

GROUNDBREAKERS:

Stories of Rural Innovation



HOSTED BY ETHAN CANTRELL

EPISODE

1



Groundbreakers Episode 1: Transcript

Intro 0:00

Welcome to Groundbreakers: Stories of Rural Innovation. The podcast that takes you into the heart of agriculture, exploring the cutting edge technologies and innovation practices shaping the cattle industry today, hosted by Ethan Cantrell, dealer relations manager at M J. D livestock equipment. Each episode brings you inspiring stories from the high plains and beyond. Whether you're a cattleman, rancher, dairyman, or simply passionate about rural life, Groundbreakers is here to bring you stories that are transforming agriculture. Get ready to be inspired by today's pioneers in the

Ethan Cantrell 0:38

Hey guys, I just want to take a minute to welcome everybody to groundbreakers. I'm your host, Ethan Cantrell, dealer relations manager here at NJ livestock equipment. And joining me today is going to be someone who's deeply involved in bringing our big feedlot projects to life. Justin Hendrickson, our Senior operations manager at MJ, Justin, welcome to the show.

Justin Hendrickson 0:58

Thank you, Ethan, I'm happy to be involved.

Ethan Cantrell 1:01

Yeah, I'm glad we can make this happen. Today, I'm pretty excited to see where this is gonna go and reach some more fan base that we have and some customers and get some information out there for him. Absolutely. So I was just going to kind of let everybody know my role. So I'm like said dealer relations manager here on the livestock equipment side of MJE, I basically help all of our dealers with any questions or information they need on our products, make sure they have what they need, make sure that the end user has what they need, whenever they get the product and help resolve any issues or problems that they might have along the way. Justin, can you kind of give us a little bit of summary of what your job entails and what all what all you cover up there on the MJE side?

Justin Hendrickson 1:41

You bet. So I'm a senior Operations Manager. And I also manage basically project manage all of the feed yard sector of our business. On a daily basis for me can be anywhere from doing AutoCAD design, meeting with customers, or going out and meeting with my supervisors, making sure they're staying on task and getting the job done in an orderly fashion. So I guess I could say I wear a lot of hats around here, I manage several different sectors of the business, our, our pickup fleet, I tried to help Aaron, our owner and CEO as much as I can to take some off his plate. But I'd say the most of what I do is is all the feedyard designs, and then also the project management of that portion of our company.

Ethan Cantrell 2:33

Yeah, for sure. Definitely sounds like you stay busy. And they, they keep you going all the time up there. I know that anytime I've been by the office, you're always always busy working on stuff. So once again, I appreciate your time today. The purpose of this podcast that we're doing is just to, we're not trying to sell anything, we're not trying to promote that much stuff. We're just trying to talk to people that work in the industry that we have a passion for, and then have stories to tell that, that relate to people we deal with and in our day to day lives. So that's kind of kind of what we're trying to accomplish here. And, you know, hope that somebody gets something out of it maybe learns a thing or two? Yeah, absolutely. So the kind of the importance of of podcast is, is to learn stuff and, and get information out there and reach another crowd that you don't always reach in other areas. So that's one thing that we're excited about doing this is there's like I said, bringing stories forward that from people from the industry that other people in the industry may not know what they do or know that their how their job entails and how their job affects the ranch and industry and things of that nature that we deal with on a day to day basis. Can you give us a little bit of history of MJ and where where they've come from and where we are today and kind of what we do as a as a company on the MJ side of it?

Justin Hendrickson 3:50

Yeah, absolutely. So I started back in 2016, or excuse me, 2008. And we had approximately 70 employees. And in 2016, we were up to about 100 employees, and today we're at 242 employees. So the growth of this company that I've seen over the last 16 years is is groundbreaking. It really is the what Max set up with this company and how he built it from the ground up. And where Heather and Aaron have taken it sense is it's been fun. It's been a fun ride. It's been fun to be a part of our company has has grown outside of just the ag sector. We do the turnkey feedyard and dairy design and construction. We've really got heavily involved in more of the highway construction, wastewater facilities landfills, which would be more of our public sector. And we do a lot with hog facilities, too. So I'd say we are as diversified as any company around and we're able to lean on the private sector when the public sector slows and vice versa. So, I would say that the company portfolio was pretty fast and pretty impressive to see where it's come in to be a part of this growth over the last 16 years, as is second to none. For

Ethan Cantrell 5:16

For sure. No, I agree. Totally. It's, it's definitely a growing business. It's booming every day, I'm thankful to be a part of such a company in such a business, and that is really revolutionising everything that that I have a passion for, and the industry that I grew up having a passion for. You mentioned Max earlier, can you kind of give us a step back and tell us how the company originally got started? And in what MJE stands for?

