

SPOTLIGHT ON OUR 110-YEAR HISTORY

LOOKING BACK

To celebrate 110 years of MBAKS history, we're spotlighting the long-serving members who have helped make the association what it is today.



110 YEARS
OF BUILDING
COMMUNITIES

1909–2019

BUILDING
A LEGACY
BRICK
BY BRICK

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Builders Brick Company founder Daniel Houlahan circa 1900

Like the bricks they've sold for nearly 120 years, Mutual Materials is made to last.

For 119 years, Mutual Materials has manufactured and sold masonry materials across the Puget Sound region. Success came early to the company. After the Great Seattle Fire in 1889, the city's new code required stone and brick construction in all new commercial buildings, swinging open the doors for an ambitious supplier like Builders Brick Company.

Founded with humble beginnings by a bricklayer named Daniel Houlahan in 1900, Builders Brick Company went to work producing many of the bricks that rebuilt Seattle. You'll see their products across the city in both modern and historic locations, like the Fairmont Hotel, constructed in 1924. The company, now in their fifth generation of family ownership, was rechristened Mutual Materials in the 1960s to reflect their expansion into other masonry materials to meet the needs of the growing construction market.



Manufacturing facilities in 1944

“We mine our own clay, run our own manufacturing facilities, run a trucking fleet to move products, and we have our own stores to sell from.”

— Kendall Anderegg, Mutual Materials President



UW Chemistry Building

Their products continue to grace monumental works of local architecture, including CenturyLink Field, T-Mobile Park, and a large swath of the UW campus, to name just a few. The company is also currently supplying materials for the massive SeaTac Airport North Satellite modernization project. Their materials are just as ubiquitous in residential neighborhoods, like Issaquah Highlands, a 2,200-acre mixed-use development that includes a vast array of hardscaping, walls, retaining walls, and cornerstones.

As Mutual Materials President Kendall Anderegg explained to me in a recent conversation, “In pretty much all the local neighborhood schools you’ll see our masonry products.

When you walk to a neighbor’s backyard, their retaining wall may very well include our products. We’re ubiquitous throughout the region.”

FROM MINE TO STORE

That region is large. Mutual Materials now operates in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, and Western Canada and, while they do business with a variety of suppliers, the company is largely vertically integrated.

As Anderegg told me, “We work with other suppliers, especially with products we don’t make, like concrete. But with everything else we are involved in every stage of the process. We mine our own clay, run our own manufacturing facilities, run a trucking fleet

to move products, and we have our own stores to sell from.” With more than 400 employees and several manufacturing facilities and retail stores across four states, Mutual Materials is the largest supplier of masonry and hardscaping products in the Pacific Northwest.

Despite the geographic scope of Mutual Materials’ operations, they still consider the Puget Sound region their home. Anderegg notes that “One of the benefits of being in the Puget Sound is the thriving local economy. There’s a lot of building going on and an incredibly strong workforce. People are building and buying houses. We’re lucky to live and work in the place we do.”

BREAKING A PATH TO THE FUTURE

Mutual Materials has always looked to expand both their range of products and the market for them. “We started as just a brick company,” said Anderegg, “but we got into concrete in the 80s and then into hardscaping and outdoor living space in the 90s. And looking ahead, we’ve got a few new features breaking a path to the future.”

One of these new features is an e-commerce site the company launched so homeowners, builders, and remodelers can browse and buy products online. While this may seem commonplace these days, it’s still unique for the building materials industry, which has been slow to adapt to direct online marketing. Anderegg said the website “really supports what we see happening across the board with Amazon and other online retailers.”

Soon, that site will include an online estimator where customers can input project dimensions; the estimator will then calculate how much material is needed so customers can confidently buy materials online. With the addition of a visualizer, customers will be able to load stock images or their own photos to see what stone might look like next to their mantelpiece or what pavers bring to their backyard. While the company has an industrial background, they’re



The Olympic Hotel, now the Fairmont in Seattle



The Olympic Hotel under construction

“There are buildings of ours built 100 years ago. Our product is durable. You don’t have to repaint or refinish it.”

increasingly marketing directly to consumers.

As part of that strategy, Mutual Materials also recently opened their first showroom store in Portland. Traditionally the company has stocked branch locations and structured sales around contractors who pick up the materials on a will-call basis. But “as land has become scarcer,” Anderegg explained, “we’re unable to stock materials in urban locations. So we created a design center where people can select what they

want and have it delivered. We’ve worked hard to make the store accessible to not just builders, but homeowners, architects, and designers as well.”

A DURABLE BUSINESS

Companies like Mutual Materials survive, thrive, and grow for a reason: Anderegg’s business strategy looks at the long-term big picture. “One of the benefits of being privately owned is that we don’t have to present quarterly earnings reports to stakeholders.

This means we can focus all our energy on long-term sustainability. We can invest to support the company for the next, five, 10, 20, 100 years.”

Another long-term advantage the company has is that the product they manufacture and sell stands the test of time, even more so than other construction materials like wood. “There are not many materials more lasting than brick. There are buildings of ours built 100 years ago. Our product is durable. You don’t have to repaint or refinish it. It lasts.” ▲

Since 1952, Mutual Materials has been an MBAKS member. Because the MBAKS office is so close to Mutual Materials’ Bellevue headquarters, the company takes full advantage of membership benefits like networking and marketing opportunities, as well as utilizing space to conduct business. Of MBAKS, Anderegg said, “We’re over there all the time. ... Being able to use the facilities for classroom and conference space has been incredibly beneficial to us. From a PR perspective, being able to establish partnerships with other members is also a huge benefit.”