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DESTINED FOR DISASTER WORK

Many paths led to what HernandoAg is today, a team of hardworking people committed to cleanup.

By James Careless

ON THE COVER

Led by sixth-generation Floridians, HernandoAg knows what it takes to return communities to normalcy following hurricanes because they've been on both sides of the storm. The company brings experience and integrity to cleanup.

(Photos by Preston Mack and courtesy of HernandoAg)



» COMING NEXT MONTH

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Tom Gosselin

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Tim Dobbins
EDITOR

A Refreshing Reminder

What a remarkable industry we work in

As I write this, I am fresh off the plane that returned me home to Wisconsin from a much warmer Miami Beach, Florida.

The reason for my travels was the Disasters Expo USA, which was the first convention for disaster recovery professionals I have been able to attend since DCR started. I went there with one main mission: to learn as much as possible about the people and products that make up this industry.

Here's what I gathered.

THE INDUSTRY IS VAST

A quick walk through the show floor proved how many fields this industry touches. Exhibitors consisted of both manufacturers and contractors specializing in debris removal, tree trimming, excavation, power utility work, hazmat, stormwater infrastructure and everything in between.

I was able to chat with people that have been serving the industry for years and others that were at the show to break ground. From prime contractors with fleets of equipment and armies of subcontractors lined up and ready to respond, to professionals specializing in their respective niche.

It was a great reminder how many industries it takes coming together to get communities back on their feet after a disaster.

INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGY

Is technology taking over the world? Maybe, but I'm not diving into that topic. What I will say is, seeing the state-of-the-art technology being put to use in products for the advancement of disaster recovery efforts was encouraging.

The show floor was filled with drones, mobile surveillance equipment, rapid deployable shelters, trailer

units, water generation technology and so much more.

Products to support business in disaster management, communication, response and resource planning were also plentiful. I came across multiple software companies specializing in storm and damage prediction. This technology not only looked to track potential weather events but concentrated on the specific area and assessed the likely outcome in terms of infrastructure damage and likely immediate needs of repair. An example of this type of software is highlighted in this month's Business Builder.

THE PEOPLE ARE GREAT

Every booth I approached was excited to share, happy to discuss their role and willing to answer any question I asked. This has been my experience with the majority of those I've conversed with and met with this role.

This month's profile story is no exception. J. Lee Driskell shares the ins and outs of HernandoAg, a recovery and agricultural service company based in Florida. What brought her to the industry might be a similar story to many of yours.

Learning about HernandoAg and attending Disasters Expo USA was a refreshing experience and great reminder of why DCR exists; to serve all branches of the entire disaster industry. It's my privilege to bring news of technological advancements, to share success stories from industry leaders and provide a platform that helps bring first-response contractors and suppliers together.

As always, please reach out to me with questions and story ideas and thanks for reading this month's issue! **D**

We welcome your comments, questions and column suggestions and promise a prompt reply to all reader contacts. Call 800-257-7222 or email DCR editor Tim Dobbins at editor@dcrcontractor.com.

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» SCAN ME



NET SURFING

Sharing The Best Disaster Related Content

We're always on the lookout for relevant and interesting disaster recovery content. In our e-newsletters, we regularly share and highlight news stories and social media posts that we are reading and watching, **like this article about a rare hailstorm causing destruction in a South Carolina town.**

W I found it very surprising that the lack of managers' responsiveness drives such profound implications outside of work. I think that many leaders don't recognize how they show up in terms of being available and insightful or being good mentors or coaches."

– From: How Responsive Leadership Ensures You're Seen as a 'Good Boss'

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BETTER BUSINESS

Managing tree services after disasters

Learn how a tree service company in Alabama switches gears from their everyday services to cleaning up after storms blow through their hometown.

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MAINTAIN POWER

Generators need maintenance too

Unfortunately, the equipment we rely on for backup power is often ignored until the moment we need it. If left unmaintained, these power suppliers may be down for the count when it's their time to shine.

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Cutting Through Cleanup

Tornado damage recovery highlights deep community connections

By Stormy Shafer | Photos provided by Taylor Tree Service

Owner and crew chief, Nathan Taylor directs bucket and crane operators, using Sena Bluetooth headsets mounted inside patriotic helmets company crews wear with pride.



When an EF3 tornado ripped through their hometown of Prattville, Alabama, on June 12, 2023, Taylor Tree Service sprang into action with the ease of a practiced drill team.

Licensed in the state of Alabama, they have worked as emergency services in Florida and Georgia, as well, and consider the entire Southeastern U.S. their service territory.

PREPARATION

Taylor maintains what they consider a 24/7 rapid response team, capable of handling any emergency situation, whether an uprooted tree that has fallen on a house, fencing or commercial property; even vehicle entrapment, where an individual is trapped inside by a fallen tree. “We haven’t had to specifically respond to [the latter], though we’ve had the training to do so,” explains Cheyenne Taylor, who co-owns the arbor care business with her husband, Nathan Taylor.

“In November of last year, we responded to a situation where a customer had hired another tree service, which cut trees that then fell through the customer’s house while they were inside. That’s not a Mother Nature incident, but another emergency event classification, and we handle that as well.”

But when it comes to Mother Nature, Taylor keeps a close eye. “We take a very cautious approach to staying current with the weather forecast,” she says. “That allows us to gauge what to expect on a day-to-day



Another uprooted tree finds a resting place on a building, this time a historic home in the Cloverdale area.

basis, particularly in storm season here in Alabama.” Through such vigilance, they’re usually aware of any threat of a possible tornado outbreak, straight-line winds, hurricanes or severe thunderstorms, all of which are frequent visitors to the state.

When on such alert, the Taylors make sure all their employees are ready to respond, whether during or outside of working hours. “Our trucks are fully stocked, all chains have been sharpened or new ones have been put on every chain saw.” All trucks receive proper maintenance to avoid possible issues on the job site, right down to

fueling up, and being loaded with cases of drinking water.

It was that sort of thinking that allowed the company to quickly deploy resources and help their community when the June tornado touched down.

EQUIPMENT READY

Taylor will always bring a crane when responding to emergencies or disaster cleanup. Their versatile Altec Telescopic Boom Truck Crane reaches between 40 and 120 feet. They also take at least two skid-steers, a Bobcat A770 and a Vermeer CTX 120 Mini.

With the June tornado, they relied on an Altec LRV 58 19 bucket on their 2021 Mack Granite truck, with a Palfinger M13A80 A-Line Loader, which also hauls debris. They also broke out their Carlton SP7015 Series Self-Propelled stump cutter.

Of course, the usual chain saws, including their Milwaukee M18 FUEL 10-inch Pole Saw Kit and Milwaukee M18 FUEL Top Handle chain saw, plus yard equipment and tools come along, with any specialty tree care industry rigging devices that may be needed, such as a GRCS (Good Rigging Control System, for lowering heavy loads in a safe and controlled fashion).

