

Plants Emphasize Quality in Earning Diamond Achievement Commendations

By Mary Lou Jay

Each year more than 600 asphalt plants fulfill the rigorous requirements of NAPA's Diamond Achievement Commendation. The employees that participate find that the process improves the facility, their approach to quality, and their relationship with the surrounding community. LTM Inc.—Roseburg Division., C.W. Matthews Contracting Company, and Superior Paving are three of the companies whose plants completed the process for this commendation.

The managers at LTM Inc. in Roseburg, Ore., decided a few years ago that they were going to do whatever it took for their plant to earn NAPA's Diamond Achievement Commendation for Excellence in Hot Mix Asphalt Plant/Site Operations. "We're part of the Knife River Corporation, and there are other companies within the corporation that have received the Diamond Commendation," said Chris Doan, the company's operations manager. "It's something to be proud of, and we thought

that it was our turn to stick out our chests."

When they opened the application, the process looked daunting. "We just didn't know how long it was going to take," Doan admits. "But as we got into the application it became clear to us that we were closer to obtaining the commendation than we had thought."

Their persistence paid off, and last year the Oregon plant earned the Diamond Achievement Commendation for the first time. Doan said everyone there is very



C.W. Matthews Plant 56



LTM Roseburg Plant

pleased. "It said a lot about being a good neighbor and an efficient producer," he said.

More community outreach

LTM Inc. – Roseburg joins the select group of plants throughout the U.S. that earned NAPA's Diamond Achievement Commendation in 2007. Applicants go through a self-assessment that covers six areas: appearance, operations, environmental practices, safety, permitting and regulatory practices, and community relations. Plants must also be reviewed by a third party – a local public official, neighbor, or community association official.

The process provides a good opportunity for a plant to take stock of its strengths and weaknesses, said Doan. "Our plant was in good shape, but we needed to step up our community relations. We have always been neighbor friendly, but we hadn't done as much as we could to communicate with them and let them know that we would be responsive to their concerns."

The plant personnel had been doing many things right – a bi-weekly sweep of the streets in the

bordering trailer park, for example – but applying for the Diamond Achievement Commendation spurred them to take additional action. For example, they put a sign at their entrance with contact information that neighbors can use if they have a concern.

"As a result of the Diamond, we developed a regular baghouse maintenance plan."

"We also did some community awareness events including providing tours of our facility," Doan continued. "We had our community leaders, including a Congressman, visit our facility, and we explained to them what we do."

The close examination of the plant's systems brought the company's attention to other areas where improvement was needed, too. "We developed a baghouse maintenance plan that we hadn't had prior to looking at the application.

We found some areas in the baghouse that we needed to seal up, and now we'll add that to our regular maintenance schedule," he said.

The plant personnel are already planning other improvements to enhance their operations in the future. "Just because we got the commendation once doesn't mean that we can stop; it's an ongoing thing, and we will want to maintain it," Doan said. "We will do things in the future to keep the plant clean and environmentally friendly." That will include landscaping and additional paving around the plant.

In the end, even going through the application process was a rewarding experience, said Doan. "Without it, we would not have investigated the baghouse as we did, and this has heightened our awareness of some of the other problems that are out there. It has piqued our interest in finding other ways that we can conserve energy and make our plant more efficient."

Trying for company-wide certification

The C.W. Matthews Contracting Co., headquartered in Marietta, Ga., also found that going through the Diamond application process refocused its attention on plant operation.

"Many of the Matthews plants were eligible, but we just hadn't submitted them in the past," said Brian Lawrence, vice president of environmental affairs. "But when we bought APAC Southeast in Georgia last year, we learned that some of the plants already had the Diamond certification. So we decided to try to get it for all of our plants." He has submitted 28 plants for the Diamond Achievement Commendation this year.

To prepare the plants, C. W. Matthews Contracting took steps like paving stockpile areas. "It keeps the dust down and helps with inventory and moisture control too," said Lawrence. "There's also been an



Superior Paving Corp.'s Leesburg Plant

emphasis in the plants on complying with programs like lockout/tagout and monitoring for site atmospheres.

"We've always kept a high priority on housekeeping," he said. Many employees take such great pride in their plants that they tackle landscaping and beautification projects themselves.

Community relations is another important emphasis for the company. The plant hosts tours and sponsors youth sports teams. "We like to think of ourselves as good neighbors in the communities that we're working in," Lawrence continued.

"One thing that I emphasize to people is that we live and work around these plants. We don't want to do things that are detrimental to the environment since we have our own health to consider. We take our community and our environmental responsibilities seriously.

"We find that asphalt plants often get a bad rap," said Lawrence. The Diamond Achievement

Commendation helps overcome that misperception. "We felt it was important to show the public that our plants meet an industry standard."

Employee pride works for company good name

For employees at Superior Paving Corp. in Virginia, earning the Diamond Achievement Commendation is a matter of pride – and perhaps involved a little friendly rivalry among the company's 10 plants. "All of the guys work hard and take pride in obtaining the commendation," said Sean Knick, the company's safety officer. Plant employees are aware when the company has applied for the commendation. "They want to know if we've obtained it or not, and when I come in with the plaque to put on the wall, they want to see it," he said.

Superior Paving earned its first Diamond Achievement Commendations in 1999. "We

strive to be the best in quality and production," said Knick. The company makes yearly improvements to its plants – repainting as needed and adding new landscaping. It also maintains a schedule of weekly and monthly maintenance to keep plants in good shape.

"I feel that our image in the communities we operate in is very high," he said. "We're looked upon as a great organization." The Diamond Achievement Commendation helps enhance that reputation. "I think of it like a resume. The more you achieve in awards like the Diamond Achievement, the more that people look and say, 'This is a great company.'

"It's important for our employees and the company itself to obtain the Diamond Achievement Commendation," he added. "It makes the company stand out." **EMAT**

Mary Lou Jay is a freelance writer from Timonium, Md.