Justin Hendrickson 5:41

Yes. So Max tells the stories of back in the '70s, he, he worked at the local Co Op and had the opportunity to buy a tractor and a pan from a local guy. And he basically started out building terraces and tailwater pits for flood irrigation. He likes to tell the story about the first time he got the opportunity to do a feed yard project. He was sitting in a tractor and kept looking out the window and seeing the guys doing all the concrete and the fence and he's like, Man, those are the guys that got to be making all the money. So of course, naturally, what did Max do, he advanced his company started doing more of the turnkey stuff and not just the dirt work. So Max was was at the forefront of learning how to do feed yard construction properly. He learned what proper drainage is all about, and was able to incorporate that into the industry, which has been a turning point for how cattle are fed and raised,

especially in this in the beef belt area. And a lot of it I give credit to Max for his his vision and his ability to take people's ideas and grow with it. So yes, it was It started out as Max Jantz Excavating. And so Max is retired and, and Heather and Aaron have taken over the business and in wanting to want to the Max Jantz Excavating part of it is still I mean, still everybody called us that. But they wanted it to be just MJE so that it kind of took the a lot of people, even locals here in town, they see excavating, and they think that's all we do. In fact, Aaron and I used to always say there's people in town that probably think we drive a scraper every day, and we don't do what we do. So they wanted to kind of take the excavating piece out of it so that when people saw MJE they thought more more construction and more of a widespread business than just an excavating business. So I'd say you know, Max, we had our big 50th anniversary here a few months ago. And just seeing the people that still love Max respect, Max. And know what he started is pretty special on I talked about it all the time, Max built this business off of reputations he made buddies out of these guys, these weren't. These weren't clients to him, they were friends to him. And I take a lot of pride in that today, to continue the growth of the feed yard part of it that I have, I take most care of because I know all these guys have built those same relationships. And it's very important to me to continue to build on those relationships because I've watched Max do it. And man, if it's not broke, don't fix it.

Ethan Cantrell 8:27

I know, for sure. And that's, that's a great story I love whenever we get to talk about back in the old days and how it started and where it's come from there. I'm sure Max is super proud of everything that's happened and where Aaron and Heather have taken it. It's definitely a family business where Max handed it down to his son and daughter and I feel like as an employee, that it's still a family business and and we're not employees, we're family members to the company. And that's a great feeling as an employer, so or as an employee. So I really appreciate that and I'm sure you feel the same way. Yeah, absolutely. So a lot of people will see the you know, they know the the Max Jantz Excavation side of it, the construction side, and then we've got our livestock equipment side as well. And a lot of that goes hand in hand. We we overlap a lot on we help build some things for y'all on the feedlot side and y'all help give us some feedback and design ideas on the livestock equipment side. Can you kind of touch a little bit on that on where we kind of overlap as our two companies and how we intermingle and work together to help improve the ranch in industry?

Justin Hendrickson 9:31

Yes. So I remember years ago, Aaron and I would always be approached by a lot of our customers about wanting us to start more of a livestock equipment division and we just was always like, you know, we've got enough irons in the fire do we really want to take on something more like this? And so when Aaron and Heather and Max was still involved at that time decided to take on that livestock equipment division. It was a game changer for our business. For MJE, we'd always built our own gates here at the at the home office location we had outgrown it years ago. And so building that facility that we have now the MJE livestock equipment division has really opened the door on being more efficient with our gate production that we use in the feed yards and dairies. We've also been able to bring on more equipment, I utilize a lot of our alleyways, and the MJE alleyways inside the processing and hospital facilities in these feed yards. We've also got relationships with other companies. We're dealers for livestock waters, the squeeze chutes that they use in these facilities for doctoring the cattle, so it opened up the door to give our construction division more of a crutch, I guess you could say when it comes to needing those services, because we have it right here and in our own backyard. The people that we were able to bring on, that help make that company, - it is a sharp group. And they have a lot of great ideas, a lot of great designs, that I'm able to help bring in and incorporating these facilities that

we're building. So I'd say that marriage has been great since the beginning. And I it's only going to get stronger as we move on.

