

Gillespie & Son Inc. conducts concrete products business in a very personal but highly efficient manner

Maryland firm operates on a family style basis *P*

by E. E. Halmos

The vast Baltimore-Washington megalopolis is less than 100 road miles away from Chestertown, seat of

Maryland's still-rural Kent County, but the distance might well be light years.

Chestertown (population about 3,000) and Kent County (population about 15,000) is another world, more

closely tied to its early 18th century beginnings as a seaport and agricultural center than to the teeming activities across the broad waters of Chesapeake Bay to the west. Chestertown's world moves at a more leisurely pace, attuned to the growing season and the fisheries. Jobs are smaller and service is very personal.

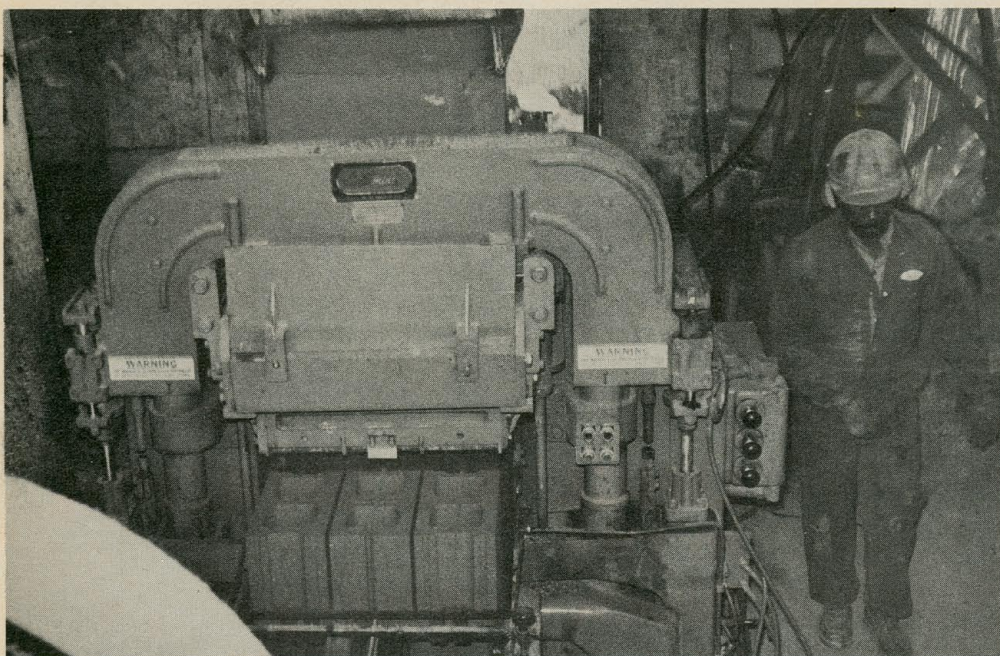
So is the service provided by Ed Gillespie, grandson of the founder and now president of Gillespie & Son Inc., blockmakers, precasters, and ready-mix suppliers.

His home is less than five minutes away from the company's plant and yard on the edge of "downtown" Chestertown (and so are the homes of most of the 25 people that staff the plant and the trucks). His six mixer trucks (four Macks and two Internationals carrying 10, 9, and 7-yd. Rex drums) cover customers in a 25-mile radius of the plant. His newly installed Columbia three-block machine, with its new BECO system for delivery to kilns, cuber, and storage yard, supplies the equivalent of a million block a year for delivery by company Dico Side-O-Matic boom trucks to a myriad of jobs. His precasting plant supplies septic tanks, precast steps, and burial vaults all over the lush Eastern Shore of Maryland and Delaware.

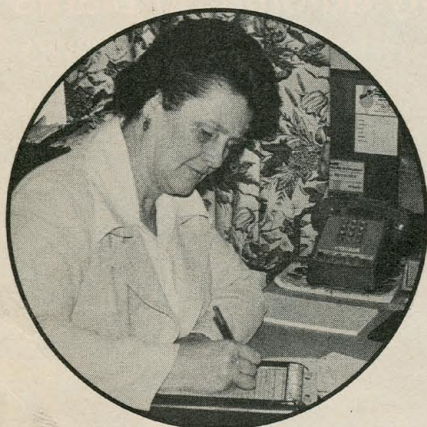
But, like the size and character of the jobs to which deliveries are made, things run on a small town, family style basis. The block deliveries run largely to small builders of single-family homes, small commercial buildings (though they have, like the ready-mix work, included some major projects like construction work on the campus of Washington College, just on the edge of town), and deliveries to isolated farms where paving of cattle feeding



One of firm's six mixer trucks gets ready for a road trip that might run to more than 50 miles, round trip.



Columbia block machine is heart of plant that turns out a million block a year.



Left: Mrs. Margaret Cooper is in charge of dispatching all equipment, receiving customer inquiries and complaints, and providing much-needed geographical directions.



Right: Edward S. Gillespie, third-generation leader of company, runs a small business that is relaxed, but stresses service and up-to-date methods.

yards, for example, is a cash-producing necessity.

