

A Garrett County Success Story

Pillar Innovations

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**



Above: The towers in the background are called the e-SAT and e-CAT— equilibrium solar articulating tower and equilibrium communications articulating tower respectively. The towers are used by the railroad industry as well as the oil and gas industries. The yellow metal miner's refuge

chambers are equipped and ready for placement. They provide clean air, food and water to miners in emergency situations for up to 96 hours.

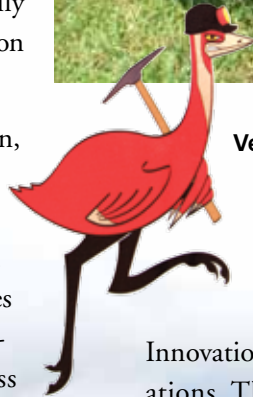
Below: Pillar Innovations is proud of its loyal employees and their positive attitudes to meet customer's needs.



Beitzel Corporation and Pillar Innovations LLC are Garrett County success stories. Both businesses trace their beginnings to Garrett County resident Olen Beitzel who started operations four decades ago with a pickup truck, one welding machine, and a strong work ethic. As Mr. Beitzel recalled, "I always chased opportunity but had no idea where it would lead." From modest beginnings the companies have grown and diversified to become two of Garrett County's largest private employers and a nationally recognized leader in the fields of industrial construction and coal mining support systems.

Olen Beitzel's first business, Beitzel Corporation, is described as a turnkey industrial construction and maintenance company that specializes in fabrication, machining, electrical, maintenance, engineering, and rental equipment. What separates Beitzel Corporation from competitors is the diversification it offers customers that want a seamless transition through all the phases of construction projects. In-house expertise ensures job continuity.

In 2007, Beitzel Corporation formed a new wholly owned subsidiary of the parent company called Pillar



Above: The enhanced EMU (Electric Mine Utility Vehicle), developed at Pillar Innovations is built on a Polaris ATV platform with major modifications and custom features for rigorous mining tasks.

The logo at left is a stylized "mining Emu" developed for the EMU vehicles.

Innovations LLC with Titus Beitzel as Manager of Operations. The move was necessary to meet the specialized technological needs of underground coal mining operations that had been affected by federal safety legislation. The Miner Act of 2006 mandated the development of emergency communication and tracking plans for underground mines.





The tent above inflates from the miner refuge chamber in emergency situations. It would actually be attached to the chamber at the open end, where clean air, food and water would be available. The tents range from 23' to 50' long and can accommodate 16 to 36 miners for up to 96 hours.



Inset: The tent deflated and ready to be installed into the miner refuge chamber.

The challenge presented by the new mandates were numerous since routine means of communications either did not work in underground settings or could be quickly destroyed by catastrophic events such as explosions or water inundations. “We had already started on communication and underground tracking before the law was implemented, so we were well positioned to take the lead in providing products and services,” stated Adam Brenneman, Director of Sales and Marketing for Pillar Innovations.

Pillar Innovations has evolved into a diversified company with products and services in mining controls, fire suppression, mining/industrial communications, towers, fiber optics, and Electric Mine Utility Vehicles (EMUs). Approximately 85 percent of Pillar Innovation’s business is related to coal mining. With over 100 employees the Grantsville location serves as the manufacturing and design center for products while 85 employees working in offices located in West Virginia, Indiana, Colorado, and New Mexico communicate with mining and industrial companies to provide tailored service, sales, and support of the product line.

Pillar Innovations continuously meets the challenges required by underground mining operations. One unique and popular company product recently introduced to the market was inspired by the observations of Titus Beitzel who noticed that underground mining vehicles were typically not equipped for rigorous tasks. The enhanced ATV developed at Pillar Innovations is built on a Polaris ATV platform but with major modifications that include lower seating, a ruggedized chassis, and other custom features. The new vehicle, called Electric Mine Utility (EMU) may be configured in a variety of ways to meet the needs of miners. Pillar Innovation’s EMU (pronounced ee-moo) brand name is well established in the industry and has been featured in trade publications.

Another standard of the industry is the Pillar Innovation’s designed and built miner’s refuge chamber, an artificial environment resembling a tent that provides clean air, food, and water to miners in emergency situations. The fabric tent component is stowed within a metal enclosure until inflated upon manual command in a manner resembling the deployment of an automobile airbag system. The



Above: Miners refuge chambers being outfitted with safety equipment, air, food and water, for use in a mining emergency.

Right: One of the fabric tents inflated in a simulated chamber that looks and feels like a coal mine. The state-of-the-art simulated mine enables the company to develop, test and maintain its products to meet customer demands and federally mandated safety standards.



miner's refuge chamber is a federally mandated system that will provide 96 hours of breathable air, water, and food.

The physical environment of an underground coal mine has been created by staff at the Grantsville site. The simulation chamber looks and feels like a coal mine but has greater technology capabilities than its actual counterpart. Temperature, humidity, oxygen levels, and other key factors can be created and monitored to establish their effects on equipment and workers. The state-of-the-art facility enables the company to develop, test, and maintain its products to meet customer demands and federally mandated safety standards.

Pillar Innovations also collaborates with the railroad industry, oil companies, and industrial manufacturers to solve problems and improve products. As the company moves forward, it continues to diversify and hire additional employees.

Beitzel Corporation and Pillar Innovation's growth have been accomplished with support from the town of

Grantsville, the Garrett County Commissioners, and loyal employees. According to Adam Brenneman, "We are appreciative of the support we have received from the local governments and our employees. Many of our Garrett County workers have a family farm background and a super work ethic. They have a positive attitude about accomplishing whatever needs to be done to meet our customer's needs. Our employees really want to take care of our customers."

Beitzel Corporation and Pillar Innovations continue to balance each other into the twenty first century. Beitzel offers customers industrial construction services while Pillar Innovations responds to technological challenges presented by customers in a variety of fields. While the challenges and services of the companies differ, Mr. Beitzel's strong work ethic and dedication to customer service continues to guide the employees of both businesses. As Adam Brenneman states, "When we see challenges at a work site, we know that our employees can find solutions."