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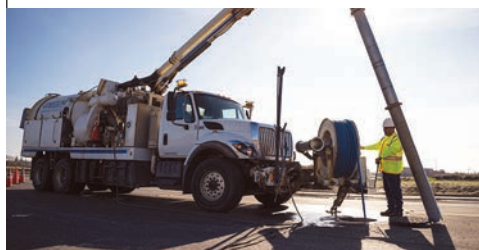
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Power at Your Fingertips

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 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 is at every family member's fingertips.

With the release of the fifth 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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INNOVATION PAVES THE WAY

Trius Inc. provides specialized trucks and equipment to a client base that includes high-profile accounts like the New York City Department of Sanitation, the New York Department of Transportation and Con Edison.

Vac-Con dealer builds, maintains customer base with highly personalized units

BY SARAH UMHOEFER | PHOTOS BY CHRISTOPHER CAPOZZIELLO

For Trius Inc. to provide its customer base what it needs, the company relies on innovation — a concept Vac-Con has built its reputation on.

“I think it’s always been Vac-Con’s badge of honor that they aggressively integrate new technology,” says Bob Hamilton, Trius executive vice president. “They’ve always been willing to take on new challenges, which is part of what’s brought us to the point where we are in the market today, at least in our territory. I think we are probably the No. 1 selling vacuum loader in our territory for municipalities. I can’t verify that number, but from what we see — and we have a pretty good handle on what’s going on — we’re certainly vying if we’re not No. 1.”

Trius Inc. has four locations, including a corporate office in Bohemia, New York; a 35,000-square-foot facility in Fort Edward, New York; a facility in Farmingdale, New Jersey; and a 30,000-square-foot facility in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

MADE TO ORDER

Trius’ Vac-Con customer base comprises high-profile accounts, including the New York City Department of Sanitation, the New York Department of Transportation and Con Edison. Across the board, no two Vac-Con units are the same.

“They’re all different. Some of them have different pressures and flows, some have different water capacities, some have



different articulated hose reels,” Hamilton says.

Con Edison, one of Trius’ most recent big contracts, switched from a competitive product to Vac-Con after running a test unit for a year. “They immediately went to bid for a single unit last September, and then in December they ordered four more. So in roughly a two-year period of time, Con Ed will have gone from a zero Vac-Con population to six units, and we expect to place additional units shortly.

“These aren’t standard units. These are highly specialized, tapered to the customer’s requirements,” Hamilton says. “For example, Con Ed requires all of its units’ compartments to be heated. It’s an easy thing to say, but a difficult thing to do.”

Complying with city law was another hoop Trius and Vac-Con helped Con Ed jump through. The maximum allowed length of a single-unit vehicle is 35 feet. “We worked collaboratively with Vac-Con to come under 35 feet for Con Ed. We kicked

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“RIGHT NOW IF I LOOK AT VAC-CON IN COMPARISON TO THEIR MAIN COMPETITOR, THEY HAVE MORE BOOM REACH, THEY HAVE MORE VACUUM BOOM ROTATION, THEY DRAW LESS HORSEPOWER, THEY HAVE THE MOST EFFICIENT HYDRAULICS AND THEY HAVE THE MOST DURABLE WATER TANK.”

Bob Hamilton

around a few ideas, and the final analysis we were able to work together was a shorter boom elbow. It required some pretty fancy footwork and shaved about 6 inches overall off the length of the truck. When you're 3 or 4 inches over and it's the difference between bid acceptance or rejection, that's huge.”

Units for the Department of Sanitation and DOT also required specialization, which took time to design. “We placed two units in each of those departments, and each of those departments had their own specialty requirements, which made them very different units in the final analysis.

“For example, Sanitation had a dedicated cab-over fleet. Placing Vac-Con units on conventional cab trucks is a difficult task because of the difference in weight distribution between cab-over and noncab-over trucks. Just to define the unit as built was a two-year process — identifying the nuances and figuring out how to accomplish that.”

DRIVING INNOVATION

Hamilton describes two different schools of thought when it comes to manufacturing equipment. First, there's building equipment with parts that fit all units from year to year, model to model, for the sake of efficiency, easy inventory management and consistency.

Then there's the other line of thinking: staying on the lookout for new technology to introduce to units. “So the product



Company President Gary Cervelli and the team at Trius Inc. service and sell Vac-Con trucks to contractors and municipal departments throughout New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The company was founded in 1959 by Cervelli's father.

is ever changing, but you develop the technological edge. Vac-Con, for instance, has pioneered the use of front-crankshaft driven load-sense pumps. Unless you really know the nomenclature to understand the difference between that and a gear pump, you can't appreciate how it affects your performance, your fuel consumption, your engine longevity, your pump longevity and your simplicity of use in a very positive fashion.”

Vac-Con's drive for improvement is what sets it apart in the market. “Right now if I look at Vac-Con in comparison to their main competitor, they have more boom reach, they have more vacuum boom rotation, they draw less horsepower, they have the most efficient hydraulics and they have the most durable water tank. Those are all key elements of what it takes to build a successful truck over the long run.”

Vac-Con's innovative approach wasn't developed by accident, either, Hamilton says. “It's because their top management were operators. When you boil it all down, at the end of the story you come to find out that the guys who are innovating this equipment were the people who were working in the hole, and that makes all the difference in the world.”

