They look like huge grey anchors and have been getting lots of looks recently on area highways.

Nearly 1,000 massive and oddly shaped concrete forms called dolosse are being sent out one at a time from a precast concrete manufacturer in Lima, Livingston County, through Monroe County and down Route 104 for a project at the Port of Oswego.

"We were eating lunch at the local diner here in Lima and there were people at the windows," said Todd Clarke, president of Lakelands Concrete Products, Inc. "We've been making them for a while, but nobody really knows about them."

The $4 million job is the largest project ever for 64-year-old, family-run Lakelands, which has been sending the 16-ton dolosse out from its site for the two-hour tractor-trailer ride to Oswego.

Lakelands started making the dolosse after landing a contract with the Durocher Marine Division of Kokosing Construction Co., a Michigan-based firm working on a nearly $19

million breakwall. The reconstruction project began as a result of Superstorm Sandy, which damaged breakwalls in the area about three years ago.

The Lima company started shipping the dolosse is June and expects to complete its work in September.

While the project is the largest ever for Lakelands, it is not the largest for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Nearly 30,000 1.8-ton dolosse were placed in the Cleveland harbor in 1979-80, while 680 38-ton units were placed at Crescent City, California in 1985, according to the U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers. They have been used at other sites around the country as well.

Building 1,000 Dolosse

Each morning, crews at Lakeland lift eight dolosse out of a steel form filled a day earlier with concrete. Each is then pulled out by crane and transported to a storage yard on the company's 52-acre site.

The forms are then cleaned and prepared for another batch of concrete and rebar bent into cages for reinforcement. Overhead cranes are used to poor the concrete into the forms, which are then closed shut. Each form requires multiple batches of concrete.

“You’ve got to have your game face on when you mess around with this stuff. It’s a lot of pounds. ”
Scott Letson, Lakelands employee
"You've got to have your game face on when you mess around with this stuff," said Lakelands employee Scott Letson. "It's a lot of pounds. That is our No. 1 pour of the day."

Last month Lakelands started shipping the dolosse with the help of three trucking companies. A single dolos is placed and secured on a truck before heading out on the 100-mile trip to Oswego, where they are taken by barge onto the water and then placed into

position using POSIBLOC, a 3D topographical system that doesn't use any cameras or sonar systems.

Along the way, each dolos undergoes a variety of tests for strength and other standards. Lakelands expects to have them all delivered later this year.

"We have never done this type of project before," Clarke said. "It is very, very nerve-wracking taking on a project of this size, but our whole team has really pulled together."

Ready for More

The Oswego project is the first of its kind for Lakelands, which was started in an old railroad roadhouse in Avon by Clarke's grandfather, William Clarke, and a partner. They started out building septic tanks, but over the years expanded to make a variety of retaining walls, utility buildings, bridges, sound walls, manholes, catch basins and other concrete products.

The company has had some setbacks over the years.

Its Honeoye Falls plant was leveled in 1968 by two separate fires in four days. Company officials would eventually sell that property and build a new home in Lima, which would undergo several expansions until a fire burnt the plant to the ground in 1996.

Now the company is close to another expansion, said Clarke, who took over as company president for his dad, Richard, in 2005.

He said the market for concrete and other services provided by Lakelands has recovered from a down period between 2008 and 2012, when the recession impacted a variety of industries across the country and impacted public funding for infrastructure projects.

But the industry has rebounded with the company seeing more bridge, utility and architectural work, along with the Oswego project, in recent months. Lakelands also developed a bridge system to help smaller municipalities that don't have the funds or time to bid work out.

He declined to reveal annual revenues but added that Lakelands is expecting an increase in sales of about 20 percent this year. Its steel fabrication department, woodworking division, testing lab, project management department and other services are housed in a 56,000-square-foot facility.

"Really over the last year I have seen big growth ... especially in the bridge market right now," added Clarke. "We are ready for another expansion. It is really the space for production that we need more than anything else."

Source: Todd Clausen, Democrat & Chronicle