Cheyenne raves about their Milwaukee power equipment. “I just had a conference call with Milwaukee, and was excited to share that our crew loves their new bat-

“I THINK IT’S ALSO IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT, ALTHOUGH THERE IS A LOT OF GLORY IN RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES, EXPERIENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM OUTWEIGH ANY GLORY.”

– CHEYENNE TAYLOR



A loader-mounted grappling arm wrestles a large blow-down tree into position for delimiting prior to hauling away for disposal.





On cleanup days, the crew's intense labor is punctuated by a hearty lunch provided by the company. For the June tornado, it was catered by Fat Boys BBQ in Prattville, Alabama.

tery-powered pole saw. They're coming out with a whole new line of battery-operated outdoor power equipment.

"Originally, we thought, 'Oh, battery powered, ... it's not a good fit for us. We need something that is going to perform.' But Milwaukee has exceeded those expectations. It's quiet and light. I mean, it is phenomenal. And our climbers really like the Milwaukee battery-operated top handle saw, because all you've got to do is charge it. You don't have to worry about somebody on the ground making sure it's got oil and gas in it. They just put it on the rope and send it up to the climber."

PERSONNEL AND PRIORITIES

Taylor's crews are well acquainted with working on a high-end production schedule, while maintaining all rules and regulations in the tree care industry. In a storm work situation, she explains, "We have designated tasks for each team member, whether it is directing traffic or the responsibility of mitigating the tree off of the house or any type of structure, to debris removal, all the way to the logistics of the schedule."

From that logistical standpoint, Taylor's office will evaluate current routinely scheduled work, and formulate a plan to either run multiple crews so that schedule is not interrupted while they respond to storm work, or they will backlog their schedule for the appropriate amount of time they expect the storm work to take, which is generally two to three weeks. "We will start with the most current scheduled job and move three weeks out on that. There have been times where certain storms locally have backlogged our schedule for up to three months."

Because the June tornado was a local job, Taylor was able to dispatch both their crews to the cleanup. First priority were trees on structures and vehicles, so their occupants could begin the long job of returning their lives to normal.

"We worked from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. some nights. Understanding that your customer — in this case, our neighbors — cannot begin repairs to their homes until the trees have been completely removed and disposed of from their property, is very motivating in carrying out the job in a timely but safe manner," Cheyenne says.

Particularly challenging in this storm's cleanup was very limited chipper access on most yards due to fencing, small backyard size, and the inability to pull heavy equipment across driveways and over underground utilities, so the amount of logs Taylor's crews had to move to the road and pick up made their days longer. "We like to call this 'working twice,'" says Cheyenne, "because we are handling it twice — no one's favorite situation."

TRACKING PROGRESS AND INVOICING


When Taylor estimates jobs, they quote by the number of trees and charge by the hour, giving their best estimate on how long it will take to prune, reduce or remove each, as needed. In total for the June event, they removed roughly 23 trees from structures, fences or vehicles. The

debris was taken to a spot on their land, where it was mulched and sold to a nearby paper mill by a third-party contractor.

It's important to also track work-hours, to help in estimating future similar jobs. No two trees will fall the same, nor will they land on a roof or a fence the same as another, and all yards and homes have their unique physical properties. Because of all this variability, billing the June tornado job fit into the category of all invoicing, which, according to Cheyenne, is "by far the most dreaded process of emergency services."

Before Taylor begins service to any client — whether routine or storm cleanup work — they begin with a contract. "We have a specific contract for emergency services that allows us access to work on the customer's property as well as to seek reimbursement for our services to the insurance companies." The contract addresses services



 A Vermeer mini skid-steer serves as a maneuverable and powerful aid in safely pulling downed trees off of homes and other structures.

» Surprising Payoff From Digital Marketing

While many parts of running a small business can be learn-as-you-go, Cheyenne Taylor has one facet of entrepreneurship down solid: marketing. Though it's just one of the many hats she wears as co-owner of Taylor's Tree Service, she's been actively experimenting since the beginning with a mix of different promotional approaches.

In the past few years, she has willingly moved from strictly traditional methods such as sponsorships of sports teams and events (though they still do a lot of that), into the realm of digital marketing. It's a move that has paid off handsomely, and she's become a strong proponent of embracing the broad reach and immediacy of select digital channels.

Taylor has a dedicated business page on Facebook, which she uses to appeal to both potential residential customers and

larger prospects such as real estate and insurance agents, and even local government.

On Facebook, she says, "We keep up with our progress. It's a good place for us to show our big commercial accounts what we're working on. I love to use it to interact with the plant health care side of Taylor Tree, because not only do we do emergency work, we do our routine work, and for the tree and plant health care side of our business, it's really beneficial. A lot of people are eager to learn about that. So I keep that a very information-based platform. And then Instagram, I have learned over the years, is really good for companies who are wanting to connect with other local people."

Cheyenne has found TikTok — a platform most popular with younger folks — a serious channel for outreach in some surprising

ways. "Younger kids really enjoy watching TikTok, and [through them], we have met people from all over the world, even some contractors who have actually come down to help us on big emergency situations.

"For example, if we have a tornado that's come to the area and our two crews are maxed out, we'll start pulling in these connections that we've made off TikTok, for other local companies and even statewide contacts. We've even had people from Canada visit us here and work with us for several days and even weeks, that we've just connected with through TikTok, so that's been fabulous. That's really been a good tool for networking."

Her next digital foray will be into LinkedIn, as a primary business-to-business outreach mode.

“WE WORKED FROM 7:00 A.M. UNTIL 9:00 P.M. SOME NIGHTS. UNDERSTANDING THAT YOUR CUSTOMER — IN THIS CASE, OUR NEIGHBORS — CANNOT BEGIN REPAIRS TO THEIR HOMES UNTIL THE TREES HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY REMOVED AND DISPOSED FROM THEIR PROPERTY, IS VERY MOTIVATING IN CARRYING OUT THE JOB IN A TIMELY BUT SAFE MANNER.”

— CHEYENNE TAYLOR

» Taylor’s crew team lead cuts a large tree that has been rigged so it won’t do further damage to a house.

to be rendered, along with legal language regarding safety, and which party is responsible for each part of the work.

ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY

At the end of the day, Taylor’s management and crews understand deeply what it means to be contributing members of a community, even if the one they’re working in is not their own.

“Any devastation on any structure — whether it be property or automobile — is always an unexpected, tragic event,” says Cheyenne, “and for us to be a part of help-

ing these people is very rewarding. Most rewarding is to take someone’s catastrophic event and help them manage, from start to finish, what seems an impossible task.

“Sometimes, when we drive by neighborhoods or homes we have serviced after devastation, it is rewarding for us and every member on our team to look back at that house and watch what was rebuilt.

