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Power at Your Fingertips

We have one word for our dealers, employees and customers, and that's family.

Not just anyone can walk into the Vac-Con family.

Our family members all have a few things in common: they are hardworking, tough, loyal and empowered, just to name a few. They also know that the Vac-Con brand is the only way to go when they have to get the job done right. We don't take that for granted here at Vac-Con either, and that is why we take the time to highlight our family members in *IVT* magazine.

In each issue you will find page after page of powerful stories about the people we work with to make the sewers cleaner and the digging safer in the most innovative ways possible. Henry Ford once said, *"Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."* That is a quote we hold near and dear to our hearts, as we strive to ensure power at every family member's fingertips.

With the release of the fourth issue, *IVT* magazine perfectly embodies our slogan, *More Power To You*. Our family members know this all too well, and we encourage you to read their outstanding stories.

Visit vac-con.com to learn how you can become part of our Vac-Con family.

Todd Masley

Executive Vice President
Vac-Con, Inc.




IVT is a specialty publication produced by COLE Publishing, Inc. on behalf of Vac-Con, Inc. and is distributed to nearly 8,000 private, industrial and municipal vacuum truck owners throughout North America. This publication is dedicated to showcasing Vac-Con's outstanding products and industry leading customer service through its extensive network of authorized dealers. For more information on Vac-Con or feedback on this publication, our products, employees or dealers, please contact us at (904) 493-4969, or online at vac-con.com.

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Utility Operations Superintendent Ben Wright and his team in Fort Mills, South Carolina, rely on their Vac-Con combination truck to get their work done safely.



Former cop Ben Wright chooses a Vac-Con combo truck to protect his operators

By Jared Raney

PHOTOS BY **KEN OSBURN**

From Police Force to Force Mains

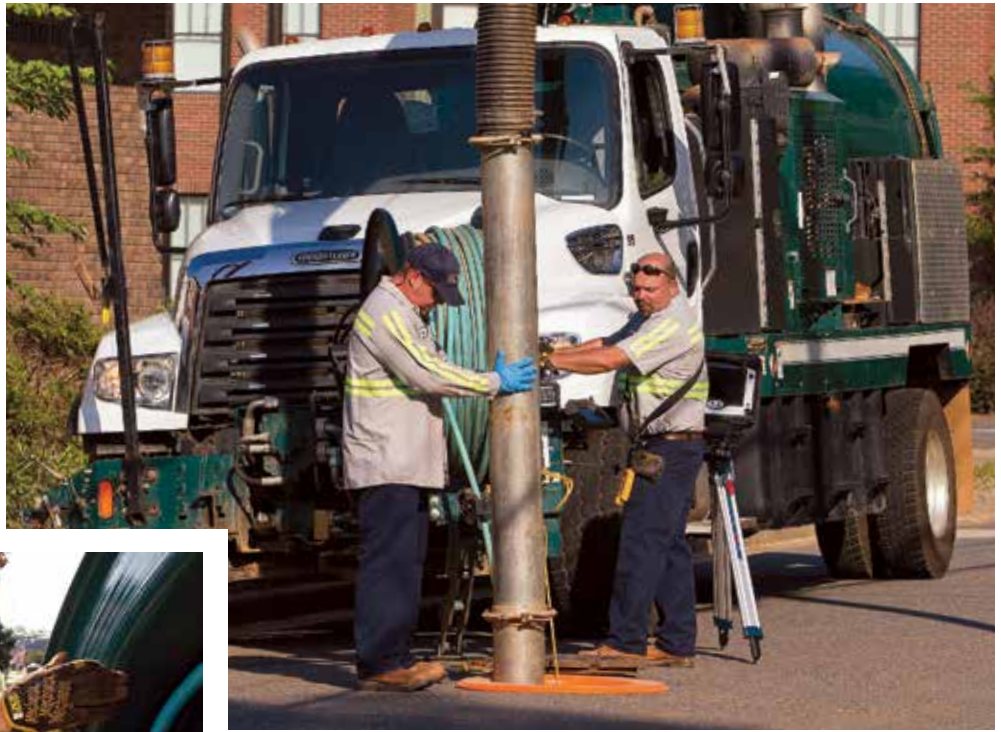
When a force main unexpectedly springs a leak, Ben Wright and his team don't hesitate. They jump right in and get to work without fear, because they know they have the right equipment on their side.

It's something the crew in Fort Mills, South Carolina, has come to expect, but Wright, a former police officer, doesn't take it for granted.

Seven years in law enforcement has a way of making safety a top priority, and 15 years after switching careers, Ben Wright has held on to that mindset as utilities operations superintendent in Fort Mills.

His biggest asset when it comes to safety is the Vac-Con V390LHA-P/1000 combination truck his department bought just over a year ago.

RIGHT: Crewmen operators Travis Blackwelder (left) and Mike Evans connect an extension tube to the vacuum boom while setting up to clean a sewer line. BELOW: Mike Evans handles the controls on a Vac-Con truck while vacuuming debris from a sewer main.



"If it's a very large water leak, we're able to use our Vac-Con to keep water out of the hole and provide our guys with a safer area to work in," Wright says. "We use it every day."

A BETTER WAY

Fort Mills is a fast-growing city, with an estimated population growth of over 10 percent between 2015 and 2016, and a nearly 40 percent increase since 2010 — the seventh-fastest-growing municipality in South Carolina.

The utility serves approximately 6,500 water connections and maintains 250 miles of sewer mains, with 2 mgd passing through their wastewater treatment plant. It is also an MS4 stormwater utility.