“It's because their top management were operators. When you boil it all down, at the end of the story you come to find out that the guys who are innovating this equipment were the people who were working in the hole, and that makes all the difference in the world.”

F

ollowing the recession, most companies sought stability. Sanders Bros. had a more ambitious idea: expand into new services.

When the economy started to bounce back and new construction increased, Sanders Bros. jumped in to fill the market gap for vacuum services in a big way.

After only a few years, South Carolina construction contractor Sanders Bros. took its startup vacuum division from four workers to 30, and one to seven trucks, securing an indefinite contract with Charleston along the way.

GETTING STARTED

Sanders Bros. has been in business since 1962, and has expanded over the years from its base in heavy highway and civil construction. They didn't make the foray into vacuum and camera

work until 2014.

"We primarily got into it because we needed to control our own schedules on our construction work, and from there we saw a need in the market. It just began to grow in our area," says Kurt Becht, vacuum division manager.

Since then, they've grown exponentially.

Starting small and creating growth one building block at a time is a tradition for Sanders Bros., which started with the two brothers and a pair of dump trucks, and grew into a leading force in the South Carolina construction game.

Today they have numerous services, from grading and paving to soil stabilization and concrete work, with 250 employees. They have three asphalt plants, and also recycle crushed asphalt and concrete.

They have six combination machines and a hydroexcavation truck — all Vac-Con. In addition they have three camera trucks, and occasionally rent equipment to meet demand.

Sucking Up Market Share

Internal demand floods over into successful new vacuum division for South Carolina contractor

By Jared Raney

PHOTOS BY KATE THORNTON



Sanders Bros. Construction – Vacuum Division

Founded: 1962; Vacuum Division – January 2014

Employees: 250 companywide; 30 in division

Equipment: 6 Vac-Con combination machines; 1 Vac-Con hydroexcavation truck; 3 camera trucks

Website: www.sandersbrothers.com

WORKING FOR THE COMPETITION

Although there's a need in the market and room to grow, the area isn't without competition. Fortunately, an unusual confluence of factors has allowed them to build.

"We're a little bit unique in that we work a lot for ourselves, internally, but we also work for pretty much all of our competition — all of our company's competition in other areas," Becht says. "So we have a fairly wide customer base, and that's been a little bit of a unique challenge."

Being an established construction company lends a certain standing among the industry — even when it comes to opposition forces.

"The big thing is we recognized that there was more demand than the current market was supplying, and we had an internal demand," says Vice President Tom Stokes. "So we made a decision to start with one truck, based upon the internal demand, but as we got into it, we recognized that the demand within the market necessitated growing from where we were four years ago to where we are today."

In addition, the new division was able to leverage the parent company's long-standing good name to get jobs that otherwise might have been out of their reach.



THE CHARLESTON CONTRACT

One of their biggest, earliest and most stable contracts has been with the city of Charleston.

"Our contract with the city is, for lack of better terms, an indefinite-quantity-type contract," Becht says.

They started working with the municipality early on in the division's history, starting small and building the contract up until they became a go-to contractor.

"The first year was a touch-and-go situation. It was a one-year contract with a possible renewal. We worked really hard to build a relationship with the city personnel over that time," Becht says. "That trust level has given us opportunity to continue."

"Through the years, the company has built a reputation for being able to accomplish pretty much anything that we set out to, and we used that level of trust and reputation to secure that city's contract."

NO SHORTAGE OF CHALLENGES

Despite its reputation for picturesque beaches, a rich history and temperate climate, South Carolina is far from paradise when it comes to vacuum work.



Sanders Bros. crew members Matt Paules (top) and Joe Hatton work on a project at the Medical University of South Carolina Children's Hospital.



"We run into challenging jobs on every project," says Joseph Hatton, field supervisor. "We actually enjoy finding those and conquering them."

Everything from tidal issues to aging infrastructure comes into play on a day-to-day basis in the southern coastal area. That's not to mention the less frequent, but not uncommon pains, such as hurricanes and flooding.

"Probably our bread and butter is new construction," Hatton says. But they also take on plenty of cleaning and inspection work for existing infrastructure — much of it for the city of Charleston.



Matt Paules operates the controls on a Vac-Con truck while Joe Hatton uses a spray gun to clean a pit.

A flood of demand during weather events

South Carolina is popular for many reasons, but the state's reputation for hurricanes and floods aren't among them.

Despite the risk of such weather, the islands along South Carolina's coast are populated with vacation homes and play host to numerous tourists.

When the inevitable flooding comes, someone has to be ready to spring into action. Enter Sanders Bros. vacuum and camera division.

After the historic flood of 2015, Sanders Bros. secured a FEMA contract cleaning the storm drain infrastructure for Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms. They cleaned approximately 250 boxes and 8,000 feet of pipe.

They have also worked to prevent problems related to flooding. For example, the company secured a contract with Kiawah Island, cataloguing the island's aging storm drain infrastructure.

"Our customer base is fairly wide-ranging," says Kurt Becht, division manager. "We primarily got into vacuum work because we needed to control our own schedules on our construction work, and from there we saw a need that we wanted to meet."

The division's seven Vac-Cons have held up to every challenge, including 1,000 feet of double-barrel box culvert, 10-foot by 5-foot-diameter, that was about 50 percent full of material.

Another job involved keeping up with a directional drilling rig, vacuuming the boring mud along a 300-foot bore going beneath the terminal building at Charleston International Airport.