“I think it’s also important to remember that, although there is a lot of glory in responding to emergencies, experience and professionalism outweigh any glory.” ■





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Gain the Upper Hand

A new software from Idaho National Laboratory aims to anticipate needed recovery efforts before storms hit

By Joan Koehne | Photos provided by Idaho National Laboratory

“IF YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME, YOU’RE ABLE TO RESTORE POWER FASTER, WHICH THEN HELPS GET ALL THE REST OF THE INFRASTRUCTURE UP.”

— OLLIE GAGNON



Hit by three major storms in two years, a U.S. utility company was seeking a scientific model to better predict when and how to deploy its resources.

The company was searching for something beyond weather forecasts and current disaster management platforms to improve storm-related electrical service for its 3 million customers. The utility turned to the scientific experts at Idaho National Laboratory for answers. Idaho National Laboratory, located in Idaho Falls, is a U.S. Department of Energy national laboratory equipped with an exceptional array of scientific expertise and equipment.

INL researchers Ollie Gagnon and Mary Klett set out to find a way to integrate weather data, electric infrastructure assets and the utility’s response resources

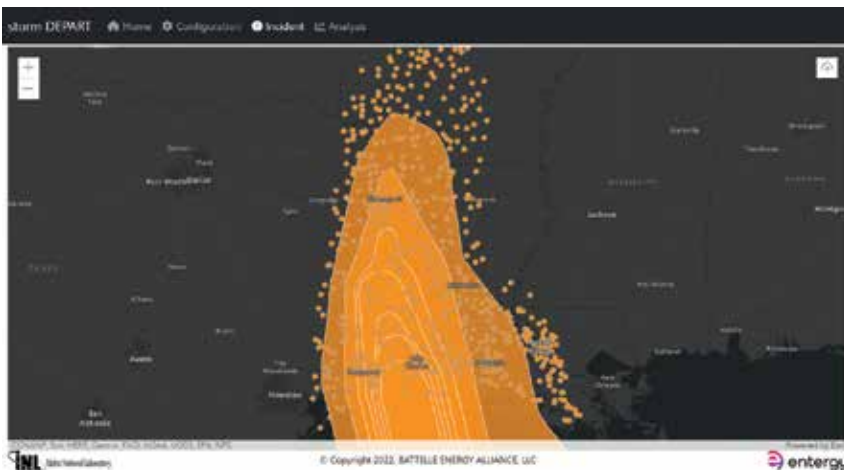
to effectively predict damages, determine resource deployment needs and estimate restoration timelines. The result is Storm-DEPART (Damage Estimate Prediction and Recovery Tool). This software was introduced for the 2022 hurricane season, and the first Storm-DEPART commercial license contract was issued in 2024.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY

In the event of an approaching tropical storm, this new solution assesses potential damage to power generation capacity, transmission grids, distribution networks and communications assets from hurricane force winds. Additionally, the software’s ice damage prediction functionality assesses potential damage from a winter ice event.

Storm-DEPART allows utility companies to make data-driven prioritization decisions on resource allocation before a major weather incident occurs. These resources include how many external mutual aid resources to request.

“If you have the right people in the right place at the right time, you’re able to restore power faster, which then helps get all the rest of the infrastructure up,” Gagnon says. Resource calculations determine how many crew members are needed, for example, to restore a wood pole in a heavily vege-



A closeup look at an image created by the software depicting potential damage to Shreveport, Louisiana and surrounding areas.

tated area versus a marshy area versus a concrete base.

“If your calculation is off on that, you get the wrong crews in the wrong place, or you may not have enough. You could also send too many, and it’s a lot of extra money that’s being spent on the response and recovery,” Gagnon says.

Storm-DEPART also helps utility companies prioritize the restoration process based on predicted damage to critical infrastructure. “If you get a big impact in the area of generation, you may want to get that restored first because then you can send power to transmission and distribution systems,” he says.

FILLING THE GAPS

To better prepare for storm events, utility companies can identify ways to be more resilient to disruptions by assessing resilience gaps through modeling.

“Think about how you can model potential storms to determine where you may want to make resilience investments,” Gagnon says. Utilities can shorten restoration time because they’re building in resiliency by investing in the infrastructure to withstand different types of storms or stronger storms.

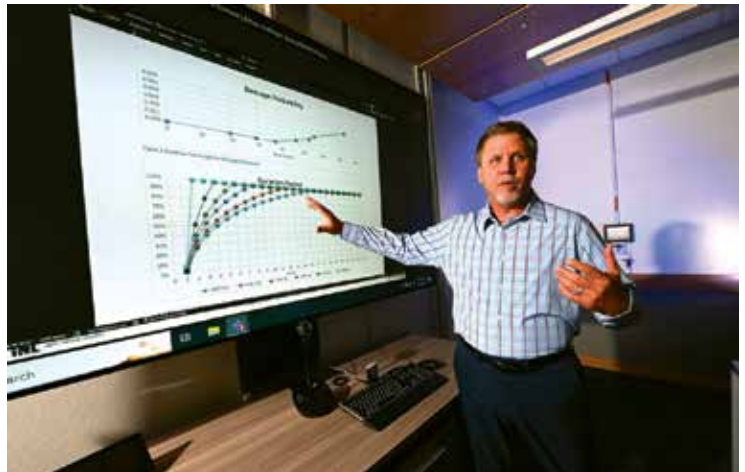
Utility customers depend on electrical service for just about everything, and being without power disrupts everyday living. The Storm-DEPART data helps utilities determine when power will be restored.

“Like in Florida, we get hit by a storm, and they’ll say, ‘Yeah, we don’t yet have an estimate on when power will be restored. You know, it could be a week.’ As a resident or business dependent on power, it’s hard to operate like that,” Gagnon says. “You want to know if it’s going to be two weeks, a week, or 24 hours.”

UPGRADES

While Storm-DEPART initially applied just to hurricanes, it now covers ice events, also.

“It’s the same type of service provider



Idaho National Laboratory researcher Ollie Gagnon demonstrates the uses of Storm-DEPART. This new tool assesses potential damage to power generation capacity, transmission grids, distribution networks, and communications assets from hurricane force winds or the potential damage caused by a winter ice event.

with unique configuration data, just a different weather event,” Gagnon says. An ice event requires a different storm response than a tropical storm and potentially a different crew composition.

“Different regions have unique service requirements that can be captured to increase response flexibility and adaptiveness,” Gagnon says.

To get started with Storm-DEPART, a utility’s storm response team works with the software provider to enter configuration data, including a catalog of the utility’s infrastructure. The initial configuration takes about three months of weekly meetings and data sharing. After the initial configuration, the data is updated regularly. The next version of Storm-DEPART will have a web-based application, so storm response teams can enter their data themselves. Because the software is so new, Storm-DEPART has been used for ice events, but is yet to be tested by a hurricane.

