# Trenchless Pioneering Company Looks to the Future

Avanti International provided an expansive resin to reinforce a badly damaged "bathtub" wall at the World Trade Center after 9/11, preventing water from the Hudson River from filling it. Here, Daniel Magill is at the wall, now a part of the 9/11 Museum.

Daniel Magill grew up in the trenchless technology industry. He spent summers working at his father's company, Avanti International, working the forklift and packaging product for shipping. He also learned a lot watching how David Magill ran the business, growing it, along with the grouting industry.

Today, Daniel Magill owns the company and is as committed as his father was to its success, as well as to the success of the grouting industry he serves. Making something your own and following in the footsteps of a well-respected industry pioneer isn't an easy journey but Magill accepts those challenges as he continues to lead Avanti International to the top of the grouting arena.

"I feel like I grew up in the industry," says Magill, now 42. "I joke with people that I didn't have Nerf footballs growing up, I had urethane resin footballs. I worked during the summers and on and off throughout college. Finally, I came onboard full time in 2006 as a regional manager and became president in 2008, purchasing the company in 2009."

Injection grouting is one of the oldest methods of stopping infiltration and exfiltration of sewer pipes, laterals and manholes and it is arguably considered to be the original trenchless technology method. Formed in 1978, Avanti helped to pioneer this trenchless market segment with its AV-100 chemical grout. Nearly 40 years later, both are still going strong as a means to address North America's underground infrastructure.

# Avanti International Continues to Educate and Develop Chemical Grouting Industry

By Sharon M. Bueno

Avanti started out as a company serving the rehabilitation market for municipalities, producing grout to address the condition of the leaking infrastructure. Over the years, the company has expanded into new markets — industrial and geotechnical — to diversify and extend its reach. The company started out with one grout and today touts 27 to serve those three markets.

Still headquartered in Houston, Avanti now has five warehouses strategically located in central and eastern United States, enabling the product to reach its customers' hands faster. Education and training remain at the heart of the company, with the late David Magill — who passed away at age 70 in January 2014 — an enthusiastic advocate of its use to promote Avanti, as well as the industry.

"Education has always been important to Avanti but today, injection grouting, though it is the original trenchless technology, is not the new, "sexy" technology. It's been around for so long," Magill says. "For us to work with other companies and talk with them about [grouting] is very important, otherwise there is a great technique that new engineers do not know about because it's not 'the newest' technology."

David Magill laid the foundation for Avanti to be successful. Daniel Magill is taking and adding to what his father started to secure its success for the years to come through the use of technology and creativity.

"In some ways we are similar to how we were 38 years ago," Magill says, "because we have that same original product and education has always been important to us then and now. We used to serve only the municipal market but today we are more balanced. The market has changed, as well. Today there is a better understanding of the resins and how they are used."

## Company History

Avanti International was created in 1978 when four rehabilitation contractors joined together to form the company. That same year, the company hired David Magill as its first employee and president; Magill would guide Avanti into a position of dominance in the injection grouting industry, combining astute and smart business practices with an emphasis on education of the customer. During Magill's tenure — purchasing the company from its original owners in 1988 — Avanti expanded its product offerings, as well as its commitment to educating the industry on the use of injection grout.

The company started out with one product: AV-100 chemical grout, which seals the soil outside the sewer pipe or outside the lateral or lateral connection or manhole. "About 25 seconds after you start pumping [the grout] it turns to a solid and you have a ring on the outside of the pipe that stops exfiltration and stops groundwater infiltration," Magill says. "This grout is still the most predominantly used grout in the municipal industry."

Today, Avanti has 27 different grouts, as well as ancillary products that complement them. Some of them are chemically activated, some are water activated and some are cementitious based. While the municipal market is still its primary market, the company has extended its reach to other markets such as industrial and geotechnical in order to diversify its customers and expand its presence.

Those new markets have led to impressive new projects, including the New York Transit system and work during the 9/11 cleanup, in which a "bathtub" wall of the World Trade Center needed to be reinforced to prevent water from the Hudson River from filling it. An Avanti expansive resin was injected behind the wall to help secure it so that the cleanup and rebuild efforts could continue at Ground Zero.

Daniel Magill purchased the company from his father in 2009, allowing the older Magill to retire. While he respects his father's business acumen, drive and determination, he wants to grow the company into new areas, with new ideas to reach more customers.

When the company began, it had one warehouse in Houston, with product shipped just from there. In order to meet the customers' needs at a faster pace, Avanti established additional warehouse locations in the United States, with regional managers handling those territories. Today, Avanti has five such warehouses, including the one in Houston.