That does not mean that operations are not sufficiently businesslike and efficient. It does mean that the company is constantly on the lookout for any possible means of improving its operations, its production machinery, and its controls to make things work (and produce a profit) on the necessary and comfortable small scale basis that is the foundation of the operation.

The BECO installation is being watched with care and considerable pride by everyone concerned, to work out any "bugs," learn every detail, and familiarize everyone with the care and feeding of the machines and their as-

This dry batch plant supplies concrete for ready-mix and precasting operations.

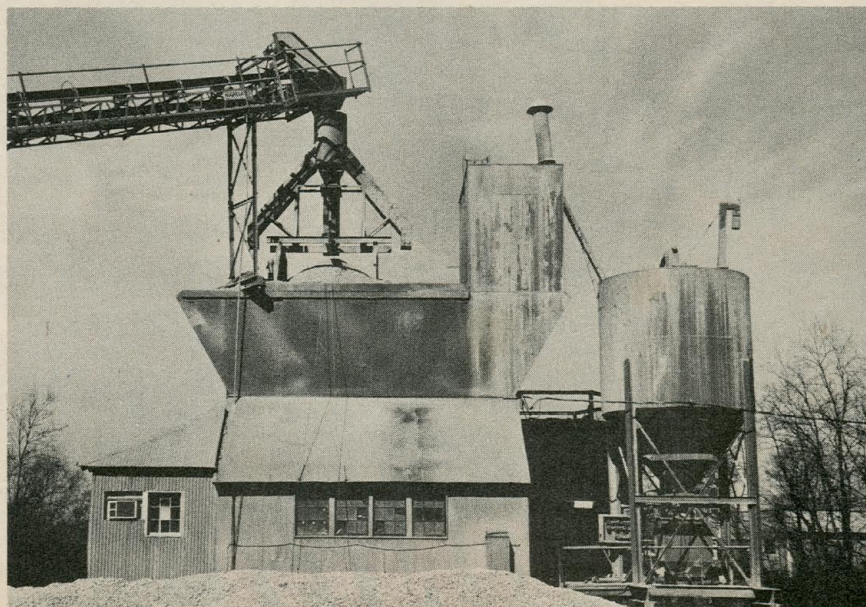
sociated equipment, and to make them better.

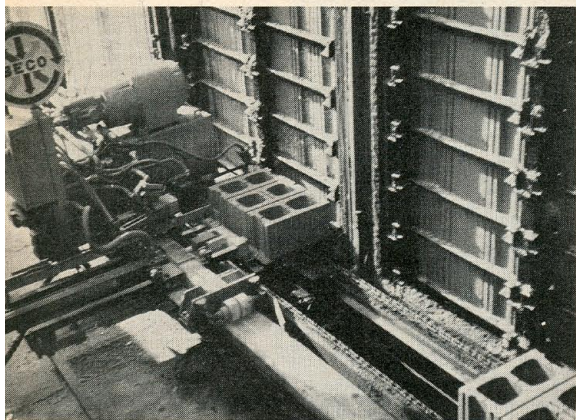
Mrs. Jean Gillespie, Ed's wife, is company vice president. Other officers include his mother, Mrs. Juliet Powers, treasurer; Mrs. Susie Comegys, secretary, and Pratt Vansant as general manager, with Al Cunningham handling ready-mix and precasting operations.

Dispatching of all equipment—ready-mix, block trucks, sand and gravel, and precast deliveries—is handled by Mrs. Margaret Cooper, a 15-year company employee who also makes out job tickets, answers telephone inquiries, soothes customers and crew. Her knowledge of the vagaries of country lanes and creek bed crossings is legendary and is much needed to direct even born and bred local drivers over unmarked and unpaved lanes to reach some isolated farm, where feed lot paving or barn building is in progress.

All of the concrete is truck mixed, dry batched at the plant (through an Erie-Strayer bin with a capacity of about 60 yards of aggregate and a 1,000-bbl cement silo batching about 3½ yd. at a time) because of the usually long hauls to reach a delivery point. Aggregates and cement are brought in by truck. Truck maintenance, short of major overhaul, is handled at the plant. Since drivers all live within minutes of the yard, all trucks come in each night.

Blockmaking is handled by a Columbia Model 16 three-block machine delivering to the automatic conveyors from a "ferris wheel," as the conveyor automatically lifts or lowers to charge the four steam kilns—shoving cured block out one end while charging green





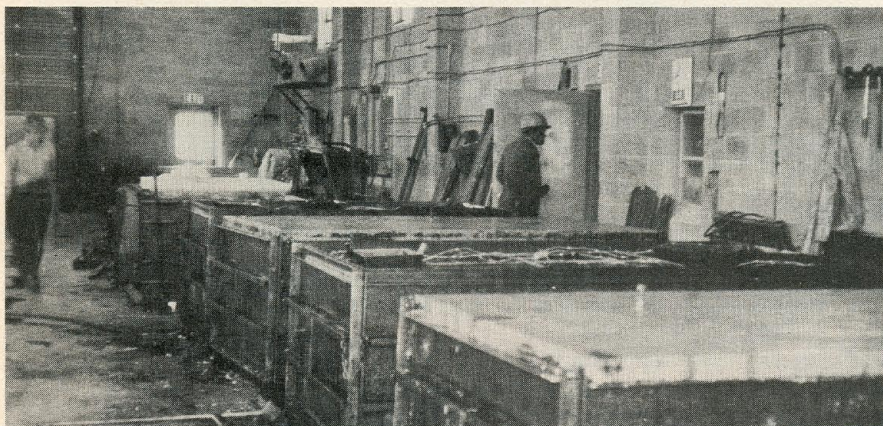
Left: Block plant has BECO ABC system for moving units in and out of kilns.
Right: Cured block head for cubing station under watchful eye of worker.