"With the size we were at, we were just poised to get a Vac-Con. We kept seeing the need, and we came up with a number and a spec that we liked on the truck, and ended up buying it," Wright says. "From day one we have been using the truck in all three departments."

On more than one occasion the combo unit has saved the day. Like the time a force main sprung a leak and quickly flooded a pump station.

"When you turn those pumps off, you only have a limited amount of time before that wet well is going to fill up, and then you're going to start having overflows," Wright says. "We were blessed to be able to do that, get down in there, hydroexcavate ... and we were able to fix it safely in a timely manner."

"With the size we were at, we were just poised to get a Vac-Con. We kept seeing the need, and we came up with a number and a spec that we liked on the truck, and ended up buying it. From day one we have been using the truck in all three departments."

BEN WRIGHT

Everything has its limitations, but Wright is confident in the equipment's ability to handle just about any challenge.

"You're going to have breaks with high gallons per minute when the truck's not going to be able to keep up. It's just not," he says. "But I would say probably 85 percent of every leak we've had, that Vac-Con has been able to keep up with the water coming out."

In another such instance, when an old, galvanized iron line was accidentally torn loose by a backhoe during excavation, the truck did more than just keep up.

"We were able to keep the water level down, keep the main on so people had service, and our guys were able to get back in there and fix the line no problem — without having to shut anybody off," Wright says.

PAYING THE BILLS

The combo unit more than pulls its weight, and Wright says it's already on its way to paying for itself.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The Fort Mills Utilities team includes (from left) crewman operator Mike Evans, Utility Operations Superintendent Ben Wright, and crewman operator Travis Blackwelder; Ben Wright (right) checks progress while the crew vacuums debris from the sewer main; Wright ties off a rope connected to the lead on the jetting hose.



When he convinced the town of Fort Mills to buy the combination truck, his pitch included achieving a quick return on the investment.

"I set out with a goal of within three years showing return on investment to our council, and we're on track to meet that goal," Wright says. "We know what the contractors charge around here per linear foot to clean the line, or to come in and hydroexcavate a site ... so we're able to keep up with that."

In fact, he is so confident in his goal that he's already planning to add a second Vac-Con. He hopes that by 2021 the utility will be in a position to start spec'ing out another truck, as they did the first.

"I will have that return on investment; I'll have all of that proof right there — 'This is what we've done, this is what we've saved,'" Wright says. "And if I have to push it out six years, I'll be able to say, 'You know what, we've paid for one — we've paid for two actually — with the money we've saved with this one.'"

Though he's thinking of getting a straight-up hydroexcavation truck next time around instead of another combo unit, he's happy with the way the first truck was spec'd.

In particular, a rear pump-off valve has come in handy. Beyond that, the truck has a 9-yard debris tank on a Freightliner SD114 chassis, a Giant 7145 water pump, John Deere 140 hp auxiliary engine, Vac-Con three-stage blower and Linde pres-

sure-compensated pump for precise boom control and other secondary functions.

Disc braking on the chassis is another favorite feature. Despite increasing the weight of the truck considerably, Wright says it's worth it for the increased life span and easier maintenance.

VISIBLE VALUE

Because of the truck's importance to the utility's productivity, operators are required to take excellent care of the vehicle. What's more, Wright loves to have the unit out in plain sight.

"It pays for itself. We want it seen working by the public, so the public can see their investment in action," Wright says. "It makes the taxpayers feel good, that you're not just wasting their money."

"As administrators and providers, we have to be good stewards of their money, because at the end of the day, that's exactly what it is, it's theirs, and they're paying us for a service."

And at the end of the day, the Vac-Con is a win on many fronts. It not only provides safety and reliability for operators, and great ROI for the city, but it fundamentally improves infrastructure.

"We're able to clean, and not just move debris, but clean our actual sewer mains, getting debris and everything out, ultimately prolonging the life of the system, prolonging the life of the pumps and the pump stations." 📷

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The Adams Equipment team includes (from left) Nick Boyles, Rachel Cruzado, Savannah Conger, Tim Conger, Gregg Fugatt, Zack Williams, Danielle Spiess and Mickey Reed.



GIVING CUSTOMERS WHAT THEY NEED

Georgia Vac-Con dealership uses unique perspective to get the right products in customers' hands

BY **CRAIG MANDLI** | PHOTOS BY **KAYLINN GILSTRAP**

If there's one thing Tim Conger hated about dealing with equipment companies in his previous career, it was the attempts to oversell. In fact, he got so fed up that he made a vow that if he were ever in that position, he'd do it the right way.

Conger lives by that philosophy as the owner of Adams Equipment Co., a supplier of sewer and road maintenance equipment, parts and services in Georgia and the Florida panhandle. Before he was hired at Adams, Conger spent more than two decades as a utility worker for a Georgia municipality, working his way up the ladder from a sewer cleaner to combo truck operator and finally department head in charge of equipment purchases for his department. In that role, he dealt with many manufacturers hoping to sell him equipment — some more pushy than others.

"There were always companies trying to sell us things we didn't really need in municipal work," says Conger. "You have to know what you're selling and be honest with your customers. I just think that's the best way to run a business."



CONTINUED LOYALTY

By the time Conger was hired by company founder Grady Adams in 2002, the dealership was already a long-time Vac-Con dealer, specializing in combination truck sales to Georgia municipalities. In fact, Conger had purchased several Vac-Con rigs from Adams in his previous role as a municipal department head. When Conger took ownership of Adams Equipment in 2009, that loyalty to Vac-Con continued.

