



The Turner Company, headquartered in Rhome, Texas, USA, was established in 1980 and has been growing rapidly in the precast industry. Built on integrity and a strong work ethic, The Turner Co. prides itself on quality workmanship in the manufacturing of precast concrete structures, producing septic tanks, grease traps, storm cellars, and manholes. As The Turner Co. expanded and opened a new plant in Lockhart, Texas, they knew they needed a high-volume automated pipe system to meet the ongoing infrastructure demands in the region. Learn why the BFS Souveraen system was the answer, and how this installation made history as the first Souveraen placed in North America.



Installation crew finishing the setup of the BFS Souveraen 1625 S at The Turner Co. plant in Lockhart, Texas.

Case Study

Texas Two-Step

Lone Star State precaster The Turner Company opens a second plant in the Texas Triangle, featuring the first BFS Souveraen pipe system from Afinitas in North America

It was 1997. Brian Turner was getting ready to graduate early from high school and definitely did not want to go to college. He wanted to work with his hands, so he found a job installing septic tanks in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Fast forward a couple decades and Brian and his wife Michelle have a growing precast concrete company that employs 220 people with a newly opened plant 200 miles south in Lockhart, Texas.

It's a certain type of hard-working, can-do person who ends up running a successful precast concrete operation, and Brian fits that mold. As a septic tank installer, he eventually grew frustrated because he couldn't get the tanks when he needed them. So, in 2001, he started making them himself, eventually opening a plant in Rhome, Texas, 30 miles north of Fort Worth.

While Brian learned the ins and outs of making precast concrete, Michelle ran the office side of the operation. They figured it out as they went along, adding product lines, hiring, navigating the regulatory system and building a customer base.

"We just did it," Brian said matter-of-factly. "We started small and grew big. It seemed easy."

Growing with the Region

The Turner Co. grew as the region grew. Texas has been one of the fastest growing states in the United States every year for decades, and the Turners fit right in, supplying a wide range of underground infrastructure and other precast products throughout the territory.

"We sell to just about everybody – electrical contractors, site utility contractors, commercial developers," Brian said. The company also supplies to the Department of Transportation and municipalities.

In recent years, The Turner Co. outgrew its facility in Rhome. "We had finished building and adding everything we were going to add in Rhome," Brian said. "We kind of came to a completion state and needed another project, so we decided to put in another plant."

When it came time to outfit the new plant, Brian knew he needed a high-volume automated pipe system to meet the ongoing infrastructure demands in the region. A trip to Luxembourg in 2018 to check out the BFS Souveraen pipe system sealed the deal. In August 2019, the Turners opened their second plant in Lockhart, featuring the first BFS Souveraen installed in North America. BFS was acquired by Afinitas in 2018 and is one of five Afinitas brands serving the precast concrete industry globally with infrastructure equipment and services. Other Afinitas brands are HawkeyePedershaab, CAM Products, New Hampton Metal Fab and the Spillman Company.

Matt Childs, Afinitas vice president of sales for the Americas, has watched The Turner Co., grow over the years. Childs and his colleague Daniel Bühler, President of Europe for the Equipment and Automation Division of Afinitas, helped bring the Souveraen system to the Turners. For Bühler, who formerly worked as managing director of BFS, this was particularly meaningful after years of trying to breakthrough to the U.S. market with the BFS packerhead solution. "It is a testament to our partnership with Afinitas," Bühler said.

Childs said he has marveled over the growth of The Turner Co. over the years.



The BFS Souveræn is a fully automated concrete pipe machine for high-output production.



The Souveræn's counter-rotating, roller-head, compaction tools compact the concrete and are controlled by an advanced, high-tech control system.

"They are a great American success story if you think about it," Childs said. "Brian started buying wetcast forms, then he put in a couple of manhole machines for drycast, then he bought a pipe machine. Then he started doing boxes, and before you know it, they're huge."

One Operator Runs the Plant

Childs accompanied Brian to a fully automated plant in Luxembourg to witness the Souveræn in action.

In Luxembourg, one operator ran the entire production process at the plant. The Souveræn, "ran on its own," Brian said. "Automatic. After the operator got it started, he was able to go do other tasks." The Luxembourg plant featured robots to deliver and set the cages, demold the fresh pipe, and transport it to the curing area. The Turners opted for what is basically a two-person system, which features one operator and a forklift driver to set the cages and move the product.

While the robotics are a huge benefit, what separates the Souveræn from other pipe systems is the design of the packerhead.

"Most packerheads have a row of rollers and a row of trowels that pack the concrete against the form," Childs said. "The Souveræn has multiple rows of both. That allows you to pack the concrete with as much force but with less torque required from the machine. And, you have more even distribution of that force against the concrete," he added. "So, typically a Souveræn exerts higher pressures with less torque and it allows the manufacturer to make a single pass to produce the pipe as opposed to a double pass, which is required by many packerheads."