“We haven’t had an actual storm, but we looked at legacy storms in terms of running the model and then giving them what we thought the resource needs would be. They said, ‘This is what we actually deployed,’ and it was very accurate,” Gagnon says. **D**

ABOUT IDAHO NATIONAL LABORATORY

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Safe Sawing

Dangerous tools in hazardous situations is a recipe for disaster, unless crews are practiced and prepared

By Giles Lambertson

“IF THE TEETH ON A CHAIN ARE SHARP, YOU CAN DO THE WORK WITHOUT EXERTING A LOT OF PRESSURE. WITH EITHER AN AXE OR A SAW, THE DULLER IT IS, THE MORE YOU’LL BE CONCENTRATING ON CUTTING AND LESS ON THE SAFETY THINGS WE’RE TALKING ABOUT.”

– RYAN DESANTIS



After a storm blows through an area, utility and municipal crews are left to wrestle wind-whipped trees with shattered limbs and trunks, structurally damaged buildings encumbered by leafy debris, and downed electric lines hissing and crackling. Doing it safely is the thing.

“The best guidance about doing cleanup around downed lines is, don’t do anything until an electric company gives clearance,” says Dr. Ryan DeSantis, assistant professor of forest ecology and management at Oklahoma State University. “No cleanup is worth messing with live electrical wires.”

That’s just one sensible recommendation coming from the 48-year-old academic and forestry expert. Another is not to worry about getting limbs off a roof until you determine if roof joists were damaged by the falling limbs, rendering it unsafe to work on. First things first.

MASTERING MACHINERY

The largest cleanup challenge is safe utilization of chain saws and axes, ropes and cables. The very tools that facilitate the work can foster casual attitudes that lead to injury. DeSantis speaks of his own experience last summer while pulling downed trees from a forest.

“A cable with a 5,000-pound load capacity snapped and whipped back toward our vehicle.” No one was injured, however, because the decision had been made not to let anyone stand within a hundred feet of the tensed cable. “With the amount of pressure on a cable in that situation, it could have cut off an arm or leg.”

Chain saws are the go-to cleanup tool. DeSantis urges anyone handling a saw to liberally use the chain brake. “Overuse it, if anything. If you’re moving a few feet between cuts, put on the brake. You can trip or stumble and if your finger is near the trigger, the chain suddenly is moving. Use the brake a lot.”

Don’t operate the saw at head level or above, he says, and don’t saw while standing in an unbalanced position. Such stances endanger both the sawyer and anyone nearby. This especially is true in the event of kickback — when the moving chain near the tip of the bar catches on something and is pushed back toward the operator.

“If the bar and moving chain tip back toward you, make sure you’re not in the line of fire,” advises DeSantis. Having feet firmly planted is the first line of defense against kickback.

PROPER PPE

A second defense is wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants, maybe even chain saw chaps over the pants. “They usually are designed with Kevlar fibers to stop the chain if it kicks back into a leg.”

Leather gloves, ear and eye protection, hard hats and boots with traction soles also are recommended. Tree and brush cleanup, after all, happens in less-than-ideal conditions, oftentimes with debris underfoot, dangling branches overhead, and saws and brush mulchers operating in full whine.

STAY SHARP

The professor makes a point about having sharp teeth on a chain saw, or on

the cutting edge of an axe. “If the teeth on a chain are sharp, you can do the work without exerting a lot of pressure. With either an axe or a saw, the duller it is, the more you’ll be concentrating on cutting and less on the safety things we’re talking about.”

Damaged trees are of varying hardness and weight, notes DeSantis. So it pays to have some background knowledge and understanding of tree species. An oak tree has genuinely hard wood that resists sawing and will dull a chain saw quicker than will a softwood tree. Because an oak limb weighs more than a comparable limb from a pine or spruce tree, an oak limb falling on someone also is more apt to injure the person.

Beware of dead limbs, too. If a standing tree in a cleanup area has dead branches amid its foliage, it indicates an unhealthy tree that is apt to come crashing down. “You need to keep an eye out for that tree.”

When a decision is made to fell a tree, dropping it in a particular direction is more

than notching it on the leaning side, the professor says. “You also have to consider the canopy in the tree, the foliage. There’s a lot of weight up in there. A tree can be leaning one direction, but all the foliage — the weight — is on the other side.”

DeSantis says chain saw safety certification courses sometimes include learning strategic planning, such as having an exit route in case a tree falls in an unexpected direction. “You should clear out a path behind you in case the trunk unexpectedly comes toward you. You’ll have some place to go.”

When damaged limbs and trunks finally are on the ground, DeSantis recommends having a “swamper,” or laborer, help move brush piles for the saw operator working the debris. “Otherwise, you might have one hand on the saw and the other one moving a limb one way or the other, instead of having both hands on the saw. I’ve been guilty of doing that.” **D**

PRO TIP

MAINTAINED MEANS SAFE

Regularly inspect and tighten all nuts, bolts, and chains before each use to ensure optimal functionality and prevent accidents. Keeping the chain sharp and properly tensioned reduces kickback and enhances cutting efficiency, so sharpen it regularly and adjust tension as needed.

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DESTINED FOR **DISASTER** **WORK**

MANY PATHS LED TO WHAT HERNANDOAG IS TODAY, A TEAM OF
HARDWORKING PEOPLE COMMITTED TO CLEANUP

By James Careless | Photos by Preston Mack and courtesy of HernandoAg

◀ An aerial image of HernandoAg workers loading a barge full of debris and wreckage using Takeuchi excavators.

When hurricanes hammer Florida, HernandoAg comes in to pick up the pieces. Based in Brooksville on Florida's Gulf Coast, this family-owned-and-operated firm sets aside its regular duties to cleanup and mitigate storm sites as needed.

"Depending on the year, sometimes we're doing more disaster recovery and sometimes it's more farm support or municipal right of way services," says J. Lee Driskell, who co-owns and operates HernandoAg with her fiance David Ledbetter. "In 2023, there wasn't much. Hurricane Idalia did hit Perry but it didn't produce a lot of work. So this year was mostly farm support services."

A CHANCE MEETING

The formation of HernandoAg goes back to David Ledbetter's heritage as a sixth-generation Florida farmer in Hernando County. He and his future fiance met in 2017, when Driskell was operating a pottery studio and working as a musician.

"I got hit by two Florida hurricanes," Driskell recalls. "First there was Hurricane Matthew in 2016 in St. Augustine. My pottery studio got flooded and I lost all my gigs because all the restaurants were closed. So I moved to the Keys and got hit by Hurricane Irma the next year. I had put my pottery studio upstairs this time, but that didn't matter because Irma dropped the roof on it. And that's when I met David Ledbetter: He came down right after Irma, tearing down houses destroyed by the hurricane in my neighborhood."

Driskell actually sent him a drink at the bar hoping she could convince him to tear down her brother's destroyed house, which he did. That gesture opened the doors

to a future doing business.

