

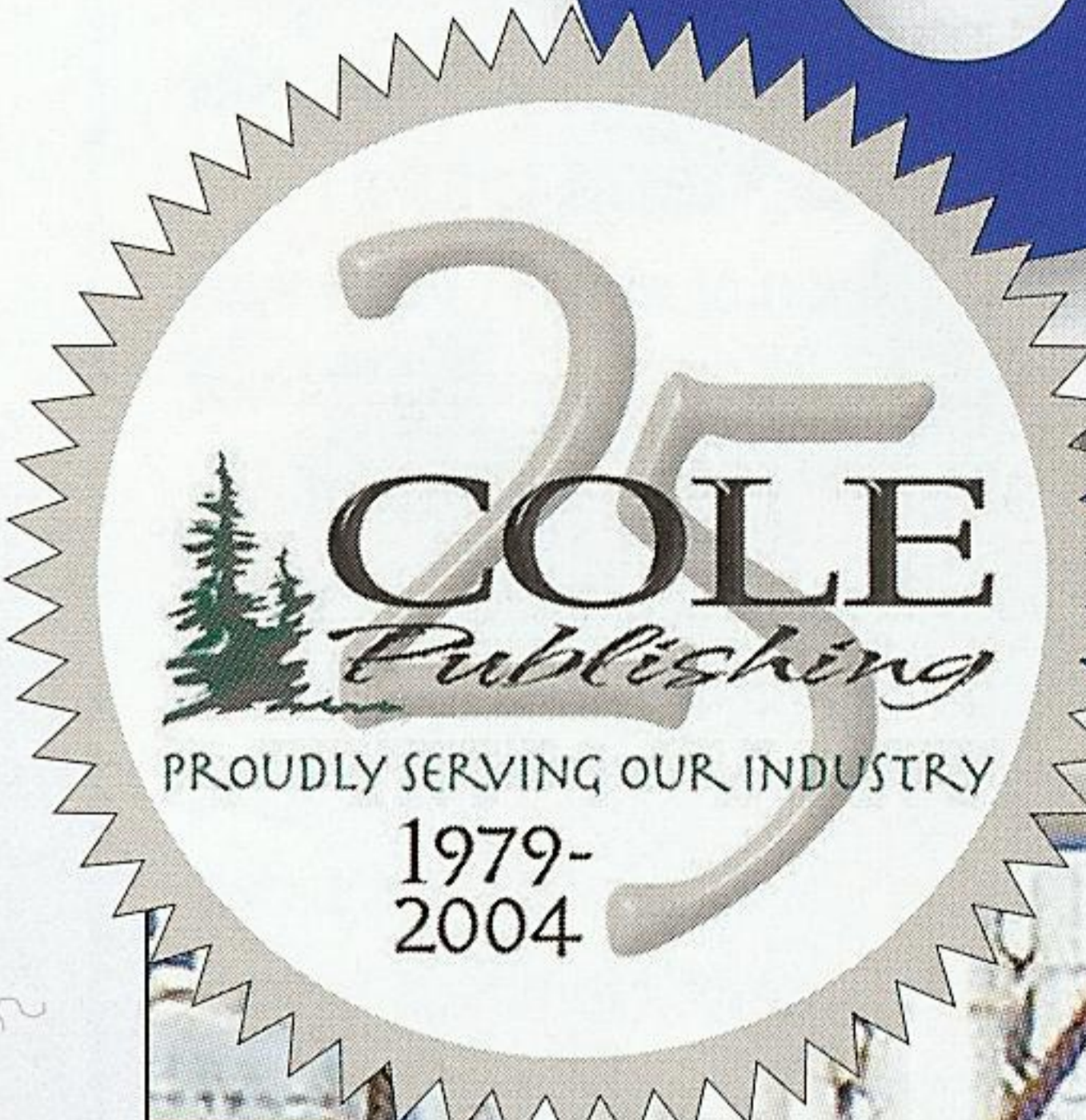
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