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Industry Scoop

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George's Grading & Son

Succeeding with the latest
equipment technology



George Karczewski,
Co-owner



Tim Karczewski,
Co-owner



Pavement Maintenance Inc.



Josh Smith,
Co-owner



Sam Smith,
Co-owner

A Message from the President



Matthew L. Roland



Dear Valued Customer:

Technology is a part of our everyday lives. During the past several years, its prominence in the construction, mining, quarry and other equipment-intensive industries has grown astronomically. Today's machinery is more advanced than ever with integrated GPS and telematics that provide information remotely to enable tracking and automation.

Komatsu has always been on the cutting edge. Twenty years ago, it began looking at ways to implement this technology into its construction machinery. Hours and location were the first bits of information supplied by what, in time, became KOMTRAX. Today, it and KOMTRAX Plus for mining machines, offer a wealth of data that can potentially lower your total cost of ownership. See more about the history and evolution of this innovative tool in this issue of your Roland Industry Scoop magazine.

KOMTRAX has been standard on all new Komatsu equipment for quite some time, including the machines spotlighted in this issue's case study. I think you will find this an interesting read as it shares how equipment users like you utilize Komatsu equipment to increase production and efficiency.

Komatsu believes in serving as a total solutions provider, and that includes being a source for financing. The Komatsu & You article, featuring Komatsu Financial President Rich Fikis, gives insight on why more than 80 percent of Komatsu machines are financed through Komatsu Financial.

There are also articles that offer an outlook on the construction industry for 2020, show how diversity can be a strength for your organization and more. I think you will find them valuable.

As always, if there's anything we can do for you, please call or stop by one of our branch locations.

Sincerely,
Roland Machinery Co.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Roland".

Matthew L. Roland
President

**On the cutting
edge of
technology**

Industry Scoop



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Published for Roland Machinery Co.
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Printed in the USA.

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Matthew L. Roland, President
Dan Smith, VP, Product Support
Mike Brunson, General Manager,
Allied Product Support
Jay Germann, General Manager, Used Equipment

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6450 Melton Rd.

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1505 Donna Dr.

George's Grading & Son succeeds on water-management projects with latest equipment technology



George Karczewski,
Co-owner



Tim Karczewski,
Co-owner

There are family companies, and then there is George's Grading & Son. The largest growth spurt in the company's history was when it doubled in size to two people in the early 1990s. Today, George Karczewski and his son, Tim, continue to make up the entirety of the business, which is based in Union Grove, Wis.

"I love it," proclaimed George. "My dad worked until he was 86. He could barely walk, but he still worked a full day. Tim and I are happy doing things ourselves. We put in a lot of hours, but we don't have to worry about training or managing other employees. Our name is on the company, and we're the ones doing the work."

Despite being a two-man operation, George's Grading & Son can match the output of much larger outfits. Many of the firm's early jobs involved grading for residential developments around southeastern Wisconsin. Today, the work focuses on a unique niche as the Karczewskis have become experts in water management.

"The housing market was great until 2008 when the economy began to crash," recalled Tim. "We had been doing some field tiling for farmers and when housing slowed down, there happened to be a lot of water projects. We switched our whole approach and were one

of the only companies doing water. Currently, about 90 percent of our work is in water management."

In December, they broke ground on a project near the start of the Des Plaines River in Racine and Kenosha counties. The duo installed a water main, laid nearly 180,000 feet of pipe, moved 25,000 yards of material and constructed several water and sediment control basins (WASCOB) on the 180-acre site.

"The WASCOBs were anywhere from 300 to 1,000 feet long and four to eight feet tall, depending on the topography," detailed Tim. "They serve as dry dams to help with drainage."

"This was a farmer's field, so we had to make sure it could handle a significant amount of rain without drowning the crop," added George. "However, we had to slow the water that comes out of the field to prevent flooding. We put in a 12- to 15-inch main to slowly move water from that into a four-inch hole before diverting it to an outlet. This also prevents soil erosion and keeps phosphorus out of the navigable streams."

Working smarter

It might come as a surprise to anyone passing by a George's Grading & Son jobsite that only two people are at work. That's because when George and Tim arrive at a site, they do so with a full array of equipment – and run it all.

"The equipment always outnumbers us," laughed George, "I might be in an excavator for a few minutes, then jump in a skid loader to do another part and then get back in the excavator. Tim does the same. We have a plan when we show up, and we execute it."

The Karczewskis' strategy is built on substituting manpower with horsepower. With Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control equipment from Roland Machinery Company and Sales Rep Aaron Strade, the "horses" they are using are on a different level.

"We want to remain small, and the best way we've found to do that is to incorporate technology in any area possible," said George. "With Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control, we are able to increase productivity without adding employees."

Using a Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control D61PXi dozer, George's Grading & Son Co-owner George Karczewski grades a jobsite.





George's Grading & Son uses Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control equipment, like this PC210LCi excavator, to maximize efficiency without adding manpower. "We couldn't work the way we do without *intelligent* Machine Control," said Co-owner Tim Karczewski.