"David said to me, 'Do you want to get into this kind of business?' Because I was doing a lot of volunteer hurricane cleanup stuff," Driskall says. "And so I replied, 'Yeah, it looks like they're following me around, doesn't it?' So, David made me half owner of HernandoAg disaster cleanup business in 2018."

Although Ledbetter had been doing hurricane cleanup with his company HernandoAg for decades, Driskell's first experience as a disaster contractor occurred after Hurricane Florence devastated Wilmington, North Carolina in August 2018. "Florence was only a Cat 1 when it hit, but was the area's wettest hurricane on record, so it was pretty bad," she says.

Then, Hurricane Michael wrecked Panama City, Florida, in October of that year, "which was really bad. We helped cleanup after it, and I have been doing disaster recovery operations with David and HernandoAg ever since."

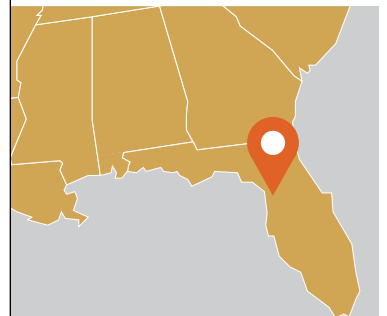
THE PART THEY PLAY

When it comes to disaster recovery operations, Driskell says many people believe that FEMA hires HernandoAg to clean up after storms. But that's not how it works for this company.

"You don't actually work for FEMA," Driskell says. "Instead, FEMA reimburses the municipality, and the municipality hires you. To be specific, local governments sign 'pre-event' contracts with big contractors, because there's only a handful of prime contractors that are big enough to supply those kinds of resources. And



▶ HernandoAg crews work to clear a large tree that's blocking a residential roadway. A CAT tracked skid-steer with grapple attachment makes the heavy lifting a little easier.



HERNANDOAG

Brooksville, Florida

YEAR FOUNDED:
2003

SERVICES:
Municipal services, line clearance, debris removal, tree trimming, agricultural and aquatic services

SERVICE AREA:
Nationwide

WEBSITE:
hernandoag.com



David Ledbetter tidying up debris using a Kenworth self-loader grapple truck equipped with a Serco 8500 loader.

they have a handful of trusted first tier subcontractors on tap to help them out — and that’s where we fit in. Sometimes we hire more subcontractors under us or if we can handle it, we do it ourselves.”

HernandoAg has anywhere from 10 to 20 crews in-house to do storm cleanup work. Through their own subcontractors, the company can assemble more than a hundred crews, depending on their prime contractor’s needs.

This ability to assemble people at a moment’s notice is central to HernandoAg’s continuing success in this field. But that’s not all that keeps prime contractors coming back. “I think one of the bigger things is we’re safe,” says Driskell. “We have nice equipment, and we keep it well-maintained. Our guys are drug free and properly licensed, and they stay with us for years.”

Another thing she adds is the leadership they provide. “David and I come together on the job, so you don’t have just one owner/leader on site, you have two. If needed, we can branch off and I can run one side of the state and he can run the other,” she says. “Finally, we’re very honest. We don’t ever oversell ourselves. If you ask for 20 crews and we have 19, I’m going to say we have 19; I’m not going to say we have 25. And I think that’s one of the bigger things that the primes trust us for.”

Honesty also helps the company find contract workers through Facebook and word-of-mouth, and retain them season after season. “We have a

A destroyed building holds up traffic, but the team makes quick work of clearing the way.



lot of people that work for us every year because we're just really honest; brutally honest, basically," she explains. "In this line of work, you don't get paid for 30 days, so someone has to trust you to leave home, travel across the country and work without getting paid for 30 days. And it's amazing what these guys do. We've got a little family now that comes every year."

HERNANDOAG AT WORK

HernandoAg's primary duty during disaster cleanups is to safely remove organic and constructed debris and then transport it offsite for further disposal. To do this, their crews use heavy equipment such as self-loaders — "some people call them grapple trucks" — Driskell says, plus bucket trucks, wheel loaders and skid-steers.

"They have us staged before the storm even hits," says Driskell. "They'll

call us and say, 'We need 50 or a hundred crews.' Each crew is usually one skid-steer and three or four workers. After the storm passes, we're the first ones in. We clear the road and enable ambulances and everybody else to get in behind us. That's the first part, which the primes call 'The Push.' We just get in and get all the trees and boats and cars and whatever else might be in the road out of the way."

In the next stage of HernandoAg's disaster recovery work, they send in the self-loaders, which remove debris and take it to a dump or a landfill or a temporary debris management site, or DMS.

"The DMS is like a temporary landfill because there's not enough room for all this stuff to go to the regular dump and it's too far away as well for you to make that many trips," says Driskell. "A company like us will manage a site where these big self-loaders

W **IN THIS LINE OF WORK, YOU DON'T GET PAID FOR 30 DAYS, SO SOMEONE HAS TO TRUST YOU TO LEAVE HOME, TRAVEL ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND WORK WITHOUT GETTING PAID FOR 30 DAYS. AND IT'S AMAZING WHAT THESE GUYS DO."**

— J. Lee Driskell

» LIFE BEFORE DISASTER RECOVERY

Before they got fully involved in disaster recovery and agricultural support services, HernandoAg's J. Lee Driskell and David Ledbetter had very different lives. "In the past, I was an East Coast champion surfer and David was a rodeo champion," says Driskell. "That way back when we used to have time to do our hobbies."

J. Lee Driskell started surfing off Florida when she was just four years old. "My mom and dad taught me; mainly my mom," Driskell says. "She was one of the first surfers in Florida back in the 1950s and early '60s. I got good at surfing and entered contests, becoming East Coast champion twice."

Learning to surf in Florida wasn't easy. "The conditions are pretty brutal for surfers," says Driskell. "The waves are small most of the time. The coast is windy and then about a third or half of the year, you have to wear some kind

of wetsuit due to the Atlantic getting colder in wintertime; either a full wetsuit or a partial."

Despite these challenging conditions, J. Lee Driskell succeeded at being a competitive surfer. It was an exotic life with "a lot of traveling," she says. "I competed in places like Australia, the Bahamas, Costa Rica, Hawaii, Mexico, and Tahiti."

While Lee was making her mark on the waves, David was making his mark in the rodeo ring. "He and his family were ranchers in Florida from way back," says Driskell. "They can trace their ranching roots here back to 1790. In fact, one of his oldest ancestors that I could find was brought in from England by the U.S. government to teach the colonists how to farm. Anyway, David and his grandfather used to go all over the Everglades and Okeechobee areas to gather up their cows, staying out for

a few days at a time doing real cowboy stuff. That led him into the rodeo thing, where he was a bronc rider."

For the record, bronc riding is one of the toughest rodeo sports. It involves riding a bucking horse — a "bronc" — whose intent is to buck the rider off his back. Compared to bronc riding, dealing with hurricanes is pretty tame stuff.

