

An Underwater Niche

✚ Bill Castle with his wife, Janet, have parlayed an underwater engineering and inspection firm into a one-stop shop for bridge solutions. *By Russ Gager*

"We have to develop innovative ideas and work with the client needs to come up with the most cost-effective solutions."

> Bill Castle, owner/president

Photo: Jeff Fusco



The Castle Group worked on the walkway over the Hudson River in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

The Castle Group

www.wjcastlegroup.com

2010 revenues: \$8 million

Headquarters: Hainesport, N.J.

Specialty: Innovative structural and marine engineering and construction

Employees: 26

➤ **W.J. Castle P.E. & Associates P.C. was** started in 1983 as a one-man operation. Today, The Castle Group's three companies employ more than 25 people and offer engineering, construction and design/build of bridges.

With strong currents and low visibilities, underwater inspection of existing bridges is a difficult and sometimes dangerous specialty of Bill Castle's. "Most of

the time you have maybe 6 inches of visibility," he reveals, adding that much of his work is done by feel. "This is critical and one of the main reasons for engineer/divers."

With 28 years of underwater engineering experience, Castle and his wife, Janet, knew they also could offer construction services. "Since I'm a diver, our niche was known for underwater inspections and engineering," Bill Castle explains. "There's very few licensed engineers that do both underwater inspections and rehabilitation design. We used a lot of diving contractors up until 1997, when we decided to start our own construction company - Hydro-Marine Construction - to control the

quality of the work and offer both companies for design/build aspects."

In 2000, the Castles founded Simplified Bridge Systems to offer custom-designed and prefabricated bridge systems. "We've won four awards for bridges from NJDOT we've designed and constructed," Castle points out. The company also has won an award from the American Society of Civil Engineers - Coasts, Oceans, Piers, Rivers Institute (COPRI) Division - for a design and repair project involving a pier along the Delaware River in Philadelphia.

Today, Castle is owner and president of W.J. Castle and Associates, Janet is owner and president of Hydro-Marine Construction, and they both own >>

Photo: Jeff Fusco

>> Simplified Bridge Systems. Bill Castle is president of Simplified and Janet is vice president. “We put on different hats as required to get each job done right the first time, every time,” Janet Castle says.

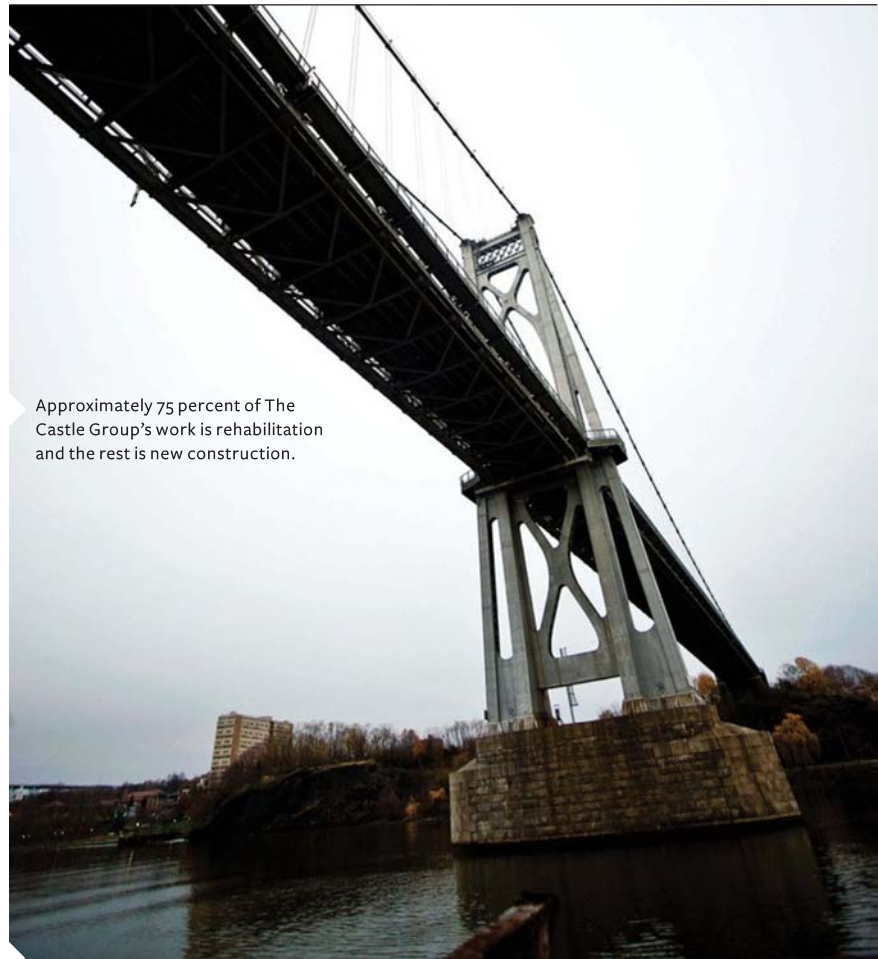
One-stop Shop

Customers can request a bridge inspection and any design and/or specifications needed from W.J. Castle and Associates – the engineering company – and a bid for the construction, rehabilitation or repairs from Hydro-Marine Construction. “That’s what we can offer because the companies are all affiliated,” Bill Castle declares. “If there’s a problem in the field, we can essentially change the design and keep moving forward instead of dealing with two or more separate companies which may delay the project. Our company’s motto is, ‘Our innovative solutions make your problem simple.’”

Castle’s background primarily was in bridges including with the Pennsylvania DOT. “The engineering came first, and I always liked the diving, so I took it up, and thought hopefully one day it would enter into what I wanted to do, and it’s all come together underwater,” he says. “A lot of people think of Castle when they think of underwater, and that gave us a niche and opened the door, and then they found out we can do other things.”

For a recent project in Roebing, N.J., the EPA asked Castle to bid a temporary bridge at a Superfund cleanup site. “We came up with a concept of rehabilitating the old bridge and saving them a tremendous amount of money,” Castle relates.

The group has worked in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and portions of New York. “There’s still one bridge we’re trying to win the contract



Approximately 75 percent of The Castle Group’s work is rehabilitation and the rest is new construction.

for inspecting – the Delaware Memorial Bridge,” Castle says. “If we do that one, we will have done every bridge on the Delaware from the mouth all the way up to New York.”

Rehab and Repair Extraordinaire

Approximately 75 percent of the companies’ work is rehabilitation and 25 percent new construction. “The only difference between us and other engineering or construction companies is that anyone can do the work, so we have to do it better,” Castle emphasizes. “We have to come up with innovative ideas and work with the client to come up with the most cost-effective solutions. It’s easier to go in and build what is new than try to rehab an existing structure, but if you can rehab it, it is going to be less costly.”

Work for industrial customers also is proving lucrative. Rather than chase stimulus money, the Castles focused on oil and energy firms. “We found that there’s a lot of organizations or companies along the rivers that can use our help – they just don’t know it yet,” Bill Castle declares. “So we go out and promote.”

That approach has paid off. “We were fortunate that last year was the best year we’ve had,” he reports. “Hopefully we’ll continue to grow. The economy has become tighter, and with a lot of the bidding, the prices are to the point you can’t understand how some can do it.

“When The Castle Group bids a job, we say what the price is going to be and we don’t exceed it,” he adds. “That’s just one example of how The Castle Group sets itself apart from competitors.”

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