George credits Tim for researching Komatsu's integrated GPS system and pushing for the equipment. Today, the company has D65PXi and D85PXi dozers and supplements with rental machines as needed. "Tim proved that it was a solid investment, and the equipment performed. It was a pretty easy decision."

The initial dozers were the first Komatsus to make their way into the Karczewskis' business. While they made an impression, George still planned to complete his fleet with a competitive brand. Once the Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control excavators hit the market, however, his thinking changed.

"We rented a PC210LCi to lay 5,000 feet of 18-inch pipe and it only took us four days," recalled George. "I was leery of it, so I made Tim dig while I checked the grade every 10 feet. After the first day, I trusted it. He dug as I backfilled, and we went as fast as we could. We were sold. Now Komatsu makes up the majority of our fleet."

"We couldn't work the way we do without *intelligent* Machine Control," stated Tim. "If you don't have this technology, you aren't working right."

The Roland touch

In addition to industry-leading technology, George and Tim appreciate that they have a trusted partner in Roland Machinery.

"We're certainly not their largest customer, although Roland treats us like we are," shared George. "Aaron goes above and beyond for us. Their mechanics save us so much on downtime. We feel like everyone at Roland is working to help us succeed."

"Honestly, if it wasn't for Aaron, I would never have known how great Komatsu is," he added. "I would have just continued with the other brand because that's what I did. Aaron and Roland did a great job of working with us, providing information and making sure we are successful. I'm happy they did, because the equipment is second to none." ■

Pavement Maintenance Inc. sees second generation officially take reins



Josh Smith,
Co-owner



Sam Smith,
Co-owner

Tom and Mary Smith started Pavement Maintenance Inc. (PMI) in Menominee Falls, Wis., in 1989 with a single milling machine and a solid work ethic. They hoped to grow it into a family business and pass it on to their sons, Josh and Sam, at some point. That vision became reality this year as the sons officially took ownership of the company.

"This was in the works for a while, and it finally became official on January 1," shared Co-owner Josh. "Mom and Dad did a phenomenal job building PMI into what it is today. Now, they can start focusing on having fun and enjoying retirement."

With the second generation in the driver's seat, customers should get ready for a massive overhaul, right? Not so fast.

"We're going to continue to do what we've always done," reassured Josh. "We'll concentrate on milling and pulverizing; it's a niche that we are good at. We have excellent crews, operators and foremen who are very experienced in this field and are set up to work efficiently."

Josh and Sam agree that they will look for ways to grow in those areas.

"We have about 30 employees right now, and we completed nearly 1,000 projects in 2019," estimated Josh. "We have added a crew and some other employees recently to meet our milling demands. We have no interest in expanding into an area like paving. We work with large paving companies, and we don't want to put ourselves in a position where we are competing with them."

PMI continues to tackle large jobs for customers primarily from Milwaukee to Rockford, Ill., with some work in Minnesota and North Dakota as well. Last summer, the firm completed a pair of road assignments for the City of Rockford, with each requiring roughly 120,000 yards of milling.

"Those were two examples of going after projects that are in our wheelhouse," explained Josh. "We have the ability to succeed on big jobs, although we do smaller ones, too. We don't turn anything away."

Ahead of the curve

Similar to the brothers' plan to still focus on certain types of business, another tradition that will continue is PMI's loyalty to Wirtgen Group equipment.

"We got our first Wirtgen mill in 1998, and we've run them ever since," said Josh. "We don't have any desire to make a switch, either. From a technology standpoint, Wirtgen is a decade ahead of the competition."

The latest additions to the PMI fleet include W 220 and W 50 Ri cold milling machines.

"We added the W 220 to replace our older W 2100R models," noted Josh. "The W 220 blows them out of the water from a production standpoint. It's still a 7-foot mill, but it has so much more horsepower, in addition to the traction and load control features. It's a very efficient machine.

"The turning radius of the W 50 is amazing," he continued. "We use it as a complimentary machine to the W 220 to finish around

An operator for Pavement Maintenance Inc. uses a Wirtgen W 50 Ri cold milling machine to finish a cut on a project near Milwaukee, Wis.





Using a Wirtgen W 220 cold milling machine, a Pavement Maintenance Inc. operator mills a parking lot. "We got our first Wirtgen mill in 1998 and we've run them ever since," said Co-owner Josh Smith. "I don't have any desire to make a switch, either. We haven't even tried another brand. From a technology standpoint, Wirtgen is a decade ahead of the competition."

manhole covers and water boxes as well as to crosscut butt joints. The front tires can go almost perpendicular to the rear ones, so it can turn on a dime."

The company also recently added a pair of WR 250i soil stabilizers, purchasing them 18 months apart.

Working smarter

Building a fleet of the most advanced equipment on the market helps PMI work efficiently. Coupling that with service and support from Roland Machinery Company and Sales Rep Jenn Jacobs helps PMI operate at its highest level.

"We really enjoy working with Roland," said Josh. "They make our job easy. We're able to come to terms on purchases effortlessly, and they stand by their equipment. We don't have the luxury of downtime. If a machine is down, we're losing money. Roland is very quick with parts and service, so we can get back up and running."