Brad Schmidgall, Afinitas CEO, said the BFS Souveræn complements the other pipe systems the company has in North America, which is one reason why Afinitas acquired BFS. "Looking at this from a strategic perspective, we have had great success with our ePak packerhead solution in North America. Now, with Souveræn, we have two highly rated packerhead machines that cover the full range of customer needs. Both out-produce any of the competitive domestic machines."

State of the Art

After seeing the pipe that comes out of his new plant, Brian Turner would agree. He calls it "state of the art" equipment. "The packerhead makes a smoother pipe," he said. "It's just a better-quality pipe."

The Turner Co. is currently running about 200 to 300 tons of pipe per day with the Souveræn, Brian said. The equipment runs pipe with diameters ranging from 18 inches to 60 inches.

At the Lockhart plant, the pipe production is a two-person process. The operator oversees production, while the forklift driver installs the cages, demolds and moves the product. It runs like clockwork.

"The forklift takes the first piece and moves it," Brian said. "By the time the forklift gets back there's another piece already made. So, it's making product while the forklift is taking product off the machine."

The forklift driver can accomplish all those tasks without leaving the driver's seat. That's because the Souveræn is equipped with a double hinged mold with hydraulics that opens automatically, enabling the forklift driver to both set the cage and remove the finished product.

BFS calls the 3-piece form a Power Jacket, Childs said. The automated feature of the form increases efficiency and improves safety, he added.

"You don't have a guy waiting on the floor to strip the pipe from the form," he said. "When a worker is standing in the rows of pipe there are safety hazards. He can get hit by the forklift. He can have a pipe fall on him. This just eliminates that."



The BFS Souveraen three-piece "Power Jacket" form is an automated feature that increases efficiency and safety.

Automation is the Key

The automation also addresses an issue that impacts most precast manufacturers in North America: finding skilled production workers. It is another reason Afinitas wanted to bring the Souveraen into the market. Automation will be the key to industry growth in years to come, Schmidgall believes.

"Some of it is a function of the economy and some of it is just that the labor force is changing," Schmidgall said. "The kind of jobs that people want to do are being more toward screen-facing jobs and less toward manual labor, and the problem will only get worse from here, so as a company we are laser-focused on introducing automation solutions to the market as well as continuing to refine and develop our own existing automation solutions, primarily as it relates to areas of the precast market that are currently done with manual labor."

While automation has become more prevalent in recent years, "there are still wide swaths of the precast market where work is being done the same way they did it 50 or 60 years ago," Schmidgall said, "so we are very focused on addressing those issues and will be, as far as I'm concerned, for the next 10 or 20 years. We have to help these producers future-proof their businesses by reducing the amount of dependence on manual labor."

Making the investment in a new pipe plant is a huge decision for a family-owned company, and Schmidgall said the Turner's investment is not lost on Afinitas.

"Regarding family businesses making big personal investments in their future, we take that responsibility extremely seriously," Schmidgall said. "When we're doing business with customers like Brian, he is literally trusting us with his family's future, and we can't take that responsibility seriously enough. And so that's a big reason why, as we structure our company, we are so focused on providing that lifetime of service," he added. "Parts. Service availability. We overstock on parts. We keep lots of service technicians available in our business because we know these guys are relying on us to help keep their machines running."



The Turner family: Michelle and Brian, flanked by Wyatt (left), Tate, and Morgan (front).

Extending Their Reach

With their second plant running smoothly, the Turners are continuing to look ahead to future growth, including the possibility of opening a third plant. The new plant extends the reach of The Turner Company across the booming region known as the Texas Triangle. One of 11 megaregions in the United States, the Texas Triangle includes a population of 13.8 million and stretches from Dallas-Fort Worth to Austin to San Antonio and back to Houston. The region is rich with infrastructure projects and growth is projected to continue far into the future.

Brian and Michelle have three children, and at least two of them are likely to keep the family tradition going. Wyatt, 14, and Tate, 11, are likely future precasters. Morgan, age 7, is on board too.

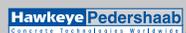
"It's a family business, so the kids will come out to the plant and do things in the summer and on weekends," Michelle said. They all kind of have places where they will do things within the business.

"The two oldest would rather be there than anywhere else," she added. "We have to fight them to tell them they have to go to school."

While the boys are too young for most production chores right now, Tate did get in on the action over the summer.

"Tate got to make grade rings this summer," Michelle said. "He was dying to make grade rings. You would have thought we had taken him to Disney World, he was so pumped."

Is that a sign that the boys are probably headed for a career at The Turner Co. "Unless something significantly changes, yes!" she said.



The AFINITAS family of brands

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