Pulls like that have gone above and beyond what Sanders Bros. was promised with the equipment.

"We'll push the envelope for things that people probably don't want to do," says Fred Warner, division manager. "We run 'em all the time; they run smooth."

Some of the challenges aren't just situational. As the oldest city in South Carolina, many of Charleston's pipes are 200 years old. Add that to the challenges of being on the coast, with tidal saltwater eroding storm drains and flooding common on the small islands.

Fortunately, the vacuum division team is more than up to the task — and so is their Vac-Con equipment.

WORKING WITH VAC-CON

Sanders Bros. staff say it's not just the equipment itself that helps get the job done, but also the support that comes implicit with each purchase.

"Fred and Jo are extremely innovative in their approach, and how they utilize the equipment, and the local dealer as well as Vac-Con has been receptive to working with them and helping them produce good results," Becht says. "When issues arise during projects, they stand behind us and work through those issues, helping us continue to achieve good results."

In one instance, on a job out of town, a rental Vac-Con they were using broke down. It was

over the weekend, and a Vac-Con salesman who was on his way out of town turned around and joined the crew on site.

"He changed his plans so he could stay with the crew to ensure the equipment got repaired and the rest of the job went smoothly, and offered us support," Becht says.

REVENUE DIVERSIFICATION

The vacuum and camera division makes up about 10 percent of the company's overall workload, and 5 percent of revenue. For a new asset of a company that's been around since 1962, it's not a negligible contribution.

If the last four years are any indication, the division will continue to grow, providing not only dependable vacuum, inspection and hydroexcavation for the large construction company's many projects, but also diversifying Sanders Bros.' revenue through a market segment that isn't going away anytime soon. 📷





SUCCESS IS BUILT ON SUPPORT

The team at Henard Utility Products includes (from left) Service Manager Mickey Henard, mechanic Bob Schoff, company owner Mike Henard, sales consultant Jerry Todd and sales administrator Doug Nussey.

Vac-Con dealer prioritizes education and service to maintain customer satisfaction

BY SARAH UMHOEFER | PHOTOS BY KAREN PULFER FOCHT

After 30-plus years in the field and experience with multiple manufacturers, Mike Henard is confident that Vac-Con is second to none.

"We deal with around 15 different manufacturers," says the owner of Henard Utility Products Searcy, Arkansas. "Ever since I've been with Vac-Con, I've said they're the most dealer-friendly, customer-friendly, accommodating, and easiest-to-live-with manufacturer that we have. Vac-Con is No. 1 in the way that they support me and in the way they support the end-users I sell to."

Vac-Con understands the challenges that dealers and end-users encounter every day, and Henard considers that a significant differentiator.

"Vac-Con has not forgotten how it feels to sell Vac-Con. They help us face the issues that customers have every day, and

they're very good at it," he says. "Everybody from their parts department to service and sales has a very good feeling for what the end-users go through on a daily basis."

EDUCATION A PRIORITY

Evolving technology over the last few decades requires ongoing training for both end-users and dealers.

"The evolution of these machines has gone from a basic mechanical truck to a unit that has a great deal of electronic and software controls that need a particular kind of education and training," Henard says. "That has changed what an operator is required to do these days to make sure the trucks operate the way they're designed to."

To meet the training needs of customers and its own service technicians, Henard Utility Products works with Vac-Con to provide instruction sessions throughout the year.

"Vac-Con has a national dealer meeting every year where we come for training and the introduction of new products. Their field representatives have always been very good about scheduling service schools in our territory, and we'll usually have one or two sessions for operators to make sure they are up to speed on operations."

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In addition to service school opportunities, Henard Utility Products also ensures customers are educated initially after a sale, with an emphasis on safety.

“Our sales rep, Jerry Todd, goes on site and stays as long as it takes — one day, two days or three — to make sure that everybody understands everything there is to know about the operation of the truck, particularly the safety aspects,” Henard says. “Operator safety is foremost. These trucks are big equipment that have high-pressure pumps and high-pressure water, so there is a safety issue with every sewer cleaner.”

SUPPORT DURING AND AFTER THE SALE

Many of Henard’s customers order custom units, which require a high level of service from the dealer and the manufacturer.

“There are so many variables that can be built into these machines, and different customers have their own preferences,” Henard says. “Vac-Con is the best for meeting all of our customer preferences and the logistics of getting the product to us and to the end users. They are better than anybody I know of as far as getting the product built in a timely fashion and maintaining a high level of quality control.”

When it comes to filling customer orders, Vac-Con has a turnaround time between 45 to 60 days, Henard says, and the support continues after delivery. “Vac-Con’s support after the machine is paid for is second to none. As far as their service,

In addition to quality service and equipment, Henard Utility Products and Vac-Con work together to provide instruction sessions for customers throughout the year.

“VAC-CON’S SUPPORT AFTER THE MACHINE IS PAID FOR IS SECOND TO NONE. AS FAR AS THEIR SERVICE, THEIR WARRANTY AND THEIR PARTS, THEY ARE THE VERY BEST.”

Mike Henard

their warranty and their parts, they are the very best.”


Support after the sale is the foundation for Henard Utility Products in building and maintaining customer relationships — even under questionable circumstances. “We had a customer bring in a truck after the fan assembly had failed, and on this particular unit, it was because it was not taken care of properly. However, to maintain a relationship with that customer, Vac-Con provided a new fan assembly in a very dubious warranty situation. It was very much appreciated by us, and greatly appreciated by the customer.”

