

# Infrastructure™

**GREGORY POOLE**

SUMMER 2017



## STAKING THEIR CLAIM

Contractor doubles production with GPS

### ALSO INSIDE:

Marine contractor relies on durable Cat® Material Handlers and Excavators

Modeling software enables contractor to implement plans on GPS-equipped Cat machines

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**Gregory Poole**



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# STAKING THEIR CLAIM

Contractor doubles production with GPS

**A**s the housing boom continues in the greater Raleigh-Durham area, site prep contractors like Wellons Construction have all they can do to keep pace with demand.

“Raleigh is one of the Southeast markets that a lot of builders entered and scaled up on during this recovery,” says Rick Palacios Jr., director of research at John Burns Real Estate Consulting.

With many new residential developments under construction in Wake County, Wellons is relying on a large fleet of Cat® machines equipped with GPS grading technology to meet deadlines from local and national builders, who seemingly cannot build new housing fast enough in the current boom.

Established in 1982, Wellons made a significant transition coming out of the 2007-08 recession that positioned the company for growth, says Seth Thompson, vice president for the company based in Dunn, N.C.

“During the economic turndown, we had to get creative on how to better ourselves, so we adopted a lot of technology—including GPS grading and utilizing different software programs for bidding and tracking costs,” Thompson says.





"This has helped transform us into who we are today, a company that utilizes cutting-edge technology to increase production and cut costs."

As a turnkey site prep contractor, Wellons performs land clearing, earthmoving, erosion and stormwater control, demolition, installs water and sanitary sewers, builds concrete pads for homes, and does curbstone and asphalt paving. With 100 employees, Wellons works in two markets—the Triangle region of Raleigh-Durham, as well as Fayetteville.

Currently, 90 percent of the company's work involves site preparation for residential subdivisions.

"We're thankful for our partnerships with certain developers and owners around the area," says Thompson, who took over running day-to-day operations in 2006. "We take pride in giving them a good looking project and turning it out sooner rather than later so they can start building houses."

With a fleet of about 100 machines, Wellons utilizes GPS grading on 15 workhorse earthmoving machines—dozers and excavators—to meet or

exceed production deadlines for new housing developments.

"A lot of our guys, especially our foremen, have been with us for 15 to 20 years," Thompson says. "There's an old saying that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, and that was an obstacle that we had to face at the time because these older foremen didn't want anything to do with the GPS at first."

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**“YOU ALWAYS HAVE THAT PARTNERSHIP, AND THAT CONTINUING SUPPORT... IT'S A LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS MANY BENEFITS.**

— **SETH THOMPSON**  
Vice President, Wellons Construction





“But once we adopted it and installed it on multiple Cat dozers and our 330 and 336 excavators, now the guys can’t live without it,” he says. “If our GPS goes down they act like they can’t grade without it.”

Wellons’ operators utilize GPS primarily for rough grading. The result is greatly increased production.

“With stakeless grading, you don’t have to worry about surveyor errors, losing stakes, or waiting on re-staking,” Thompson says. “We are literally able to hit a job and start the same day. There’s no doubt that GPS represents a tremendous savings in cost and production. But saving time is the biggest factor for us with GPS. We’re able to get in and out on

projects a whole lot quicker than we ever used to.

“When you can turn projects over for the owner in half the time, you know your productivity and efficiency are up,” Thompson adds. “What used to take us two months to complete, now takes one. It has proven to be a very good move for us.”

From developing an estimate to dropping curb on the job, Wellons strives for ever-greater accuracy. Using GPS systems, Thompson is able to be more precise on billing and forecasting schedules for his crews.

“Now that it takes a grading crew half the time to do a job, I know that we can take on more work and I can double my production,” he says.

The next step for Wellons is to utilize drone technology to develop its own topography maps before and after jobs to more accurately gauge how much dirt the contractor is moving, Thompson adds.

### Better fleet management

Another area where Wellons leverages technology is Cat Product Link™, which enables the contractor to constantly monitor the location, health and efficiency of its equipment. Using the VisionLink® interface, Product Link gives the contractor the ability to:

- Spot problems before they happen with data, inspections and fluid analysis
- Receive expert recommendations on equipment maintenance and repair
- Reduce machine owning and operating costs through preventive maintenance, fleet optimization and lifecycle planning

“All of our field guys have access to VisionLink,” Thompson says. “They know where every piece of equipment is at all times. They’re 100 percent able to know what’s going on with that piece no matter where it’s located. Even if they’re in Fayetteville and they’ve got a problem with the machine in Raleigh, they can go to an iPad and pull it up, know exactly



where it’s at, when it’s running, where the fuel levels are, and more.

“This helps by eliminating the need to make a two-hour trip from Fayetteville to Raleigh,” Thompson continues. “They know what’s going on with the machine, and if it’s something that can wait until the following morning or requires immediate action.”

When it comes to equipment maintenance, Product Link monitors machine hours, which is a critical aspect of Wellons’ preventive maintenance program.