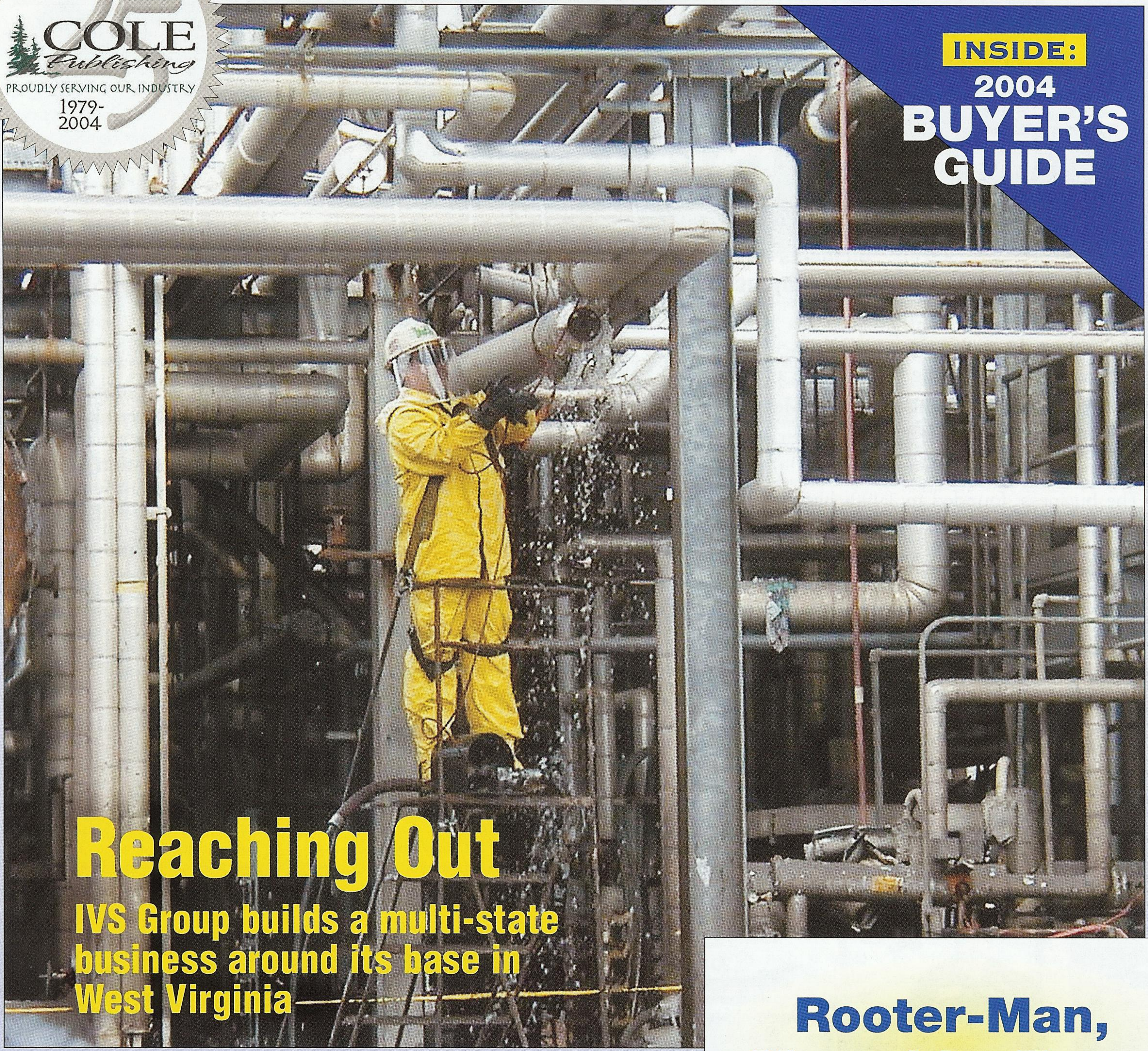
July 2004

