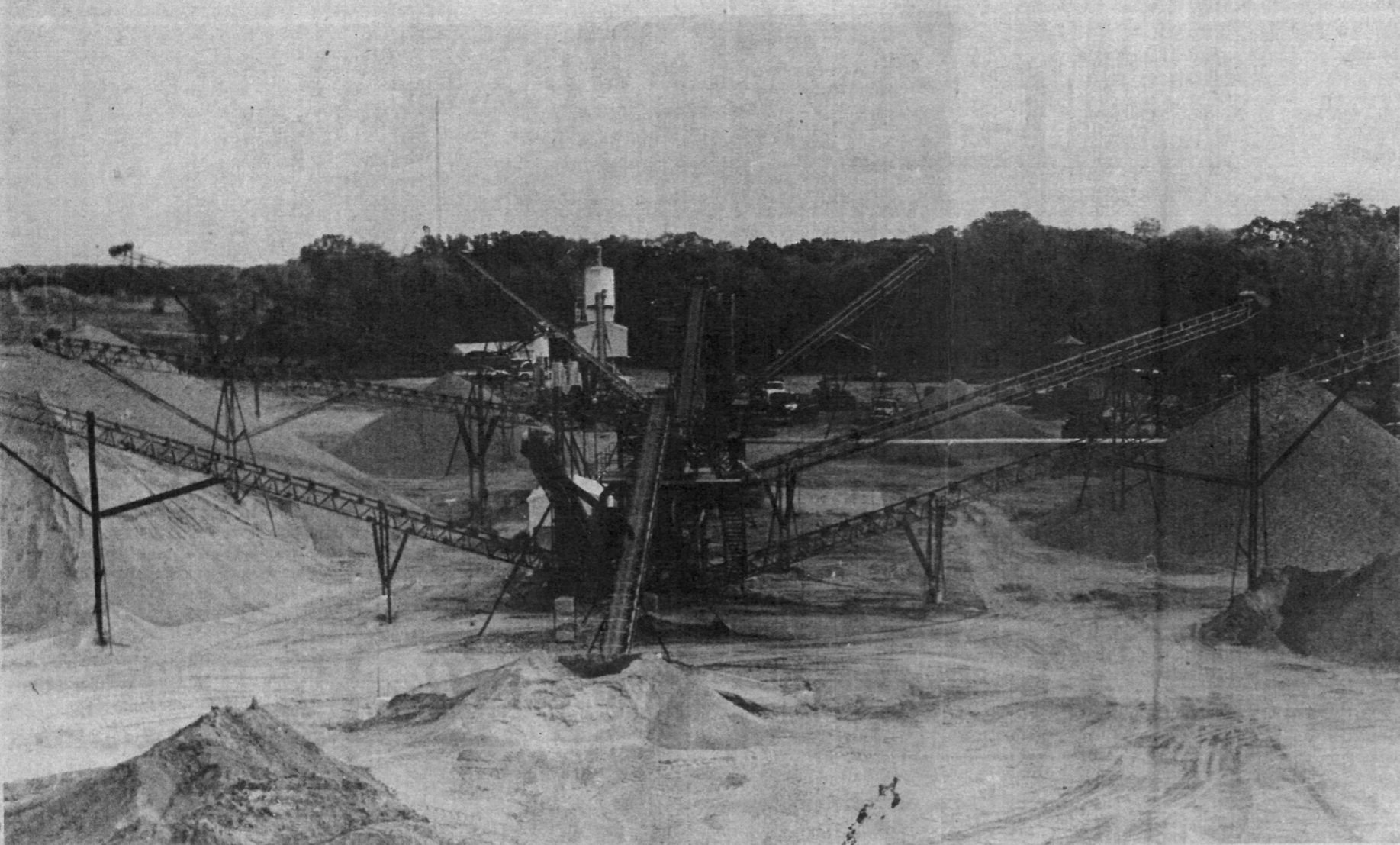


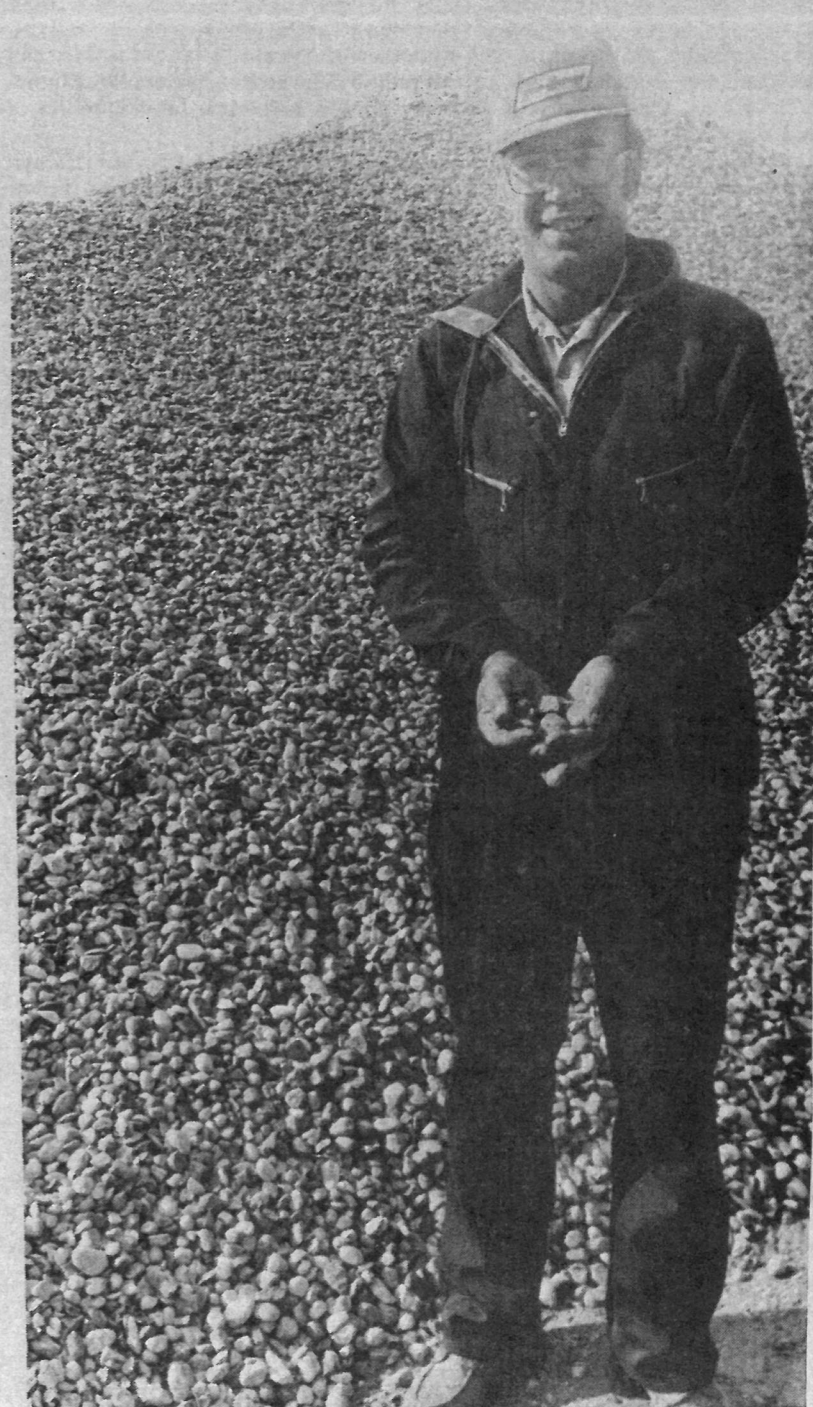
# Ottertail Ready Mix: Sand, gravel