“We used to have to write our daily equipment reports,” Thompson says. “Now that everything is on VisionLink, our guy in the shop pulls up data showing where every piece of equipment is at every day, and he can monitor exactly how many hours are on that machine. He can set up a notification at 100 hours, and start monitoring that piece depending on where it’s at, what it’s doing, how many hours it’s running a day, and he can time that PM schedule.”

### Strong workforce

The strength of Wellons Construction is its workforce, as many of its associates have been with the company 20 years or more. This factors heavily in the company’s emphasis on worksite safety.

“Safety is an ultimate goal everyday,” Thompson says. “We have a weekly meeting with our foremen, and that’s typically our first topic to make sure everybody goes home safe every



## WELLONS CONSTRUCTION

**Owner:** Bobby Wellons

**Vice President:** Seth Thompson

**Location:** Dunn, N.C.

**Established:** 1982

**Employees:** 100-plus

**Services:** Land clearing, grubbing, demolition, grading and excavation, erosion control measures, stormwater and sanitary sewer installation

**Cat® Equipment:** 257B 3 Skid Steer Loader; 259 Compact Track Loaders (2); Backhoe Loaders: 420, 426 (2); Wheel Loaders: 930 (4), IT 28 (4), 938K; Excavators: 312, 320 (4), 330 (8), 336 (3); Motor Graders: 12H (3), 12G (2); Dozers: D4 (2), D5 (7), D6 (3); Scrapers: 613 (2), 615 (3); Compactors: 815B, 433B (2), CP563]



night. We've had very few injuries on the job, and that comes from having long-term employees, foremen that have been here for a long time. They are conscientious, aware of their surroundings—always knowing what's going on, where people need to be, where people don't need to be and just working safe."

But with construction in the Triangle booming, Wellons' biggest challenge is finding qualified employees.

To that end, local Cat dealer Gregory Poole has been instrumental in developing a two-year associate's degree program in heavy equipment operation at several area community colleges.

"By the end of their two years in the community college, they'll have more tools than just learning how to run a piece of equipment," Thompson says. "Our goal is to offer a scholarship to individuals to attend these community colleges and build them from an internship program from which we can develop our own people instead of trying to find people through advertising and word-of-mouth referrals.

"We can bring them in, provide them with a ladder to success and show them that the construction industry can be a positive career for these kids and give them a future," he says. "We can let them learn from the ground up just like I did."

### Long-term relationship

Beyond finding and retaining good employees, the backbone of Wellons

Construction is its Cat fleet. The company prefers to own its equipment over the long term, and has experienced higher uptime and productivity since changing its strategy of acquiring used equipment to buying new machines. The change in strategy has resulted in a 60 percent decrease in equipment maintenance and repair costs.

"Typically, a newer machine is running 98 percent of the time, and that's important to us," Thompson says. "Buying a piece of equipment is no different than buying a car—there comes a time when you have problems with it. Buying the equipment that has the least problems is what's important to us, and the strategy has paid off. We know we can count on our Cat machines for higher uptime, which equates to greater productivity."

For the last five years, Wellons has gone through Cat Financial for equipment acquisitions, a process that Thompson calls "seamless."

As a case in point, recently Wellons wanted to demo the 336F Hydraulic Excavator. Once the company determined that the larger size was more effective for the application, Thompson contacted his Gregory Poole representative, Paul Calton, who located a machine and determined the lead time, which is typically one to two weeks. Once Calton delivers a contract, Wellons' controller follows the necessary steps through Cat Financial, and the process is so efficient that typically

the machine is up and running the next day.

Once the machine is delivered, a PSSR from Gregory Poole will meet with Wellons' mechanics and equipment operators to go over maintenance and operation of the new machine.

"They know exactly the ins and outs of the more technical new machines with Tier 4 technology," Thompson says. "With all the changes in technology on these machines, it's good to know what this button does that's different from the previous model.

"Now we have a 336F, and there's a lot of upgrades in those machines that our operators aren't used to," Thompson says. "So by bringing that machine to the shop and having that walk-through, letting them explain what the differences are with the machine and what things you need look for, is very helpful. And also having the equipment operator there learning the control system, means you have a minimal learning curve until the operators are very productive."

Thompson says the experience with Cat equipment starts with the purchase but essentially never ends.

"You always have that partnership, and that continuing support through Caterpillar and Gregory Poole from the minute you buy a piece of equipment until the time you sell it," he says. "It's a long-term relationship that has many benefits." ■



# SHIP TO SHORE

Marine contractor relies on Cat®  
Material Handlers and Excavators  
to do the heavy lifting





**B**en LeBlanc always loved the marine life, becoming a scuba diver at age 15 and starting his own one-man diving service in Delcambre, La. the following year. The idea came from a former Navy diver who lived in his hometown. He taught Ben how to do “wheel jobs,” which involve underwater removal of ropes and cable from propellers of shrimp boats.

Upon graduation in 2000 from Commercial Driving Academy in Jacksonville, Fla., Ben went to work as a self-employed commercial diver performing wheel jobs, and expanded into the oil and gas industry, working on crew boats and tugboats on the Louisiana coast. Not long after, he learned the underwater repair process on hopper barges, eventually doing permanent barge repair work at the salt mines in southern Louisiana.

