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Baker's Construction & Excavation

THIRD-GENERATION LEADS BLUFF CITY SITE-WORK COMPANY

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Komatsu CARE provides peace of mind

Twelve years ago Jeremy and Josey Baker and their sister, Jessica Hodge, took over the operation of Baker's Construction & Excavation after their father, Jerry, stepped away from the business. In the subsequent years, the Bluff City, Tennessee, company has tripled in size.

"In 2002, it was basically us and a handful of employees," Jessica recalled. "We're up to around 50 now, and we have the ability to provide a site package that includes clearing and grubbing, mass and fine grading as well as utility installation. We do on-site crushing, if needed. We'll also general contract a project and take responsibility for the curb and gutter as well as paving, but we sub out those services."

"It's not uncommon for us to be the first and last contractor on a project," added Jeremy. "We clear a site, do the grading and put in the utilities; then after the building is up, we come back and spread topsoil and seed. It's our preference to supply customers with a package of services, but we will break them out and do earthwork or utilities only, if that's what they want."

No one is prouder of what Baker's Construction & Excavation has become than Jeremy and Jessica's mother, Patti Baker, who is the company President and oversees finances. Jeremy is Vice President and Jessica is the Estimator. Josey, who was instrumental in building the business, passed away in an accident in 2015.

"The kids ran equipment from a very young age, so they grew up with a firm understanding of the business," said Patti. "They know it takes hard work, and all are willing to put in the time and effort for the company to grow and succeed. I knew they had it in them."

Transition to earthwork and more

That drive for success might be partly due to the fact that they are the third generation of family members involved in construction. Their grandfather, W.C. Baker, started Baker's Construction as a homebuilding company. Their

father and his two brothers joined the business and expanded it to include dozer work. That trio eventually led Baker Construction and operated it until 1986 when they split and went separate ways. Jerry and Patti retained the original company, which became Baker's Construction & Excavation.

"By the time we took the reins in 2002, the business had long since transitioned away from housebuilding," noted Jeremy. "The sole focus was earthwork, and we continued with that and built upon it. Josey played an important role because he took on the challenging, high-profile jobs, and he could get them done efficiently and profitably. We fed off that and still do."

Today, it's typical for Baker's Construction & Excavation to have roughly 10 projects going at a time as it operates in a 100-mile radius of Bluff City. The company is licensed to work in Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky and North Carolina.

Extended family

Baker's Construction & Excavation completed its largest project to date in 2015 when it moved more than two million yards of rock for a new commercial site known as The Falls in Bristol, Virginia. It teamed with W-L Construction on this job. Baker's subbed out the drilling and blasting, then crushed the loose material and hauled it around the site for reuse.

"We handled approximately 10,000 yards of rock a day," recounted Jessica. "In addition, we installed almost 6,000 feet of water line and nearly two miles of storm sewer. It was definitely a signature project that really stands out. It proved that our hard work paid off."

"We are really proud of that project because it was for one of our longtime customers with whom we developed a good relationship," added Jeremy. "About half of our work is repeat business, and the other half comes from people who were referred to us. That's a testament to our service. We've always focused on being honest and fair with customers and giving them more than they expect."

Helping the Bakers deliver that caliber of service is a dedicated group of staff. Patti, Jessica and Jeremy consider Baker's Construction & Excavation's employees as extended family. Many have been with the company as long as, or longer than, Jessica and Jeremy.

"We have many 20- and employees," noted Patti. "They work with us, not for us. Their loyalty and dedication are much appreciated. We certainly would not be where we are today without them. They deserve a world of credit for the company's ability to grow and tackle larger and more challenging jobs."



(L-R) President Patti Baker, her son Jeremy (Vice President) and daughter Jessica Hodge (Estimator) own and operate Baker's Construction & Excavation. The company provides earthwork-related services in Tennessee and surrounding states. Son Josey (left), who passed away in July 2015, was instrumental in the growth of the business.



Baker's Construction & Excavation uses a Komatsu intelligent Machine Control D61PXi-23. "We love the D61i's integrated machine control," said Vice President Jeremy Baker. "The operator is always pushing the right amount of material, and it helps prevent overcutting, so we don't have to unnecessarily place and compact expensive replacement fill."

Komatsu proves reliable

Baker's Construction & Excavation has relied on Komatsu machinery for nearly 30 years, and as the jobs grew and became more challenging during the last decade-plus, the company kept adding new pieces. Today, its list of equipment includes excavators ranging from a compact PC45MR-2 to a PC600LC-8. It also has a D155AX-8 dozer and an intelligent Machine Control D61PXi-23 dozer.

"We love the D61i's integrated machine control," shared Jeremy. "It saves time installing and removing the masts and cables, which, in turn, increases profitability. But, the real savings come from the production it provides. The ability to turn it on and doze automatically from start to finish is great. I'm really impressed with the accuracy. The operator is always pushing the right amount of material, and the machine helps prevent overcutting, so we don't have to unnecessarily place and compact expensive replacement fill."

"As good as the technology is, it's the reliability and longevity of Komatsu that have played a big role in why we purchased more machines," added Jessica. "We tend to keep equipment long term, and Komatsu has proven to be tough, especially the excavators. In addition to buckets, we run hammers on a couple of them, and the Komatsus handle that strenuous application with no problem. They have excellent power and good cycle times. We're confident that they will perform every day, even with some age on them."

The Baker family purchased its latest pieces of Komatsu equipment from Power Equipment Company's Kingsport branch with the help of Territory Manager Matt McQueen.

"Matt did a great job of finding us the right machines for our needs, and Power backs them with excellent service and parts availability," explained Jeremy. "We turn to them as needed, and Power handles the routine scheduled service on the D61i through Komatsu CARE. That's a terrific program, and it gives us peace of mind knowing the services are done on time."

Comfortable size, niche

Baker's Construction & Excavation has used aftermarket GPS systems for quite a few years, and it's likely the company will upgrade its fleet to include more intelligent Machine Control technology in the next few years. Jessica indicated that's probably the only big change on the horizon for the company.

"We're comfortable with our size and the niche we have created in the commercial market," she noted. "We still do a little residential work, and if times get tough like they did during the recession, we would consider doing more of that, as well as municipal projects. But, we prefer to stay nearly 100 percent commercial."



Baker's Construction & Excavation Vice President Jeremy Baker (left) meets with Power Equipment Company Territory Manager Matt McQueen. "Matt did a great job of finding us the right machines for our needs, and Power backs them with excellent service and parts availability," said Baker.



A Baker's Construction & Excavation operator moves dirt with a Komatsu PC600LC excavator on a landfill project near Bluff City. "The reliability and longevity of Komatsu played a big role in why we purchased more machines," said Estimator Jessica Hodge. "They have excellent power and good cycle times. We're confident that they will perform every day, even with some age on them."

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