



Randy Laskowski (left) of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, observes as Eldon Lambert (center) and Brian Hansen of Pace Construction prepare for a confined-space entry. (Photography by Dale Schmeling)

Whatever, Wherever

A Montana cleaner makes a clean sweep in municipal business serving even the smallest towns in three wild western states

By Marian Bond

TIn the 22 years of servicing municipalities in Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota, Pace Construction has earned a solid reputation.

With specialties in pipe cleaning, TV inspection and root control, as well as trenchless spot repair, the company tackles jobs of every size for cities or towns as small as 200 people, or as large as Cheyenne, Wyo., home to 56,000.

With a customer list of 200, Pace Construction arms its crews with current technologies and helps them build the skills to keep sewers and storm drains clean, intact and functioning smoothly. The company is also aggressive, going anywhere and doing anything to earn and keep municipal business.

“There is just no job we will not bid on,” says Steve Patterson, project manager. “If it’s in our area, we’ll bid. If I have the equipment and crews and it’s within our means, we’ll bid on it. For the coming year, we have already bid and won on three major root control contracts in Wyoming for more than 70,000 feet. That’s pretty big.”

Chance to grow

Pace Construction, based in Billings, Mont., has been in business for 22 years. In 2005, C&S Construction, owned by Clint Stovall, bought the company, believing there was opportunity for growth in the industry. The two operations are separate entities – C&S laying sewer pipe, and Pace providing pipe inspection, maintenance and repair.

In the past three years, Pace has become established with some larger cities, including Casper, Wyo., Glasgow, Mont., and Beulah, N.D. Financial backing from C&S has helped the company invest in equipment and grow, observes Patterson, who has been with Pace since 1999.

“Our crews average 2,500 to 3,000 feet per day for cleaning and TV inspection, depending on the pipe and the conditions,” Patterson says. Many of the sewer systems are 40 to 60 years old and have mainly clay pipes. Crews still encounter some Orangeburg, which was used in the early and mid-1900s. This pipe can be cleaned, but usually is in bad shape and often is completely

contractor with a backhoe and start digging. Then when they’re finished, we’ll usually come back in to clean it and TV it.”

Keep it repaired

Maintenance agreements are an important part of the business. “Where we have a regular maintenance agreement, the pipes are pretty clean,” Patterson says. “With some

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gone, leaving only a channel where the pipe had been.

“When we can we will clean and service the Orangeburg,” says Patterson. “Some cities are hesitant about replacing it because of the costs. When it’s just dirt, then they will usually end up getting a local

municipalities, those that have not had a regular cleaning arrangement, the pipes may be half to three-quarters full of material.”

Where pipes are full of roots, Pace uses root saws supplied by UEMSI or nozzles by ENZ USA Inc. “Where there is a lot of material, we

just take it 100 feet at a time,” Patterson says. “You have to work your way through it. Roots are the biggest problem we see. Every town has roots in their system.”

When the job does not require root cutters, the company uses Sanafoam Vaporooter II chemical treatment. “With this, the roots will dry out,” says Patterson. “They will tend to flake off a little. The next thing we do is jet them, and they come out in tiny pieces, like dry twigs.”

The company’s five combination trucks (four Vactor units and one Camel truck from Super Products LLC) have 1,500-gallon water tanks and debris tanks up to 2,000 gallons. Pumps average 65 gpm/2500 psi.

Going trenchless

To repair damaged pipes, Pace Construction uses Link-Pipe trenchless spot repair technology from Link-Pipe Inc. “Link-Pipe is a stainless steel sleeve insert up to 4 feet long,” says Patterson. “If you run into a pipe with a hole in it, or badly cracked pipe, instead of digging, you can go in with one or several of these sleeves in a series.

DIG IT OUT, CLEAN IT UP

While 95 percent of Pace Construction’s pipe cleaning and inspection is for municipalities, the firm also takes care of some power plants.

“There’s not a lot of difference in taking care of power plants versus a town or city,” says Steven Patterson, project manager. “We had a challenging job recently where a power plant had a problem with their storm drain lines. After several other companies tried to open the lines, we were brought in.

“They had slurry in the storm drain lines that had hardened and was close to concrete. The pipe was completely full. Material had accumulated over a 10-year period. Hydroblasting and other techniques had been tried without success. Everyone was saying they would have to dig. We came in and within two days we were starting to get the pipe open. We used a Vactor truck, and the skills of our guys.”

The company spent two-and-a-half months on the project. At times, workers used a 40-pound jackhammer on the 48-inch pipe. “We started making progress right from the beginning using ordinary techniques,” Patterson says. “We used water from a hydrant, and we started jetting with progress right from the beginning. We got every bit of pipe opened up. It was close to 5,000 feet.”