"Vac-Con had the best combo truck on the market back

Customer service manager Gregg Fugatt (front) and parts associate Mickey Reed make sure everything is tightened down on a Vac-Con combination truck that just arrived at their shop.



LEFT: Customer service manager Gregg Fugatt (front) and sales associate Nick Boyles work through an error code on the operation panel of a customer's truck. BELOW: Adams Equipment owner Tim Conger with a Vac-Con demo truck outside the company's office in Austell, Georgia.

“VAC-CON HAD THE BEST COMBO TRUCK ON THE MARKET BACK THEN, AND THEY HAVE THE BEST ONE TODAY. THERE IS NO NEED FOR US TO LOOK AT ANY OTHERS. I’VE NEVER EVEN CONSIDERED IT.”

Tim Conger

then, and they have the best one today,” he says. “There is no need for us to look at any others. I’ve never even considered it.”

Conger estimates that 80 percent of the company’s sales are to municipalities, with the remaining to private contractors typically performing municipal work. He says the company prides itself on providing a quality product, but is equally dedicated to providing top-notch customer service after the sale.

“That’s the only way you get repeat customers in this business,” he explains. “I may sell a customer the first piece of equipment, but our customer service sells the second, third and fourth.”

Conger says Vac-Con conducts business the same way. He considers several Vac-Con employees to be friends, and doesn’t think twice about calling on them when he has questions, regardless of the time.

“The people I work with at Vac-Con are great from the top down,” he says. “They always step up to put their best foot forward. I like to think we do the same.”

ALONG FOR THE RIDE

Conger soon learned that, while he was very familiar with combination trucks, there was a big difference between trying to buy one and trying to sell one. Fortunately, Vac-Con was right there to help teach him the ropes.


“It’s just such a different perspective between buying and selling,” he says. “You need to be prepared for every question, and really know the product line backward and forward. The people at Vac-Con stressed the importance of making sure our staff was dedicated and knowledgeable, and I’ve taken that to heart. We strive to hire qualified people all the way down the line.”



Conger frequently takes advantage of Vac-Con’s training programs to make sure his mechanics and sales people are on top of new technology. Not only has Adams Equipment continued to sell Vac-Con’s combination machines, they’ve also sold several hydroexcavation units in recent years.

“Hydroexcavation really took off a few years ago,” he says. “We’ve gone out of our way to make sure our employees know Vac-Con’s hydroexcavation units up and down. The people who have bought them from us have had good experience working with them.”

Conger will continue to push the importance of customer service and product knowledge because, having sat on the other side of the bargaining table, he understands a satisfied customer often turns into a repeat customer.

“We aren’t selling something just to sell something,” he says. “Our people know the equipment, and can recognize the applications. We get them exactly what they need.” 

CLS Sewer Equipment owner Jerry Sonier stands alongside a Vac-Con combo unit at the company's office in Richardson, Texas.

SUPPORT LEADS TO GROWTH

Backed by Vac-Con's dealership support, CLS Equipment serves huge Texas territory

BY SARAH UMHOEFER | PHOTOS BY LESLIE BOORHEM-STEPHENSON

When the opportunity to become a Vac-Con dealer presented itself, Jerry Sonier didn't hesitate. He jumped on it, twice. Sonier has opened two Vac-Con dealer facilities that serve a vast area across the state of Texas.

"I've been affiliated with Vac-Con for 20 years now," says Sonier, owner of CLS Equipment. "I was selling Vac-Cons for a company that was a dealer in North Texas since '97, and then in 2007 the opportunity came up to take on the distributorship in North Texas. So I formed CLS 10 years ago and we were able to become the Vac-Con dealer for North Texas."

Vac-Con's support and dedication to its dealers made it possible to take on a territory comprising nearly 270,000 square miles. "That's what sets Vac-Con apart from other manufacturers, absolutely — the unwavering support they give to the dealerships."

TAKING ON TEXAS

When Sonier founded CLS and took over the North Texas territory, he had the advantage of familiarity. "I had an established customer base in North Texas, so that helped," he says.



"Having sold Vac-Cons previously and knowing how they operate also helped tremendously."

Doyle Chapman Jr. tests the controls on a combo unit before moving the truck out of the shop.

A few years later Sonier expanded CLS' operations to include the rest of Texas. "We opened the facility in South Texas in 2011. It was a challenge to open that facility. The market is much bigger in the South Texas area, and we really didn't have a customer base established, so we started at ground zero.

"We went out and demoed, and really the service CLS provides made a big deal," Sonier explains. "Service is what sells trucks. And taking care of the customers' issues and providing continual training, that's what helps build and establish a customer base. That's what gets repeat customers."

RIGHT: The CLS Sewer Equipment team includes (front, from left) Brandi Carr, Jennifer Sonier, and Jerry Sonier; Back: Jeremy Rednor, Aaron Morris, Doyle Chapman Jr., Paul Baumy, Kelly Guy, Kevin Price and Terry Ginn. BELOW: Doyle Chapman Jr. checks over the hose reels on a new Vac-Con V4211 LAJ combination sewer cleaning truck.



But CLS wasn't the only dealership tapping into the southern market. The oil boom increased demand for hydroexcavators, which attracted several other manufacturers to the area.

"It was a good move, but at the same time it was an uphill battle," Sonier says. "Southern Texas is a huge market, and all the major players know it. There are at least 10 shops that are competitors, and they're all converging down there. When the gas market was up in 2007, '08 and '09, they started coming to try to get a little piece of the market."