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Henard’s customer service philosophy can be summed up in four short words: Go the extra mile.

“We never give up on service. We always go the extra mile to make sure the customer’s needs are met. We want to sell them their next truck and be their vendor of choice. In order to do that, we have to give them good service and good attention. I don’t know how anybody could stay in this business if they don’t provide good, attentive and complete service.”

Providing excellent customer service doesn’t start or stop with the dealer, though. It’s a team effort between manufacturer and dealer, and Henard Utility and Vac-Con maintain a strong partnership.

“We have no issues with Vac-Con at all. Period. I have nothing but admiration for the way they do business, the logistics of how they get machines built and get them to you, and support them after the sale.” 

GOING STRONG

Preventive maintenance will keep your Vac-Con up and running

Preventive maintenance is imperative to the performance, longevity and success of your Vac-Con. It also protects your investment and ensures higher resale value.

One of the most common questions from Vac-Con's end-user customers is "What can I do to prevent our unit from being down?" Fortunately, the answer is simple. By understanding and following the company's scheduled maintenance, you'll see an improvement in performance and a reduction in downtime and component failures.

SERVICE INTERVALS

When tracking service intervals on a Vac-Con, it's imperative that the hours are tracked rather than the miles. The unit's systems are being used in stationary work mode and the miles won't compensate for that wear.

Beyond that, maintenance is simple and is broken down into the following subcategories: chassis, auxiliary engine, water pump, hydraulic system, hydrostatic system and positive displacement (PD) blower.

For the chassis and auxiliary engine, the manufacturer's recommended maintenance intervals are followed. Meanwhile, hydraulic and hydrostatic filters should be replaced every 500 hours. At the same time, Vac-Con recommends changing the oil in the water pump and topping off the hydraulic reservoir.

You should also take an oil sample with each service to verify there is no wear or water intrusion.

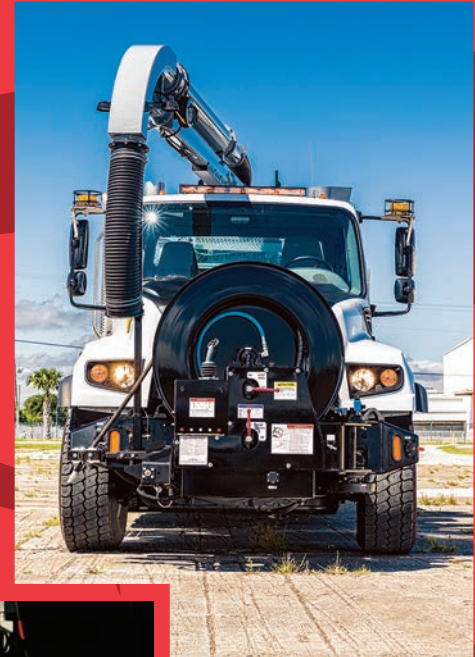
At 1,200 hours, the U-joints should be replaced in the front engine PTO shaft. If the unit is a single engine, the transfer case should be flushed every 1,000 hours.

The only other maintenance that is required is the lubrication of the machine, which should be handled regularly by the operator to prevent unnecessary failures. The lubrication schedule is broken down into daily, weekly, monthly and yearly intervals. Vac-Con recom-

mends that the operator keep maintenance records to prevent parts from being over- or undergreased.

ATTENTIVE OPERATORS


The operator will be most in tune with the unit's condition, playing a vital role in the overall condition of the unit. If regular maintenance isn't preformed, you'll start seeing expensive component failures. If those failures occur due to a lack of daily maintenance, you'll lose valuable hours that unit can be working on top of the cost of the damaged equipment.



Vac-Con maintenance is relatively simple, but to keep your truck operating properly, it's imperative to take care of all maintenance at the regular suggested intervals.

The operator is also responsible for cleaning the debris tank and clean-outs while dumping. This allows for the seals and tank to last longer, and it prevents carryover from starting the unit after material has dried to the sides of the tank.

The Vac-Con also must have consumables replaced, including ball valves, Kanaflex and water-pump packing. Contact your dealer or Vac-Con to request a full list of consumables to determine what parts to keep in stock.

With proper maintenance, there's no reason your unit can't continue performing well. After all, the first Vac-Con ever produced in July of 1986 (Norton 1) is still working to this day. 

Aaron Gonzalez is the National Service Manager for Vac-Con.



Operators Richard McCurley (left) and James Chambers of MAER Construction use their Vac-Con to clean silt from a catch basin in Gainesville, Florida.

Maintaining Balance

Florida drainage installation contractor builds business security with vac truck services

By **Jared Raney** | PHOTOS BY **ROB HERRERA**



onstruction is a roller coaster, demand always in flux. Achieving stability is a tricky prospect, but one Florida contractor has found it through vac truck services.

"Sewer systems, whether it's storm or sanitary, they've all got to be cleaned and maintained," says Michael Gonzalez, who co-owns MAER Construction with his wife. "You want to have maintenance service just for that security — to kind of hedge your bet in construction."

MAER's main business is drainage systems in new site construction. Approximately 70 percent of its work is through Department of Transportation contracts.

A FAMILY LEGACY

Gonzalez says he's always been in construction. His father was in the field for 30 years, and owned his own construction company, so Gonzalez grew up in it.

