

Infrastructure™

LOUISIANA CAT

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BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

BROTHERS INJECT NEW LIFE INTO
OLD-LINE CONSTRUCTION FIRM

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Louisiana



BACK TO THEIR ROOTS

BROTHERS INJECT NEW LIFE INTO OLD-LINE CONSTRUCTION FIRM

In 1948, Max Milton Merrick started a highway and heavy construction business in central Louisiana with a used dragline and three employees.

With an emphasis on integrity, safety, quality, and timeliness, Merrick grew the business to approximately 80 employees with projects in the \$10- to \$30 million range, performing municipal work as well as projects for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Four years ago, construction veterans Clay and Chad Juneau were approached by Max and Cain Merrick about purchasing the third-generation firm. Clay was intimately familiar with Merrick Construction, having worked for the Cottonport, Louisiana company for 16 years and always dreamed being an owner of a construction company. "My first job out of school was as a laborer with Merrick at which time I fell in love with construction," Clay recalls. "Working through the ranks, I was taught by many seasoned veterans the business. So to come back to where I started and become an owner was perfect. Merrick was and is a great company."

The Juneau brothers were working for other highway contractors when the opportunity "kind of fell in our lap," Chad said.

"We're from Cottonport originally and grew up a block away from Merrick Construction. When I was a young boy we would see the Merrick trucks



Co-owners (L to R) Clay and Chad Juneau

and heavy equipment going back and forth, so it was neat for us to get back to our roots and be part of something that has been in Cottonport for many years."

The Juneaus retained Merrick's existing 40 employees, most of which had been with the company for over 20 years. In the four years since they assumed control, Merrick has grown to over 100 employees. About 90 percent of the work it performs is in the public sector. The contractor will have as many as 15 jobs working statewide at any given time.

Historically, Merrick has always placed an emphasis on heavy earthmoving and infrastructure projects.

"We've kind of shifted away from the Army Corps of Engineers projects, but are still big in the highway sector, as well as municipal infrastructure work,"

Chad says. "If it has dirt and pipe and concrete on it, we think we can do it. We don't concentrate on just one owner or one specific type of work or one area of the state—our guys can do just about anything. We have guys who are experienced concrete finishers on day, then they change hats and are efficient pipe layers the next."

Alexandria projects

Two recent projects in Alexandria provide a glimpse of the scope of Merrick's work.

The contractor recently completed a \$7 million airport apron rehabilitation project at Alexandria International Airport. The work involved removal of 60,000 square yards of pavement, and excavation, subgrade and base

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MERRICK CONSTRUCTION, LLC

Co-owners: Chad and Clay Juneau

Location: Cottonport, La.

Established: 1948

Employees: 100

Services: Clearing and grubbing, grading, earthwork, gravity sewer, underground utilities, sub-surface drainage, stone base course, cement and lime base course, concrete pavement, concrete walks and drives, stormwater controls, pile driving and structural concrete

Cat® Equipment: 289D Compact Track Loader; Mini Excavators: 303.5D, 308E2 CR; Hydraulic Excavators: 314D L, 329F L; Dozers: D3C, D3G LGP, D4K2 LGP, D5K LGP, D6N LGP; Backhoe Loaders: 416C, 420E; 140M2 Motor Grader; Vibratory Soil Compactors: CP54B, CS56B

construction, and construction of the new 14.5-inch thick concrete apron.

On the south end of town, Merrick has moved 25,000 cubic yards of earth as it rebuilds just over a mile of road and constructs an adjacent 6,000-foot concrete-lined drainage ditch in a \$4 million road-widening project for the Louisiana Department of Transportation.

Most of Merrick's public works projects require a stormwater prevention plan, which provides specific guidelines to follow throughout the construction process, such as erecting silt fences to contain runoff. Under the guidelines, the contractor must also take steps to contain concrete washout materials.

In order to keep the concrete ditch clean, Merrick crews utilize a Cat® 289D Compact Track Loader with a broom attachment.

"Given the size of the ditch, there is very little equipment that you could

get in there to clean it and we use our Cat CTL with a broom attachment to keep it clean, and it does a great job," Chad says.

The Cat 289D is also equipped with GPS and is used with a HitchDoc blade attachment to grade the subgrade and base in the ditch bottom and the slopes.

A Cat D6N LGP Dozer performs a good share of the earthmoving, with several excavators taking care of the rest.

"Caterpillar has the best dozer around, hands down," Clay says. "They are dependable, comfortable and easy to operate. They outlast most other dozer and have very little down time. The key is to keep the same operators operating the machine if you can, because one guy will treat that dozer better than he'll treat his pickup truck most of the time."