In 2004, LeBlanc Marine opened for business, starting with three employees who performed mobile topside barge repair and crew boat services for Carlin Fleet—an owner of barges, tugboats, cranes. As a subcontractor for Carlin, LeBlanc Marine expanded to 15 employees in 2007 and was able to take over contracts working directly for salt mines and barge lines for large companies such as Ingram Barge Line, ACBL-American Commercial Barge Lines, MG Transport, and ARTCO.

In 2009, Ben purchased all of Carlin Fleet and expanded into coastal restoration work. A few of LeBlanc’s clients include the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and the Coastal Protection Restoration Authority (CPRA).

“We do a lot of shoreline protection projects, and most of the things that we put in place are called artificial living shorelines,” LeBlanc says. “Basically, these are man-made structures weighing 2,000 pounds apiece, which are an alternative to limestone or rip rap, that are placed in shallow water along the shoreline to prevent the waves from hitting the shoreline.”

Today, the business has grown to 35 full-time employees consisting of tugboat captains, deck hands, crane operators, welders, truck drivers, laborers, and office personnel. LeBlanc owns everything from barges and tugboats, cranes and excavators, to lowboys, and is expected to off-load over one million tons in 2017. About half of the company’s work takes place at its home base in the Port of Iberia, while the other half is at various locations on the Gulf Coast.

Over the last two years, LeBlanc has expanded into the construction industry, which has broadened all aspects of his business. LeBlanc has also moved into the gas industry, with its west yard—supplying dock services—and has grown the off-loading (unloading barges) sector in Texas and Mississippi.

The contracting side of LeBlanc Marine currently represents the largest growth segment of the business, providing dredging, coastal restoration, bulkheads, and also marine construction such as levees, boat ramps for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Louisiana and state parishes.

“The contracting work is awarded via public bids, so for us, it’s all about the production we get from our Cat® machines,” LeBlanc says. “That helps us get the jobs.”

### Counting on Cat reliability

LeBlanc counts on Cat Material Handlers to unload barges and Cat Hydraulic Excavators to lift concrete structures into place for coastal restoration projects. The durability and the uptime of the Cat machines are critical in getting the job done on the water.

“Most of my jobs are in remote locations, so a lot of time cell phone service doesn’t work and having equipment breakdowns and repairs can be an issue,” LeBlanc says.

“When you’re out on the water, it’s not as easy to swap out equipment as it is on land,” he continues. “When one thing breaks it shuts down the whole

operation. You have a huge support team that’s out there to make these projects happen. There are tugs and barges and crew boats and supporting personnel, and if one machine breaks it shuts down the whole project.

“The dependability of our Cat machines is something we count on to keep working in these conditions, which can sometimes be rough depending on the weather.”

On land, Cat Material Handlers are workhorse machines for LeBlanc Marine, loading and offloading barges at the company’s home base at the Port of Iberia, and elsewhere.

*continued on page 10*



## LEBLANC MARINE

**President:** Ben LeBlanc

**Location:** New Iberia, La.

**Established:** 2004

**Employees:** 35

**Services:** Towing and shifting, barge fleet, barge repair and inspection, cargo handling and more from the Port of Iberia. Barge off-loading, marine construction and coastal restoration projects in Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi

**Cat® Equipment:** Skid Steer Loaders: 242, 246C, 262D; 299D 2 Compact Track Loader; 308 Mini Excavator; Telehandlers: TL642C, TL943; Hydraulic Excavators: 316E L, 320E LRR; Amphibious Excavators: 320, 329; D5K Dozer; Material Handlers: 345C L, 365C L, 385C L (2)



Working at the Port of Iberia, LeBlanc utilizes a 345C Material Handler for offloading. The track machine is built for strong performance and long service life, and features excellent lift capacity and working range whether operating close in or at full reach. The C13 engine with ACERT™ technology delivers power, reliability, fuel economy and low emissions.

A cab riser positions the operator at an operating height with excellent visibility for loading or unloading. Access to the cab is provided by a work platform with safety railings that extends around the riser to allow windshield cleaning.

LeBlanc Marine also utilizes small, powerful Cat Skid Steer Loaders to perform cleanup inside barges once they are offloaded, and Cat Telehandlers for a variety of tasks such as

loading and unloading project materials onto barges, and yard handling.

### Dealer support

LeBlanc counts on Tommy Fernandez, manager of the industrial

**The dependability of our Cat machines is something we count on to keep working in these conditions, which can sometimes be rough depending on the weather**

— **BEN LeBLANC**  
President, LeBlanc Marine

division at Louisiana Cat, to provide the machines he needs to keep the business running.

“The material handlers are unique pieces of equipment, and you can’t just go and get one off the showroom floor,” LeBlanc says. “So, as people trade them in, we usually get used material handlers from Louisiana Cat. We have a good relationship with Mr. Tommy, and he meets our needs.”

