

Jim Argabrite Talks to Coal Miner Exchange



Jim Argabrite

Bill Reid: *We're with Jim Argabrite, the owner and President of Professional Highwall Mining Services, LLC. Jim, first of all, congratulations on the formation of the company. It's exciting to hear of a startup at a time like this! Tell us how it all got started?*

Jim Argabrite: It started about three years ago. I saw an opportunity within the highwall mining industry that I felt like would progress as the years went on. We've got a small team of about nine people here. I have five master welders, two service technicians, and a parts manager, and myself leading up the sales end of it. We formed Professional Highwall at a tough time in the industry, but we've been growing every year, even as the industry conditions of the last few years worsened. Our vision is to take the Highwall Mining business back to its roots where it started! Our team has been involved with evolution of this unique mining system and we are focused on pushing the design to the next level.

Bill Reid: *Tell us about your facilities here at Beckley?*

Jim Argabrite: Professional Highwall is located at 855 Ragland Road. It's about two miles from the old Superior facility on Ragland Road in Beckley, WV. We've got about 18,000 square foot here. In West Virginia and Kentucky, we are servicing about sixteen highwall miners that we specifically take care of, and that number continues to grow. Right now, working in the industry, I would say there are at least 40 plus machines working. We have the ability and expertise to work on anything that has to do with an old or new Highwall Mining system. Past and present projects include rebuilt powerheads, right angle exchanges, enhanced new push beam designs, as well as customized rebuilds of old push beams. There is not a fabrication project we are not capable of handling. Our technicians are fully capable of onsite repair whether it is mechanical, electrical including PLC services, hydraulic and cutter module rebuilds and upgrades. Professional Highwall also contracts for, Nexus Terra, which supplies the GPS on all the Highwall machines, so we are on all these job sites literally weekly.

Bill Reid: *So you have a fair percentage in the market of those working. What kind of production results are being obtained?*

Jim Argabrite: The guys at these operations are running anywhere from 25,000-60,000 tons a month on a single shift production schedule depending on geology. Currently for many of the jobs we call on the coal demand is just not there to run second shifts, but it looks like it's steadily improving and on may be on the rise!

Bill Reid: *Let's talk about the coal market. We see that met coal prices are rising, and so is steam coal. Are you seeing that in the market as well and what about the international market?*

Jim Argabrite: We absolutely are. We've seen a steady pick up here in the last two quarters, and a lot of domestic companies are talking about expanding rather quickly to capitalize on the met market right now. There are international opportunities and we are selling into to Colombia, Russia and India. We sell parts to Alabama, West Virginia, Kentucky – anywhere there's highwall mining, we are selling parts, service and upgrades right now.

Bill Reid: *What's new in the technology of highwall mining? What's the difference in a machine today and a machine ten years ago?*

Jim Argabrite: Well they haven't produced too many new machines in the last several years, but the interesting thing about these machines is everything is upgradable. So you're essentially buying a mobile plant when you buy a highwall miner. But there have been technology changes through the years with PLCs. They are simplified and more reliable. There is a new push beam design that allows for much greater pull force and also to prevent from unlocking underground. They are also much less labor intensive for ground personnel. The track systems on the newer models compared to the older will climb steeper grades faster. Probably the single greatest enhancement to the highwall machines are Variable Frequency Drives. The VFD's allow control of motor speeds and reduces wear and tear along with longer life on many major components of the miner and is much quieter than soft starts.

Bill Reid: *How do you see the future for coal and the future for your own organization?*

Jim Argabrite: We are quite optimistic right now. Professional Highwall has a great deal riding on the election this year, but one way or the other, both presidential candidates are talking about investing in infrastructure. Infrastructure requires steel and of course met coal. The country can't just quit producing coal without another plan, so whether they like it or not, we're going to have coal for a while. So I'm cautiously optimistic. In the highwall mining industry, I'm extremely confident that Professional Highwall is going to be here and contributing to our great mining industry!

Bill Reid: *Well, thank you very much for talking to us and we wish you every success!*

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