Ethan Cantrell 11:19

For sure. And I know as as on my side of it going out and talking to dealers and doing trade shows and talking to end users. It's definitely something that that I take a lot of pride in that, that our products on the LE side have been have been feedlot designed, feedlot tested, feedlot approved. Everything we sell has been, you know, designed to be used in a commercial setting, but can also be obtained by your average farmer or rancher that has a smaller herd side doesn't necessarily do it for a living, but they need something that's safe and efficient for their cattle herds. So whenever we're building our dealer base, that's a big deal that we're working on is building our dealer network. And we've got dealers from the East Coast to the West Coast and the Canadian border down to deep into Texas. So we're definitely building that we're trying to bring it closer to everybody make it more available. And that's kind of kind of what I'm excited to see it grow and get our products out there and get more people's hands on it. And once they see it, it's the product speaks for itself. So we really appreciate y'all's input that y'all had on the construction side and all that advice and in testing and things that we've got y'all to do for us and help us build the product that we have today. So if you would could you kind of explain a little bit of why people should choose MJE whenever they're going to look at a looking into building a commercial feedlot or dairy situation, what sets us apart from the next construction company down the road.

Justin Hendrickson 12:48

So, I would say what gives us an advantage over any competitors out there is we are a full turnkey construction company. Meaning if an owner calls me up today, I meet with them figure out what they want to do their vision, we go survey the land, and we design it all. And then we build everything 100%. We we try to avoid any any subcontractors underneath us. One subcontractor I can think of is electrical, we don't have an electrical division, but everything else we try to do in-house so that we don't have to rely on somebody else's schedule. It's our own schedule. So I'd say the thing that sets us apart is there's no one else out there that can can design it, go do the excavation. And we just did a large project here. I finished up about a year ago, where we did a 30,000 head expansion. We also did the shipping and receiving facility. We did the processing facility, we put in a hospital facility, a horse barn, a 300,000 water storage tank and pump, building silage pads and modifications. And then a lot of of what the development of research going forward is water consumption. So we also did a water reclamation system up there. So I'd say that to answer your question, Ethan, there's no one else out there that can compete with us when it comes to being able to do everything. And the owner has, we're a one-stop-shop to meaning that I'm the one that the owner calls and we just we take care of it all. And and they don't they don't have to deal with four or five different contractors and trying to bring everybody's schedules together.

Ethan Cantrell 14:34

For sure. No, and that's a that's a big thing to customers where it's where they can trust you and put it all on to you and let you handle it. I'm sure that's a lot of lot of stress and responsibility on you but I know you handle it well and and you're literally there from the time that the land is just bare land till the time you hand over the keys to the office and they start running cattle through there is how I'm understanding it. Yes, sir. That's correct. Yeah. And so you know, On our LE side, we've got some pretty revolutionary equipment coming out some cool stuff that we're going to start doing as well to help farmers and ranchers our Conquistador is a big product that we sell. It's our wheel corral, a portable

wheel corral. It's, it's got a lot of advantages that a bunch of other competitors out there don't have. And I think that uh, that is something that's going to revolutionize the ranching industry in the future. It's something that that as more as time goes on, and the ranching industry is ever changing and evolving, I think this is something that is going to be stepping out and stepping in front of the spotlight, and every rancher is going to have one before long. And if you ever do have one, you'll, you'll for sure understand the advantages of it and how they can help you as a rancher in the industry. And you can even get on our website and you look at our ROI return on investment calculator, and it'll show you you're out there on how these this equipment this one piece of equipment can save you money and produce more money out of your herd that you already have without increasing your herd. Or buying more land or anything that any of those major drastic changes. Just one piece of equipment can change it and all of our equipment is designed that way to where it's for maximum efficiency, animal safety and handler safety. Those are, those are major, major aspects to us and our equipment. And we take a lot of pride in them as well, just like y'all do on the feedlot side. Whenever y'all are designing stuff, everything's about human safety, animal safety and animal health. So we'd like to like to pull those morals over and put them into our equipment whenever we're building them as well.

