar Industries Corp.
- Truck probe** CR Mfg.
- Truck scales**... Mid America Scale Inc.



The port terminal elevator at Brownsville, TX, built in the 1960s and mothballed since 2010, has been refurbished by West Plains LLC and was scheduled to reopen partially on Feb. 1. Photos by Ed Zdrojewski.

Grain handlers on the High Plains have a long tradition of shipping grain by rail to port terminals along the Texas Gulf Coast for shipment to customers in Mexico and overseas. Few grain shippers, however, can boast having their own port terminal elevator on the Gulf.

West Plains LLC, headquartered in Kansas City, MO, has such an outlet at the Port of Brownsville, TX. When *Grain Journal* visited the port terminal elevator in mid-January 2017, workers were scrambling to get the facility ready for its reopening planned for Feb. 1.

West Plains LLC, which operates grain elevators across western Nebraska, Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming, acquired the terminal in 2015. The privately held company has been refurbishing the elevator, which had been shut down since 2010.

“What attracted us to the Port of Brownsville was the flexibility of the site,” says Paul Johnson, corporate director of operations. (Johnson joined



From left: West Plains Grain President Mike Rowan; Paul Johnson, director of operations; and Darin Hanson, vice president-business development.

West Plains in 2014 from Northern Ag Service.) Grain can be shipped in and out of the terminal via every available form of transportation:

- The Brownsville & Rio Grande Railroad, a short-line serving the Port of Brownsville, offers direct connections to the Union Pacific, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and perhaps most importantly, the Kansas City Southern

Railroad, which offers direct service into the interior of Mexico.

- The port offers excellent highway connections for truckers and is only a few miles from the bridge into Matamoros, Mexico.

- The port is located about 10 miles from the mouth of the Rio Grande into the Gulf. When work is completed in another six to eight months, the terminal will be able to handle Panamax-size vessels, as well as barges traveling on the Intracoastal Waterway.

Conditions by 2016

The original sections of the 3.1 million-bushel slipform concrete elevator, constructed in 1965, were opened as a public elevator by the Port of Brownsville. It originally included a 500,000-bushel concrete house and two 500,000-bushel flat storage buildings. The elevator was expanded in 1969 and 1981.

Ownership of the terminal elevator later passed through several private owners, most recently Southwest Grain, a Edinburg, TX-based cooperative. Southwest Grain was still the owner when the elevator was heavily damaged in 2008 by



Donaldson Torit cyclones mounted near the receiving pits. Much of the project focused around beefing up dust collection systems.

Hurricane Dolly.

“They tried to make a go of it as a truck house after that,” says Darin Hanson, vice president-business development, who joined West Plains in

November 2016 from Gavilon Grain. “They couldn’t get enough business to keep it running and maintain the equipment, so it was mothballed in 2010.”

When West Plains came on the scene, the elevator clearly needed a lot of work. In addition to the hurricane damage, much of the grain handling equipment dated from an era when galvanized steel generally was not used, and most of that was too rusty to be salvageable.

“Much of the property and the boot pit were full of rattlesnakes,” says Johnson. “We had an exterminator in, and we saw fewer and fewer of them.”

Other equipment was in better shape than expected. “We thought we were going to have to replace the inside legs,” he comments. “But the belts and buckets actually were in pretty good shape, so all we did was clean them up and add hazard monitoring equipment.”

The Makeover

West Plains acted as its own general contractor on the refurbishment, but the company brought in a number of subcontractors for various parts of ▶

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New 25,000-bph Hi Roller enclosed belt conveyor replaces an old open belt conveyor in the facility basement tunnel.

the project:

- Perez Construction Co., Houston, TX (281-449-2155), and Pitcock Supply Inc., Lubbock, TX (806-762-3484), handled various aspects of the millwright work.

- AgriMech Consulting, LLC, Olathe, KS (913-940-7774), did extensive civil engineering work.

- NOHR Wortlann Engineering, Yankton, SD (605-665-1214), performed structural engineering.

As of the time of *Grain Journal's* visit, West Plains had spent approximately \$2.35 million on the first two phases of the project, sufficient to open in February 2017 for truck and rail shipping and receiving. The third phase focusing on vessel loading was just getting underway and was expected to be completed some time later in the year.

Among the work done so far:

- State-of-the-art Donaldson Torit Point of Use dust collection systems were installed throughout the elevator including at the receiving pits and legs, shipping bins, and bulkweigher upper garners.

- All of the open belt receiving conveyors were replaced with Hi Roller enclosed belt conveyors. They are rated at 25,000 bph for truck receiving and 40,000 bph for rail receiving. All of the oil in existing gearboxes was replaced, a major operation in equipment that holds 100 gallons each.

- Old shipping structures were torn down to their foundations and replaced with 50,000-bph Hi Roller belts and LeMar towers. A 50,000-bph Schlagel drag conveyor to be built will run from two existing shipping bins out to the Hi Roller shipping belts.

- An Electro-Sensors HazardPRO® hazard monitoring system was installed terminal-wide. Equipment monitoring data can be accessed from anywhere, including smartphones, although it is password-protected for security.

- All of the ladders and cages around the facility were replaced with OSHA-compliant models. Throughout the elevator, galvanized steel was used to protect against corrosive, salt-laden air from the Gulf.

- All of the existing flat storage buildings have been reroofed, and one of them is being completely rebuilt from the ground up.

In anticipation of startup, West Plains Grain held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Dec. 14 for area producers, local officials, and the public.

Ed Zdrojewski, editor