It's so ingrained in their family's story that he even met his wife while they were both graduate students in Florida International University's construction program. Their first job after establishing MAER was referred to them by Gonzalez's father.

Originally, they planned to go into home construction, but when an old customer of his father's offered a different opportunity — a drainage project at an airport — they explored underground work. That combined with the economic downturn, and home construction still lagging when they formed in 2010, pushed the pair in a different direction.

The maintenance arm of the company was born out of convenience.

After working in Miami for only a few months, the pair moved to Jacksonville, but their contracts took them all over the state. It was while they were working some DOT jobs that the idea of sewer maintenance took hold.

"In construction projects you have to clean and inspect your pipes at the end of it. Not too many guys were doing it," Gonzalez says. "Just fighting to get people to do it and scheduling for our own work that we needed cleaned and inspected, we started exploring it. Plus we wanted to expand our maintenance."

"It looks like building construction's growing, but if it ever stops, they're still going to have to maintain it, so maintenance was an area that we wanted to grow, just to have that security."

DEALING WITH THE UNKNOWN

Challenges are plentiful in construction, but underground is a special type of work.

"I'd say the biggest challenge in underground work is you don't

know what you're getting," Gonzalez says. "Every job's different."

MAER has come across old utilities and obstructions, including a premodern wooden junction box with no manhole lid that was simply left in the ground. Gonzalez has found buried storm drains, junction boxes and even structures that weren't in any records, and crews had no idea they existed until they were in the middle of the job.

"There's stuff that's been buried in the ground for years and years and years, and nobody really knows what's there, what's going on. You give your best on what you think is going to happen, and pricing for some unknown, and then you get there and it's nothing like what they thought," Gonzalez says. "Drainage isn't working because there are things that probably were done 50, 60, 70 years ago, and they're stopping you from working. You've got to do some more ex-



MAER Construction

Founded: 2010

Employees: 33; 6 on maintenance side

Specialty/Services: Pipeline installation, cleaning and inspection

Equipment: 2017 Vac-Con 1500 combination machine; used 2006 Vac-Con

ploring and figure out why you can't even clean these pipes."

He's also seen 60-inch drainlines completely blocked, and his crews just have to power through — which requires some serious equipment.

"Just think 60 inches — 5-foot diameter all the way — completely full of silt," Gonzalez says.

Working in Florida, there are other unique challenges brought on by environmental factors. A job in the middle of the Everglades is on his list of interesting jobs, as well as work in areas where saltwater inflow results in pipes filled with barnacles.

"You've got tidal issues, pipes with barnacles in them — the vac truck's been able to handle removing barnacles off these pipes," Gonzalez says. "You have to clean all of it out — tons and tons of barnacles. It's just crazy how powerful these nozzles are."



"We went to Vac-Con, toured the plant, shopped all the different makes, went to shows, went to everything. I was impressed with what Vac-Con had to offer. We shopped around and they had the best product for the price."

MICHAEL GONZALEZ

CHOOSING EQUIPMENT

Despite huge potential for a balance-keeping addition to the business, a vac truck is still an investment, and Gonzalez says due diligence is important when making this type of purchase.

"We went to Vac-Con, toured the plant, shopped all the different makes, went to shows, went to everything," Gonzalez says. "I was impressed with what Vac-Con had to offer. We shopped around and they had the best product for the price."



Top, left: The MAER Construction crew includes (from left) foreman and Project Manager Bradley Jones, camera operator Brian Barrett, and Vac-Con operators James Chambers and Richard McCurley. Approximately 70 percent of its work is through Department of Transportation contracts.

Reliability, customer service and a local presence are among the top reasons MAER chose Vac-Con.

They picked up a used 2006 model in March 2017, and quickly followed that up with a 2017 Vac-Con Model VPD4216LHAE/1500 last October. In less than a year, they've picked up several contracts.

"With the vac truck work, we've been pretty lucky. I mean, we got some good contracts. They've been profitable, but there are a lot of startup costs," Gonzalez says. "We're still trying to recover some of that stuff, just to get all the equipment and whatnot, but we've been pretty fortunate."

FILLING A SERVICE VOID

Despite a competitive area, the addition of vac truck services and infrastructure maintenance has allowed MAER to thrive.

"In the cleaning and new construction area, you have to clean the pipes and then inspect and laser profile them, so that's a little niche that we've tried to capture," Gonzalez says. "There are contracts for years to come, and it's an area where you want to be balanced."

Vac truck vs. nature

Taking jobs across the state of Florida, MAER Construction has run into many unusual situations — like working in the heart of the alligator-infested everglades, and clearing barnacles that had accumulated due to tidal inflow.

"Things like that have been crazy," says Michael Gonzalez, owner of MAER Construction. "Just with the cleaning, we've done all kinds of stuff."

On the barnacles job, there were so many that a diver had to go in to remove some by hand before they could even de-water the pipe. After that, there was nothing to do but blast away with their Vac-Con equipment.

"The vac truck's been able to handle removing barnacles off these pipes where the tide water comes in," Gonzalez says. "There's just pretty much nothing you can't get out of a pipe with these things."

FIND THE FLOW

Get to know your options before choosing a water system

Water systems for today's combination machines are offered with a multitude of choices. How do you choose what pressure and flow is best suited for your application? Does variable flow help? What type of tools or nozzles do you use to increase efficiency? These are the questions you must ask when purchasing a combination machine.

