

Cultec



Robert DiTullio says that through hard work and persistence, this plastic chamber company made its way into the storm water and septic industries with an alternate product.

Weathering the Storm



Robert DiTullio Sr. may not be a radical environmentalist, but he is proud of the role his company played over the last 25 years in assisting with water quality. “As a country, we take the fact we have so much water available in certain parts of the US for granted—we don’t understand how development affects the quality of water,” he said.

“Our company helps the environment by providing good products that don’t impede water quality with development,” added DiTullio.

DiTullio’s mission to provide a new product to manage storm water and septic drain fields started in the 1980s. While running his family’s construction company, DiTullio became exposed to the heavy, hard-to-handle precast concrete products that, at the time, were used in storm water management and septic systems. He decided he wanted to provide something that was easier to work with.

DiTullio did some initial designing, but it took him a few years and encouragement from a friend to get serious. That friend put DiTullio in touch with some companies in the Midwest, which provided advice on design and manufacturing. In 1986, after almost two years of prototyping, DiTullio had a product he thought could meet the demands of the industry.

In 1988, DiTullio founded Cultec Inc., the company that would sell plastic septic and storm water chambers. Based in Brookfield, Conn., Cultec initially focused on its backyard. According to DiTullio, there is a popular product in New England called a leaching gallery, which is a concrete box with holes in the sides to allow storm water to discharge and infiltrate into the ground.

“We were looking for a counterpart to that leaching gallery,” he said. “Although the demand was there for an alternative, it took a few years to get people to look at a product that was not concrete. Concrete, being big and heavy, is related to strength. We had to prove that a lighter-weight product could do the same thing.”

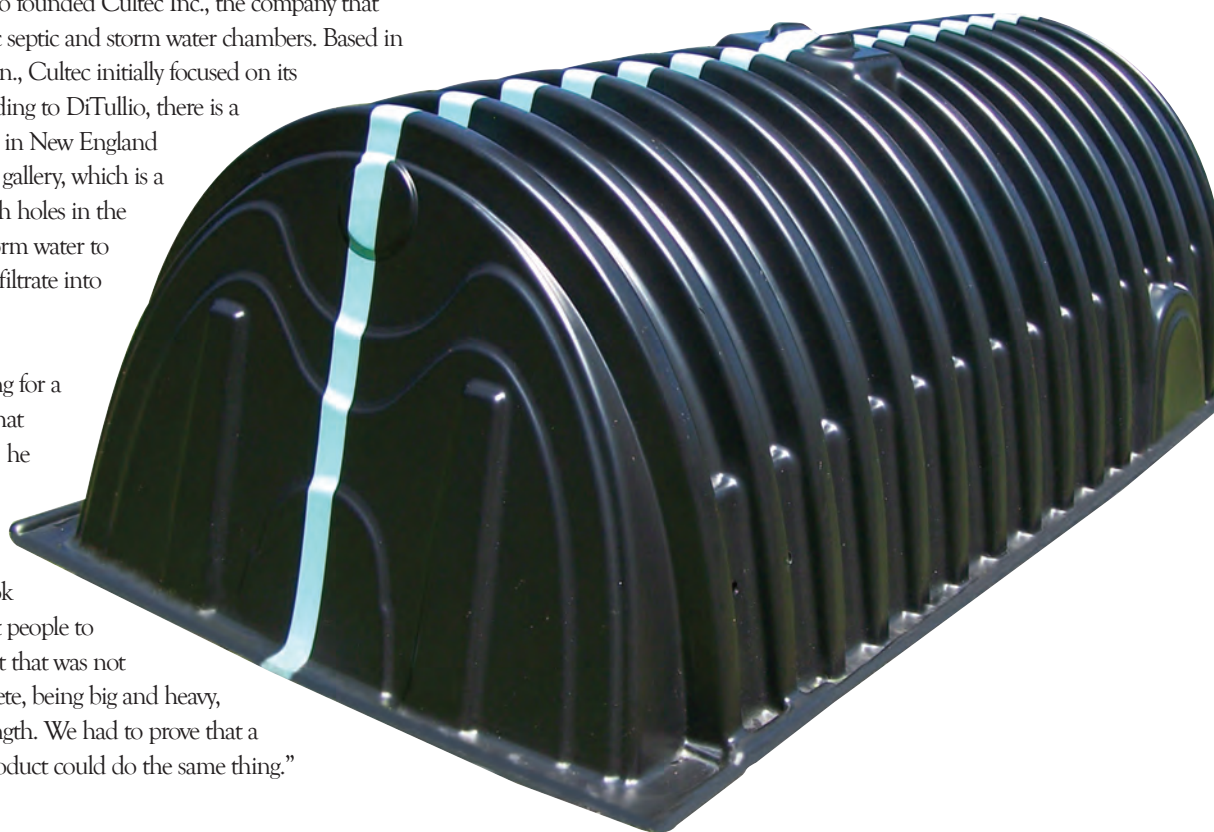
Once Cultec’s Contactor and Recharger septic and storm water chamber products became accepted in New England, it did not take long for word to spread outside of the region. According to DiTullio, a lightweight product was even more appealing in the agricultural areas of the country because they did not have the heavy-duty machines that could easily handle concrete. In snowy areas, Cultec’s products became appealing because concrete is susceptible to deterioration from rock salt.