Justin Hendrickson 16:36

Yes, I agree. And I'm glad you brought that up Ethan because cattle handling. And safety is very big for us. So it's all about the husband tree and making sure you've got cattle comfort. I mean, that's that's what these cattle are going to gain. That's how these guys are going to make money. And they lean on us a lot to make sure we're keeping the cattle safe. The people working the cattle are safe. So yeah, it's very big on both the construction side and the livestock equipment side.

Ethan Cantrell 17:05

Yes, sir. I couldn't agree more. I know I see it on our side of it is, you know, a lot of people whenever they're working cattle and whatnot, and they have their, it's becoming a family event, and they want their kids to be involved and they want their wife and kids to be out there. And, and it's it's almost a bonding time. And in the last thing you want is it for to be an unsafe environment whenever you have your family out there. So that's a big deal to us is is animal safety and, and more importantly than that human safety as well. So we take a lot of pride in that for sure of that. That's our one of our big aspects is, is safety and health. And also with that portable weld corral, you're able to work your cattle on site without having to move them down the road, you got less stress on your cattle, which being in the feedlot industry, you understand how stress on cattle isn't a good thing, you always want them to be in a low stress situation. So that's, that's another big deal is gets back to that animal health point of low stress equals more profitability in the cattle industry for sure. So is there anything that uh, that you can tell us about? Anything coming up on the MJE side that is exciting or changing or that we might be able to look forward to the future?

Justin Hendrickson 18:20

You know, we're we're trying to always advance ourselves. I know one, one question I always ask when a project is over is what can we done different? What could we have done better? So getting feedback from the guys that are actually using it? And I'm not talking about just the owners, I'll go ask the guy that has the syringe in his hand, and he's the one doctor in the cattle, what can I do to make your job easier. And so I'm always trying to take everybody's ideas and improve on it each each time we do something. So, one thing that we've really done to advance the industry is we've with our monolithic bunk, we've added a four foot truck apron that's poured monolithic with the bunk. And what that is, is a

four-foot wide, virtually a sidewalk that's next to the bunk that the front drive tire and the back doors of the feed truck are on one of the worst maintenance areas and a lot of feed yards has been that area right up against the bunk. And so we've we've cured that with with this new innovation that we've brought into the industry here in the past couple of years. I mentioned it a little bit earlier. Our water reclamation is becoming bigger. I mean, let's be honest waters turning into be a more valuable commodity than oil , or will someday, and we've all got to work together to be able to figure out what do we got to do to conserve our water. So most of the feed yards we build have constant overflow water tanks. So we are collecting that water running it through a purification system where it goes through sand media filters, and then through a UV light that kills all the bacteria. Yeah, and it's able to be fed right back to the cattle. That's been a game changer for a lot of guys, especially out here in western Kansas where we're water's getting harder and harder to find. So that is that is working that's been in the industry now for for several years, we're just improving on it every time. Probably our newest biggest task that we're trying to figure out is how to purify lagoon water, or waste runoff water. So we've been working with a couple of different companies to figure out how to reuse this water out of the lagoons and help with the water shortages. And I know we're gonna figure it out. And when we do, that's, that's really going to be big for the industry, because every single farm feed yard dairy out there has lagoons, and if we can figure out how to clean that water and and make it edible for the animals and safe for the animals, then we'll have some some great advancements in the industry. So that's exciting to me that if we can pull that off, I'm excited to get in front of my customers and tell them guys, we were able to do what everybody was hoping to can be done. And so we're working together to try to make that happen. We also got some more projects coming up that are going to be more student focused, to where we can build some facilities where where students can, can learn from the day they get to campus, learn how to feed cattle properly understand the new advancements and female construction. So that's exciting. I've been spending a lot of my time working through that process. There's a lot of hurdles to jump, but it's exciting to know that we're going to be able to do something that'll be student focused and, and be an advancement for for kids that are coming through the system. And we're going to be the ones running these facilities down the road.

Ethan Cantrell 21:51

For sure sure! Now that that's very exciting. Because like we've been, we've been talking about throughout this podcast today, the ranching industry is ever changing and ever growing. And we need some people coming up in the industry that that will understand it and know how to how to be successful and how to make things more profitable. And so that's awesome that we're getting the younger generation involved and keeping people coming up and keeping them keeping their knowledge of up to date and how things are advancing and changing throughout the industry. So that's awesome that you get to work with them and improve that. And I you also work on other facilities that are more research based. I'm assuming that it's not just all commercial feedlots. There's some research that goes on throughout that kind of stuff as well.