Josh adds that he appreciates the consistent level of dedication that Roland and its staff have provided PMI through the years.

"We are confident that whoever we work with at Roland will act in our best interest,"



At the start of a street rehab project, a Pavement Maintenance Inc. operator uses a Wirtgen W 250i soil stabilizer to tear up an existing roadway.

explained Josh. "Jenn has been our sales rep for three years now, and she's been awesome. Shawn Price is someone else who I can call, and he'll get me an answer. Anytime we talk to someone from Roland, they are helpful and responsive. We trust them." ■



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Construction, mining and aggregate customers demo latest equipment and technology

Komatsu welcomed customers to recent hands-on events where they had the chance to operate a variety of heavy equipment. Demo Days took place at Komatsu's Cartersville Customer Center in Georgia, where guests met with product experts and learned about the latest advancements in construction technology. Quarry Days sessions were held at the company's Arizona Proving Grounds in Sahuarita, Ariz.

Demo Days

"It's fun to see and run all of the new equipment to get a great feel for what the technology is truly doing," said Rachel Contracting Operations Manager Robbie Koopmeiners. "To be front and center with the newest and greatest technology is something that can't be replaced."

Headlining the new machinery and technology on display was Komatsu's Proactive Dozing Control logic, available on the D51i-24 and D61i-24.

"We featured our *intelligent* Machine Control dozers with Proactive Dozing Control," said Komatsu District Manager Isaac Rollor. "We debuted this technology last spring, and a lot of customers were ready to get into the dozers and get first-hand experience with how it really works."

The three-day event featured 25 machines ranging from utility equipment to mining and aggregate pieces, including the full lineup of *intelligent* Machine Control dozers and excavators.

"We design Demo Days as a highly interactive experience," said Rollor. "With machine demos and Komatsu experts, plus games, booths and other information, we want customers to get all of their questions answered before they leave. It's our goal to provide the best experience possible."

Customers agreed that Komatsu accomplished its mission.

"I'm blown away at the hospitality Komatsu provided," said War Paint Enterprises Owner



Isaac Rollor,
Komatsu District
Manager

Continued...



(L-R) Larry Gindville,
Roland Machinery
Company; Daniel Oakes,
A.W. Oakes & Son; and
Josh Freitag, RAMS
Contracting, take in the
activities at Demo Days.

▶ VIDEO



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Demo Days attendees had the opportunity to operate a wide array of equipment as well as gather information and other tips from Komatsu product experts at the Cartersville Customer Center in Georgia.

Events offer time for meaningful conversation

... continued

Brock Parker. "You have the opportunity to see and run everything. Plus, you get to talk to the people who designed these machines and learn a lot about the equipment. I would definitely recommend coming to Demo Days."

(L-R) Dennis Schmit, New Berlin Grading; Aaron Strade, Roland Machinery Company; and Ben Kroeger, New Berlin Grading get ready to test the latest Komatsu offerings.



(L-R) Jeff Mikus, Roland Machinery Company; Mickey Alessio, Alessio & Sons Co.; and Jason Hook, Vulcan Materials compare notes at Demo Days in Cartersville, Ga.



A Komatsu WA900-8 wheel loader drops dirt into the bed of a Komatsu HD785-8 haul truck at Komatsu's Arizona Proving Grounds during Quarry Days. "The HD785-8 includes a wide range of technological upgrades and is a perfect match with the WA900-8 wheel loader," noted Komatsu Senior Product Manager Joe Sollitt.

► VIDEO



Quarry Days

More than 140 customer and dealer attendees representing 25 different companies across mining and aggregate industries attended a session during the two-week Quarry Days event.

"This is a unique opportunity to bring our customers into an actual mining site where they can operate equipment, and we can demonstrate it in an application that is representative of their working environment," explained Komatsu Senior Product Manager Joe Sollitt.

"We bring in a lot of larger gear and encourage customers to engage with our product experts, equipment trainers and staff to learn about the machines," he added. "The group sizes are limited each day so that guests and employees have more time to engage in meaningful conversation."

Quarry Days highlighted the recently introduced Komatsu HD785-8 haul truck and previewed the WA475-10 wheel loader. The HD785-8 has a rated payload of 101.6 tons and offers operators a bird's-eye view with KomVision (see related article on page 19). The WA475-10 wheel loader has an all new hydromechanical transmission to increase efficiency.

"We're really excited to preview the WA475-10 because it's a major technological step that increases productivity and reduces fuel consumption," noted Sollitt. "The HD785-8 also includes a wide range of technological upgrades and is a perfect match with the WA900-8 wheel loader." ■

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Hiring a diverse staff could be the key to future growth by expanding your customer base

“What it boils down to is creating a staff that includes varying backgrounds.”

Seeking greater workplace diversity is becoming more common; however, putting a strategy into practice can be a little more difficult. “What it boils down to is creating a staff that includes varying backgrounds,” said Adrienne Troilo, Chief Administrative Officer for the American Society for Engineering Education.

