

IRON

in the

FIRE

**FORMER
FIREMAN
FINDS
SUCCESS** AS
CONSTRUCTION
CONTRACTOR

As a fireman in Mandeville, Louisiana, Kort Wittich started a side job grading yards with a skid steer loader and hauling dirt for building contractors in 2000.

On his days off from the St. Tammany Parish Fire District #4, Wittich started with a Dodge pickup truck and a skid steer. After a short time, he purchased a bobtail dump truck, with most of his work coming from residential contractors providing material and fill and grading yards.

KORT'S

**CONSTRUCTION
SERVICES, INC.**

Employees: 60

Location: Covington, La.

Cat® equipment: 259D

Compact Track Loader, 289D

Compact Track Loader (2),

299D2 Compact Track Loader,

305E2 CR Mini Excavator,

420F IT Backhoe Loader, 314E

L CR Hydraulic Excavator,

D5K2 LGP Dozer

Wittich later purchased a triaxle dump, which he operated for years performing contract hauling for another contractor. Over time, he would acquire other equipment and start performing other residential services such as constructing house pads, roads, driveways, and ponds.

With the experience gained, in 2008 Wittich traded in his fireman's helmet for a hardhat when he started his own full-time business, Kort's Construction Services, Inc.

"I was working over 100-some hours a week between the two jobs, and if I wasn't on the phone or on a piece of equipment, I was sleeping," Wittich recalls. "So it was either one or the other, and I had so much time and money invested in the company at that point that I wanted to give it my full effort and see what I could do with the business."

Fast forward to 2017, and it's clear Wittich made the right decision. With 15 to 20 projects underway at any given time and employment fluctuating between 55 and 70 team members depending on the season, Kort's Construction Services is a diversified site contractor specializing in all phases of sitework, including concrete, asphalt, earthwork and excavation, pad building, finish grading, drainage, field engineering, saw cutting and joint sealing.

The contractor performs about 65 percent of its work for municipal and state entities, which requires competitive bidding. In order to win jobs, Kort's Construction must determine how to do the work more efficiently.

"We figure out a better, faster way to do the job than the

(Continued on page 14)

WHAT HE LIKES ABOUT CAT® EQUIPMENT

As a contractor that moves from job-to-job within the course of a day, Kort Wittich likes the versatility of his Cat compact machines, which are enhanced by time-saving attachments.

"Say we're doing some backfill work with a skid steer loader and a 305 Mini Excavator on a roadway," Wittich says. "When we're ready to leave the jobsite, if I didn't have the broom attachment to sweep the street before we leave, I would have to get another piece of equipment to the jobsite—find somebody to transport it there and drop it off—and that's going to cause a delay in moving to my next job."

"We just disconnect the bucket, attach the broom with a Cat Quick Coupler, and sweep the street with the skid steer. Then we load everything up and go to the next jobsite. So it's a tremendous savings in time and money."



"We have hardly any downtime. So it has been tremendous. We haven't had any major breakdowns that would slow any of our jobs down at all."

**- KORT WITTICH
OWNER
KORT'S CONSTRUCTION SERVICES, INC.**



next competitor,” Wittich says. “So as we finish existing jobs, we learn better ways of how to manage them, and what equipment to use that will make the job go faster.”

The technical edge

Over the last five years, Kort’s has made a large investment in GPS technology. An in-house field engineer builds 3D models with job-specific Trimble software.

“The technology we’re using now has helped us streamline our operations and make us more efficient,” Wittich says. “Before we would have to contract a survey company to come in and do that for us, which is costly over a year. Now we can take the Trimble model and upload it into our Cat® D5K2 Dozer, and into the 314E L Excavator.

“When you have a large amount of dirt or base course, which could be stone or various materials, it allows us to rough it in versus having to have stakes everywhere and do a string line,” he says. “It helps us get to the end result a lot quicker because the guy on a dozer or the guy on the excavator can see the limits of construction on the screen.”

As Kort’s equipment fleet migrated primarily to Cat machines, the contractor

chose to make the move to Sitech and Trimble products.

“They provide better support, as they have more people. It has been great, and they come to our office to do training and help with other system issues.

“They’ve helped us with finishing up jobs like these roundabouts, doing the as-buils and transferring all the grades and the stations,” he continues.