The power plant is now on a maintenance program with Pace. “We come through and clean their pipes once a year,” says Patterson. He credits the crews for their professional manner in handling such challenges.

“My technicians are crew leaders,” he says. “They are the ones responsible for the projects. They know that if they run into any major problems, they can contact us back at the office and we’ll work with them until we figure out a way to get the job done.”

Technicians can view the installation from a TV monitor in a camera truck. Locks hold the sleeve open until grout applied to the outside of the sleeve sets up. In addition to the camera, the process uses a 1.2-hp air compressor and quick couplers. Sleeves can be ordered in several lengths and diameters. “Link-Pipe can also be used to prevent water infiltration,” Patterson says. “They have special sleeves just for this problem.”

The company has used Link-Pipe sleeves for at least 10 years. Training for the installation is not difficult. “You can watch a video of the installation on their Web site from beginning to end,” Patterson says. “It’s mainly a case of paying attention to detail.”

The right training

Choosing the right technologies has simplified training for Pace. Patterson finds PipeTech software from Peninsular Technologies to be a user-friendly program, easily grasped even by technicians with limited computer experience. “I can have someone running a van alone after one or two days of training,” Patterson says. “That person will be

“You pull the sleeve into the pipe using the installation plug, which has wheels front and back, using a CCTV camera. The sleeve is

centered where the hole is. Then the center of the sleeve is inflated, and it expands to the diameter of the pipe.”



Inside the Pace Construction TV inspection van.



Eldon Lambert works from an inspection van equipped with a Night Owl pan-and-tilt camera from CUES Inc. and PipeTech software from Peninsular Technologies.

PROFILE

PACE CONSTRUCTION INC., BILLINGS, MONT.

OWNER: Clint Stovall

SPECIALTIES: Mainline cleaning and inspection, root control

SERVICE AREA: Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota

YEARS IN BUSINESS: 22 years

BUSINESS FOCUS: Municipalities



“Some businesses come and go. We’re not going anywhere. We’re only getting bigger. In order to keep the ground we have, and the customers we have, our technicians need to sell themselves, and their professionalism is everything. If they do a safe job with professionalism, the customers will follow.”

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doing well enough that you don’t have to sit and watch.”

The company owns three camera trucks from CUES Inc. and one from Pearpoint Inc. All use PipeTech software. “Our customers appreciate the features in PipeTech,” says Patterson.

“It gives customers or end-users a lot more control, as they can make changes in the report. They can lock in a format and take snapshots of any part of the video, even after recording.”

Customer relations is another important skill for Pace technicians.



From left, Brian Grant, Brian Hansen, Eldon Lambert and Randy Laskowski make final preparations before placing a camera for inspection in a manhole at Martinsdale Dam in Montana.



Steve Patterson is project manager for Pace Construction of Billings, Mont. The company serves municipalities in Montana, Wyoming and North Dakota, specializing in pipe cleaning, TV inspection and root control, as well as trenchless spot repair.

“What I drill into them is first and foremost safety,” Patterson says. “There is no job out there worth getting hurt over. The second part of this is professionalism. If they do the job as safely as possible, and with professionalism, they are selling our services – selling our company.

“I tell them, ‘We’re not doing anything somebody else can’t come along and do.’ We have to sell ourselves in order to stay ahead. Some businesses come and go. We’re not going anywhere. We’re only getting bigger. In order to keep the ground we have, and the customers we have, our technicians need to sell themselves, and their professionalism is everything. If they do a safe job with professionalism, the customers will follow.”

Employees enjoy benefits that include fully paid medical insurance (after a one-year probation period), higher initial pay than for similar companies in the region, and a congenial work atmosphere.

On the move

When on a job out of the area, technicians receive expense reimbursement and a per diem for food. About 90 percent of the time, they return home on the weekend. Typically, they leave the jet truck on the work site and drive the TV van back to Billings.

It’s not unusual for Pace to be called in by communities that own the necessary cleaning and repair equipment, but cannot fit the job into the schedule. “We’ll go anywhere the money is and the need is,” Patterson says.

The willingness to do what it takes to serve customers has helped

Pace Construction earn a loyal following and stake a claim to a big territory in the Wild West. ■

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COLE Publishing
1720 Maple Lake Dam Rd.
P.O. Box 220
Three Lakes, WI 54562
800-257-7222
www.cleanner.com

MORE INFO:

CUES Inc.
800/327-7791
www.cuesinc.com

ENZ USA Inc
630/692-7880
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