Need to grow your customer base? Diversify your offerings. Looking for a safety net for investments? Diversify your portfolio. Want your marketing campaigns to succeed? Diversify your staff.

That’s right, a diverse staff could be the key to reaching more customers, according to Adrienne Troilo, Chief Administrative Officer for the American Society for Engineering Education. “A mix of employee backgrounds leads to results that can resonate with a much wider audience,” said Troilo.

A snapshot of the population shows a broad and rapidly changing composition of potential consumers. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that by the year 2042, there will be no single demographic majority as people of color will comprise more than 50 percent of the United States. The same study also says that 20 percent of all Americans will be affected by a disability, and five different generations will be active in workplaces.

Troilo says that in order to communicate effectively, it is important that the people crafting that message reflect the intended audience. “Including a mix of backgrounds, heritage, experience and education into a team has immense benefits,” said Troilo.

How can my company diversify?

Diversity has been an important topic in nearly every industry for some time now. While there are legal requirements for non-discrimination in hiring practices, there are practical business reasons as well. Trumpeting diversity as a strategy has become commonplace for companies; however, putting a strategy into practice can be a little more difficult. There are a few reasons for this, including misinterpretation of the definition, an adverse attitude toward the goal or just a basic inability to grasp the concept.

“What it boils down to is creating a staff that includes varying backgrounds,” said Troilo. “Assembling a diverse staff should be a goal for any company that serves a wide customer base.”

Is there a checklist?

No, there isn’t a handy list to check off, and that is where most companies get hung up, according to Troilo, adding that organizations limit themselves by trying to hire specifically for diversity purposes.

“Varying the work experiences, education levels and ages within a team can work toward accomplishing the goal the same way as race and gender do. It is up to you to decide how much diversity is required to maximize your group’s potential,” she emphasized.





A diverse staff could be the key to reaching more customers, according to Adrienne Troilo, Chief Administrative Officer for the American Society for Engineering Education. “A mix of employee backgrounds leads to results that can resonate with a much wider audience,” said Troilo.

The best way to diversify is to enter the hiring process with an open mind and commitment to finding the candidates that best fit your needs, regardless of their background. For example – don’t limit your hiring process for a sales position only to people with sales experience. If you interview someone who is engaging and charismatic, but has spent years in marketing, he or she might be the right hire for the sales team. The same goes for education. While an Ivy League degree looks great on paper, maybe someone with a high school diploma and years of experience will relate better to your customer base. Opening the door to all types of applicants will give you access to a wide variety of people with diverse backgrounds and experience.

What if I am not in a position to make a lot of hires at this time?

You may be closer to your goals than you realize. Diversity can come from the inside of your organization as well. Evaluate your current staff and see how teams and pairings can be designed to increase diversity within those groups.

“Shake things up. Who knows, maybe Jane from accounting has some ideas that the sales team might benefit from hearing?” Troilo remarked.

Once I build a diverse team, then what?

It’s time to put your money where your mouth is. Step two is all about inclusion.

“If diversity is the mix, inclusion is what makes it work,” Troilo said. “Inclusion is the deliberate act of welcoming diversity and creating an environment where all different kinds of people can thrive and succeed. Diversity is what you have, inclusion is what you do.”

Just like with any plan, there should be some form of short- and long-term goals and a reasonable plan for success, conveyed Troilo. Developing the team is important, but the plan for that team is paramount.

“Create a culture where everyone feels comfortable and is encouraged to add their opinions and share input,” Troilo said. “It won’t happen overnight; however, establishing a work space that invites insights from everyone will eventually generate big returns for your company. ■

Editor’s note: Adrienne Troilo is the Chief Administrative Officer for the American Society for Engineering Education. The information for this blog is based on Troilo’s presentation at the 2019 Associated Equipment Distributors Summit.



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Keep visual records of your jobsites for progress, legal purposes

The first thing most contractors think about when it comes to records is retrieving copies of important documents such as contracts, invoices and pay applications. They don't often consider photographing their work. They should do so, and no less than once weekly, not only of the sites where they are working but also of those areas that may impact their work or schedule.

Case in point – a stucco contractor received a delay claim from the general contractor asserting that he hadn't completed his work on time. Fortunately, the contractor had his construction records in the form of pictures, which showed post-tension cables sticking out of the building. With those in hand, he explained to the general contractor that he was prevented from putting swing stages down the building, something essential for him to apply the stucco. A handful of photos saved him from contending with a legal headache and an expensive delay claim.

Extra steps worth the effort

Photos weigh heavily in a court of law as well. Judges and juries don't necessarily understand construction. Having photographs that depict the situation make it much easier to prove a position. Simply taking photos for construction records is not enough; contractors also need to:

- **Include a description** noting when and where each picture was taken. Having thousands of pictures from a job, which are downloaded from Dropbox with no way to tell when or where they were taken, is no help. Photos need to show a visual history of the job to be useful. Identify all pictures with a date and time stamp as well as a note indicating where they were taken.
- **Save and back up all photos.** Anyone assigned to take photos on the job can easily use a cell phone to take the pictures. However, those visuals are useless if the person's phone is lost or damaged. Save all pictures in a central location and back up everything, regularly.

