



# Hard Rock Business

*These two Hereford breeders have discovered rock, sand and soil are big business.*

by *Christy Couch Lee*

Many folks can appreciate the beauty of their property as they look out over green grass, water, trees and, of course, those red and white Herefords. But how many people can say they've seen the beauty beneath the surface?

Randy Christy, Union City, Mich., and Randy Davee, RW Davee Enterprises, Mooresville, Ind., can say just that. By tapping into the resources

beneath the surface of their land, they've each developed a big business in the gravel, soil and water industry.

## **Christy's story**

Christy worked for years as a farmhand, beginning when he graduated from high school. Eventually, he was able to purchase 80 acres of land from the family he worked for — much of which is forest and river.

He's been able to utilize many resources from the land, including the wood, gravel and soil. However, his main source of income from the property has been the latter two.

The gravel is harvested from a 30-acre field that sits on a river bottom and an end moraine, which is a place where a glacier stopped and pulled back, leaving a high concentration of stone as a result.

"The water table is 3 feet below the surface of the ground,"

Christy explains. "I use a dragline crane to remove the gravel and let it dry on the bank. Then I screen it out."

Christy says although many quarries leave a pit resulting from harvesting, he is able to harvest in a manner that remains attractive.

"It's in my backyard, and my house view is over what is now a large lake," he says.

A one-man operation, he harvests about a half acre of gravel per year, which yields about 5,000 cubic yards or 1,000 truckloads of gravel. Although other companies in his area cater to larger projects and needs, Christy specializes in serving personal-use needs — such as driveways or yards — within a 15-mile radius of his home.

In addition, Christy combines the manure from his cattle with the topsoil removed from the gravel excavation to market a premium compost product, he says.

## **Davee's story**

Davee and his family, who live on the ever-growing outskirts of Indianapolis, have found a way to stay on the land they love and once farmed, while maintaining a constant revenue stream.

"We tried to diversify the farm, and we had been a small family farm for three generations," Davee recalls. "We were getting eaten up by the

**Above:** Randy Christy, Union City, Mich., and Randy Davee, RW Davee Enterprises, Mooresville, Ind., have developed a successful business in the gravel, soil and water industry.

population in Indy, and we knew we either needed to relocate the farm, or stay here and adjust to what was around us. With the housing projects, we were losing a lot of ground. So, we decided to stay here and do what we could do, and give us some income and enjoy life.”

The farm was originally started by Davee’s dad, William, and uncle, Dale. The families farmed together until the mid-’80s, when the farm was split between the two families. And, in 1996 the family decided to venture into the sand and gravel rights business.

“We didn’t get anything actually up and running until 1999 or 2000,” Davee says. “This is a slow income-making process. Like with any business, it takes time.”

Today, Randy and William manage their portion together as RW Davee Enterprises, along with Randy’s wife, Robin, and daughter, Desiree.

They have leased the land formerly planted in corn, soybeans and wheat to companies who mine aggregate for various industries.

“Two companies are in the asphalt business, building parking lots and interstates including I-69, and the other harvests the dirt,” Davee says.

Because their land also lies on a large aquifer, they have discovered a great market for the water rights on the property, as well.

“We’ve found that water has more value than anything,” Davee says. “It’s the new oil of the next 100 years. You can’t find good water in



**“The diversification helps a great deal.”**

*— Randy Davee*

every city, but every city has to have it. Once the sand and gravel are removed from the property, the lake is a natural focal point.”

The future of Davee’s operation is bright, as well. Once the excavation is complete on his land, the long-term plan is to develop housing along the lakes, which are 100 acres in size.

“We can develop some land and sell some land,” he says. “We foresee a long-term revenue stream from the land.”

Both men say these businesses provide great benefits to their families.

### **Benefits of the business**

Davee says the greatest part of his business is the consistent income.

“It’s nice to know the check is going to come, whether or not I get out of bed,” he says with a laugh. “The diversification helps a great deal.”

And, Christy says, the people he works with daily make his job worthwhile.

“There is seldom anyone not happy when I’m done taking them what they’ve requested,” he says.

In addition, he says, being able to set his own hours is a great advantage.

“I can leave my 13-year-old daughter, Holly, at home for brief moments and come in the house to check on her often,” he says.