“You can’t find a better person than Mr. Tommy,” LeBlanc adds. He is definitely the one that holds it all together for us on the equipment side. He does lots of different projects like this for customers who have unique needs.”

Parts and service from Louisiana Cat is another area where the dealer provides unparalleled support. LeBlanc cites an example of a 385 Material Handler that was working at a jobsite when the hydraulic oil cooler malfunctioned. The machine was returned to LeBlanc’s home base in New Iberia overnight via a barge, and the part was delivered to LeBlanc the following morning.

“They hot-shotted the part overnight from Oklahoma, and we had the machine back up and running by the following day,” LeBlanc says.

“It takes a great team to get things accomplished in our line of work, and having Louisiana Cat on my side is very helpful in this business.” **I**







# CAT® EXCAVATORS OFFER **COST-SAVING** CONNECT TECHNOLOGY

Contractors can enhance their jobsite accuracy, productivity, and efficiency using the latest Cat® Connect technology. Cat GRADE with Assist and Cat Payload are now available on several F Series excavator models.

## Cat Grade with Assist

Cat GRADE with Assist, introduced last year on the 323F L, is a simple-to-use system that helps operators dig a level base with just the right slope. With a touch of a button, the boom and bucket adjust automatically to help operators consistently get to grade with more accuracy, less effort, and less rework. Plus, it works with tilt buckets for even greater versatility.

“Regardless of your experience or skill level, you’ll get to grade much faster with Assist than with traditional grading techniques,” said Damien Giraud, global product manager for Cat large excavators. “It’s been a popular addition to the 323F L, and that’s why we are expanding the offering to the 330F L, 336F L XE, 349F L, and 352F L.”

## Cat Payload

The latest technology addition is Cat Payload. Introduced last year on the 336F L XE, the system calculates

load weight as the operator swings the bucket toward the truck with no interruption in the loading cycle. It eliminates the need for the truck to make an additional trip to the scale, and operators can track load weights in real time to know exactly how much material is in the bucket and in the loaded truck.

Managers can access the data remotely through Cat LINK technologies to help improve their overall jobsite efficiency.

Payload eliminates the need guesswork. There really is no longer any reason for costly overloading and underloading of trucks. Contractors’ success using Payload on the 336F L XE, led Caterpillar to offer it for larger machines like the 349F L XE, 374F L, and 390F L. ■

***Contact our dealership to learn more about adding Cat GRADE with Assist and Cat Payload to your excavators to help achieve greater efficiency and productivity on your jobsites.***





# VALUE **ADDED**

Contractor cuts project costs with GPS modeling



“

**CAT® MACHINES NOT ONLY  
GIVE US OPERATOR COMFORT,  
BUT THE TECHNICAL  
ADVANTAGE WE NEED.**

— LARRY PHILLIPS  
Owner, Phillips Brothers Construction



**G**rowing up on a dairy farm in Northern Kentucky, Larry Phillips would routinely get up at 4 a.m. to milk cows and perform other chores before catching the bus to school.

As a teenager, Phillips knew the life of a full-time dairy farmer was not for him. He recalls telling his brother that they needed to form a business venture that involved something other than farming.

Not long after graduating from high school, Phillips and his brother, Jerry, went into business in 1981 as Phillips Brothers of Hardin County, digging basements, footers and doing land clearing work for farmers in the Elizabethtown area, about 45 minutes south of Louisville.

Over the next two decades, Phillips Brothers would evolve into a successful home building and site development business. In 2001, the brothers parted ways, with Jerry taking the home-building and warehousing business, and Larry inheriting the construction equipment along with the site and commercial development business.

"I never liked the house building industry much," Larry admits. "I like the earthwork and development side better, where you are able to come in, do the job, and be done with it."

Now, more than 15 years after the split, it's apparent that he made the right choice. Phillips Brothers Construction has 125 pieces of equipment, 85 employees, and a satellite office in Owensboro. The Vine Grove-based company specializes in all aspects of sitework, including: excavation, grading, utilities (storm, sanitary, water and gas), building and site demolition, land clearing, and concrete and paving work.

As an established contractor, Phillips Brothers is able to leverage existing relationships with general contractors in the E-town and Owensboro areas, who know they can count on the contractor to provide cost-saving solutions and overcome obstacles en-

countered on the job to successfully complete projects.

Located in close proximity to Fort Knox, Phillips Brothers has worked on multiple projects at the U.S. Army base. The biggest involved \$10 million in site development as a subcontractor on the massive Fort Knox Human Resources Command center—the largest general contracting project in the base's history.

The project involved 60 acres of land clearing, moving 280,000 cubic yards of material, installing nearly six miles of underground pipe/utilities, and placing 130,000 tons of stone.

While preparing the site for utilities, Phillips Brothers crews encountered a unique and potentially hazardous obstacle: multiple rounds of unexploded military ordnance that dated back to an earlier era at Fort Knox, when soldiers received combat training.

"When we found one, they'd clear everybody out 1,000 feet in each direction, tape it off, and everybody on the other side kept working," Phillips recalls. "Nine times out of 10 they'd throw it in the bed of the truck and drive off and take the tape down and back to work we went."

