

The Recorder

IN THE COMMUNITY, ABOUT THE COMMUNITY, SINCE 1877.

2017-11-23 / Top News

Businessman says pipeline will boost economy

BY GEOFF HAMILL • STAFF WRITER



Pocahontas County, W.Va., businessman Jacob Meck at his main office in Green Bank. Meck said he expects to hire as many as four more employees due to construction of the Atlantic Coast pipeline. The company currently has 20 full-time employees.

GREEN BANK, W.Va. — The owner of a diverse business in Pocahontas County thinks the benefits of Dominion Energy’s Atlantic Coast pipeline will outweigh any negative consequences in the long term.

Jacob Meck and his wife Malinda have worked together for 17 years to build and manage a construction, recycling, portable toilet, and septic pumping business from the ground up.

The couple was named “Young Guns Class of 2011” by WV Executive Magazine, and nationally recognized by Remodeling Magazine in 2010 as a Top 50 company.

The business employs 20 full-time workers, making the Mecks one of the county’s top employers.

The Mecks are already profiting from the pipeline project. The company is leasing space across the road from its main office in Green Bank for a growing equipment lay-down yard and motor pool. The property was a foreclosed and abandoned wood processing facility, unused for several years before the Mecks purchased it and leased it to Houston-based U.S. Pipeline Inc. this year.

The property is now filled with an ever-growing fleet of heavy equipment, that will be used to build a pipeline segment, or “spread” in pipeline terminology, beginning in Pocahontas and continuing through Highland and Bath counties.

A handful of U.S. Pipeline employees have arrived to unload and prepare the equipment.

“They’re going to be using it for basically a rebuild yard for their equipment,” said Jacob Meck. “When they’re done, we intend to expand our trucking operation because we’re on three acres here, and we’re pretty crowded. It was definitely a win-win situation for us to be able to bring these guys in. They get to use it for a little bit and when they’re gone, we intend to use it for another 10, 15, or 30 years and hopefully employ some more people there.”

Meck attended a public meeting a year ago, where Dominion representatives signed up contractors interested in providing services during pipeline construction. He expects to receive more contracts for his solid waste and portable toilet businesses as construction proceeds, but he hasn’t confirmed anything yet with Dominion or U.S. Pipeline.

“We certainly hope to be in the middle of that and providing those services, which we are already providing to the rest of the community,” he said.

Meck said several other local business owners, including proprietors of lodging establishments, had signed up to provide services during Dominion’s public meetings.

A Fasten-All company representative doing business with Meck told him one of the national hardware company’s local stores had received a \$300,000 contract with U.S. Pipeline for a recently completed project in northern West Virginia, raising Meck’s hopes for business opportunities in this area.

“I’ve heard the same thing with your local automotive parts stores,” said Meck. “These guys were laying some pipe in another location and that local auto parts store did over \$1 million worth of sales. These guys need alternators; they need batteries; they need hydraulic hoses; they need hydraulic fluid – where’s this stuff come from?”

Meck expects contracts will be awarded to local businesses once pipeline construction commences.

“When the construction actually begins and we have boots on the ground, I intend to be ready to provide whatever services I can provide,” he said.

Meck anticipates a financial boost that will enable his business to expand. “This type of project allows us to pay down debt,” he said. “It allows us to purchase more equipment. It allows us to

expand ... It will make a huge difference. Maybe what we normally work for in 10 years, maybe we can work for in two years.”

In addition to business profits, Meck noted several landowners had received compensation for pipeline easements.

“We have 37 landowners in Pocahontas County who have already received more than \$1.7 million for easements,” he said. “The other thing is property taxes. In Pocahontas County, in 2020, estimated property taxes from the ACP are \$1.8 million ... I want our community to understand there is tax revenue coming off of this. We don’t have to do anything. We don’t have to go out there and mow the grass on the pipeline. We don’t have to do anything. This stuff flows through the community and we get a \$1 million check into our local courthouse coffers every year, simply by letting this thing pass through.”

Meck said pipeline opponents have used fear tactics. “All too often, we use fear techniques to drive home our point to people who are not as well educated and it causes a lot of frustration in our community,” he said. “If we can get people to sit down at opposite ends of the spectrum – these folks are interested in preserving the environment, that’s a good thing to be concerned about. Let’s sit down; let’s talk about it, with the pro guys, with people like me, and let’s come up with the best installation, the best building practices. Let’s get a hold of this thing.

“We live in the United States of America, the greatest nation on Earth,” he added. “We have some of the most brilliant people, some of the best inventions ever on the face of the Earth happened right here in this country and, seemingly, we can’t figure out how to get a pipeline across a stream. Are we really that ignorant? We have the technology and we have the people and we have the best equipment to make this work.”

Meck noted a gas pipeline passes through neighboring Pendleton County, as well as a compressor station at Seneca Rocks. “When you drive through Seneca Rocks — and that is one of the hottest tourism areas on our side of the state — we’ve got a compressor station and a transmission line within sight of that. Apparently, everyone can cohabitate. Everybody wants to come to Seneca Rocks to climb the rocks ... There’s a lot of fear that this is going to run the tourists out of the community and this is going to be bad for tourism. I don’t buy that. It’s already been shown in a neighboring county that, apparently, it’s had little to no effect.”

The Columbia Gas transmission line passing through Pendleton County is a 26-inch pipeline, smaller than Dominion’s proposed 42-inch Atlantic Coast pipeline.

Meck said he has confidence in Dominion’s commitment to environmental protection due to his extensive business dealings with the company.

“When it comes to environmental and safety requirements, when I pull my liquid and solid waste truck up to the gate (at Dominion’s Bath County Pumped Storage Station), my driver is required to get out and do a walk-around. If there is anything leaking off that truck, liquid or solid waste or hydraulic fluid, that truck is not allowed to enter that facility,” he said. “It’s a zero tolerance on spills. When you’re talking liquid and solid waste and then you add equipment on top of that

– hydraulic cylinders, hydraulic hoses, fuel tanks, differentials, transmissions – boy, is that something to achieve.”

Meck invited U.S. Pipeline workers at the Green Bank site to take part in the conversation with The Recorder, but none of the workers present are authorized to speak with the media. Meck said he would notify The Recorder when company representatives are present and can provide information on the project.