"When Avanti started, the municipalities were the primary customer base, actually we almost solely served that market," Magill says. "Today we are much more diversified. We serve the geotechnical market, the industrial market, as well, which is great because when one market is down, it helps us stay stable as a company."

## Making the Company His Own

In looking over the horizon of the trenchless industry, Magill sees an industry in transition — a changing of the guard, if you will. His father was a trenchless pioneer, who mentored the next generation. Magill sees the need for other industry stalwarts and advocates to do the same in the coming years. Technology is pushing the industry to new heights. Magill loves what he is seeing for the future.

"It's an exciting time. We have more and more failing infrastructure that needs to be addressed and we don't want to dig it up, so trenchless technology is becoming more and more important," Magill says. "But I also feel like it is a time of transition right now for the industry, at least from my perspective. There are some great minds who are retiring and the next generation is stepping up. We have lots of new technological advances, which help the industry right now and can help our contractors and municipalities. The equipment is better and faster, we have smarter grouts and faster service because of technology."

When Magill bought the company from his father, he left behind a lifetime of advice through his work ethic and words. The company philosophy still resonates with this Avanti team: Excellent customer service and support. Without it, Magill says, we don't have much of a company. "We don't think a lot about how to beat the competition. We focus a lot on improving ourselves, personally and professionally," he says. "We try to be better today than

we were yesterday at everything, from marketing to customer service, to webinars to training. Those are our core values. We just try to focus on that."

But things are a bit different than the way his Dad used to run things. Magill has his own ideas on how to improve upon what was already a strong company. He believes his background in the creative arts has factored into today's success with regards to reaching customers and introducing and marketing products. There is a fresh, energetic team vibe to the atmosphere, he says, noting this bit of insight that would have been unheard of "back in the day":

"If you had visited our office five years ago and then visited today, there is a noticeable difference when you walk in…Miss Shirley at our front desk is almost 80 years old and she is responsible for the music that gets played throughout the office. Just the other day she was playing Ozzy Osbourne's 'Crazy Train.' I believe I bring a creative side to the company and take a different way of looking at things to convey the message of how these products are used, such as through animations and the web.

"My Dad was a brilliant businessman, very old-school and very driven. He was definitely my mentor," he says. "In the past, Avanti was known for training people for this industry and then they would go off to other companies. Today, we have people calling us to see if we have openings. That feels good and allows us to be selective as we create the team we want."

Today Avanti focuses on stopping leaks, stabilizing soil, and controlling groundwater in a multitude of applications with a geotechnical engineer and two chemists. The company's customer support team doesn't travel so they are better able to get answers to the customer faster. The company's R&D department has grown and the field service team does onsite training all over the United States.

## Educators at the Core

What hasn't changed is Avanti's commitment to education and growing the grouting industry as a whole. Avanti grout schools have been a part of the company's fabric since its earliest years, conducting onsite and internal training. The grout schools serve multiple purposes: they advance the grouting industry, as well as introduce potential and existing customers to the slate of Avanti products available to solve their infiltration challenges.

"From the beginning, [education] has been who we are," Magill says. "Today, we do four to six grout schools a year, all over the country. In addition to those, we do private grout schools for companies or municipalities. We want our contractors to be good at what they do and by helping others, we are helping the whole industry."

The grout schools — a combination of intensive classroom and in the field presentations — also gives Avanti the opportunity to work with other technology partners in sharing their knowledge. The focus of the schools is primarily the application of injection grouts and the operation of the equipment. Schools on the Avanti campus take place at the Avanti Education Center, a separate, but adjoining space from the company offices.

Magill wishes more companies took part in these collaborative educational efforts, putting aside competition for the betterment of the industry. "I think it's cool that we do this," he says. "It is important to us to have those partnerships. There are some competitors that don't give back. They don't realize that a rising tide raises all ships. When we grow the industry we help our customers, and grow our company as well."

Magill also notes the importance of maintaining strong, active participation with industry associations such as NASSCO, NASTT, APWA, CIGMAT, ACI, WEF, ICGA and more. Working with these groups keeps Avanti in tune and an integral player when it comes to grouting issues and standards, he says.

Magill is excited for the trenchless and grouting industries' short- and long-term future, as well as Avanti's. "The industry is absolutely growing, with more trenchless rehab and more decaying infrastructure. Our existing infrastructure is old and really needs help. Today, there is more of a national focus on that need and the financial investment required to improve it."

"We're a pretty collaborative team and we're open to new ideas," Magill says. When asked about the future of Avanti and where he'll be five to ten years from now Magill evokes the spirit of Avanti with simply "I believe we will be better than we are today!"

**Sharon M. Bueno is managing editor of *Trenchless Technology*.**

Avanti International remains committed to education and its grouting schools are at the core of that committment.