The age-old question of pressure versus flow is something one must consider when building out a combination machine. Generally speaking, operators waste a lot of water thinking flow is all that matters when cleaning a pipe. When cleaning large-diameter lines from 36 to 60 inches, flow does the best job.

The increased flow keeps solids waterborne longer, allowing water to convey the material to the manhole for removal. Using low flow in large-diameter pipes works well when cleaning inverts, but with a very dirty pipe, high flow works best. Generally, the flows in this class of water system are 60, 70, 80 and 120 gpm with pressures reaching 2,000 to 3,000 psi.

When working in pipes smaller than 36 inches, lower flow and higher pressure works best. By using pressure to clean the pipe you are able to conserve water and remain on the job longer. In periodical maintenance applications where the pipe is relatively clean, you can lower the volume of water even more, extending the amount of time your operators spend cleaning.

A COMPARISON

Picture this: two machines are side-by-side. One of them is running 80 gpm at 2,000 psi and the other is 50 gpm at 3,000 psi. Both machines hold 1,300 gallons of freshwater. The 80 gpm machine has 16.25 minutes of run time, and the 50 gpm machine has 26 minutes of run time.

When working in a 12-inch pipe, 50 gpm is all you need to convey material. The 80 gpm machine is using 110 hp while the 50 gpm machine is using 103 hp. Running with 50 gpm at 3,000 psi allows the operator to use 3/4-inch hose, which reduces fatigue,



You have to consider pressure versus flow when building out a combination machine. For larger diameter lines, higher flow works best. For smaller lines, lower flow and higher pressure is a better choice.

increases hose-reel capacity and is much more user friendly than a 1-inch hose.

VARIABLE FLOW

Your machine can be more versatile with variable flow, allowing you to increase productivity and reduce machine wear by increasing or decreasing flow rate depending on what you encounter in the line.

Regardless of the flow and pressure of your machine, adding a variable flow allows you to reduce the flow up to 40 percent, which translates to more time over the manhole and less time filling.

Without variable flow, operators often attach underrated nozzles to conserve water (reducing flow). For example, they might install a 50 gpm nozzle on an 80 gpm machine. While using a smaller nozzle does reduce flow, it can cause damage to a machine without variable flow and a savvy operator.


Choosing the right nozzle for your application can be just as important as the water system itself. General cleaning operations will use a penetrator and egg-style nozzle. The penetrator is used for mild to severe blockages, depending what is causing the restriction. Generally, a penetrator is used when there is sand, grit or grease in the pipe.

An egg nozzle is used in general mainte-



nance cleaning. Egg nozzles have rounded edges that allow them to traverse pipe joints easier than a nozzle with a flat surface at the rear.

For applications requiring more aggressive cleaning, there are several different tools that can help the operator perform the task. Tools like root cutters can help remove stubborn roots and blockages that require more force. Chain flails and saws make quick work of protrusions that block flow. And spinning nozzles, percussion milling nozzles, sonic/pulse nozzles and even inductor nozzles can quintuple the water flow in the pipe.

For assistance in choosing the right water system for your application, contact your local Vac-Con dealer. 

Mike Selby is Vac-Con's inside sales manager.

Red Equipment General Manager Bill Akins shows off a brand-new Vac-Con outside the company's office in Kansas City, Missouri. The company has been a Vac-Con dealer since 2011.



WHATEVER IT TAKES

Red Equipment builds on its success by keeping the priority on people

BY SARAH UMHOEFER | PHOTOS BY DENNY MEDLEY

Red Equipment General Manager Bill Akins expects nothing but the best when it comes to customer service.

"In order to be the best, you have to be the best. That's easy to say, but to go out there and accomplish it, it's a rigorous day-to-day commitment," Akins says. "If there's one thing I always tell the entire group, it's that you promise what you can deliver, and you deliver what you promise — nothing less."

That customer service philosophy stems from Akins' relationship with Vac-Con, both as a dealer and as a professional. "Vac-Con is the backbone and the key for the business model and mindset of this," he says. "Since the beginning of my career, Darrell LeSage, the president of Vac-Con, has been my mentor. I have watched how he does business and gleaned a lot of understanding and business discipline from Darrell."



"Sometimes I talk to him four times a week, and sometimes I talk to him every two weeks. He's always there for me. I'm the general manager of two businesses, so it just goes to show that everybody has to have a sounding board."

UNLIKELY START

Akins' strong relationship with Vac-Con began in the mid-'90s and resulted in him starting his first company. "I worked for a company that was a Vac-Con customer, but there was some disorganization in that company. Through that disorganization I was introduced to some of the people at Vac-Con and Darrell was given my phone number."

After a few phone calls, Akins purchased a round-trip flight to Jacksonville, Florida, to see what Vac-Con had to offer. "I still have that return flight because I drove a machine home and started a business."

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The staff at Red Equipment includes (from left) Andy Armstrong, Ralph Riley, Ashley Jones, Mary Parks, Anthony Florez, Levi Williams, Bill Armstrong, General Manager Bill Akins and Mark Ricnords. Below: Akins and Parks look over an order.

“IF THERE’S ONE THING I ALWAYS TELL THE ENTIRE GROUP, IT’S THAT YOU PROMISE WHAT YOU CAN DELIVER, AND YOU DELIVER WHAT YOU PROMISE — NOTHING LESS.”

