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EQUIPMENT > TANK REPAIR

Polar Service Centers prepared for another solid year of growth and expansion

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DURING the past year, Polar Service Centers revved up an already aggressive campaign to expand and upgrade its network of tank truck and trailer parts and repair facilities. And there is more to come in 2020.

With last year's expansion surge, PSC now operates 28 cargo tank service and repair facilities across its system. This includes two new-build facilities, one acquisition, and two shop expansions. The company also increased the range of tank component and equipment vendors it represents.

“We’re making a significant investment in growing our footprint, our parts and service offerings and our pre-owned trailer sales and leasing offering,” says Jerry Cignarella, president of Polar Service Centers. “Building our network means our customers will never have to look far to find the service and parts they need. This investment underscores our commitment to lead the industry.

“We now have operations in place serving customers across the United States from coast to coast. With 28 facilities, we’re the largest provider of cargo tank repair services in the industry.

“New facilities added in 2019 included shops in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Odessa, Texas. We also acquired C&R Fleet Services in Griffin, Georgia, an operation that offers repair and maintenance of all classes of trucks, trailers, and cargo tanks.

“In Cherry Hill, New Jersey, we expanded the existing building that housed the PSC operation, adding four new service bays. Six service bays were added at our Augusta, Georgia, location, as well as two tank wash bays.

“In May this year, we will open a new 48,000-sq-ft shop in El Paso, Texas, that includes a 13-bay shop which will complement the Heil Trailer and Polar Tank manufacturing plant across the border in Juarez MX. We’re also building a new 10-bay service shop and two-bay tank wash in Casper, Wyoming, that is scheduled for completion in mid-2020.

“Going forward, we’re looking for more new-build opportunities, acquisitions of established operations and our existing facilities will be expanded as needed. Tank cleaning is a critical first step in tank repair. We’ll be adding more commercial wash bays at our locations in 2020 and beyond.”

Cignarella adds that “parts sales and our commitment to bulk unloading products remain an integral part of the PSC operation, and the company has worked hard to strengthen its vendor network and product offering. Over the past year, PSC reaffirmed a distribution agreement with Tuthill Blowers that allows PSC to market Tuthill transport blowers in all or parts of 24 states; formalized a partnership with a

global brand leader for piston and vane liquid tank unloading compressor products; introduced our TankGuard brand line of hydraulic coolers and accessories and the Polar Pac, a fully integrated plug and play pump and compressor module designed exclusively for the bulk transportation market.”

Odessa shop

One of the most impressive additions to the PSC network in 2019 was the new 28,000-sq-ft facility built in Odessa, in the heart of the Permian Basin oilfield. This is first time PSC has shared a location with sister company SERVA Group, which designs, manufactures and markets a diverse line of specialized oilfield products used in cementing, stimulation, coil tubing applications, ancillary pumps, well-servicing pumps, fluid ends, downhole tools, software, and controls. Both companies are part of EnTrans International, which includes Polar Tank Trailer, Heil Trailer, Kalyn Siebert, and Jarco.

The new state-of-the-art facility, situated on 12 acres, features 10 fully equipped service bays, with eight dedicated to PSC and two oversized bays for SERVA that can accommodate the largest coiled tubing units. The facility features two 5-ton overhead cranes, and two 10-ton SERVA cranes, each with a 26-foot hook height.

“We had been looking at the Midland-Odessa area since around 2015, but it took a while to find the right property,” says Bryan Watson, vice president and regional manager of the Polar Service Centers South Central region. “This is one of the largest tank truck markets in country in comparison to the size of the population. Thousands of tank trucks are operating in this region.

“This shop works on a lot of DOT407 crude trailers and DOT406 petroleum trailers used to haul diesel to the well sites. We also deal with other oilfield support equipment, including water trailers and dry bulkers used to transport sand, cement, and such. We’re working with customers across a region that stretches from West Texas to eastern New Mexico.

“Often oilfield service companies bring their tractor-trailer combinations in batches for annual tests and inspections. The Odessa facility is a registered state inspection provider for trucks.”

Tank Pro

Like other PSC locations, the Odessa facility uses technology to manage vehicle testing and inspection operations. PSC developed its own application (Tank Pro) for recording and tracking inspection and testing activities. The company also uses the Karmak Fusion Software system to manage parts inventories system-wide.

“We developed Tank Pro specifically to track HM-183 cargo tank testing and inspection activities,” Cignarella says. “It gives a uniform way to track tests and inspections, and customers can access the app for details regarding their tanks.”

“The Karmak software enables customers to see our parts inventory across the PSC network, and buy parts online. We carry a significant parts inventory at every location. Our goal is to have what the customer needs when they need it at every location.”

The Odessa location has an R-stamp for code tank repairs. The shop handles a wide range of trailer maintenance, including wreck repairs. Technicians also perform some tank modification.

“We do a lot of suspension and brake work in Odessa,” says Burl Mayberry, Odessa branch manager for PSC. “The roads in the oilfield are often harsh on suspensions.”

Shop team

The Odessa facility currently has six maintenance technicians on staff and the management team is still looking for more. All of them are code welders.

“We would like to have eight trailer technicians at the Odessa location,” Watson says. “This is a tough market for hiring tractor and trailer technicians, but we are confident the Odessa shop will be fully staffed during 2020. We’re finding a good mix of

workers who want reasonable work hours and a career path. We look for workers with technical skills that go well beyond welding alone.”

Watson adds that PSC overall has a good retention rate for tank trailer technicians. “The key to retaining maintenance technicians is our technical certification program,” he says. “The program has five tiers of technical skill, and it takes a technician 2.5 to four years to advance through the tiers.”

That’s not to say all new hires start at the lowest tier. Managers evaluate a job applicant’s technical skill level at the time of hiring, and an individual may be placed in a higher tier based on prior training and job experience.

Wash rack

While tank maintenance is the primary focus, the Odessa facility just opened a new two-bay tank wash rack in late January. In addition to serving the tank cleaning needs of the maintenance operation, the wash rack offers commercial cleaning for general chemicals, oilfield chemicals, crude oil, and dry bulk products.

The vat-style cleaning system and wastewater treatment system were supplied by A-1 Chemical. A boiler provides steam and hot water for the cleaning operation. A flare from Aereon helps eliminate vapors generated through cleaning and tank trailer degassing activities.

“We’ll continue adding more facilities like the one in Odessa,” Cignarella said. “We’re going to expand where it makes sense. We’ll meet our customers’ needs with repair and maintenance services that include more truck work and more tank cleaning. We have a strong backlog of work at our service shops, and we are optimistic about the economic outlook over the next year or so.”

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