These days, neither J. Lee Driskell nor David Ledbetter pursue their old athletic passions. "We were in a motorcycle accident in 2021 and we were injured pretty badly, so that kind of stopped that," she explained. "But I just got a knee replacement, so I'm hoping once I get stronger I'll be getting back into surfing. In the meantime, we like to go fishing and hunting, and taking rides in our airboat."



▲ Aaron Maddy shows off a handy piece of equipment the team at HernandoAg uses for aquatic services, an amphibious vehicle from Mobitrac that can pull debris from water or land.

▼ Maddy watches for traffic as Jonathan Davis cuts branches away from power lines using the company's Altec bucket truck.

can bring all this debris to. It's then separated into vegetation and construction/house debris."

Usually they grind or chip organic matter at those sites, or compact it for construction debris. Then the municipality decides where it will go for final disposal, which is usually a landfill. "Sometimes, with the vegetated debris, you can burn it if you're not too close to neighborhoods and schools."

EQUIPMENT AND CREW

J. Lee Driskell has nothing but praise for her hardworking crews and the amazing equipment they operate. "Those self-loaders are incredible,"

she says. "They're over \$300,000 dollars and they're a lot of maintenance, but there's nothing else made like a self-loader that can pick up and carry that much debris efficiently and quickly. The bucket trucks are the only way to take care of hazardous trees and limbs. And then the skid-steers push everything down the road into a pile. Other than that, you also need your pickup trucks. That's why we've got a lot of one ton pickup trucks and trailers."

In terms of makes and models of equipment, HernandoAg relies on a plethora of manufacturers. Their arsenal is made up of Kenworth, In-



ternational and Peterbilt heavy trucks (self-loaders and bucket trucks); Ford, Chevy and Dodge one-ton trucks, and John Deere, Caterpillar, Kubota, New Holland and Takeuchi heavy equipment such as farm tractors, skid-steers and excavators. Most of their boats are Carolina Skiffs.



UNDER PRESSURE

Since J. Lee Driskell joined HernandoAg in the disaster recovery field six years ago, the company has seen a lot of change in the industry. “For one, it’s gotten cheaper,” says Driskell. “The contracts are getting written for less money, and so it’s getting a little bit harder to do the work for the prices that are getting bid in these contracts.

“The other thing is they’re hiring monitors now, who have to come out and watch you do everything,” she continues. “The municipality actually has another contract with a company to watch you do your work and make sure you’re not cheating. That costs about as much as it does for us to do the cleanup, so that taps the budget in half that they can afford to spend on this cleanup effort.”

The process slows progress down too according to Driskell. “You can’t just go down the road and pick up all the trash. That person has to stand there, deem whether or not this is hurricane debris, and write you a ticket for it and hand it to you before you proceed. Sometimes the printers break down or they’re late to work so you can’t work. Or they went to lunch and you can’t work. That’s one of the biggest challenges these days.”

KIND REMINDERS

These headaches are offset by the times when the public act in unexpectedly decent ways. “We did a hurricane road cleanup in Wilmington where a whole neighborhood had been trapped in there for three days because the town only had one exit and it was blocked,” recalls Driskell.

“Our people were sleeping in their trucks — because you can’t get hotels, campsites or anything — until a local lady known as Ms. Beth invited us all to stay at her house and gave us a place to sleep and a warm meal. It’s always nice when you run across really decent people. And you always do, especially in a disaster situation. People really do help each other.”

As for HernandoAg’s future in disaster recovery? The money and monitor pressures are making it harder for this firm to stay in the field, and the insurance companies aren’t helping much. “Insurance is insanely expensive when you can find it,” Driskell says. “Many insurers are leaving the state while others have dropped us when they find out we do disaster recovery. So you just have fewer and fewer insurers to pick from. Florida disaster recovery is getting to be an industry where almost no one’s going to be able to afford to do the work, which is going to be a scary situation for the residents.”

Still, J. Lee Driskell and her fiancé David Ledbetter have no plans to leave disaster recovery. “I think it has something to do with being hit twice in a row myself,” she says. “Even when you weigh it out and you think, ‘Man, we might be lucky to break even on this.’ Sometimes you do well, but then sometimes all it takes is a bad break, like when we had a truck stolen. You can lose all your money pretty quickly. Still, it’s really fulfilling work, especially the beginning part. When you clear those roads for ambulances and police and everything to get in, you know that you are making a real difference.” **D**

▲ It’s not uncommon for falling trees to find power lines. Here, the crew uses a bucket truck to safely cut up the tree before removing it from the lines and roadway.

IT’S REALLY FULFILLING WORK, ESPECIALLY THE BEGINNING PART. WHEN YOU CLEAR THOSE ROADS FOR AMBULANCES AND POLICE AND EVERYTHING TO GET IN, YOU KNOW THAT YOU ARE MAKING A REAL DIFFERENCE.”

— J. Lee Driskell

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Caterpillar Inc.
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Takeuchi Mfg.
706-693-3600
www.takeuchi-us.com

TREE AND BRUSH CLEANUP

By Craig Mandli

EXCAVATING EQUIPMENT



■ BAM! BAD ASS MATS SAFETY MATS

Avoid costly damage to your job sites with **BAM! Bad Ass Mats**. The mats are made from four-season, durable high-vis green HMWPE material with a built-in UV protector to guard against fading and cracking. Three-eighths inches thick and rated at 160,000 pounds with pressure ratings of 373 pounds per square inch, and 53,700 pounds per square foot, they have a temperature rating of minus 103 degrees F to 258 degrees F. The 4-by-8-foot sheets weigh 56 pounds and come with eight large hand holes for easy handling, even with gloves. A dual-sided tread pattern provides safe traction for both equipment and pedestrians. Mats don't absorb moisture and chemicals and can be simply hosed off. **262-877-4700; www.bamgroundpro.com**

■ RNV HYDROVAC2

The **RNV Hydrovac2** can be placed on an RNV-approved 6-cubic-foot steel construction-grade wheelbarrow to create a portable hydrovac. It can vacuum down vertically to 12 feet to convey effluent sludge, sand and small aggregate. It can be combined with a pressure washer or air spade for another excavation solution. The unit weighs 42 pounds, requires a 120-volt-AC, 15-amp power outlet and will run on a 2,200-watt generator or inverter. **607-786-2139; www.rnvac.com**



EXCAVATORS



■ JOHN DEERE 470 P-TIER EXCAVATOR

John Deere's 470 P-Tier Excavator, which is equipped to support sand and sludge removal, offers both standard and long arm options to suit different operational needs. It boasts enhanced adaptability across various applications. Its grade-control technology capabilities include factory-installed 2D or 3D Grade Guidance, or SmartGrade options. These grade control features ensure precise excavation, enabling accurate completion of tasks on the first try, which is crucial for high-precision projects and timesaving. It includes a reinforced bucket-to-arm pivot joint and a sturdy mainframe, ensuring reliability in demanding conditions. Additionally, this excavator provides various

track shoe width options, which are essential for improved flotation in soft or marshy terrains, helping to boost stability and mobility. The combination of arm versatility, precision-grade control capabilities and adaptable track shoe options makes it an efficient, multifaceted tool for diverse and challenging excavation tasks and job sites. **800-503-3373; www.johndeere.com**