## Value engineering

Live artillery shells aside, an important part of Phillips Construction's work occurs in the design phase. The contractor's operations include the latest in cost accounting, sitework estimating, and modeling with in-house survey capability in GPS and robotic forms.

Phillips has a team of in-house estimators that can take the plans from general contractors and offer value-engineering deductions.

"We can go back and chat with the engineers and recommend some changes that will save money, and 99 percent of the time it works," says project manager Cory Redmon.

Phillips Brothers has been awarded dozens of jobs by passing the savings on to project owners.

"It helps because there's six or seven of us there in there in the office and we can all look at it from different perspectives," Redmon says. "Larry looks for something different than I look at and so does the next guy. "We can digitize the plans with our computer graphics and it'll tell us

*continued on page 14*



Phillips Brothers moved 40,000 cu. yd. of earth in preparing the 15-acre site for the Robinbrooke subdivision in Elizabethtown, Ky.





## PHILLIPS BROTHERS CONSTRUCTION

**Owner:** Larry Phillips

**Location:** Vine Grove, Ky.

**Established:** 1981

**Employees:** 85

**Services:** Land clearing, residential and commercial site prep, underground utilities (storm, sanitary, water and gas), building and site demolition, concrete and paving

**Cat® Equipment:** 289C Multi Terrain Loader, Compact Track Loaders (2), Mini Excavators (5), Backhoe Loaders (8), Hydraulic Excavators: 312 (3), 314 (5), 320 (10), 321, 325 (2), 329 (11), 336(10), 345 (2), Motor Graders (2), Scrapers (9), 730 Articulated Trucks (5), Wheel Loaders (14), Dozers (20), Vibratory Soil Compactors, Hammers, Trenchers, Manual Angle Broom, 5500 Hammer

how much to adjust grade, or what adjustments to make to a section of each job—whether it's haul off or haul in—to actually lower the price.

"We can take it directly from the plans onto our GPS modeling software and convert it right out to the field on the GPS," he continues. "So the engineer doesn't have to go back and re-submit drawings or do any extra work. It's going from one software program to the next, take it out with a thumb drive, put it in the equipment, and you're off and rolling. It makes the process a lot more efficient, resulting in more cost savings, and it gives us an edge."

Phillips Brothers models every job with GPS, and continues to add GPS-equipped Cat® dozers and motor graders equipped with GPS to its fleet.

"We try to use it everywhere we can use it," Phillips says. "It's a lot easier. There's less stake driving, and it just makes life a lot simpler."

When it prepared a subdivision for a 45-lot retirement community in Elizabethtown, GPS made the job simpler, more efficient and safer.

"We never drove a stake," Phillips says. "We built the paths and the roads, put in all the ditches and the waterways. The dozer operators always know where they're at. We know what we're doing because we

can look at the plan and check it out to see how efficient we are, how we're working and how we're progressing. It makes it easier on the foremen, and easier on the guys running the pans because they basically have the guidelines. They've got what they need right there, right in the cab and they take off.

"We just make sure when they start they know what the depths are, how much to hold down for different grades on building pads and road grades, and they're off and running," Phillips says. "We just grease them and fuel them and make sure they're moving—that's it. Having the GPS just makes life a lot easier."

Phillips likes having the ability to place stone at night or during inclement weather with GPS. Having the automated grading technology is a must when bidding on larger jobs, he says.

"When we did the human resources center job at Fort Knox for the Army Corps of Engineers, we started our subgrade and blue-topped it, and we had to shoot it, show them it was on the right grade. We put down 10 inches of rock with GPS and the engineers needed to verify the elevation of rock. They asked us to go back out there and dig holes in the grade and lay a four-foot level on it to show them,







and it was just dead-on 10 inches—it couldn't have been more perfect, and they were absolutely blown away.”

“We did it on three or four big jobs that way,” Phillips adds. “It didn’t take much time. You do it once and you’re done.”

Phillips Brothers won a big excavating job in Owensboro in April 2014 thanks to GPS that was factory installed on a Cat 336E Hydraulic Excavator.

“It has grade control on it—that’s the reason we bought it,” Redmon says. “We had these basins to dig for the City of Owensboro, and that was a big, big help. “These basins were about three acres and they were 22 feet deep and the water table was high so we had to take the cut all at one time as we went, and that made the job. We have used it on three or four more jobs since, with excellent results.”

The newer Cat machines come already plumbed and wired and GPS-ready.

“You pick them up off the lot and they’re basically ready to put antennas on and go to work,” Phillips says.

GPS and other technical features on the Cat machines make it easier to train younger, less experienced

operators. Phillips says the young operators adapt well to the newer machines, almost like they are playing a video game.

“Now you can take a less experienced operator and tell him to watch the screen’s red and green areas, hit automatic, and just drive the machine,” he says. “So you can take a newer operator and make him dead-on at two or three-tenths on that final grade if he knows how to use GPS. It’s not really teaching him how to move dirt. You watch this screen and the machine is going to tell you what you need to do.”