Cultec’s lighter products were also easier to transport. Where only 16 concrete chambers could be transported by a tractor-trailer, up to 330 plastic chambers could travel on one truck. Installing the product also became easier and took less time. “The handling on the job and putting these systems in took a fraction of the time it took to put in the concrete systems. And time is money,” said DiTullio. As one of the founding companies of the plastic chamber, Cultec now serves the US and Canada, and it supplies products overseas.

Constant improvements

According to DiTullio, research and development at Cultec is ongoing. He designs most of the products, with ideas coming from himself, his team, and those in the field, such as contractors and engineers.

From spending time in the field and talking with experts, the company came up with an idea to develop its own AutoCAD design system. Developed by DiTullio’s daughter,





COO Gina Carolan, the StormGenie Automated Drawing Program is a simplified way to plot Cultec's chambers on an engineering drawing, which can also be used to get necessary construction approval.

This is one way Cultec makes its products easier to install, which, along with reducing cost, are ongoing missions of the company. Although reducing cost is important, Cultec is not willing to let the structural integrity of its products go by the wayside just to save a few bucks.

"In 25 years, we have not had a single structural failure on any properly designed and installed system," said DiTullio. "We take a lot of time to measure, design, and test products to make sure they do what we say they will do. We do not go to bed crossing our fingers and hoping everything is okay."

PENDA CORPORATION AND ALLIED PLASTICS

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Magic potion

Cultec is a family business with DiTullio's wife, son, two daughters, and brother working at the company. For those employees who are not bonded by blood, DiTullio still treats them as if they were. "We feel like the company is one big family," he said. "We try to keep everyone happy by doing a lot of social things together and also by being there to listen when someone is having a problem."

When it comes to favoritism with family members, DiTullio said there is none. He is very cognizant of how his family is perceived by the rest of the organization. He made sure to steer the transition of power from himself to his son and daughter in a guided direction.

Building trust throughout the organization and the industry has helped Cultec succeed. "You have to build



trust with the people you work with so you do not have to worry about whether or not they are steering you in the wrong direction," said DiTullio.

This trust is important when it comes to understanding the various regulations in the water industry. The implementation of the national Clean Water Act aided Cultec's success because the company could fill the growing need for storm water management.

"The mandate now transfers down to small structures such as sheds, tennis courts, and parking lots. Almost anything that is impervious has to address storm water runoff," said DiTullio.

He realizes regulations will become stronger in time, but he believes by staying abreast of what's happening, Cultec will profit from these regulations.

"We had our best year profit wise in 2010. We did cut back in some areas, such as travel and tradeshow, because the demand wasn't there. But through hard work, our employees still got in touch with the right people and brought in business," said DiTullio. "There is no magic; when things get tough, you have to work harder. Everyone here did that and thankfully, it worked out." ≡

—Karen Kondilis