

Landmark Truck Parts Firm Outgrows West Side Home July 1992

Charleston Gazette By: Rusty Marks, Staff Writer

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By Rusty Marks, Staff Writer

Many Charleston residents recognize it as the place on the West Side with all the Army trucks.

"My dad and mom bought this property," said Jack Clark, owner of Clark Truck Parts on West Washington Street. "It's been in the family for 50 years."

But Clark Truck Parts, its hundreds of military and utility trucks, thousands of parts, repair facilities and tools, is moving.



Jack Clark, owner of Clark Truck Parts, gets into a reconditioned 2.5 ton military truck. Clark's company sells and refurbishes utility vehicles and sells parts for trucks and underground mining equipment.

"Charleston's been good to us, but we outgrew this space a long time ago," said Clark, 55. "We're spilling out into the aisles."

Clark Truck Parts sprawls across four warehouses. Clark had to annex a lot across the street to park trucks, some dating from World War II. He rents another lot down the street.

The space was eaten up as Clark's business grew. Now his lots and warehouses are filled with vehicles and parts from around the world —parts and vehicles that are resold across the country and overseas.

Clark buys old Army trucks and other vehicles from California, from Europe —he even has one from Guam. The trucks are sold as is or refurbished and outfitted for oil companies, mining companies, or anyone who needs heavy trucks. They're cheaper than commercial vehicles and easier to maintain, Clark said.

Prices run from about \$10,000 for a surplus vehicle to \$20,000 or more for a truck that's

been stripped, rebuilt and specially outfitted for the customer. Need it painted red? No problem. Need a special engine or fittings? No sweat.

Among his customers are Ashland Oil and local mining companies. Twenty years ago, buyers were harder to find. "We deal with the big boys now," Clark said.

Clark also sells thousands and thousands of parts for mining equipment. In the old days, mining machines used parts converted from Army surplus. Today the machines have parts unique to themselves, some of which Clark manufactures. His parts can be found on machinery as far away as South Africa.

Inside his warehouses, stacked in great piles behind buildings and tucked into nooks and crannies are diesel engines, beds taken from Army trucks, transmissions, differentials, axles for heavy mining equipment. In the big warehouse, fenders for 5-ton military trucks are stacked on metal shelves. Massive leaf spring assemblies lie in the aisles. Clark counted \$14,000 in spindles for mining machines on a single shelf.

All are in disarray because of the move. Clark won't even show visitors what's in the basement. It won't be easy to move his inventory, but Clark says it must be done.

"This move is going to be difficult, and it's going to be expensive, but for the long haul for the company it's going to be beneficial," he said.

A 16-acre plot near Poca is the new quarters for the operation. The facility was formerly occupied by Ray Resources, a drilling and pipeline contractor. Already on the site are a 40,000 foot warehouse and a 20,000 foot warehouse. There are overhead cranes, a workshop and fuel pumps, plus space to organize Clark's trucks and mountains of parts.

The old tenants left everything at the new site. Clark inherited all the furniture, the telephones, kitchen, fax machines and computers. They even left the Pepsi machine. "They moved out and we moved in," he said.

Price of the site was about \$1 million. "If I were to build it myself I'd spend that much anyway," Clark said.

Clark has been moving since the beginning of the month —four flatbed trucks a day.

Army trucks are arriving at the new site at a rate of about eight a day. Employees lift them from the flatbed truck with 5-ton winches. Those that run are driven and parked in neat rows.

Clark says it will take about three months to move his inventory. Employees say they won't be surprised if it takes six months or a year.

Clark inherited the West Side location from his parents. He said he has been asked how he can sell the property that's been in his family for five decades.

"The facility we're going to —I'd rather leave that to my son and my son-in-law," Clark said.

The boys will be following in his footsteps, and he'd rather they do it where there's room to walk.