Contractors should also videotape their work – especially on large jobs, although still applicable to smaller projects – by walking the site and narrating where they are and what they are looking at and then adding the video to their construction records. If needed, they should go back and take screenshots of the video and indicate the time, date and location based on the narration.

It's said that "seeing is believing." When it comes to defending or prosecuting a construction case, nothing could be more true. ■



**Alex Barthet,
Attorney**

Attorney Alex Barthet (alex@barthet.com) serves as litigation counsel to many contractors and material suppliers. Board certified in construction law by the Florida Bar Association, he has been selected by his peers for inclusion in the Best Lawyers in America and the Florida Super Lawyers within the specialty of construction law.

Editor's note: This article originally appeared at TheLienZone.com.



Documenting jobsites with photographs and videos is a great way to track progress and keep visual records for potential claims, says attorney Alex Barthet.

intelligent Machine Control dozers help reduce pad construction time, 'perfect for reclamation'



Art Gutteresen,
Owner



Luke Leonard,
GPS Technician



Joey Timco,
Construction
Superintendent

Ranch owner Art Gutteresen turned a blizzard into a business. "Nobody could get to work, and there were oilfield companies installing wells on the property. I leased a motor grader to move the snow and open the roads for them. I think I moved the same snow every day for three months," he recalled.

Gutteresen saw an opportunity to provide additional resources to the oil and gas companies working the 32,000 acres that comprise Gutteresen Ranch, and that was the catalyst for Gusher Oilfield Services. It now offers drill pad, road and tank battery construction; grading; heavy hauling; and reclamation services, among others.

Proven results

To streamline operations, Gusher Oilfield Services GPS Technician Luke Leonard builds topographic maps using a data collector and rover. Then, he makes a design file that can be plugged into the company's Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control D65PXi-24 and D39PXi-24 dozers and used for pad construction and reclamation.

"Our operators let the machines do the work; they're simple and have led to greater efficiency," shared Leonard. "We love the integrated system, which eliminates wasted

time or additional expenses that come with the masts and cables of traditional aftermarket GPS."

"The D65PXi pushes and carries a sizeable load; and with the six-way blade, operators can do all the mass dirt moving, slope cutting and finish work for pads with one machine," added Construction Superintendent Joey Timco. "Previously, depending on pad size and the amount of material to move, construction could take five to 10 days. Now, with the D65i, we've cut that time in half. The smaller D39PXi is perfect for reclamation, because it involves working in some tight areas that are close to well heads."

Gusher Oilfield Services mounted a permanent solar-powered GPS base station with Virtual Reference Station control in the middle of the ranch at a height of 27 feet. A Technical Solutions Expert with the local Komatsu distributorship assisted with setup and calibration.

"He was instrumental in ensuring everything functioned properly," said Leonard.

"Additionally, he trained our operators on the ins and outs of the system. His expertise ensured that we were up and running quickly to maximize production and efficiency." ■

A Gusher Oilfield Services operator builds a well pad with a Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control D65PXi-24 dozer. "Our operators let the machines do the work; they're simple and have led to greater efficiency," said Gusher Oilfield Services GPS Technician Luke Leonard. "We love the integrated system, which eliminates wasted time or additional expenses that come with the masts and cables of traditional aftermarket GPS."



▶ VIDEO



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Mining, quarry and aggregate operations want to move large quantities of material as quickly as possible. Trucks with a tight turning radius, that are highly maneuverable when spotting to be loaded and positioning to dump, can provide an advantage in achieving those goals.

With a turning radius of 33 feet, 2 inches, Komatsu's new 1,140 net horsepower HD785-8 rigid-frame, off-highway truck helps users reach their objectives while delivering a payload capacity of 101.6 tons. The truck has a 7-speed, fully automatic transmission with two selectable reverse speeds. The Komatsu Advanced Transmission with Optimum Modulation Control System ensures smooth clutch engagement for a more comfortable ride and reduced material spillage.

Get more done in less time

"Thanks to its Tier 4 engine, the HD785-8 has the highest in-class horsepower in North America for the best travel performance on grade," said Robert Hussey, Komatsu Product Marketing Manager. "Additionally, it delivers

fast acceleration out of the pit when loaded and short return times to the loading area for more hauling cycles and increased production per hour."

The Komatsu Traction Control System is standard and automatically applies pressure to independent brake assemblies for optimum traction in various ground conditions, without the need for differential lock-up, so steering performance is not compromised.

"The wet multiple disc brakes on all four wheels provide excellent downhill brake retarding performance," said Hussey. "The Automatic Retard Speed Control maintains a selected downhill travel speed, rather than engine RPM, so operators can keep their focus on the haul road." ■



Robert Hussey,
Komatsu Product
Marketing Manager

Quick Specs on Komatsu's HD785-8 Off-Highway Truck

| Model | Net Horsepower | Payload Capacity | Industries |
|---------|----------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| HD785-8 | 1,140 hp | 101.6 ton | Aggregate, Quarry, Mining |

Komatsu's new HD785-8 rigid-frame, off-highway truck has a turning radius of 33 feet, 2 inches, making it highly maneuverable. "It delivers fast acceleration out of the pit when loaded and short return times to the loading area for more hauling cycles and increased production per hour," said Robert Hussey, Komatsu Product Marketing Manager.