In September 2016, the decision was made to add another Vac-Con dealer to the Texas market. "When you get down to the border over to El Paso, and all the way across to Beaumont, that's a lot of mileage to cover, and we decided to split the state down the middle," Sonier says. "We took the north half, which we've always had, and we gave Heil of Texas the southern part of Texas."

DEDICATED SUPPORT

When it comes to taking care of its customers, CLS Equipment emulates Vac-Con's ideology. "The customer is the most important. We wouldn't have business if we didn't have customers, and it's our job to take care of them," Sonier says. "That's Vac-Con's philosophy, and that's our philosophy: Build a great truck, and service it."

Although customer service comes in many forms, there are three significant strategies CLS incorporates, with Vac-Con's support: specialized equipment, providing customer education and training, and investing in parts.

"Vac-Con has built some specialized industrial machines for a customer of ours that manufactures the plastic bags that Walmart and grocery stores use. They use plastic pellets in their processing, and so Vac-Con helped design the trucks they use

"THE CUSTOMER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT. WE WOULDN'T HAVE BUSINESS IF WE DIDN'T HAVE CUSTOMERS, AND IT'S OUR JOB TO TAKE CARE OF THEM. THAT'S VAC-CON'S PHILOSOPHY, AND THAT'S OUR PHILOSOPHY: BUILD A GREAT TRUCK, AND SERVICE IT."


Jerry Sonier

to pick up those pellets and transport them," Sonier says. "That customer has probably bought 10 trucks in the past couple of years, and they're buying several more now. They love Vac-Con trucks, and they love our service."

Customer training is another priority at CLS. "We actually put on a training course for our customers in conjunction with Vac-Con, and we usually have 100 to 150 attendees," he explains. "It's a one-day course, and we train the end-users of the trucks we sell. We train them on safety, on operations, and general overall usage of the trucks."

Knowing how to troubleshoot and make repairs isn't very helpful to a customer if they're lacking the necessary parts, so CLS focuses on maintaining a large parts inventory. "We have about three-quarters of a million dollars worth of parts on hand, so we have a big inventory, and we have the full backing of Vac-Con's inventory that we can next-day air. So if it's something that we don't have in stock, we can have Vac-Con ship it out and have it to the customer in one day."

Providing this level of customer support directly stems from Vac-Con's dedication to its dealers and their customers. "Vac-Con is always accessible. We've had their service manager on the telephone at 10 o'clock at night discussing trucks. It's huge. And for us, it's a necessity. It keeps our guys understanding that customer service is the most important part."

"Our philosophy is we're not doing our customers a favor by fixing their trucks; they're doing us a favor by bringing their trucks to us, and we shouldn't take advantage of that. Their business is very important to us." 



A Team Approach

JAAMCO Inc.
Vice President and
COO Jon LaFlamme
with one of the
company's three
Vac-Con combination
trucks.

A healthy business is about so much more than the individual elements that constitute its day-to-day operations. Jon LaFlamme believes it's all about how all those elements work together as a team.

"To me, a successful company isn't based on the equipment you use or the owner, but on your team," says LaFlamme, vice president and COO of JAAMCO Drain Cleaning. "That includes your employees and suppliers. They are all integral to growth and success."

David and Angela Ammons started JAAMCO in suburban Charlotte, North Carolina, in May 2006, right before the recession hit. LaFlamme came on board full time in 2011 in an era of growth for the company: He was the fifth full-time employee, and since then the company has grown to 18 strong with the recent hire of a full-time mechanic. LaFlamme is quick to credit

North Carolina contractor finds that dedicated employees and solid relationships are keys to company's success

By **Craig Mandli**

PHOTOS BY **KEN OSBURN**

the company's founders with setting the wheels in motion.

"I give David and Angela so much credit for actually being able to maintain and build a client base in a time when service companies — especially new ones — were folding fast," he says. "They laid the foundation we're built on."

RIGHT: The staff of JAAMCO Inc. includes Jon LaFlamme, Zack LaFlamme, Peter Ferrufino, Ezequiel Nieto, Edgar Rojas, Emily Gray, Grant Gray, Jeff Varner, Kevin Fernandez, Jim Morgan, Adonis Martin, Al Powell Jr., David Miner, Mike Mandell, Canaan LaFlamme, Shoamari Crawford, Vincent Morgan and Cordera Robinson. BELOW: Jet/vac operator Al Powell Jr. sets up to flush a municipal sewer main with a Vac-Con combo unit.



The company handles everything from sanitary sewer cleaning and repair to storm sewer work and waterline repair and replacement. LaFlamme says that the company's Vac-Con combo trucks handle a lot of the work.

"Vac-Con has been very good to us," LaFlamme says. "Their support is top-notch, and their drain cleaning equipment is the best out there. Over the years, the Vac-Con name has also been a benefit in bringing in business."

BUILDING A REPUTATION

JAAMCO's sewer cleaning technicians utilize three 12-cubic-yard, 3,000 psi Vac-Con combo trucks. The team handles CCTV inspection of sewer lines with R.S. Technical Services camera systems.

"Having cameras takes away the guessing," LaFlamme says. "Inspection pinpoints root intrusion issues, which can be a problem in areas with a lot of trees. Having reliable equipment is huge."

LaFlamme knows that firsthand. While JAAMCO initially started out using Vac-Con rigs, the company was using a competitor's machines when he came on board. It didn't take long to see the frustration on his employees' faces as they struggled to keep them on the road.