“We would normally have to sub that out and give that to an engineer and a surveyor. But we’ve been able to do most of that in house with the help of Sitech and the actual software we bought.

“We also use this technology prior to bidding a job to see if the quantities are correct,” Wittich adds. “These things are important because sometimes they’re missed, and we can deal with that on the front end versus getting into a job and having a bust in the plans. So this represents a better way to keep up with quantities and bid the appropriate amount.”

The use of technology has helped solidify Kort’s reputation as a contractor. The company has demonstrated the ability to negotiate top-quality projects and

manage them successfully, says consultant William H. Warshauer.

“Kort’s pays specific attention to cost controls and timelines built into each project,” Warshauer says. “Their management structure also provides excellent skill under pressure when dealing with project change orders and not disrupting timelines and cost controls.”

Cat Connect

Kort’s equipment manager Mike Culotta utilizes Cat Product Link™ with the VisionLink® interface to monitor both the location and the hours on all of their equipment.

“It helps us keep up with service intervals, and to be able to move our equipment quickly when it needs to be relocated from one job to another,” Culotta says. “It makes it so much easier to keep track of everything. So being able to lean on Caterpillar to keep up with the service intervals on these machines has really opened up a lot of time for us to service other job-specific needs.”

Kort’s prefers to lease its Cat compact machines and rotate them in at two-year intervals. The advantage is increased uptime and having the ability to operate

Kort's Construction is building two roundabouts and associated road work just off Interstate 12 near Walker for the State of Louisiana.



WHAT THEY LIKE ABOUT THEIR CAT® DEALER

“Our sales rep with Louisiana Cat, Bruce Pohlmann, has been with us for the last three years, and it helps to have the same guy handling your account because he knows the struggles that we face, the type of equipment we need, and what attachments we’re using,” Wittich says. “It has been great working with him because he knows exactly what we need when we call.”

“We really lean on Bruce a lot and he does a good job,” he adds. “Mike, our equipment manager, uses him a lot to address service needs and things that we need immediately. And I appreciate having a single point of contact with my Cat dealer.”

state-of-the-art equipment.

“We don’t put any more than 750 to 1,000 hours on the Cat machines, and then we turn them back in and get new pieces,” Wittich says. “And the warranty has been phenomenal. With any small issue—I think the largest issue we’ve had with any piece has been sensor-related stuff—we’re able to call for service from Louisiana Cat, and they immediately come out to the jobsite and fix the machine. If they can’t fix it, they bring us a loaner.”

“We have hardly any downtime,” Wittich continues. “So it has been tremendous. “We haven’t had any major breakdowns that would slow any of our jobs down at all.”

Roadwork

Kort’s utilizes the compact machines on the many roadbuilding and concrete jobs it performs.

Two Cat 305E2 CR Mini Excavators are assigned to concrete crews, and used for digging out small sidewalk areas, along with performing curb and gutter work. A 259D Compact Track Loader is also utilized by concrete crews because it’s small and compact, Wittich says.

“We’ll move the dirt to the side, then pour the sidewalks and come back and backfill with the mini excavator,” Wittich says. “So we use the Cat machines for excavation work, and putting stone in for driveways where we pour concrete. We’ll excavate it with the 305, and put the stone in with the CTL, compact it, then we pour the driveway and apron to tie in to the roadway.”

“The Cat Compact Track Loaders, hands down, are the best on the market,” Wittich adds. “That’s all we’ve used for the past five years and the rest of the equipment, the smaller equipment like the 305s and 308s and even the

larger equipment that we have, it’s been all great. We haven’t had too many problems and the service has been phenomenal overall.”

Not only are they versatile machines, but easily transported from job to job, Wittich says.

While Kort’s moves a lot of its heavy equipment with its commercial trucks—it has the ability to move the Cat compact machines with a smaller trailer pulled by a three-quarter ton truck.

“And the cost and the ease of having a foreman or a guy that can move a piece of equipment with a pickup truck and a trailer versus a guy that needs a CDL driver’s license and a commercial vehicle—we’ve seen our production pick up a lot in moving these pieces to the job and moving them on to the next job,” Wittich says. “So we really like that and I’m taking advantage of it.” **OTJ**