

# BORN to the BUSINESS

## Second generation takes company to next level

**N**ot everyone thinks it's easy to work with their family, but the two parents and three siblings running Baker Construction and Excavation not only work alongside each other, but together have grown their company exponentially over the years.

Started by patriarch Jerry Baker in 1986, the Bluff City, Tennessee-based company was small and focused on digging out basements, cleaning up fence rows and grading driveways. Today, they have customers throughout Tennessee, West Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Virginia. The Bakers specialize in every aspect of the excavation process: site planning and design; rock drilling, blasting and crushing; and installing all the

utilities, including water, sewer and storm sewers.

Patty Baker, Jerry's wife, handles the company's books while her three children—Jeremy, Josey and Jessica—take care of everything else. Jeremy typically handles field work and all public relations, Josey runs the jobs, especially any that are high-profile, and his twin sister, Jessica, does all job estimates, take-offs and handles in-office project management. Jerry checks out jobs





from time to time, but he is semi-retired and spends most of his days on the family's sprawling farm property.

The Bakers pride themselves in maintaining their good reputation and for having the ability to handle all aspects of excavation.

"When we go into a project, we're the first ones in and the last ones out as far as grading goes," Josey said.

Most recently, they've moved two million yards of rock and dirt, reducing 120 feet of mountain to a level site for the new shopping center, "The Falls," anchored by Cabela's in Bristol, Virginia. While Cabela's is set to open this summer, the Bakers will continue grading and excavating the remaining area for other tenets of the center.

The company has a rock crusher onsite with a screening operation that sorts out the different sizes of rock, from larger rocks to particles so small they're almost dust. At The Falls site, a Cat wheel loader hauls rocks to a 330D Cat excavator that places the larger rocks in the crusher. This process of recycling excavated rock has proven efficient and profitable, with the crushed rock being re-used at the jobsite for backfilling with pipe installation, drains and landscaping.

Though Jerry says the first piece of equipment his company owned was a garden tiller, the company now boasts a fleet that includes 60 Cat machines, ranging from skid steer loaders to large dozers and articulated trucks, among other machines. This fleet enables the company to work both smaller and larger projects, catering to the needs of a variety of customers.

The family's commitment to longtime customers and ability to oversee jobs of all sizes enabled them to smoothly navigate the rough 2008 recession.

"When the economy tanked, we felt we were fortunate because we have repeat customers, developers we have relationships with," Jeremy said, adding that longtime employees also played an integral role during those tough times.

Many of those employees have been with the company so long that the three siblings say they were practically raised by some of them. The trio grew up knowing that they would be in the business in one way or another, and their mother couldn't be prouder of what they've done with the family legacy.

"The kids have always been involved, from the time they could climb on a dozer," said Patty Baker. "Since 1996,

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— JOSEY & JESSICA BAKER  
Baker Construction and Excavating





they've really been the ones who have grown the company and taken it to what it is today. I'm so proud of what my children have done, because they have really worked hard."

They also give credit to others they have worked with, including their local Cat dealer, Stowers Machinery Corporation.

"It takes a lot of external support to run this business, too. We need people like Wes Acklin and Wes Storey at Stowers Machinery, who are here when we call for help," Josey said. Parts availability, quick and efficient service and a longstanding relationship are all reasons the Bakers said they enjoy working with Stowers.

### Technology Aids Growth

Over the years, as technology has changed, so has Baker Construction and Excavation. They have used GPS units on their machines for a decade already, and it has been a great time and cost-saving tool, Josey said. Cur-

rently, the company employs four GPS, two of which are mobile and can be moved from machine to machine.

"With GPS, you've always got grade, you know what elevation you're at and where you are. We don't have to wait on a surveyor, and it makes us so much more productive," he said.

For Jessica, it's the transition from doing take-offs by hand to using advanced software that can be shared across platforms. Plans that once took two or three days to create can be done in a matter of minutes, and the company's new software program enables her to instantly share plans with her brothers.

"I can send a plan to the cloud and, in two minutes, I can have it uploaded to Google Earth and Jeremy and Josey can have the plan in their hands, on their smartphones," she said.

Right now, the Bakers have have so many jobs underway, they couldn't

count them all. They don't have specific growth plans for the future, but they do plan to continue upgrading their technology and equipment to maintain their leadership position in the industry.

"We want to stay on the same path, grow a little bit, and add larger equipment," Josey said, which prompted his mother to laugh and say, "Equipment is something they never have enough of; they could always use another piece."

As the Bakers continue growing their company, they don't know whether any of the family's four grandchildren will be interested in carrying it on. However, they plan to do their best for as long as they're running the company.

"Dad always taught us that you don't have anything if you don't have your good name," Josey said, with his sister adding, "At the end of the day, what matters is getting the job done and that we love each other." ■