Justin Hendrickson 22:40

Yes, sir. We've done several different research facilities. One of them here is close by to Montezuma, very proud of that facility and what it's been able to bring to the industry, it's it's also a lot of it when it started was student-based. The gentleman that approached us about it has a lot of passion for educating the youth of tomorrow and, and letting people know that that there is opportunities out here in western Kansas, and college isn't for everybody and those that want to stay home, we've got a lot of good jobs out here. And there's a lot of great opportunities and a lot of these areas that we work. And so a lot of these research base facilities are not only training people to understand the cattle flow

and the cattle comfort and the whole husbandry of, of what's taking place in these fields facilities is to also educate them that there's a lot of opportunities out here in the ag sector of what is helping feed the world, I guess.

Ethan Cantrell 23:44

Yeah, for sure. And that's where I get excited to is that as us as a company of MJE and MJE livestock equipment, we get to kind of see it from start to finish, I get to see it on the dealer side of our end users that are cow-calf operators that are that are out in the field, you know, raising up cattle, and calving out calves, and processing calves, and then growing them up weaning off, and then sending them to feedlots. And then whenever they go into feedlots, they're back in our equipment again. So we've literally got the beef industry and our equipment from the second they're born till the second that they go on after feedlot. So that's pretty exciting. For me, I think that kind of sets us apart as a company that were there just like you were talking about on the feedlot side of it. You're, you're there from start to finish, and in that sense in the beef industry all together in my opinion. So a lot of pride in that and I'm sure you do too.

Justin Hendrickson 24:37

I do and I'm glad you brought that up because one big thing and I know you guys are getting into it is this traceability. You mentioned basically having our hand in the process from when a calf is born until a calf or until a steer goes to harvest, and it is exciting and I know that MJE LE is doing a lot of research and working with some other companies on on that traceability and how we can advance our equipment to help make that happen? Because it's it's a growing thing in the industry. And it's becoming more and more important that the end user knows exactly where that beef came from. And so yeah, I'm glad you brought that up, Ethan, that is a big thing that's coming. We're already in the middle of it. And I know you guys are working hard and working with some great companies out there to make that advancement possible.

Ethan Cantrell 25:24

We are for sharing without giving away too many, too many of our secrets on stuff that we have coming up here, we do have our tag reader that integrates into our Oh, our wheel corral that I mentioned earlier, we've got the only wheel corral on the market that has a an Allflex™ tag reader built into it. So, literally every time the cattle are run through that wheel corral, they're scanned, their information goes into your database throughout, they're easy for the farmer and rancher to evaluate and keep track of and then like I said, the traceability is a huge thing nowadays. And it's an ever growing trend. So it makes it to where that's just that much simpler. It's not a strain on the rancher. It's just flows in seamlessly and makes the process as easy as possible for sure. Well, was there anything else that you'd like to talk to her, our listeners about today? Or anything that you think we missed? Or anything that you want to tell us before we let you go?

Justin Hendrickson 26:20

I don't think so you can. I think we covered it.

Ethan Cantrell 26:23

That's awesome. Well, like is said, I sure appreciate your time today. I know y'all are busy up there. And I'll let y'all get back to it. But I encourage our listeners to tune into our future episodes of

Groundbreakers and, and see what other kinds of stories we can get from people, and learn more about the industry that we all have a passion for and that we take so much pride in. You can also visit us on all of our social media websites and subscribe to our podcast. Or if you want to look at any of our product or inventory type things you can go to MJElivestockequipment.com Or you can go check out our MJEllc.net website for our construction side. If you have any questions at all, I'm sure Justin would be more than happy to answer anything that we've talked about today. And I know I would be on the LE side as well. So whatever we can do to help just be sharing let us know.

Outro 27:08

Thank you for joining us on this episode of groundbreaking stories of rural innovation. We hope you enjoyed our deep dive into the latest trends and stories from the world of ag. If you have any questions, feedback or stories you'd like us to cover, please reach out to us through social media or through our website. Don't forget to subscribe to drum breakers on your favorite podcast platform. And stay tuned for more inspiring stories and insights each month. Until next time, keep pushing the boundaries and pioneering New Frontiers in Agriculture. This has been Groundbreakers: Stories of Rural Innovation. Thanks for listening!