His 28-year-old son, Ryan, also lives next door and is a partner in a nearby corn and soybean operation. Christy says he finds great pride in having his son’s help from time to time with the aggregate business, as well.

Of course, no business comes without challenges. And this business is no exception.

Because of the nature of harvesting gravel, Christy says, when water freezes, the season is done.

“That can provide some challenges with steady income,” he says. “But, it also provides time for ice fishing and for calving in January and February.”

And, Davee says, sometimes the resulting pit from the excavation isn’t considered “beautiful” by all.

“They’re not the most attractive things in the neighborhood, and not everyone likes it,” Davee says. “But, in the end, we’re left with a very attractive lake, where the fishing is

*continued on page 86...*

Davee and his family have marketed gravel and dirt to two main companies.



fantastic and the hunting is great. And we have waterfowl in our area that we never had before the lakes.”

Christy says his land is now a wildlife haven with ducks, geese, bullfrogs, turtles and snakes.

Both men say their aggregate businesses are the perfect complements to their Hereford cattle herds.

### Herefords go hand-in-hand

Christy says he has a small operation, marketing between six and eight calves per year. However, he makes the most of the cattle he has.

Christy has found success in the showring, having raised a heifer that went on to win her junior and open classes at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver. And, having taken only five bulls to the Michigan Beef Expo through the years, he's claimed two champion and three reserve titles.

Davee says he is the only one of the family who has pursued the cattle business. About 10 years ago, he had 160 brood cows and maintained a herd of about 300. Today, that number is down to about 30 brood cows.

“We have gotten smaller for a couple of reasons,” Davee says. “We believe quality is better than quantity. And, we feel like when trying to address the needs of the Hereford breed, it's better for us to focus on genetically superior females. For us, being smaller and really good is better than being really big.”

That plan has worked well for Davee. He has seen the purple at nearly every major show in the

country, including the NWSS; North American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky.; Keystone International Livestock Exposition in Harrisburg, Pa.; and the Indiana State Fair.

His greatest success, he says, was claiming the title of 2001 NWSS champion horned Hereford bull with DS KCK Legend, whom he co-owned with K.C. Keffer and Stockdale Hereford Farm.

He also was the co-owner of Gerber Lombardi 014L, who was leased to Accelerated Genetics, and co-owner of Gerber Acclaim 43A, who was the 1996 NWSS champion Hereford bull, leased to 21st Century Genetics.

Davee says he has always had a love of the Hereford breed.

“We have always enjoyed Hereford cattle,” he says. “We see them as a better opportunity in the business than Angus, because our area is flooded with Angus breeders. If everyone is selling apples, why sell apples? We started trying to sell really good oranges.”

Success in the aggregate and cattle businesses can be tied to many of the same principles, these men say.

### Common thread

Christy says the key for him in both businesses is to be focused on quality.

“You must do it right the first time — that makes it all come out a little better,” he says. “The end result is better if you do things right from the start.”

And, he says, success with clients is the same — regardless of the industry.

“I've always had good faith in people, and in both industries, I've let my first impression guide my trust,” he says. “I've found that in both industries, I can put trust into people.”

Davee says he has learned that good business sense is critical in both industries.

“I've learned not to see things as only black and white,” he says. “Sometimes, you have to investigate and spend time digging into the past. With cattle, that could mean pulling a seven-generation pedigree. People look at me like I'm nuts. But if you don't know what you're putting into your cow herd, you'll look back and regret that decision.”

This research carries over into the rock business, as well.

“With any business venture, you need to investigate everyone you're working with,” Davee says. “Sometimes the best offers aren't the best offers in the end. Don't just jump on something by a whim. You need to do your investigation.”

And, he says, once he's done his investigation, he's been pleased with the people he's worked with in both industries.

“We are all in this to make a profit, of course,” Davee says. “But we work with people who are passionate about what they do, with a desire and interest for the industries. We have goals in mind, but we enjoy what we do, too.”

By focusing on quality and seeing the potential of their land, these two men have found great success in both the aggregate and cattle industries. It's truly a hard rock life. **HW**

Christy says the lake resulting from the gravel and soil harvest is a haven for wildlife, including geese, ducks, turtles, bullfrogs and snakes.