### **The Cat advantage**

Dale Hobbs, an operator with Phillips Brothers, likes the ease of the joystick controls on the Cat 12M Motor Grader.

“Compared to the older ones, they’re just a lot easier for the operator and a lot faster,” Hobbs says. “Everything is right there in your hands—the controls are a lot easier to use, and your arms don’t get tired.”

Que Christiason, likes the relative comfort inside the cab of a Cat 730C Articulated Truck.

“They ride really smooth—it’s night and day from running pretty much anything else—it’s a comfortable ride,” Christiason says. “And this 730 has a backup camera. So I mean I feel like a cheater sometimes but it’s real nice to have a backup camera.”

Phillips Brothers counts on its Cat dealer, Wayne Supply, for parts and technical support. Wayne delivers parts to Phillips once a week.

“The parts availability from Wayne as always been A #1,” Phillips says. “Their field people and their in-shop service people help us as well. One time we had an excavator go down on the job, and Wayne had somebody there to fix it within 45 minutes.

“And our Wayne sales rep, Jim, is real helpful,” Phillips adds. “He keeps us up to date on what’s new and lets us know when there’s something we might want to look into trying.

“We try to keep nice new equipment—a lot of our machines now have air conditioned cabs—so our operators have a good work environment, and the Cat machines not only give us the operator comfort, but the technical advantage we need.” ■



# CHANNEL CHANGER

## Little River Drainage District chooses Cat® specialty excavators

**T**he Little River Drainage District (LRDD) in Missouri maintains a system of 1,000 miles of drainage ditches and 300 miles of levees, that require constant maintenance. On a routine basis, LRDD crews mow and excavate channels, and mow and maintain levees.

LRDD and its 33 employees serve a seven-county, 550,000-acre area in the “Bootheel” of Missouri that stretches 100 miles long, ranges from 10 to 20 miles in width and accounts for one-third of Missouri’s agricultural income. The district has approximately 4,000 landowners whose holdings range from half an acre to tens of thousands of acres. The landowners pay an assessment each year based on the benefit provided by the LRDD system, which is used toward the annual cost of maintaining the district.

In total, the district actually keeps 1.2 million total acres of land drained of unwanted runoff water and drains some two million acres. Before the land was drained, less than ten percent of it was clear of water; now, approximately ninety-five percent is clear and water-free. The soil is a thick, rich gumbo that ranges to a sandy gumbo mix that

creates ideal growing conditions for rice, cotton, wheat, peanuts, soybeans, corn, potatoes, peas, melons, etc.

Since the Flood Control Act of 1928, some facilities have been operated and maintained by LRDD with assistance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The system of 1,000 miles of drainage channels, drainage ditches, and 300 miles of levees require constant maintenance.

“In addition, we have five detention basins,” says W. Dustin Boatwright, PE, Executive Vice President and Chief Engineer for LRDD. “It takes a constant effort by our 24 ground crew team members to keep the different land features functioning. It takes between five and 10 years to cover the maintenance of the entire network.”

### Special application machines from Caterpillar OEM Solutions

The equipment utilized for this maintenance work includes excavators, both short reach and long reach; track loaders, dozers, skid steers, articulated trucks, just an array of equipment. All must be reliable to keep the system running. LRDD has been running Cat® equipment for over 50 years.

“It’s a name that we’ve learned to trust and that’s been good to us,” Boatwright says. “Our goal is to provide the highest level of flood control and drainage to our landowners at the least amount of cost. Caterpillar has enabled us to do that.”

Working with Caterpillar OEM Solutions, LRDD is able to buy a base excavator without a stick and boom. Caterpillar OEM Solutions provides LRDD with the engineering designs and specs, and that information is provided to an outside custom front manufacturer. The custom manufacturer is also able to work directly with Caterpillar OEM Solutions to ensure that the fronts match up precisely to the machine.

“What we have found is if you can dream it up, Caterpillar OEM Solutions can make it happen,” Boatwright says.

LRDD owns Cat 324E and 326F Excavators with 60-foot fronts equipped with five-foot custom mower attachments that cut through debris and undergrowth up to 6-8 inches in diameter.

“There’s no comparison to the old days when we would use a Kaiser blade

*continued on page 18*



## LITTLE RIVER DRAINAGE DISTRICT (LRDD)

**Executive VP:** W. Dustin Boatwright, PE

**Location:** Cape Girardeau, Mo.

**Established:** 1907

**Employees:** 33

**Services:** Mow and excavate 1,000-mile system of channels, mow and maintain levees

**Cat® Equipment:** 324E and 326F Hydraulic Excavators with 60-foot fronts equipped with five-foot custom mower attachments; 336F Frontless Hydraulic Excavators (6) equipped with 65-ft front boom/stick configurations

and 1.25 cu. yd., 72 in. ditch cleaning buckets for cleanout work; 352F Variable Gauge Frontless Hydraulic Excavator and fitted it with an 82-ft. front boom/stick and 1.25 cu. yd., 60 in. ditch cleaning bucket; D7 Dozers; 963 Track Loaders, Skid Steer Loaders, Articulated Trucks



“

**WHAT WE HAVE FOUND IS  
IF YOU CAN DREAM IT UP,  
CATERPILLAR OEM SOLUTIONS  
CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN**

— W. DUSTIN BOATWRIGHT, PE  
Executive VP, Little River Drainage District





to cut one-half mile per week—today we cut 10 miles a week,” says William D. Boatwright, South District Foreman. “One of the things that Caterpillar OEM Solutions has been able to deliver that others have not is an auxiliary hydraulic circuit on the excavator that is dedicated directly to the mower to help operate their custom hydraulic mowing machine.