"When it comes down to it, they just weren't as reliable as the

Vac-Cons," he says. "We got rid of them pretty quick, and for the last three years we've been exclusively Vac-Con."

LaFlamme says there is always equipment he would like to add, but he's careful about making big purchases. They have the equipment to clean lines up to 80 inches, but he says the company has found its niche cleaning and maintaining 4- to 30-inch sewer lines. "We haven't expanded from our main areas because, frankly, we have the work we need and haven't had to," he says. "We do what we do, and we do it well."

While the company sticks to its bread-and-butter cleaning offerings, its service area has expanded. After two years offering service exclusively in the Carolinas, LaFlamme began offering work in neighboring states in 2013.

"We built up our reputation to the point where we got so many calls from outside our area, we couldn't not listen," he says. "We try to keep it under eight hours of drive time to and from a job, but it can be more depending on the job. Our crews and the Vac-Con trucks handle that no problem."

As for adding additional service area, LaFlamme is seriously thinking about expanding even further up the East Coast. "I see growth potential in the Virginias and into Kentucky," he says. "We get requests from those states, which means we must be doing something right."

The company's combo units have been a big part of the expansion. LaFlamme cites Vac-Con's reliability and how the company stands behind its products as the major selling points. Two examples within the last six months drove that idea home. First, a pump-off hose became disconnected from a truck, and JAAMCO's techs were having difficulty hooking it back up.

"It was kind of an off-hour time, so I ended up calling one of my Vac-Con contacts at home," LaFlamme says. "He connected us with the engineer of the system, and in minutes they were talking us through a solution. We were back up and running in a matter of minutes thanks to them."

The second example proves just how diligently Vac-Con stands behind its products. When one of JAAMCO's older com-

RIGHT: JAAMCO Inc. Vice President and COO Jon LaFlamme outside the company shop in Kernersville, North Carolina. BELOW: The company relies on a fleet of Vac-Con combo units to carry a big part of the workload.



bo trucks began showing symptoms of upper engine problems, LaFlamme called for help.

"We talked through the issues, but in the end the truck had to go back to Vac-Con," he says. "They ended up having to replace the upper engine. Even though the truck was out of warranty, they stood by it and didn't charge us. It's all about pride in what you're doing. That's what Vac-Con instills in their people, and it's what we instill in ours."

STAYING BUSY

Municipal sewer contract work provides 60 percent of the company's business, with subcontracted municipal work accounting for the majority of JAAMCO's remaining jobs. "We do a lot of work as a subcontractor to prepare lines for relining companies," says LaFlamme. "We are starting to see a little uptick in commercial and industrial jobs, but municipal is still our main focus."

The company's underground sewer work primarily involves cleaning a variety of infrastructure components, including sanitary sewers, storm lines, catch basins, irrigation lines, dry wells and digesters. In addition to CCTV inspection capabilities, the company provides lift station and wet well cleaning at treatment plants, hydroexcavation, and even equipment and services aimed at off-road utility work.

"We aim to assess and rehabilitate all types and sizes of pipelines," LaFlamme says. "I believe our service offerings make us uniquely suited to support the largest urban projects to the most remote, rural areas."

A RELIABLE TEAM

At the office level, LaFlamme's mom, Emily Gray, fills a major role as executive assistant, overseeing much of the coordina-

"Vac-Con has been very good to us. Their support is top-notch, and their drain cleaning equipment is the best out there. Over the years, the Vac-Con name has also been a benefit in bringing in business."

JON LaFLAMME

tion of payroll, scheduling and other duties. His dad, Grant Gray, serves as superintendent of sales, and his son, Zack, is the field operations superintendent.

"I believe that my parents instilled a great work ethic in me, so I'm grateful to have them here with me now," says LaFlamme. "My son is working his way up the ladder in the industry the same way I did more than 20 years ago."

LaFlamme says he is happy to have a good crew, but finding new people who are interested in making sewer cleaning a career can be a challenge. He has made training a priority.

"We hire people who have character," he says. "We do a lot of character-building work and communication training with our staff. Our people out in the community are the face of this company. The relationships they build are how we stay in business."

LaFlamme says his team includes his contacts at Vac-Con as well. In addition to sending multiple employees to several Vac-Con-sponsored training events, they know that if they have a question or an issue with a piece of equipment, the answer is likely just a phone call away.

"Every single person from the president on down at Vac-Con is willing to give out their cell number so we can give them a call anytime," he says. "My crews know that the people at Vac-Con are there for us and care that we succeed." ■

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The crew at Envirotech Equipment Co. includes (from left) Ben McDowell, Dave Bogie, Paul Shanks, Ray Price and Mike McNulty.

PART OF THE FAMILY

Wisconsin equipment dealer partners with contractors and utilities across the state

BY GILES LAMBERTSON | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL McLOONE

A company vice president doesn't typically need to work late into the night or start his days well before dawn. But Dave Bogie does that and more for his customers.

"Relationships are very important," says Bogie, the vice president of Envirotech Equipment Co. "We are on the road every day talking with customers, troubleshooting, building those friendships, those partnerships. It's not uncommon to be working till after 9 at night or to be somewhere with a repair at quarter to five in the morning so a contractor can run through another day."

Envirotech is a woman-owned business located in Lannon, Wisconsin; Bogie's wife Lorie is president. The company was founded 12 years ago after Bogie reached the position of national sales manager with a manufacturer and grew tired of never being home with his wife and three daughters. The eight-employee firm has annual business revenue of \$5 million to \$7 million.