■ VOLVO CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT EWRI30E

The **Volvo Construction Equipment EWRI30E** mid-sized wheeled excavator provides a short front and rear swing radius without compromising on lifting performance or digging force, according to Volvo. The rear swing is 5 feet 1 inch and a front swing of 5 feet 11 inches. Coupled with new four-wheel steering and in-line outrigger options, the machine is easy to control and stable, Volvo reports. Its uses include urban jobs where frequent roading is required, and confined job sites or roads where traffic safety is paramount. The inline outriggers help position and stabilize the machine in tight spaces. A divided blade option provides additional leveling on uneven ground or around curbs. The standard two-piece boom enables lifting up to 9,480 pounds at a 19.7-foot reach. **828-650-2000; www.volvo.com/constructionequipment**



■ YANMAR COMPACT EQUIPMENT VIO80-7

The 18,122-pound **ViO80-7** mini-excavator from **Yanmar Compact Equipment** offers 18% more power over its predecessor with its new 67 hp Yanmar Tier 4 Final diesel engine. It provides operators with increased attachment performance with 20% more PTO flow rate. It achieves a maximum dig depth of 14.25 feet, and includes signature zero tail-swing allowing the excavator to rotate next to a structure with less risk of hitting it. Improved engine output and hydraulics allow for more productivity and greater attachment performance. Those same improvements also allow for a 15% increase in work speed, 13% lower fuel consumption rate and 25% increase in travel speed on slope. A 2-Pump Load Sensing (2PLS) hydraulic system increases pump flow rate under high loads to direct power where it's needed to improve performance. **800-205-9913; www.yanmarce.com**



GRINDER/SHREDDER

■ DIAMOND MOWERS MILLER STUMP GRINDER

An indispensable tool for individuals involved in disaster cleanup and prevention, a stump grinder is essential for removing stumps after trees have been broken, burnt or carried away by strong winds, fire or flooding. **Diamond Mowers' Miller Stump Grinder** allows operators to cut stumps up to 36 inches in diameter without ever moving the carrier. The 26-inch, six-way grinding wheel features swing, lift and telescoping functions that allow users to process a stump while the loader is parked in one position, reducing the risk of soil or turf damage, as well as 30 dual-direction carbide teeth that slice through the toughest material. An ideal solution for arborists or where aesthetics are a significant consideration, this option also features a chain guard that helps protect the grinder and operator from flying debris, along with a push blade that fills in holes created while clearing stumps below ground level. **605-977-3300; www.diamondmowers.com**



LOADER AND SKID STEER EQUIPMENT

■ DIGGA ATTACHMENTS GRAPPLE RAKE

The **Grapple Rake** from **Digga Attachments** has an aggressive tine design that allows for gripping and moving material with security and ease. Being 42 inches wide and having a 36-inch grapple opening, this attachment is efficient in moving anything from logs to concrete. It is best suited for mini stand-on loaders and micro skid-steer loaders. With a bolt-on mount, one has the capability to conveniently utilize the attachment on various machines. Quickly and easily tie down the attachment using a number of dedicated cutouts on the side of the grapple. Two pulling points allow you to shackle chains to the front of the grapple to pull out posts and stumps. Additionally, it is equipped with 1-inch greasable pivot pins and cylinders. It has powerful 2-by-6-inch grapple cylinders. **563-875-7915; www.diggausa.com**





■ MAZIO ATTACHMENTS T8 SERIES

The **T8 Series** mulcher head attachment from **Mazio Attachments** is suitable for cutting and shredding grass, shrubs and branches up to 6 inches. It includes an identical mechanically adjustable front inlet and rear outlet for better and faster operation in both directions. A reinforced double-case frame helps prevent deformations due to extreme loads. It has height-adjustable skirts, a belt drive, standard flow and a pressure regulation valve. **561-766 0899; www.mazio.us**

LOADERS



■ MECALAC NORTH AMERICA AX1000

The **AX1000** articulated loader from **Mecalac North America** combines heavy-duty performance with self-stabilizing maneuverability and a sleek design. Its monoboom provides greater boom rigidity and strength, resisting the twisting that can occur with the traditional two-arm setup. Combining large, tinted windows with the unique monoboom design, it eliminates the two loader arms obstructing the operator's view and allows clear visibility to the left and right in addition to straight ahead. Along with enhanced safety, this visibility boosts productivity. It also offers greater stability because the machine's pivot joint is offset

at a positive angle. As the machine articulates, the center of gravity is transferred to the rear so it can re-level itself, greatly reducing the risk of the machine toppling over. It has a standard bucket volume of 1.3 cubic yards plus a 75 hp engine. It has a lift capacity of 9,038 pounds and maintains lifting power from the ground to its highest point. **508-921-3076; www.mecalac.com**



■ TAKEUCHI TL6R

The **TL6R** compact track loader from **Takeuchi** has a radial lift loader design that provides greater mid-height reach, bucket breakout and lift arm forces. With a height of 6 feet 5.8 inches and a width of just over 5 feet, it excels on job sites with height and width restrictions. This track loader comes with a newly designed cabin with an overhead 5.7-inch color multi-informational display and backlit rocker switches that control a variety of machine functions. It comes standard with a quiet track design with flotation pads that reduces vibration and noise level while improving ride quality. Its all-steel construction increases the machine's strength

and rigidity while protecting vital engine and hydraulic components. Double- and triple-flange track rollers maintain at least two points of contact at all times, making it less susceptible to de-tracking. **706-693-3600; www.takeuchi-us.com**

SKID-STEER



■ CASE CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT SV280B

Featuring 360-degree cab visibility, exceptional bucket breakout force, efficient engine torque and "Hydraulics on Demand" adjustable flow for demanding attachments, the 8,090-pound **SV280B** from **CASE Construction Equipment** offers a rated operating capacity of 2,800 pounds, 232 ft-lbs of engine torque, a bucket breakout force of up to 8,680 pounds, and both standard and optional high-flow auxiliary hydraulics for power and attachment versatility. It has an EZ-EH (electro-hydraulic) setup menu with nine adjustable speed and control sensitivity settings. CASE Ride Control and two-speed ground drive improves material retention and operator comfort. **866-542-2736; www.casece.com**