FOR RESIDENTIAL, MUNICIPAL AND INDUSTRIAL CLEANING CONTRACTORS

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BUILDING A TEAM

Memphis-based Rooter-Man franchise sets high standards for its employees, then generously rewards those who measure up

By Marian Bond

Service technicians working for Christine and Brian McLaughlin in their Rooter-Man franchise based in Memphis know what is expected of them, and they also know their employers appreciate their efforts.

The business, founded in 1990, has grown from a one-van, one-man operation to eight vans, seven service technicians, and now two Rooter-Man franchises.

Brian, who uses an open door management policy, remembers what it's like to be on the other side of the cable machine. He and Christine are as concerned about their employees as they are about the bottom line, and they go out of their way to show it.

Christine is the force behind many of the company perks and benefits, but she also enforces the expectations. She allows no exceptions to company policy that technicians have a proper appear-

ance and be in uniform at all times. If a new employee shows up with uncombed hair or a scruffy appearance, she addresses it immediately. At the same time, she consistently rewards loyalty and dedication.

Customer communication

For Brian, the most important thing is to make sure the technicians take proper care of the customers. That means getting the job done right the first time and

charging the customer the correct price.

"Communication is the key," says Brian. "My employees know they can pick up the telephone with a question any time. We also identify problems at our weekly staff meetings. Safety is another important matter. I don't want them doing anything that is unsafe or will cause property damage. We stress and re-stress that endlessly."

Christine is always cooking up programs to show appreciation. If the circus is in town, she may invite all the employees and their families to attend. Such outings can be costly, but in her book, it's well worth the price of tickets, popcorn, and soft drinks.

Family day is offered at least once during a year. This includes a visit for husbands, wives and children to the Mid-South Fair in Memphis. Sometimes Christine has a family day that involves a cook-out at the McLaughlin home. On other occasions, there will be dinner and a show for employees and spouses.

Certificates, awards and prizes are always on the agenda for those who give outstanding service. "We do give a bonus

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Brian McLaughlin

for perfect attendance," she says. "At our cook-out parties, we will have a nice door prize."

Five years ago, Christine started the Hall of Fame, where photos of employees and their families are posted for all to enjoy. Several large frames fill the halls of the company's new building, and now the break room has more photos. The pictures show the special events that have become a part of the company's benefits package, which includes health insurance for employee and family, along with vacation pay (one week after the first year, two weeks after that).

Perhaps the most popular program involves rewards to employees who have



Christine and Brian McLaughlin are shown with their newly acquired vacuum truck, built on a Sterling chassis by Transway Systems Inc.

PROFILE

ROOTER-MAN, MEMPHIS, TENN.

OWNERS:	Brian and Christine McLaughlin
YEARS IN BUSINESS:	14
EMPLOYEES:	10
FLEET:	8 service vans, 1 pump truck, 4 jettors
AFFILIATIONS:	Underground Leak Detection Association



Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

When Brian and Christine McLaughlin opened their Rooter-Man franchise in Memphis, they knew they needed to offer a full range of services. Brian, a master plumber, began by fixing faucets and toilets but soon graduated to fixing broken drains and sewer problems. They added equipment and hired people. Little jobs turned into bigger jobs. And that continues to this day.

"I felt that if I just kept it simple and followed the rules it would all work out," says Brian. "I knew to not promise anything I could not deliver, and to pay attention to customers. This is the philosophy I try to impart to my service personnel."

The company does about 60 percent residential work and the balance commercial. For the commercial side, the company offers a maintenance program.

"When we point out the features and advantages of being on a maintenance program, our customers appreciate it," says Mark McLaughlin, company technician and the owners' son. "We got involved with this by maintaining sewer systems in apartment complexes.

We approached them offering to save them money on emergency work by doing regular service for them and knowing the problem areas.

"That way, when we have a slow day, we can send one or two of our guys in to clean every line in a complex. This has been a positive approach and works well for all involved."

been with the company for five years. At a special ceremony recently, four employees received bonuses of \$500, plus a trophy and plaque. Christine started the tradition when her son Mark McLaughlin reached ten years of service (he received a \$1,000 bonus). This year, employee George Lambert will get his ten-year bonus.

How and why they grew

Brian is modest about the company's success. "In truthfulness, I was not a business guy," he says. "I was just a service guy working for someone else. But I knew I was good at what I did. I did feel confident that I would be successful."