The company represents manufacturers of what Bogie characterizes as "public works machines," ranging from sewer cam-



Dave Bogie rotates the vacuum boom on a Vac-Con hydroexcavator to connect an extension tube.

eras measured in ounces to trucks weighing tons — water trucks, street sweepers, asphalt transport trailers.

Six years ago, the company took on a full lineup of Vac-Con equipment, including industrial vacuum trucks, combination sewer cleaning machines, and hydroexcavation rigs. The brand was, in Bogie's estimation, underrepresented in the state. "They are cutting edge, the best in the market. I was given the option of representing the company and grabbed hold of it."

Of all the equipment he represents, sewer cameras are the



Paul Shanks (left) and Ben McDowell demonstrate the setup and operation of a Vac-Con truck outside the company shop.



Dave Bogie shows off a new Vac-Con hydroexcavator outside the Envirotech Equipment shop in Lannon, Wisconsin.



“CONTRACTORS SEEM TO BE LOOKING FOR CAPACITY AND PERFORMANCE, FOR EASE OF MAINTENANCE. MUNICIPALITIES ARE MORE INTO OTHER OPTIONS, MORE CREATURE COMFORTS. VAC-CON IS A REALLY RELIABLE MACHINE FOR BOTH MARKETS. IT’S JUST A MATTER OF PERSONAL PREFERENCE.”

Dave Bogie

company’s No. 1 line. “We cut our teeth on cameras.” Vac-Con equipment vies for second place in sales volume among his product lines, with sales of the machines pretty evenly split between contractors and municipal customers. He’s learned that different Vac-Con features appeal to different customers.

“Contractors seem to be looking for capacity and performance, for ease of maintenance,” he says. “Municipalities are more into other options, more creature comforts. Vac-Con is a really reliable machine for both markets. It’s just a matter of personal preference.”

The 12-yard-capacity combination sewer cleaner is Bogie’s most popular Vac-Con product, usually configured with a 1,500-gallon freshwater tank and a pump pushing out 50 to 80 gallons per minute. Bogie is impressed with a number of the Vac-Con features but says, “We really try to push the unique three-stage fan. That’s a staple.”


Envirotech’s market area is the entire state of Wisconsin. Bogie says they might someday try to cross state lines into northern Illinois, but not at the moment. Because the state’s most populous areas are in the south, the strongest market activity is there, too. “But we have Vac-Con customers throughout the state, way up in the northwest and in the northeast. There are

many pieces of Vac-Con equipment in Wisconsin.

“There are a lot of repeat customers. People who buy Vac-Con typically stay with the company’s products. The machines are very reliable and people get used to their reliability. Each machine is a large expenditure and can take a lot of effort to sell, but typically Vac-Con buyers don’t change brands. I like to believe customers also return because of our service. We spend a lot of time working with our Vac-Con customers.”

Bogie visited the manufacturer’s Florida factory and came away impressed by the multimillion-dollar expansion. “It’s beautiful. It’s cutting edge.” The family feel at the headquarters also left him feeling “part of the team.”

“We’re pretty laid back at Envirotech, but we work hard,” he says. “We enjoy working with Vac-Con. It is a fun product for us, certainly one of our flagship products.” 



Guildner Pipeline Maintenance owner Jerry Guildner grew up in the sewer and water industry, joining his dad's company right after high school and eventually taking the reins 25 years ago.

A Lasting Legacy

Business is good for second-generation Mile-High cleaning contractor and his fleet of Vac-Cons

By Giles Lambertson

PHOTOS BY CARL SCOFIELD

Most of Jerry Guildner's good work doesn't see the light of day. It's not a secret; it's just buried below the streets of the Denver metropolitan area.

Guildner Pipeline Maintenance is located in the northern suburb of Commerce City, but the company works on wastewater and stormwater collections systems throughout the area between Fort Collins and Colorado Springs. Denver alone has 1,900 miles of sewer lines, and cities and water districts in the 10 counties surrounding the Mile-High City have plenty more.

Subterranean business is good. "We're hiring," says D.J. Guildner, Jerry's nephew and the company's vice president of operations. "We've had four hires so far this year and are looking for a couple more." The company, which has annual gross revenue of \$3.5 million to \$4 million, employs 30 people, 26 of them in the field.

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The firm has been around for 40 years but its work really dates back to 1955 when founder Fred Guildner, a Nebraska native with a construction industry background, started a sewer and water line repair company in Westminster. He retired after 20 years, and then came out of retirement in 1976 to found Guildner Pipeline Maintenance. In 2001, his son Jerry moved the company 7 miles up the road to a 4 1/2-acre operations center in Commerce City.

Jerry joined the company after high school, and never hesitated about succeeding his father. "I guess it was in my blood," he says. He has led the company for 25 years now. "The variety of the work appeals to me. Day in, day out, we are not at the same site. I also enjoy being able to help customers figure out problems they're having underground. Finding solutions to their problems is a big part of my enjoyment."

Guildner believes his company's culture and workday environment are conducive to staff longevity. Two employees have logged 22 years at the company. "We have our fun. I think if you talk to the guys I would hope they would say it is like family working here."

Among those "guys" is Mariah Lei. She was hired as a helper, went on to get her NASSCO certification as a video operator, and now does a big chunk of the company's pipeline inspection work. "She's awesome," D.J. Guildner says. "It's great to have her here."

TOP: Greg Hesalroad and Ed Nelson fill up one of Guildner Pipeline's Vac-Con combination trucks at a fire hydrant.
RIGHT: Pat Wilson and Greg Hesalroad keep a close eye on their work while vacuuming debris from a 30-inch sewer main.