Bill Akins

Company No. 2 for Akins, Red Equipment, was founded in 2011 during a corporate planning meeting where they identified a need for a productive dealer in the Kansas area. “Here’s how it worked: At 2 o’clock in the afternoon the idea was brought up to start a dealership, and by 6 o’clock at night I had three product lines. We didn’t have a name, we didn’t have any employees, and I was charged with going back to Kansas City (Missouri) to start a dealership.

“We had an existing service business that we were already operating, so we covered the bases with existing personnel from there in the beginning as far as parts and service, and we went outside to find sales people.”

THE RIGHT FORMULA

To uphold his customer service philosophy to be the best, Akins follows a Vac-Con motto. “Vac-Con has a cliché: Whatever it takes. But that’s not a cliché, it’s a business model.”

And Akins does just that for his customer — whatever it takes. “Last month I flew back from a trade show in New Orleans, got home at about 11 o’clock that night, and by 10:15 the next morning I was four hours north of here in Lincoln, Nebraska, helping a sales guy deliver a new machine to a contractor from Missouri.”

This personalized approach with customers builds relationships, which is the foundation of sales. “People buy from people. I do, you do,” Akins says. “We go to people we’re comfortable with, who we trust, and it takes a while to build that. It takes years.”

Time and attention is one formula Akins applies to build




trust. “When we’re doing a sales call, a delivery or a service call, we’re not in a hurry to get to the next place. Every place is important, and the one you’re going to is no more important than the one you’re at. There may be someone in an emergency situation, but that’s an indication that you go there first.”

Providing a top-quality product also plays into customer satisfaction. As a custom-truck manufacturer, Vac-Con turns to its end-users for input, a process Akins appreciates. “You take field experience, and you take good engineering and people who listen and interact well, and you come up with a good product. Vac-Con has championed that over the years.”

Akins points to the industrial machine as an example of this ingenuity. “It was very fortuitous for Vac-Con to utilize my field experience when they were upgrading one of their product lines, the industrial machine. That field experience and good engineering can be seen in what the industrial machine looked like in 1997 versus what it looks like now.”

A STRONG FOUNDATION

The key to success is to begin with a strong foundation, according to Akins.

“Success is a journey, not a destination,” he says. “That requires continuous effort, determination and cooperation with all people involved. No one part of our business is the reason we have the success that we’ve had. Everything depends on something else. It’s just like building a very strong, permanent structure: It all starts with a good foundation.” 



B

uilding a hydroexcavation, pipeline cleaning and inspection company from scratch is a daunting undertaking for anyone, especially someone without any prior experience.

But that didn't deter Natalie Jelavich from going ahead and establishing Coastline Water Resources in 2004 in Sacramento, California.

That bold gamble paid off big time. Today, the full-service company employs 15 people and generates roughly 12 times as much revenue as it did

during its first year in business. A primary factor in the company's success? Vac-Con combination vacuum trucks equipped with hydroexcavating packages.

The company owns nine Vac-Con trucks, including one that was bought in 2004 when Jelavich first started out. That speaks to the machines' durability — a key reason why the company decided to invest in Vac-Con equipment. Another reason is the great customer service the company gets from Municipal Maintenance Equipment, a Vac-Con distributor in Sacramento, according to Jelavich.

The Art of Cleaning

Confidence and a fleet of Vac-Cons help college grad's risky venture pay off

By Ken Wysocky

PHOTOS BY LEZLIE STERLING

Coastline Water Resources Equipment Manager Jose Lopez (left) and operator Roberto Lopez clean a sewer line in Sacramento, California, with a Vac-Con combination truck.

Clockwise from right: Equipment Manager Jose Lopez checks over a truck outside the Coastline Water Resources shop; Roberto and Jose Lopez look over a system map while cleaning a sewer line; company owner Natalie Jelavich.



"We've built a great relationship with Vac-Con and our supplier, MME," Jelavich says. "These trucks have so many moving parts and they get worked so hard that breakdowns are inevitable. That's why great local support is so critical."

"Through the years, we've taken a look at the competition to see if we should switch or stay," she adds. "And we always stay. It's so great to have someone local who can provide fast, effective support."

Each truck is equipped with a 12-cubic-yard debris tank, 1,500-gallon water tank, 3,000 psi/65 gpm water pump, a wash-down handgun with 25 feet of hose, a hydrostatic drive blower, a front-mounted hose reel and a hydroexcavation package.

Cleaning and inspecting newly installed sanitary and storm sewer lines, as well as general municipal pipeline maintenance (cleaning and inspections), account for about 60 percent of the company's annual revenue. Commercial work — such as cleaning industrial tanks and pipelines and exposing utility lines at natural gas plants — generates most of the remaining annual revenue, Jelavich says.

CAREER U-TURN

Jelavich was an art major at California State University, Sacramento. But she knew that, as a practical matter, it would be difficult to make a living as a proverbial starving artist. So when a longtime friend of hers — the owner of a company that installed underground pipelines — asked her to start up a sewer cleaning and inspection outfit to fill an underserved local market, she figured she had nothing to lose.

"I was fresh out of college and thought, 'What the heck, it'll give me

good business experience for three or four years.' Now here I am, 14 years later," Jelavich says. "I was really young and naïve at the time. Looking back, it's almost comical that on a whim, I decided I could run this company. I definitely have to laugh at my confidence at age 24."

"It took a lot of learning, but it all worked out," she adds. "Some days I can't believe that I've made it this far, but I truly love what I do."