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Brian (left) and Thomas Cronin / Prosperity Construction / Jackson, MS



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President Rich Fikis says Komatsu Financial customizes solutions to fit needs of individual businesses

QUESTION: More than 80 percent of Komatsu construction equipment is acquired using Komatsu Financial. What makes it such an attractive lending source?

ANSWER: During the past several years, we have made a concerted effort to be closer to customers and better understand their specific needs. It helps us know what they are looking for in a monthly payment; whether they do maintenance in-house or need long-term maintenance plans built into their payment or lease structure; what their machine applications are; and more. Those items are important in making sure we focus on their success, rather than simply providing blanket financing at a certain rate during a given time frame.

As an example, in some parts of the country winter can be especially rough for contractors. They may not work for an extended time. We can build payment skips into their financing that allow them to finalize purchasing or leasing decisions, maintain good cash flow and start making payments again in the spring when projects are up and running and their receivables are better.

I believe another reason is our strong relationship to Komatsu's distributor network. Komatsu Financial provides training and works closely with sales personnel at the distributorships to ensure they are every bit as qualified to talk about Komatsu Financial products as we are. We are in lockstep with one another.

QUESTION: How long does it take to receive a financing decision?

ANSWER: The average time is about four business hours after the distributor submits the application to us. That's our goal; however, the vast majority are quicker. That's due, in part, to having numerous repeat customers and automatic approval capabilities.

QUESTION: How much of your business comes from repeat customers?

ANSWER: More than 70 percent, which is an excellent number for our industry. A lot

of that is a result of our willingness to work with customers and being flexible; they really appreciate it.

QUESTION: Do you finance more than equipment?

ANSWER: Yes, we also finance Komatsu Genuine Parts and service handled by our distributor network. We pre-approve a specific amount to help make the decision to have maintenance and repairs done. Our standard

Continued . . .



Rich Fikis,
President, Komatsu Financial

This is one of a series of articles based on interviews with key people at Komatsu discussing the company's commitment to its customers in the construction and mining industries – and their visions for the future.

Rich Fikis started with Komatsu Financial in 1997. At the time, he and his colleagues worked in a building that was separate from Komatsu America. "That's no longer the case; today we are a much bigger part of the picture," said Fikis. "We are closer than ever to our distributors and customers, which allows us to better understand their perspectives on financing and how we can build plans and programs tailored to their needs."

Fikis began his career in the operations area and spent four years in collections before moving into credit and then to a regional manager position. He also worked in financial planning and analysis for Komatsu America before becoming President of Komatsu Financial.

"I really enjoy going out to our distributors and sitting down with customers, listening to what their needs are and finding solutions to help," said Fikis.

He and his wife, Tami, have three sons who are active in sports, and the couple enjoys attending their athletic events.

Working to better utilize technology

... continued

term is 15 months of equal payments, which allows for a major repair without hampering monthly cash flow; however, we can develop customized payment plans as well.

QUESTION: What does the future hold for Komatsu Financial?

ANSWER: We are looking at some enhancements to tailor lease programs specifically to Komatsu Care Certified used machinery. We can look at KOMTRAX and check distributor records to verify that all of the services were done as scheduled, so when those machines go out, we and the customer are confident in their condition and value.

We continue to better utilize technology, and right now we are getting ready to launch a more dealer-friendly portal that will allow them to quickly submit an application and receive lease quote information. The enhancement of our KomatsuFinancial.com website continues as well and will offer customers the option to make payments, view their information, pull up invoices and more.

QUESTION: What is your outlook for 2020?

ANSWER: Everything we see shows that the general fundamentals of the economy are strong. Low unemployment is a positive, as are the manufacturing indexes of late. We still think there's some opportunity in the housing market. All indicators point to another strong market in 2020. ■

Repeat customers account for more than 70 percent of Komatsu Financial's business. "That's an excellent number for our industry," stated President Rich Fikis. "A lot of that is a result of our willingness to work with customers and being flexible; they really appreciate it."

President Rich Fikis says Komatsu Financial does more than provide blanket rates for certain periods of time. "During the past several years, we have made a concerted effort to be closer to the customers and better understand their specific needs," said Fikis. "That's why more than 80 percent of Komatsu construction equipment acquisitions are financed through Komatsu Financial."



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After 20 years, telematics system continues to help owners use equipment data for more cost-effective practices



► VIDEO
Steve Day,
former Komatsu
Director of Service,
now retired



Chris Wasik,
Komatsu Director of
Parts Marketing

Knowing where your machines are located and the number of hours on them are critical pieces of information when maintaining a fleet. Those capabilities were the original features of Komatsu's remote monitoring KOMTRAX telematics system, which celebrates its 20th birthday in 2020.