Other Cat machines on the job include a 329F Hydraulic Excavator used for

hoisting a portable bucket to dispense concrete slurry, and a 323F Excavator for loading aggregate. A 140M2 Motor Grader is utilized for finish grading.

"Ours is a younger workforce now, and the young guys can hop in and learn the joystick controls very quickly—that's where everything is headed in the future," Chad says. "With the 140M2, you have the ease of operation with the joysticks, plus the visibility and the power in the grader. We just couldn't find that in the other machines."

The competitive edge

Strategically managing its equipment fleet and daily workflow helps Merrick keep a leg up on the competition. This is essential in a time when public work is declining due to budgetary reasons, even as the number of statewide contractors hasn't decreased, Chad says.

"The State of Louisiana's funding for road building is down to almost nothing," he says. "We're basically patching roads instead of building new roads. With a declining budget for public spending, and an increasing number of contractors, we must think out of the box. So, to remain competitive in the market we must do things differently than other people. We have to learn to be aggressive and more efficient than anyone else to always stay ahead."

One of the ways it does that is by managing its equipment fleet for optimum performance.

"We think we have the right size equipment fleet," says Chad, adding that Merrick has over 75 pieces of equipment. "When we don't have what we need, we rent or do lease purchases from Louisiana Cat. We don't keep things sitting around. We work closely with our crews and our project superintendents to schedule daily work, and we try to keep a very smooth workflow."

Merrick can be efficient and therefore more aggressive in the way it goes after work due to the way it manages equipment hours. The company main-

Concrete-lined drainage in Alexandria



tains a 50-50 mix of owned versus leased or rented equipment.

“We know when to turn a machine in and when to keep it,” Clay says. “A construction company doesn’t make money working on equipment. So if we have new equipment that’s out in the field putting work in place that’s where we strive to be. So the idea is to keep it new and fresh and turn it in when it’s time.”

GPS grading has also had a major impact on Merrick’s ability to perform work more efficiently. It utilizes Trimble products on its dozers, motor graders and compact track loaders.

“Anything having to do with base or survey time has been cut almost to nothing,” Chad says. “The survey time is now in the beginning of the project, as we build 3D models and set up the GPS systems. The daily survey work is gone—it’s not there anymore. We have superintendents and foremen who set up their own GPS and do their own grade and survey work now.”

A Sitech representative helped train Merrick’s surveyor crew chief, Adam McCoy, on Trimble Business Center. The Sitech rep consults with McCoy on a weekly basis, and will visit jobsites to help sort out any technical issues.

“When you first get a job, you take the geometrics off of the plans and put them on the ground by coming out here with this Trimble equipment—the 855 base and your rover—setting up, and then you do a site calibration on 3D points that the state or an engineer gives you,” McCoy explains.

“Then I disseminate the information with another data collecting program and set his base point,” he says. “He works off of that basepoint until the job is finished. It’s very efficient and productive—this is what construction has come to—it has really made things faster and more accurate.”

Dealer support

The Juneau brothers like the ease of financing machine acquisitions through Cat Financial.

“The Louisiana Cat sales team handles the financing and brings us

“**It’s nothing for me to call and say, hey, I need a D5 Dozer and my Louisiana Cat rep knows, he doesn’t ask when ‘cause he knows it’s right now.”**

— **CHAD JUNEAU**
Co-owner, Merrick Construction

the proposal rather than us having to sit down with a bank and figure out how we’re going to do it,” Chad says. “So it’s just kind of a one-stop shop. And the rates have been for the most part cheaper than we could get from a bank. Louisiana Cat always works with us so that we’re not locked in to a three-year lease. We’ll do a 12-month lease with an option to increase monthly or annually.”

From sales, to rentals, to parts and service, Louisiana Cat is there for Merrick around the clock.

“Normally when we need something, it’s because something is down or something just occurred on a project,” Chad says. “We think we schedule and plan very well, but it’s construction and things happen.

“It’s nothing for me to call and say, hey, I need a D5 Dozer and my Louisiana Cat rep knows, he doesn’t ask when because he knows it’s right now,” Chad says. “And Louisiana Rents

is there when we need them, too. When we call for a piece of equipment, I can’t think of a time they said, ‘no, we don’t have it,’ or we had to wait a long time for it. They’ll find it.”

Downtime with Merrick’s Cat machines has been minimal. In other instances such as when a machine was vandalized—batteries were stolen—or a hammer on an excavator didn’t work due to a computer issue, the dealer pulls out the stops to get the equipment up and running as quickly as possible.

“Whether it’s changing the undercarriage on a dozer or fixing an air conditioner problem on an excavator, Louisiana Cat will come out and take care of it and get you back to work,” Clay says. “You get the same treatment and support from Louisiana Cat whether you’re a small contractor or a large contractor.” ■