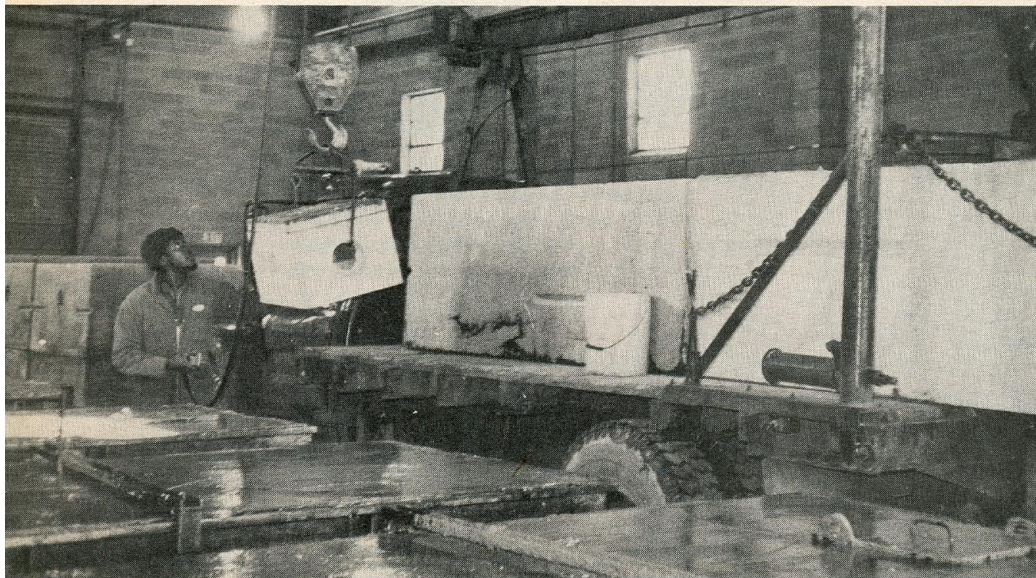
block at the other. Cured block moves by conveyor to a cuber, thence to pick-up by forklift either for yard storage or loading onto company-owned flatbed trucks (International and Mack).

The precast plant, housed in a single building, makes use of Norwalk molds for its septic tanks, burial vaults, splash

blocks, and other items. Del Zotto forms are used for step production. In addition to the flatbed trucks used for delivery of the precast items, the company also operates three 10-wheel and a trailer dump truck. Most of the employees have long tenure—two more than 30 years, several with 20



Above: Precasting plant produces septic tanks, burial vaults, and steps.
Below: Precast units are loaded directly on trucks inside drive-through building.



years of service. "There's almost no turnover," comments Gillespie.

The operation was founded at nearby Sudlersville, Md., by Grandfather George Edward Gillespie. A successful dairy farmer, he bought a hand-fed block machine in 1922 to provide materials for a new barn. A neighbor borrowed the machine, couldn't quite get the hang of it, so Gillespie made block for him, too. Shortly thereafter, he abandoned farming entirely for the block business.

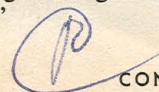
In 1945, on the return of the present owner's father, the late Victor P. Gillespie, the company branched out into sand and gravel operations. It went into precast work in 1950 and into ready-mix in 1959. With these additional items of business, the Sudlersville location was getting too crowded. So the block operation moved to Chestertown in 1963, taking over a yard previously occupied by another company. The entire operation moved to Chestertown in 1970.

Third-generation Ed Gillespie moved into the business naturally. He's been working around the place since he was in sixth grade and began full-time participation in 1952. He's got some philosophical and practical points about operating an essentially small, though somewhat diversified business, attuned to the slow and regular rhythm of the economy in which it operates.

Among his points: because you are in business, things do not have to be hurried, slipshod, or unfriendly. Also, just because a business is small, there is no excuse not to keep up with the latest and the best in the field—the best machines, the best applications, the best service to customers, the best workers, and the best training.

To this end, despite a deceptively easy pace, he is in touch through reading and association work and contacts—and through travel (he inspects plants while he's on vacation)—with developments, new ideas, new machinery, labor relations techniques. More, he feels a part of his community, both as a businessman and a lifelong citizen, and makes a point of working actively with civic groups, the town and county governments, as well as social organizations.

"We depend on the local economy and the good will of our neighbors," he says, "because the company and I have to be good neighbors and good citizens, too." □



CONCRETE PRODUCTS