"After all of these years, those are still two important functions, although KOMTRAX has considerably more capabilities now," said Steve Day, who served as Komatsu's Director of Service in 2000, and was instrumental in the adoption and implementation of KOMTRAX. He recently retired from Tractor & Equipment Company where he was Executive Vice President/General Manager-Product Support. "It evolved into a tool for monitoring equipment health, idle time, fuel consumption and much more. The information can be used to address changes that lead to better practices, which reduce owning and operating costs."

Depending on the machine, today's KOMTRAX can deliver information on cautions, abnormality codes, actual working hours versus idle time, hydraulic relief hours, load frequency and digging hours, among other critical data. The latest version, KOMTRAX 5.0, is standard on

Tier 4 construction machinery and includes Komatsu Diesel Particulate Filter soot count, active regeneration time, operator identification and diesel exhaust fluid level.

"Early on, we recognized how valuable the data could be to customers, our distributors and to Komatsu as a manufacturer, and each has played a significant role in its evolution," emphasized Komatsu Director of Parts Marketing Chris Wasik, who also worked on the initiative that eventually led to KOMTRAX. "There was some discussion in the initial stages about what to charge for the service. However, we quickly saw such great potential benefit that we decided to provide it complimentary, and we still do."

Beneficial to all

Wasik said that Komatsu now monitors hundreds of thousands of machines equipped with the technology to analyze trends and assess data, which may determine manufacturing levels and inventory. Distributors keep track of equipment in their territories to determine when to perform service intervals, what parts to stock and to remotely diagnose error codes and more.

"The customer benefit is better support," said Wasik. "For instance, when a machine has a fault code, KOMTRAX sends an alert. Before driving to a customer's site to check the machine, the technician can pull the parts that may be needed and take them along. In the past, the technician may have needed to assess the machine, determine the required parts, then go back to the shop and get them. KOMTRAX reduces downtime, and because it shows where a machine is located, the tech can drive right to it, which saves time and travel expense."

Customers can keep an eye on their machines through a secure website via desktop and laptop computers, tablets or with a smartphone using the KOMTRAX app. McManus Construction, LLC Fleet Manager James Bedgood utilizes the service to research error codes as well as to track idle time and hours.

Equipment users can track a machine's hours, idle time, usage, operation modes and much more with KOMTRAX. "The increases in productivity and efficiency we get across the board with Komatsu are fantastic," said Dorado Construction Group Fleet Manager/Equipment Manager Clay Butler. "I see it every day when I look up the machines through KOMTRAX on my desktop computer or tablet."





KOMTRAX, Komatsu's remote monitoring telematics system, turns 20 this year and has evolved from a box that offered basic information on location and hours to an integrated system that provides comprehensive data on machine health, usage and more.

"If I'm out of the shop, I check it through the app on my phone," said Bedgood. "It's a great tool that allows us to be even more proactive regarding service."

Dorado Construction Group Fleet Manager/ Equipment Manager Clay Butler consistently uses KOMTRAX to track how his company's Komatsu equipment is running.

"The increases in productivity and efficiency we get across the board with Komatsu are fantastic," said Butler. "I see it every day when I look up the machines through KOMTRAX on my desktop computer or tablet. If a code pops up, it alerts us so that we can address it quickly."

Rizwan Mirza, Komatsu Manager, KOMTRAX – Technical Support & Production Quality, Products & Services Division said that this kind of end-user adoption has always been one of Komatsu's goals.

"We want customers to utilize it to its fullest and reap the benefits of what's available," added Mirza. "Whether it's basic hours and location or more advanced data, such as idle versus production time, economy mode versus power mode functionalities, unnecessary travel or something else, it's

beneficial to their operations. Komatsu and our distributors can consult with customers to use the information in a way that maximizes production and efficiency."

Total solutions tool

KOMTRAX has exceeded the initial development team's expectations. "Telematics were being used in the trucking industry, and someone had the foresight to see its applications for construction equipment," Day recalled. "We started with a box and put it on one excavator to do some field testing and see what we could do with the information."

"It was introduced on four machines, and the benefits were so great that we expanded it," added Wasik. "KOMTRAX was so well-received, that we manufactured retrofit packages for older models. Some customers put it on their competitive brands and other types of equipment to track them as well."

Mirza said predictive analysis could be the next step in the evolution of KOMTRAX. "A machine may tell the customer that it's nearly time to replace a component, for instance. We are working to marry it with our MyKomatsu website and other business aspects as part of our total solutions package." ■



Rizwan Mirza,
Komatsu Manager,
KOMTRAX –
Technical Support &
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Marv Selge (with Noah & Justin) / Selge Construction, Inc. / Niles, MI

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Recruitment event for high school and college students emphasizes careers and technology

High school and college students learned about technician careers when Komatsu hosted its annual Komatsu Recruitment Day at the Cartersville Customer Center in Georgia last fall. The day is part of a larger initiative to generate interest in heavy-equipment careers.

"Finding qualified technicians is an issue facing the industry," explained Komatsu Training Manager Craig Yager. "We worked with some local distributors to develop this event to help attract more people to our industry and provide information on what career opportunities are available."