and cement available

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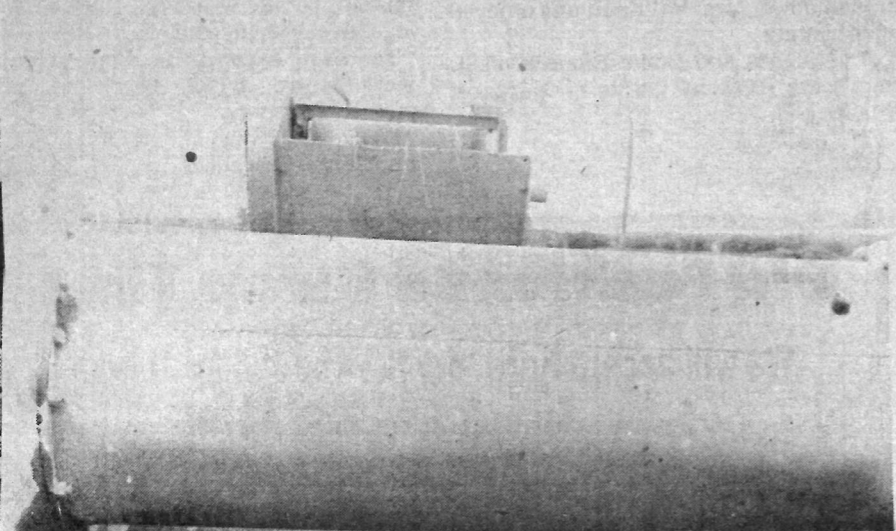