In the company's early years, most of its revenue came from cleaning and inspecting newly installed pipelines in residential developments. Then came the housing-construction crash and recession in 2007, which prompted the company to switch gears and focus more on municipal work, she says. "It was scary when the housing market crashed, because 90 percent of our business was in new pipes," she notes. "But we made it through some really tough times."

"We had to take a hit on our profit margins just to obtain business," she says. "There was a point where we did everything we could just to stay afloat. You maybe didn't even make a profit on a job, but you were happy if you were covering your

Coastline Water Resources Inc.

Founded: 2004

Employees: 15

Specialties: Pipeline inspections, industrial cleaning and hydroexcavation

Service Area: Sacramento and San Francisco Bay Area

Website: www.coastlinewr.com

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Coastline Water Resources owner Natalie Jelavich and her team provide a wide range of pipeline and engineering services, specializing in pipeline inspections, industrial cleaning and hydroexcavation.

costs. It was like that for several years. But on the plus side, it also opened up doors for us with new clients."

The Vac-Con equipment played a big role in opening those doors. Most municipalities at the time were specifying trucks from Vac-Con or its competitors when putting sewer-cleaning projects out for bid, which played right into Coastline's strength. "Without our Vac-Cons, I couldn't have even bid for jobs," she says.

POWER AND PRODUCTIVITY

Powerful Vac-Con trucks help Coastline maximize productivity, which in turn boosts profitability.

"When we do municipal projects, nine times out of 10 we're doing production work, with a set price for the job," she says. "Since we're not getting paid for time and materials, having equipment that can complete a job quickly with a minimum of breakdowns is important.

"If we have to clean and inspect, say, 10,000 feet of storm sewers in a week, and a truck breaks down and we don't finish on time, we have to pay liquidated damages," she says. "That's why reliability and great support is so important."

Moreover, Jelavich says the Vac-Cons rarely run into something they can't handle — even debris such as bricks or concrete in sewer lines. "You'd be amazed at what we find in lines," she says with a laugh.

"When we do municipal projects, nine times out of 10 we're doing production work, with a set price for the job. Since we're not getting paid for time and materials, having equipment that can complete a job quickly with a minimum of breakdowns is important."

NATALIE JELAVICH



"We've definitely pulled out some interesting things over the years. You don't always know what you're getting into. That's where power comes into play. Without powerful vac systems, we'd never get those things out of a line."

In terms of return on investment, Jelavich points out that the very first truck the company bought back in 2004 still is at work, having racked up more than 24,000 hours of service.


"We still use it on a weekly basis," she says. "The ROI on these trucks is very good, which is why we keep buying them." One of the other eight trucks is a 2006 model, while the rest are 2013 models or newer.

Jelavich says her success stems from developing strong relationships with clientele and vendors, not to mention her employees. The first person she hired in 2004 still works for the company, she proudly notes.

"You can't be successful in this business without really good operators, and we have a really awesome staff," she says. Moreover, investing in good equipment helps her retain quality employees, she adds.

"I'm also very driven," she says. "All our guys have families, so I don't want them sitting at home, not working. We try very hard to be sure our operators don't have to file for unemployment."

As for the future, Jelavich says she's not interested in exponential growth and the headaches that typically accompany it. "I'm pretty happy where we're at right now," she says. "I won't say that we aren't interested in growing, but the opportunities have to feel right. We won't buy three or four more trucks just to grow. We have to justify it and make sure there's work.

"Right now, we're solid and profitable," she says. "I wouldn't put a limit on where we want to go, but we're also not looking at making big changes. We just want to stay profitable, keep people busy and do a good job." And keep investing in Vac-Con equipment. 

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Vector Introduces Three New Vac-Con-Branded Machines

BY MIKE SELBY

In 2012, Holden Industries purchased Vector Technologies Ltd., making it a part of Vac-Con. Together, the companies provide the market with a complete line of heavy-duty, truck-mounted and trailer-mounted combination, hydroexcavation, jetter and industrial machines.


At the Vac-Con dealer meeting last year, Vector introduced three new machines to better serve the municipal markets and the Vac-Con dealer network. It launched the Mudslinger hydroexcavation machine, the Neptune combination machine and the Vec-Jet jetter machine. These new machines incorporate the same heavy-duty trailer designs and components that made Vector a market leader with its VecLoader line of industrial vacuum machines.

VecLoaders are used all over the world in a multitude of industries and applications, including ballast removal, abrasive media recovery, carbon reclamation,

catalyst recovery, drilling mud cleanup, hazardous material cleanup with HEPA filtration, and wet or dry vacuum excavation. VecLoaders stay on the job working while secondary containers are moved out once they are full and replaced. In addition to all of its standard machine offerings, Vector regularly engineers custom vacuum solutions for unique customer applications.

Vector Technologies Ltd. has built trailer and skid-mounted industrial vacu-

um machines for over 41 years in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The company has more than 6,500 machines installed throughout the world and is recognized as a leader in the industrial markets that the business began serving over four decades ago.

For more information, contact Vector Technologies at 800-832-4010, 414-247-7100, inquiry@vector-vacuums.com or visit www.vector-vacuums.com to find the right vacuum solution for your business. 



The Mudslinger hydroexcavation machine, Vec-Jet jetter machine and Neptune combination machine (clockwise from above) incorporate the same heavy-duty trailer designs and components that made Vector a market leader with its VecLoader line of industrial vacuum machines.





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