





The Precast ADVANTAGE

Written by Claire Suttles



Atantic TNG LLC, originally Atlantic Concrete, has been casting quality precast concrete products since 1969. In 2019, we sat down with Megan Kitchner, a third-generation precaster who launched her own division of the family business in 2011. We checked back in with Kitchner this month to learn the latest from her Sarasota, Florida headquarters.

The 120-employee company has raised its annual sales to around \$30 million since our last feature. A notable factor in the recent growth has been the acquisition of a PERFECT forming system used to build manholes. “We added about 28 forms total and a new Mixer Systems mixer to run that particular shop,” Kitchner says. “So that was a big improvement that we needed to be able to put out more product more efficiently.”

When Kitchner first took over the business, “a lot of the forms were pretty old,” she remembers. Some had been in use for as long as 40 years. The new perfect forming system “brings us the technology of the new forms and it gives us a safer product,” she explains. The older forms required workers to maneuver them in the air and flip them during the production process. “It’s a longer process; it’s not unsafe, but there is definitely more caution needed.”

The new forms, on the other hand, are on a track system, “so the workers don’t have to lower the crane over them,” Kitchner explains. “They can push them apart. They can move around the whole form, clean it quickly, clean it better than you could with the old-style form. And then you just shut them with both hands while you’re still standing on the ground, so there is a lot less movement and a lot more efficiency. You’re cleaning it better, you’re able to set it up better. It takes fewer people to run this shop, more efficiently, than it does for the older style forms—and they’re safer.”

This increased efficiency has made a positive impact throughout the company. “We became more of a lean plant. Although I wouldn’t say we’re textbook ‘lean’ right now, we’re getting there and we’re incorporating a lot of lean practices.”

A robust regional economy has also proven advantageous for the business over the past few years. “The economy down in Florida is very strong,” Kitchner says. “It never really took a break during COVID. So we were able to keep moving while taking a good look at everything that we were doing, increasing the amount of product we are able to put out, and improving quality so that we keep, as well as increase, our customer base.”

In March of this year, Diana Giasson came on board at TNG to fill the newly created position of Training and Development Manager. A core goal has been to enhance and improve the company’s educational programs. “We wanted to offer more education and make it more structured,” Kitchner says. From the basic principles of manufacturing precast to an extensive, Master Precaster program backed by the National Precast Concrete Association (NPCA), “Diana has the dedicated time and care needed to be able to make a structured education path for employees.”

Currently, Atlantic TNG employs five master precasters who have completed the two-year-long NPCA program, and the team hopes to steadily grow this number every year. The company also has two employees who have graduated from the NPCA leadership program (LNPCA) and two more who are currently enrolled in the program.

Atlantic TNG also offers educational opportunities at the plant level that are easily accessible to all. “We have a movie day every other Thursday where we make popcorn and we have an hour-long video with topics ranging from cutting steel and rebar to putting the proper amount of form oil on your form—anything that’s relatable to our job here,” Kitchner shares. “And anyone can take it. It doesn’t matter what you actually do in the plant or in the office, you can just come and sit and learn a little bit more about our industry.” ▶▶



“The team is committed to helping workers make the most of every opportunity.”



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▶ Not everyone is aware of the advantages of precast, so the team's educational goals include "spreading the message about the truth about precast" to the world at large. "Our biggest challenge to deal with is misconceptions and trying to show people that we have a good product that's proven by the test of time and that works."

Atlantic TNG isn't alone in this mission; the entire industry is motivated to work together to spread the word. "There's a committee that was just formed with the NPCA to try to speak truthfully about precast, so that's been a big thing for the past year, especially in Florida."

So what exactly are some of the advantages? Precast concrete products are manufactured and cured under controlled conditions by skilled workers, which helps ensure quality control. This assured quality, along with multiple other factors, has given precast concrete a critical role in the current construction environment. "Precast is a solid product," Kitchner summarizes. "It's been around for centuries. It's strong. It's all naturally resourced. It's local."

Precast concrete is fireproof, dependable, and durable, with a service life that can easily span an entire century. The product won't float or dislodge as other, lighter materials might; instead, it is heavy and sturdy enough for underground applications. This makes it a perfect fit for meeting infrastructure needs in locations like Florida that frequently suffer from extreme weather conditions such as hurricanes and floods.

Sustainability is another plus. Locally sourced and completely recyclable, Atlantic TNG's precast concrete eliminates the need for bulky field formwork, reducing onsite construction waste. And the product can be delivered just-in-time to help shrink the jobsite footprint.

The team is eager to continue supplying the industry with the highest quality precast concrete products to help build, repair, and protect Florida's critical infrastructure. The letters TNG stand for The Next Generation, "so my focus as the owner is to continue the company, focusing on the next generation of workers," says Kitchner. "Education is key to that," and so is flexibility and evolving with the times. The team is "making sure that we're adapting to the current workforce environment [and] always changing and adapting to each new generation," she says.

Paying close attention to meeting employee needs will also be key to the company's continued success. This means recognizing and "giving employees what they expect, what they need from an employer." From providing positive feedback to ongoing education, the team is committed to helping workers make the most of every opportunity. "We're constantly trying to make sure that we're touching employees' lives the way we



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should be, giving them a great place to work and educating them on what it is they do.”

When it comes to the product itself, the team will continue to stay at the forefront of new developments. “[We are] always looking out for new products and things coming around the corner, things that we can do, whether form-wise or product-wise, to improve our product line, or things that we can get in front of, like alternative materials,” Kitchner shares. With this commitment at the root, Atlantic TNG is well positioned to offer customers the best options possible in the future, while maintaining a solid, decades-long legacy. ■

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