



AHEAD OF THE GAME

Site prep contractor fills a variety of roles

“Determine never to be idle. No person will have occasion to complain of the want of time who never loses any. It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing.”

- Thomas Jefferson

In the day-to-day operation of his construction business, Jeff Robards wears many hats.

Whether it's performing front office tasks such as estimating, paying bills, or working out in the field transporting or operating equipment, Robards is not one to sit still. Just for good measure, he also helps repair equipment in a pinch.

“I developed the business from the ground up, so I've touched everything,” says Robards, owner of Jeff Robards Construction Inc. in Shepherdsville, Ky.

“You have to prioritize, and the day before I already know what I'm going to do the next day,” says Robards, who started the 40-employee company in 1995. “Last week I had a foreman who was out, so I had to run equipment all week long, and that was fine with me. That's the



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— JEFF ROBARDS
Owner
Jeff Robards Construction (JRC)



“Time is just what you make of it, and I have to prioritize to keep things running on schedule,” Robards says. “I’m multitasking all the time.”

Robards got his start while still in high school grading yards with a skid steer loader. His dad worked as a plumber and built houses, so his job was to clean up around the new houses and grade the yards.

“I was using whatever farm tractor we could find and I just knew there was a better way to do it, and that’s when I came up with the skid steer loader,” he says. “At the time, I was one of the only people in the area to have one—it was sort of a niche market.”

Site development specialist

Today, Jeff Robards Construction (JRC) specializes in site development work within a 60-mile radius of its home base south of Louisville—doing everything from finished grading residential lots to moving 100,000 cu. yd. of dirt. Crews also install water and stormwater systems, as well as sanitary sewer systems in conjunction with the earthmoving work. The company also has a hauling division.

JRC clients include a mix of commercial and residential customers. With the upswing in the economy, 80 percent of jobs this year have been devoted to site prep for residential development.

The contractor has an extensive background in residential site development projects, from single-family homes, to condominium/apartment sites, and subdivisions. If a challenge arises, JRC quickly finds the most economical solution to keep the project moving to completion.

JRC’s residential services include:

- Erosion Control
- Construction Entrance
- Clearing & Grubbing
- Demolition
- Earth & Rock Excavation
- Hauling
- Sanitary Sewer
- Storm Sewer
- Water Line
- Water Services
- Concrete Sidewalk, Curb & Gutter
- Retaining Walls
- Finish Grade Streets & Parking Lots
- Lot Grading & Building Backfill

During the recession, JRC ventured beyond its home territory and performed government projects for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to stay busy. It built several large levies in Wabash, Indiana. A crew traveled to the North Carolina shoreline to construct breakwalls out of large granite stone at Harker’s Island.

“We went to the work wherever it was, and it paid off,” Robards says. “We were able to keep our people working by utilizing some of our large equipment on the levies, and we developed some good relationships with the Army Corps people.”

During that period, JRC also built two infantry training ranges at Fort Knox south of Louisville. The job included mass earthmoving, plus construction and placement of stone retaining walls. It also built several 250-yard long wood-lined

continued on page 16

way I’ve always been—I don’t care if I’m on a shovel or if I’m in the office. I do whatever it takes to make it better that day for everyone.”

In the late afternoon, Robards changes hats to start his “part-time” job—farming almost 1,000 acres in partnership with family. During the spring and fall he routinely works from 5:30 p.m. until well after sundown raising row-crops, and during other seasons keeping up with the chores that come with crops and 160 head of beef cattle.

trenches and machine gun bunkers at its shop.

“We manufactured our own product for this job,” Robards says. “During the winter, instead of running dozers, our guys were swinging hammers. But it kept everybody working.”

Gaining an edge

In the course of its work, JRC utilizes a fleet of Cat® equipment—from 259D and 279D Compact Track Loaders on up to a D8T Dozer, a 621F Scraper and a 336E L Hydraulic Excavator.

Grading accuracy is greatly enhanced by GPS technology on JRC's dozers, enabling crews to complete mass earthmoving jobs faster and more accurately.

“We're big on the GPS grading, Robards says. “We eliminate a lot of survey time and double handling of material. You've got a 3D view of the job on the screen mounted in the cab, and with the operator monitoring that screen, it's a big time saver for us.

“We do a lot of GPS finish work with our motor grader,” he continues. “They say plus or minus an inch. But I want it plus or minus a quarter of an inch, and this technology provides us with that finer edge.”

That technology came into play last year when JRC served as a subcontractor on the 1.5-mile widening of Kentucky Highway 6, which runs right past his house. The job involved moving 520,000 cu. yd. of dirt/rock.

The key to successful completion of the project was the utilization of the D8T dozer with GPS technology and a bogie style bottom roller system. Shot rock was placed on grade within a tight tolerance for the type of material used.

“With the size of the D8 and the accuracy it gave us, it made this project a success,” Robards said.

JRC utilizes Cat VisionLink® the Product Link™ to monitor machine hours as part of its maintenance program. The technology aids Robards in monitoring fuel consumption, equipment utilization and a great

deal more data from VisionLink that aids fleet management.

JRC utilizes drones to take pictures of jobsite progress, posting the images on Facebook or sending them to the customer to keep them updated.

“We can fly the drone over a site before we move any dirt,” Robards says. “It's a timesaver for our field crews. If you have conditions that are not ideal to walk around or even drive a 4-wheeler, we can still quickly capture the topo that we need with the drone.”

Dealer support

JRC counts on its Cat dealer, WHAYNE Supply, to keep its equipment fleet up and running at all times. On those rare occasions when it has an equipment issue, WHAYNE provides the contractor with a replacement machine on the spot.

“It's probably the number one thing that draws me to them, because uptime is our business,” Robards says. “We have only nine months to make a whole year's worth of income because that's the length of our construction season. So uptime is critical.”

Parts availability from WHAYNE is another plus for Robards.

“I can pick the phone up and talk to somebody at WHAYNE's

JEFF ROBARDS CONSTRUCTION (JRC)

Owner: Jeff Robards

Location: Shepherdsville, Ky.

Established: 1995

Employees: 40

Services: Residential site prep, underground utilities, retaining walls, surveying, hauling, snow and ice removal

Cat® Equipment: 259D Compact Track Loader, 279D Compact Track Loader (2), 315C L Hydraulic Excavator, 324D L Hydraulic Excavator, 336E L Hydraulic Excavator, 621B Scraper, 621E Scraper, 621F Scraper, D6K2 LGP Dozer, D8T Dozer, 730 Articulated Truck, Vibratory Compactors: CP-433E; CP-563E; C556, CT660 On-Highway Truck, BA18 Manual Angle Broom, 5500 Hammer

parts and service department, and if they don't answer they call back right away,” he says. “I can make a decision based on the information they give me.

“I know I can count on the parts and service department at WHAYNE to give me a timely answer, and that's important.” ■