Pat Wilson and Greg Hesalroad jet a sewer main with 2,500 psi at 80 gpm from their Vac-Con.



LEFT: Pat Wilson checks over a Vac-Con before refilling the tank with water. BELOW: Jerry Guildner checks in with his crew as they wrap up a sewer cleaning job.

“Some competing dealers told me it would be eight to 10 months before I could get a delivery. Mike Williams said the same at first and then came back and told me Vac-Con could get the truck to me in 90 days. That was unheard of. Mike and the company bent over backward to get me those trucks.”

JERRY GUILDNER

EQUIPMENT ADVANCEMENTS

Inspecting and cleaning pipes constitutes the bulk of the company's work. That's been the case from the beginning after Guildner's inventive father engineered one of the industry's first CCTV units, a device that his son laughingly describes as “crude and ugly.”

The firm now has nine high-tech video units, which creep along underground on four-wheel- or six-wheel-drive tractors and provide a clear view of what's happening in the lines. Each video unit is assigned to a vehicle, part of the firm's 35-vehicle fleet that also includes nine Vac-Con combination sewer cleaning trucks.

Six of the Vac-Con combo trucks are configured with a 1,300-gallon freshwater tank and 12-cubic-yard debris tank. A more compact unit has a 9-yard debris box, but features the same standard equipment as the larger units, including a 20 gpm/600 psi washdown system hand gun with 25 feet of hose. Guildner also operates two Vac-Con Hot Shot Jet Rodders, a model 1000 with a 1,000-gallon-capacity polyethylene water



tank, and a model 1600 with a 1,600-gallon tank. The jet units dislodge stones and sludge using a 30 gpm/3,000 psi water pump system and a variety of nozzles.

All the trucks roll out to support municipalities and water districts with clogged or problematic lines. The company also helps contractors renovate sewer lines. Guildner assists the contractors by cleaning and inspecting to document a pipe's true condition.

The company also offers root treatment, manhole rehabilitation and pipeline point repairs. Yet the cleaning and video services constitute 80 percent of Guildner's business. The company does all the cleaning and video work for 15 major customers and a good portion of the work for another 20 customers.

The work definitely has its challenges. For example, in 2013, after extensive flooding in the area, Guildner Vac-Con crews unplugged lines by flushing out bodies of dead raccoons — about one a day — that had been swept into the pipes. Two years ago, a video camera being floated on a pontoon inside a 48-inch pipe in downtown Denver toppled into the water after a line snagged and workers lost it trying to dislodge it. “We never did find that camera. It didn't even show up at the sewer plant.”

The least favorite pipe cleaning assignment was at a local rendering plant, where dead animals and slaughterhouse waste is recycled. “The smell is bad, the condition of the pipe is bad — so greasy — and you have to cut through all that grease.” Guildner hasn't heard from the plant in a while and privately is not disappointed.

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Pat Wilson and Greg Hesalroad set up for a sewer cleaning job; Jerry Guildner keeps an eye on the progress as his crew cleans a line; Pat Wilson and Greg Hesalroad feed the Vac-Con's jetting hose into a sewer main.



AN ABIDING ALLIANCE

During Jerry Guildner's tenure as chief executive, the company started investing in Vac-Con combo units for cleaning. His father had previously owned a sewer cleaning truck and jetter from other manufacturers, but when his son took over, an enduring relationship with Vac-Con began. Guildner gives two reasons for his brand loyalty. The first reason, he says succinctly, is it's "a good piece of equipment."

The second reason is Williams Equipment of Henderson. Guildner credits the 25-year-old Vac-Con dealership with providing him exemplary service in the handling of any issues that develop with the equipment. What's more, he says the dealer and the Vac-Con factory in Florida rescued him twice after the company picked up cleaning projects and needed a new truck ... yesterday.


"Some competing dealers told me it would be eight to 10 months before I could get a delivery," Guildner recalls. "Mike Williams said the same at first and then came back and told me Vac-Con could get the truck to me in 90 days. That was unheard of. Mike and the company bent over backward to get me those trucks."

Guildner's newest Vac-Con combination rigs have optional features like telescopic booms, wireless remote control that lets operators work truck functions — including chassis engine rpm and boom movement — from the working end of the hose, as

well as the three-stage centrifugal compressor that enhances vertical and horizontal pull in difficult vacuuming situations. The trucks are not fitted with the Hi-Dump option because his projects don't require it.

Guildner is a big fan of the standard dual engines in Vac-Con cleaning trucks. "I like the idea just because it reduces wear and tear on the engines. If you have to run that chassis engine all the time for whatever you are doing, it's going to wear out quicker."

Most trucks leave the yard and return the same day, but overnight assignments pop up, such as a Hot Shot crew staying in Colorado Springs rather than fighting freeway traffic along the Rocky Mountain front on successive days. Guildner also has sent trucks as far away as Montana, Texas and California after local contractors landed big jobs there and brought in Guildner as a subcontractor.

Job satisfaction for Jerry Guildner comes from knowing a cleaning crew has done a good job and given a customer the ability to function at a higher level. "It's gratifying." 

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Balar Equipment President Mark Spaulding and his team provide Vac-Con sales and service for the entire state of Arizona.

CUSTOMIZED SOLUTIONS

Balar Equipment deals with diverse topography by tailoring equipment to application

BY SARAH UMHOEFER | PHOTOS BY MARK HENLE

From deserts and canyons to mountains and plateaus, Arizona's diverse geography presents a unique situation for Balar Equipment, the sole Vac-Con dealer in the Grand Canyon State.