Christine, with a degree in account-

ing, was ready to step into her role. "He is the president," she says with a chuckle. "I'm everything else if it has to do with the office." That means accounting, payroll, hiring, and keeping the staff on target.



Within five years, Brian and Christine had four service vans, had purchased property in a good location in Memphis, and moved the business from their home into an old house on the site. Today, the business runs out of a new 4,800-square-foot metal building that has the offices and three service bays. Brian started the company as a drain-cleaning business, then gradually added water-jetting, inspection, grease trap pumping and septic tank cleaning.

"For me, the most important thing in buying equipment for new lines of work was to check what was available and learn about it at the Pumper & Cleaner Expo, and through *Pumper* and *Cleaner* magazines," says Brian. "I also network with other people in the business. That is the beauty of this industry. There are a lot of people willing to share information. They want to improve the quality of service for all of us. They want someone like me to be successful."

Searching for information
Brian finds that generally, even with the more costly items such as video cameras, it's not difficult to learn the basics. "When I was looking for camera equipment, I checked with other people and learned about the various options," he says.

Searching for information

To the Rescue
Rooter-Man has been the right franchise for Christine and Brian, and name recognition has been important. Also, Rooter-Man allows operators to grow in their own chosen directions. That's why it was easy for Brian to add new services his customers were asking for.

Mark (left) and Sean McLaughlin, sons of owners Brian and Christine McLaughlin, using a Gen-Eye camera from General Pipe Cleaners on an inspection job.

"In truthfulness, I was not a business guy. I was just a service guy working for someone else. But I knew I was good at what I did. I did feel confident that I would be successful."

Brian McLaughlin

"That's what I'm doing now with underground leak detection. I'm still learning the techniques and looking at the equipment. I found an organization out of Atlanta, Underground Leak Detection Association, a networking system. I joined the organization and went to their training program and got a lot of information there. We have the equipment now to add that service." He bought Goldak equipment.

Brian makes sure that all the technicians can work in all areas of the business. He does a good bit of training in-house. "The goal for us is that everyone be trained to work on everything we offer," he says. "I tell them that learning to do it all is an advantage for the company but also for each individual. My people get job training they would not get anywhere else. These are opportunities I'm happy to provide."

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Brian McLaughlin



At the right, Mark McLaughlin locates a gas line. At the far right, Brian McLaughlin with a recently acquired jetter from O'Brien Manufacturing.

Adding another franchise was another step. In 2001, when Brian and Christine saw growth in northern Mississippi, they bought a second franchise there. Now, besides serving the 750,000 population of Memphis and surrounding areas, they serve 100,000 more in Mississippi.

Although growth has been systematic, Brian does regret “procrastinating” about building the new facility. For several years, he and Christine ran the business

out of the old home on the property they bought.

“We were slow getting into the new building,” says Brian. “It has been a big asset for us. I do a lot of my own maintenance. In the bays we have a hoist so I can service the vans. We have an indoor wash bay with hot water pressure where we can keep the equipment and trucks clean. Before we had the building, if it was cold outside, we had to winterize



every piece of equipment with water in a tank every night. It was difficult.”

The fleet is fit

Brian and Christine chose Dodge service vans. “We prefer primarily the 3/4-ton full-size cargo vans,” says Brian. “Standard equipment for us is the 1065 Spartan sewer-cleaning machine. We have an O'Brien 40 gpm/2,000 psi jetter. We have two 15 gpm/2,000 psi Gem Jet units by Lely. Then we have an old Myers jetter on an International truck that delivers 65 gpm/1,700 psi.”

The pumper truck is a 2001 Sterling with a 4,300 gallon tank (4,000 gallons waste and 300 gallons fresh water) built

by Transway Systems Inc. It carries a 5 gpm/2,000 psi jetter by General Pipe Cleaners. The company uses a variety of camera equipment, including SeeSnake from Ridge Tool Company, Gen-Eye from General Pipe Cleaners, and GatorCam by Radio Detection.

After 14 years in the business, Brian and Christine have been at it long enough to see their plans come to fruition — and their employees prosper along with the company. Those are ample rewards for all the long hours and hard work. ■

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