This year's Recruitment Day brought in more than 100 attendees and four Komatsu distributors. General diesel program students from nearby Chattahoochee Technical College met and interviewed with distributor recruiting representatives and also had the opportunity to operate equipment. The high school students could talk with distributors, take part in machine walk-arounds and participate in an equipment-themed game show.

"Both groups had a unique experience here," said Yager. "For the college students, it was geared more toward a career path and getting them in front of potential employers because they are further along in their

education. An instructor shared that students start talking about attending this experience months in advance.

"The goal for high schoolers was to raise their interest in this field and build excitement for it," he added. "They aren't old enough to operate the equipment, so we focus on making it both fun and informational with some interactive activities."

'Eye-opening' experience

Yager says that events like this have taken on a greater role in an effort to ensure a qualified workforce for the heavy-equipment industry in the future.

"Being able to educate both the students and guidance counselors about the opportunities in our industry is very important," noted Yager. "There are so many more options available than a four-year degree. Plus, for some of these programs, the distributors or Komatsu will pay for the schooling. That's another big selling point we try to emphasize."

"These events also help us change the perception of this kind of work – we are a high-tech industry," he continued.

"It's more than grease and dirt; it's very technology-driven. When students see what is really going on, it opens their eyes to all of the possibilities." ■



Craig Yager,
Komatsu Training
Manager



More than 100 college and high school students participated in Komatsu Recruitment Day at the Cartersville Customer Center in Georgia. "When students see what is really going on, it opens their eyes to all of the possibilities," said Komatsu Training Manager Craig Yager.



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Aileen Collins encourages both women and men to pursue service technician careers

When people ask Aileen Collins why she didn't become a doctor or a nurse, her answer is, "I sort of did. The patients are just bigger and not human. They come to us, and we take care of them. Like people, sometimes the issues are big. Other times, it's a checkup and some maintenance."

In 2018, Collins became the first woman to graduate from a Komatsu Advanced Career Training (ACT) program when she earned an Associate of Applied Science in Diesel and Heavy Equipment, Komatsu ATC Technology degree at Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology (OSUIT). The two-year curriculum at the school in Okmulgee, Okla., combines classroom and hands-on courses on campus, with real-world work in the shops of sponsoring Komatsu distributors.

Collins' patients represent a cross-section of heavy equipment, including dozers, excavators, wheel loaders and more. As a service technician for a Komatsu

distributorship, she can diagnose and fix what ails them.

'Very rewarding'

"I wanted a career that would never get boring," stated Collins. "This definitely hits the mark. No two days are ever the same, and there are always opportunities to learn something new."

While in high school Collins knew she wanted to pursue a career working on machinery. In 2014, she graduated with a degree in diesel and heavy equipment from a technical college, then went to work for her dad's plumbing business. After a few years, she decided to further her education.

"I didn't realize I was the first female until a couple months before graduation," said Collins. "I hope that more women consider becoming technicians. In fact, I encourage anyone – male or female – to pursue this as a career. It is very rewarding." ■

"I wanted a career that would never get boring. This definitely hits the mark."



Service technician Aileen Collins was the first woman to graduate from a Komatsu Advanced Career Training program. Now, she tells others about the benefits and opportunities afforded to service technicians. "I encourage anyone – male or female – to pursue this as a career. It is very rewarding," said Collins.

Construction analysts agree on growth in public works, disagree on most other sectors

Construction forecasts were a mixed bag heading into 2020; however, nearly all agreed that the public works sector could be a bright spot for the industry. Dodge Data & Analytics sees a 4-percent increase in public works starts across the board, including transportation and environmental projects.

Associated General Contractors (AGC) of America Chief Economist Ken Simonson predicts that public works will be flat to showing as much as a 4-percent gain. Simonson's overall outlook seems the most positive with overall growth in the construction industry at 1 to 5 percent, with an increase in residential building of 2 to 7 percent.

Slower gains, no recession repeat

ConstructConnect's Alex Carrick eyes a 0.9-percent rise in non-residential building, and a 5.9-percent improvement in civil

construction. His outlook for the industry as a whole is a 1.6-percent decrease in overall starts. He sees residential dropping by up to 8.3 percent.

Dodge Data & Analytics predicts a 4-percent drop in overall starts. "The recovery in construction starts that began during 2010 in the aftermath of the Great Recession is coming to an end," said Dodge Chief Economist Richard Branch. "Easing economic growth driven by mounting trade tensions and a lack of skilled labor will lead to a broad-based but orderly pullback in construction starts in 2020.

"This year, however, will not be a repeat of what the construction industry endured during the Great Recession," he added. "Economic growth is slowing but is not anticipated to contract (in 2020). Construction starts, therefore, will decline but the level of activity will remain close to recent highs." ■

Public sector work, such as transportation and environmental projects, looks to be a bright spot for construction in 2020, according to industry forecasters. Dodge Data & Analytics sees a 4-percent increase in the sector, and Associated General Contractors of America predicts up to a 4-percent gain.



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