**LIKE AN OCTOPUS**—The numerous conveyors pointing out from the central plant at Ottertail Ready Mix look almost like an octopus. The different piles of material are

different grades of rock and gravel. (Chuck Johnson photo)



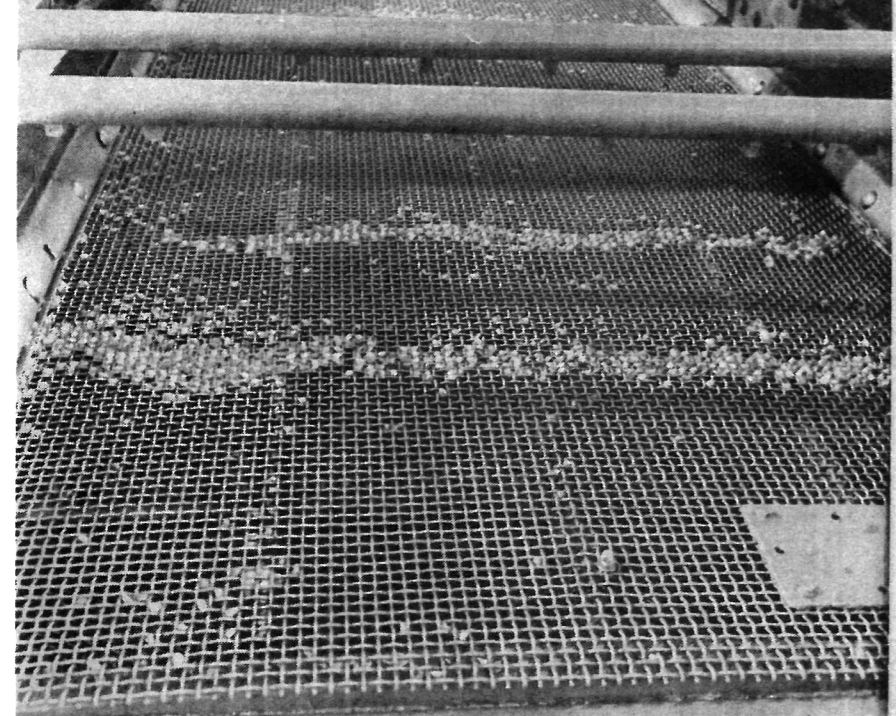
**JIM AHLFS** has been the owner-operator of Ottertail Ready Mix for 25 years. He opened the crushing and washing operation three years ago after operating a cement and dirt moving business in the area for the years before that. He estimates the gravel pit contains 8-13 million cubic yards of material. (Chuck Johnson photo)



**By CHUCK JOHNSON**  
As you see the Ottertail Ready Mix plant for the first time you're reminded of some huge octopus of conveyors radiating outwards from some large central body. Then as owner Jim Ahlfs explains the workings of the plant, you see the reason for the strange looking configurations. Ahlfs has been at this location in Ottertail for the past 25 years, although it's just been in the last three years that the sand and gravel plant has been put up. Before that he was into hauling and leveling sand with trucks and loaders...but not washing and crushing as he does now. "When you're in this business long enough eventually you find out where the gravel is," he says. He bought the land for the washing plant 10 years ago from an estate. It's a huge deposit which he estimates at 8-13 million cubic yards of material.