“It actually helps us increase the productivity of that machine because we’re not losing power to the tracks or to the boom or to the stick while we’re operating the machine,” W. Dustin Boatwright says. “That’s something that we have reached out to other companies and talked to them about, but Caterpillar OEM Solutions is the only one that’s been able to provide us what we need.”

LRDD also purchased six 336F Frontless Hydraulic Excavators equipped with 65-ft front boom/stick configurations and 1.25 cu. yd., 72 in. ditch cleaning buckets for cleanout work. Working with Caterpillar OEM Solutions and local dealer Fabick Cat, LRDD also acquired a Cat 352F Variable Gauge Frontless Hydraulic Excavator and fitted it with an 82-ft. front boom/stick and 1.25 cu. yd., 60 in. ditch cleaning bucket.

“These custom excavators enable LRDD to excavate our large channels from both sides of the channel and complete the work twice as fast as we did before, covering as much as two miles of channels in three weeks,” says William D. Boatwright. “It’s unbelievable. We get twice the work done now.”

Channel maintenance requires mowing the overgrowth and clearing out the debris, cleaning out and scouring the bottom of the channels flat and swinging up the bucket loads of sediment and placing them alongside the rims of the channels: building the berms up to ensure water flows away from the channels to fight erosion; and cutting the sides of the channels at smooth 1-2:1 slopes for rapid, unimpeded water flow.

The work crews also operate a team of D7 Dozers for land leveling and road building, along with 963



Track Loaders equipped with specially designed multipurpose buckets built by Caterpillar OEM with thumbs to remove larger trees and heavier debris that has grown up on the banks of the channels. The 963s also do brush piling, dirt moving and truck loading.

### Low cost of ownership

“One of the primary reasons that we choose Cat machines—it’s not necessarily up front cost because, at times, they do cost more than the competitors—but it’s the lower cost of ownership over the life of the machine,” W. Dustin Boatwright says.

With crews running 60 to 75 hours per week, operators need to be comfortable in the cabs of the Cat machines, and they are, says North District Foreman Donnie Pobst.

“All the operators really enjoy our new Cat equipment,” Pobst says. “The comfort is a huge thing for all the operators. If you want to have a happy operator and you’re going work him 60-75 hours a week, you want that person to be comfortable.”

Operator comfort is a major benefit of the new excavators, William Boatwright says.

“We actually have a guy with almost 40 years’ experience who’s in his mid-70s and still able to operate for us. He’s a terrific operator and with the new level of comfort and safety on the machine, he is able to keep

going. Now if this was a dragline, there’s no way.”

Adds Pobst: “The advances that Cat machines have made in sound protection, general comfort, audio, all the other cab conveniences, keep the operators happy and that means you’re going to hit your production targets. You’re going get the hours in to complete all your jobs.”

“At the end of the day, Cat machines have proven their value and have basically earned our business because the cost of ownership and productivity that we receive from them is the best value for our district.”

### Dealer support

Support staff from Caterpillar and Fabick Cat provide technical assistance with any issues that LRDD may have.

“Caterpillar support is always just a phone call away,” William Boatwright says. “If we have a problem, we call the service manager or one of our salesmen and the problem is taken care of. But we have very few problems.”

“Fabick Cat has been terrific,” adds W. Dustin Boatwright. “Fabick Cat is actually one of the commercial developments located in our district, which proves they believe in the flood control protection and drainage LRDD provides. In turn, they have proved to LRDD they can provide the equipment and services that we need to maintain our system at an optimal level.” ■



# TRAINING

## Makes a Difference

To greatly enhance the professionalism and productivity of your operators, in addition to making them safer on your jobsites, consider basic machine operator training from Gregory Poole. This program delivers these specific benefits:

- Increases operator efficiency; enables completion of jobs ahead of schedule
- Greater operator understanding of equipment maintenance
- Reduces the chances of operator accidents
- Lowers operating and maintenance costs, reduces downtime
- Results in better agency safety ratings that lower insurance costs



**Four progressive levels of training programs are available for various levels of operator experience. They include:**

### **I. Basic Machine Safety and Familiarization**

Educates and familiarizes experienced operators with a specific machine model and is usually associated with the introduction of a new machine model. Focus is on:

- Safety
- Walk around inspection
- ISO symbols
- Monitoring system
- Machine controls

### **II. Competent Operator Training**

This next level program covers:

- Operator safety awareness
- Walk around inspections
- ISO symbols
- Monitoring systems
- Warning categories and operator reactions
- Proper start up and shut down procedures
- Machine controls
- Basic operating techniques

### **III. Professional Operator Training**

Program is designed to refine and enhance experienced operator skills and can be conducted at a Gregory Poole location or the customer's facility. Focus is on:

- Refining operating techniques
- Learning application tips and information
- Safety and maintenance inspections
- Monitoring systems
- Control familiarization and applications
- Additional supervised equipment operation ("stick time")
- Coaching to fine tune experienced operator skills

### **IV. Professional Operator Certification**

Machine specific, based on Cat standards, this program is for experienced operators with advanced operating skills. Successful participants earn a Certificate of Registry and a personalized belt buckle from Caterpillar Inc.

Currently available on: Off-Highway Trucks (769-797) Medium Wheel Loaders (938-980) Articulated Dump Trucks. Focus is on:

- Review of Level 1 and 2 training
- Written safety evaluation
- Written technical evaluation
- Evaluation of the experienced operator's skill set
- Operator and application proficiency, by machine family, in a number of applications
- Certification through demonstration of skills in completing established tasks to course standards

### **Customer Technical Training (Level I and II)**

We offer different courses for Customer Technicians from best maintenance practices to providing training for specific machine systems.

- Contamination Control, oil sampling, PM maintenance
- Basic hydraulic, cooling, fuel, air conditioning, or electrical systems
- Monitoring Systems, Warning Categories, and Schematics
- Introduction to Tier 4 machines
- Customized training as requested

**For more information about Greg Poole's training programs, please call 800.451.7278 and ask for Robert Perkins (operator training); or Gerald Tew (technical training). Or visit [gregorypoole.com](http://gregorypoole.com)**



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# MAKE the **GRADE**



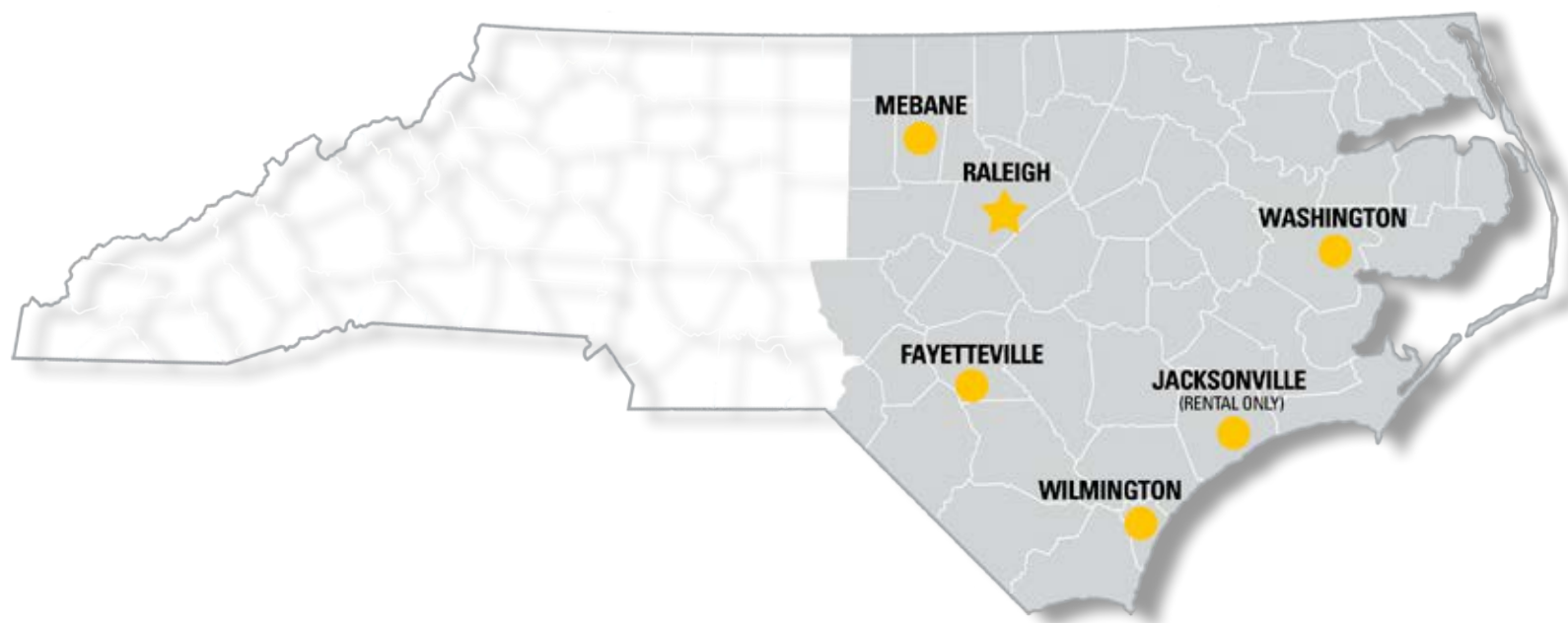
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