"We sell our equipment in quite the range of environments, with mountains in the north and on the eastern border with New Mexico, all the way to the south where it's all desert," says Mark Spaulding, company president. "That has an effect on how equipment is built and specified, depending on where customers are at and what application they're using it for."

Balar's customer base is predominantly municipal. "We sell to every single city, town and county, including the state of Arizona and every Native American community, water districts and other entities. For example, we just sold a truck to one of the largest nuclear plants in the country located in western Arizona. We're able to cover quite the gamut," Spaulding says.

This variety boils down to one overarching concept for specifying out Vac-Con products: "Conditions dictate how we build combination machines and hydroexcavators," Spaulding says. "We have places with rock-hard soil in Arizona, which is called caliche and is kind of like chalk, so the hydroexcavation prod-



Service manager Brian Stevens cuts a piece of metal tubing for a repair in the company shop.

ucts are designed and built to handle that type of environment where, as in other parts of the state, we deal with much softer materials.

"My point is, with Vac-Con we have the ability to customize the equipment that we sell to our customers."

LONG HISTORY

Ever since the company's founding in 1984, Balar Equipment has primarily done business with municipalities.

"We originally started out selling parking meters. Over the years it expanded into multiple lines of what we call infrastructure maintenance equipment," Spaulding says. "The founder of Balar Equipment, Mike Baker, was one of the original Vac-Con dealers.

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LEFT: The Balar Equipment crew includes Danny Malejko, Steve Pietrzykowski, Jim Blasko, Paul Shanks, Nicki Federman, Brian Stevens, Peter Evans, Dewayne Moody, Mark Spaulding, John Pase, Troy Huntley, David Orwen, Steve Hirschfeld and Dustin Frisk. **BELOW:** Balar Equipment President Mark Spaulding, Mark Snyder of Achen-Gardner Construction, Balar sales representative Steve Hirschfeld and COO Peter Evans talk outside the Balar office in Phoenix.

“WHEN MANUFACTURERS’ REPRESENTATIVES FOR OUR OTHER PRODUCT LINES COME IN, THEY GET TIRED OF US SAYING, ‘WHY CAN’T YOU DO IT LIKE VAC-CON?’ AND THAT’S THE TRUTH — THEY REALLY ARE THE GOLD STANDARD IN THE WAY THEY WORK WITH THEIR DEALERS FOR THE MUTUAL SUCCESS OF BOTH ENTITIES.”

Mark Spaulding

He became a dealer just a few years after founding the company.”

Spaulding and his business partner, Peter Evans, bought Balar Equipment in 2002, and the fact that the company carried the Vac-Con line was instrumental in their purchase decision.

“Vac-Con is without a doubt the gold standard of manufacturers involved in this industry. When manufacturers’ representatives for our other product lines come in, they get tired of us saying, ‘Why can’t you do it like Vac-Con?’ And that’s the truth — they really are the gold standard in the way they work with their dealers for the mutual success of both entities.”

CUSTOMIZED SOLUTIONS

Considering the varied geography of Balar’s customers, Vac-Con’s flexibility and ingenuity when it comes to unique product applications is one of the manufacturer’s greatest strengths, Spaulding says. “Vac-Con has the most customizable accommodations in the market. They’re always open to engineering adjustments so we can provide the customer with exactly what they need for their application.”

Vac-Con’s commitment to customization leads to product evolution, which can open up opportunities in the market. The company’s stand-alone hydroexcavator is a prime example.

“That really started out as an add-on to their combination sewer machine, but over the years people started to ask, ‘We’ve got high-pressure water here and the ability to pick up mud and dirt. Can we get a little more pressure? Can we customize it this way and that way?’

“That’s where we’ve really seen Vac-Con grow, and what makes it so great to be a Vac-Con dealer: When you say, ‘Hey, can you do this?’ their answer is always, ‘We’ll sure try.’ And they



usually come up with a solution for the customer. That’s what gives us an advantage over our competitors who represent other manufacturers of similar equipment.”


With Arizona’s large copper mining industry, Vac-Con’s ability to quickly adapt to unique applications was key in helping one of Balar’s customers. “The copper mining process creates a very thick waste product, similar to a mud-type slurry, that periodically has to be removed,” Spaulding says.

“We had an enterprising customer who had a contract with the mines to remove this, and he came to us and asked, ‘Do you think we could suck this material out with a Vac-Con, or is it too thick?’ We took one of our machines up there, and Vac-Con helped us make a few minor modifications. It worked very successfully to remove that material from the mines, and at a lower cost than the alternative. So it was a win-win for us, for our customers, and for Vac-Con.”

DEALERSHIP AND CONSULTANTS

Spaulding considers Balar to be not only a dealership, but also a consulting agency of sorts. “Our goal is to be a solution provider and maintain long-term relationships with our customers. To do that, we look at ourselves as consultants: We come out and talk about the need the customer is trying to address with their purchase.

“Especially with Vac-Con’s array of options, we can very specifically address the customer’s needs so their crews are more efficient and they have a piece of equipment that does exactly what they are trying to accomplish.”

Balar’s approach with customers mirrors Vac-Con’s with its dealers. “Vac-Con is exemplary as far as the way they make us feel part of their company. Their goal is to help us, and that makes all the difference in the world. The bottom line is Vac-Con was one of the primary reasons that my business partner and I bought Balar, and it is one of the primary reasons for our success.” 



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