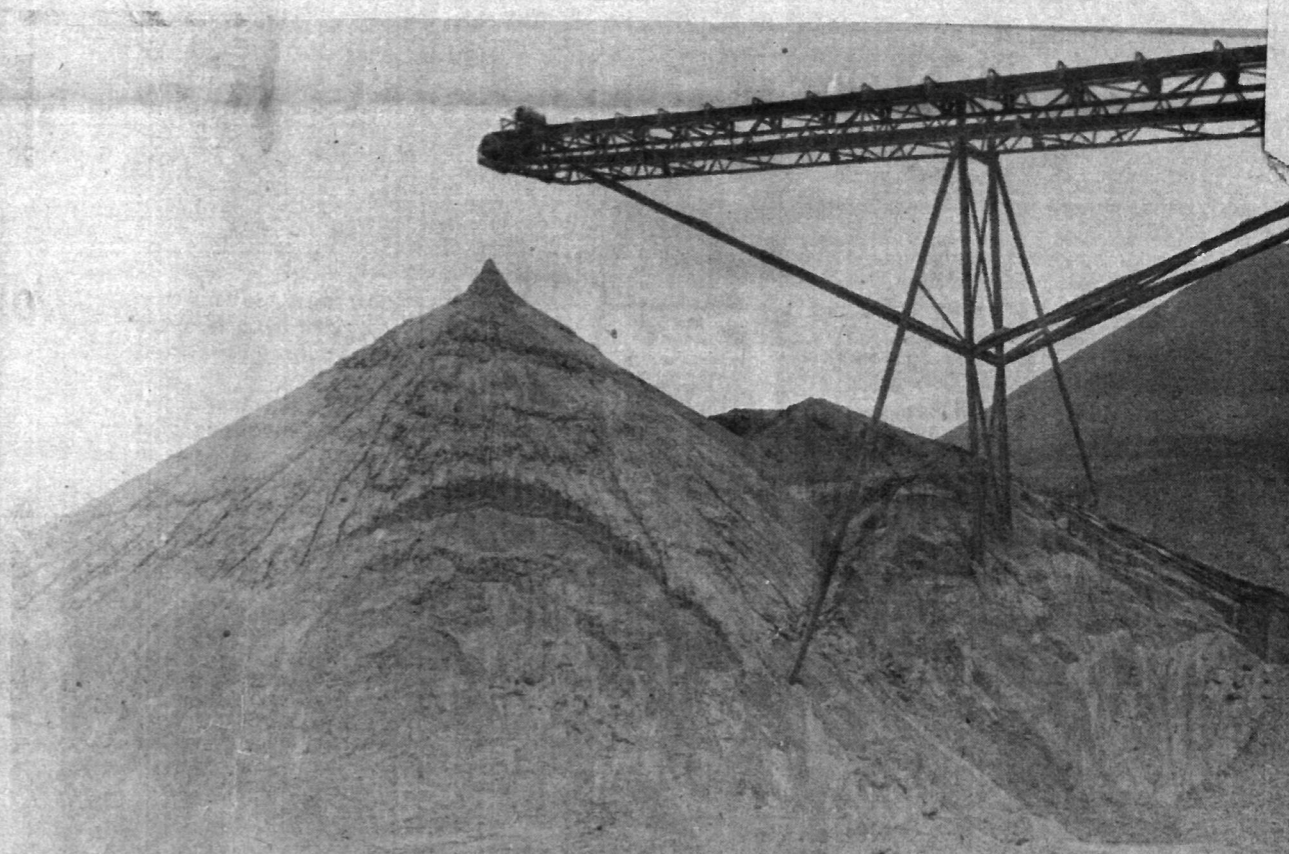
The washing and crushing plant is only part of the overall operation, though. The company also has a Ready-Mix plant for cement deliveries to customers. The fleet of trucks involved in the total operation gives an idea of the amount of equipment needed to keep a plant moving. 22 trucks, including seven big dump trucks, are on the go from Ottertail Ready Mix. It takes

13 employees to keep everything moving. The firm gets involved in just about any type of dirt work you might be interested in...including scrapers, bulldozers, building roads for townships, building basements, backhoe work, and landscaping. Jim Ahlfs is very proud of the plant he has set up in Ottertail and he says he tries hard to keep it looking and clean as possible. "I produce some of the best around," he says, "because of our equipment."



**SIFTING GRID**—This screen is one of the numerous layers the gravel is sifted through as it is sorted into sizes by the equipment at the plant. This grid was about 1/2 inch, with the grid below that smaller, and the one below that smaller yet. The gravel is washed to lower levels by water squirted out of the cross pipes (in middle of photo) (Chuck Johnson photo)

"This is probably one of the only plants in the state to conform with all the DNR permits and everything else," he says proudly. "That's because we're close to a lake." The permit process was long and drawn out, as you would expect in dealing with government regulations. The actual construction of the plant took two years. The plant is a very versatile outlet for just about any type of sand or gravel you might desire. "If we have a market for some material, we'll make it," he says matter of factly. The process begins by scooping up the gravel with payloaders and dumping it into the crusher. That's the last time it will be handled until it comes out as a finished product. From that point on the whole process is electrical. Surprisingly, the crusher isn't deafening, which Ahlfs demonstrates as he turns it on. It grinds and churns, but you can still easily carry on a conversation from 10 or 15 feet away. After the gravel has gone through the crusher, it continues through the various levels in the complex for sorting. The sorting is done through a series of grinds. The material goes over a large grid first, keeping out the larger rocks. Then it falls to a smaller grid, then a smaller grid, etc., until it is totally sorted. Finally, the sorted material rides out on the octopus-like conveyors to be dumped into piles until it's hauled away to fulfill some contract with a builder. With the



**GRAVEL**—This is one of the large piles of gravel accumulated at the end of a conveyor system. Ahlfs estimates he has over a



**LOADING**—Crews were busy last week loading up this Class 5 gravel for some road construction going on in New York Mills. These are two of the seven big dump trucks operated by Ottertail Ready Mix. (Chuck Johnson photo)



**READY MIX**—This Ready Mix truck awaits a load from the mixing plant. The cement was to be delivered to a job site in the area. (Marilyn Johnson photo)