TRACKED EQUIPMENT

■ MATTRACKS

Mattracks rubber track conversion systems are ideal when there is a need for mobility in disastrous situations - from winter storms to wildfires and other natural disasters. A wide range of tracks are available to fit tens of thousands of vehicles from ATVs and UTVs to SUVs and pickup trucks to heavy-duty trucks, industrial and specialized vehicles. A hub-mounted design makes it easy to convert tires-to-tracks in less than one hour. The 400 Series is ideal for commercial vehicles weighing up to 40,000 pounds. The 400M1A1 model in the photo features a 20-inch front track and a 30-inch rear track. Designed to support heavy loads, the tracks feature a rubber torsion anti-torque system, steering assist and rocker suspension. As a result, operators benefit dependability and durability as well as a smoother ride. **218-683-9800; www.mattracks.com**



TREE CARE

■ MILWAUKEE TOOL M18 FUEL TELESCOPING POLE SAW

The **M18 FUEL Telescoping Pole Saw** from **Milwaukee Tool** is designed to meet the performance, durability and ergonomic needs of the professional arborist, power utility lineman and landscape maintenance professional. The saw's POWERSTATE Brushless Motor delivers 2.3 hp peak power. M18 FUEL technology allows the saw to reach its full throttle 25 m/s chain speed in under 1 second, delivering the fastest cutting in its class. This saw is optimized for use with M18 REDLITHIUM HIGH OUTPUT batteries. With a professionally demanded feature set, including a rigid, easy-to-adjust telescoping shaft, lightweight magnesium cutting head, robust branch hook, cutting sight line, captured bar nut, compact design for easy storage and transport, easy access chain tensioner, automatic oiler and onboard srench storage, this saw is fully compatible with 250-plus solutions on the M18™ system. **800-729-3878; www.milwaukeetool.com**



■ LOGOX 3-IN-1 FORESTRY MULTITool

In post-disaster environments, where tree cleanup is a critical step for restoring normalcy, the **LogOX 3-in-1 Forestry MultiTool** shines with its multi-use functionality and portability. This tool integrates a log/branch hauler, a 21- and 40-inch cant hook and timberjack into one multipurpose tool. Its ergonomic design significantly minimizes bending while lifting and bucking logs, thereby reducing strain on the body, minimizing fatigue and enhancing safety. Its lightweight, compact and modular design makes it easily transportable inside a 30-inch CarryOX gear bag, ideal for rapid deployment across varied cleanup sites. Its robust steel construction ensures durability in the toughest conditions, offering a reliable chain saw companion for teams tasked with clearing after natural disasters. **877-695-6469; www.thelogox.com**



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CASE STUDY



■ GRAPPLE ATTACHMENT INCREASES VERSATILITY FOR TREE SERVICE

PROBLEM: Tyler's Tree Service is a small, family-owned tree removal and lot clearing contractor in Fargo, North Dakota. To maximize productivity with a single machine, owner/operator Tyler Gylland needed a versatile grapple attachment that provided power and maneuverability to remove more than just stumps.

SOLUTION: Gylland began operating a stump bucket grapple from **Ignite Attachments**. The grapple features a 12-by-8-inch weld-on cutting edge for digging and ripping. A 41.7-inch jaw opening easily grips awkward loads such as stumps, cement slabs or other

materials. The grapple also features laser-cut, robot-welded steel, faster flat-face, connect-under-pressure couplers and strategically placed large gusset reinforcement plates for durability and dependability. Gylland employed the grapple on several job sites, handling stump and tree material, concrete, pipes and more.

RESULT: With the stump bucket grapple, Gylland was able to move from one task to another without stopping to switch attachments, maximizing productivity and equipment utilization. **888-232-1988; www.igniteattachments.com**

CASE STUDY

■ EQUIPMENT DEPOT APPOINTS NEW REGIONAL VICE PRESIDENT OF NORTHEAST

Equipment Depot has announced the appointment of Ed Schwarz to regional vice president of its Northeast region. Schwarz was hired to lead the region as the company continues to focus on its 2025 vision to reach \$1 billion in revenue by the end of 2025. Schwarz brings almost 30 years' global leadership experience and hands-on knowledge from the maritime industry. Most recently, he served as vice president of sales for Marine Systems at ABB. Prior to his time at ABB, he developed product positional strategies for ZF Marine, the North American division of ZF Group, one of the largest global automotive companies. He also brings experience from the Voith Group, where he lived in Germany and managed their global aftermarket business.

■ MATTRACKS CELEBRATING THREE DECADES

Mattracks, the inventor and manufacturer of the original rubber track conversion system, is celebrating its 30th year in business. Headquartered in Karlstad, Minnesota, Mattracks has customers located across 150 countries and all seven continents. The Mattracks product line has experienced significant growth and continual innovation with over 170 different models and counting. Today, Mattracks rubber track conversion systems are manufactured for virtually any multi-axle vehicle including ATVs, UTVs, SUVs, trucks, heavy-duty agricultural and construction equipment, the military and the motion picture industry.

■ GAPVAX AND CAN-EX TECHNOLOGIES FORM ALLIANCE

GapVax and Can-Ex Technologies have formally entered a partnership, designating GapVax as the sole distributor of the ZIPCAM 360 within the U.S. The alliance also allows Can-Ex Technologies to establish itself in the American market. By adding the ZIPCAM 360 to its line of combination trucks, trailers and jetters, GapVax can now offer its customers a comprehensive sewer cleaning and inspection solution. **D**

DISASTER CLEANUP & RECOVERY

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SPOTLIGHT
by Craig Mandli

COMPANY OFFERS FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND SAFETY HELMET TO NORTH AMERICAN MARKET

Keeping work crews safe and on the job is paramount to running a successful business. That means investing in innovative products. A new full-brimmed hard hat option from STUDSON – the SHK-1 Full Brim Safety Helmet — provides better protection than standard hard hat.

The helmets have numerous innovations to keep workers safe. Inside, the safety helmet features Koroyd welded tube polymer for absorbing impact. The Koroyd material provides more effective heat dissipation and venting via its cellular structure design. On the shell, the embedded Twiceme technology digitally integrates a wearer’s health data. In the event of an emergency, that data is accessible via a smartphone NFC chip reader viewable through an SMS text message or the Twiceme app available for iOS or Android devices.

The innovative hard hats were a fit for Clayco, the full-service, turnkey real estate, architecture, engineering, design-build and construction firm. An initial 3,000-unit shipment represented Clayco’s first step in its planned transition to adopt the first-ever full-brim Type II safety helmet in North America for employees across the organization.

“In working with Clayco to develop the SHK-1 Full Brim Safety Helmet, we knew that it needed to provide improved ventilation and comfort along with 360-degree head safety, especially for those who work outside and prefer the full-brim style of helmet,” says Ryan Barnes, founder and CEO, STUDSON. “STUDSON is proud to bring to market the first full-brim safety helmet that complies with American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z89.1 Type I and II safety standards. That means the safety helmet is designed to reduce force as a result of impacts to the front, back and sides, not just to the top of the head.”

Bob Clark, Clayco’s executive chairman and founder, has been happy with the decision. “We knew we needed to transition to a type II safety helmet due to its overwhelming safety advantages, but we didn’t find anything available that offered the right mix of comfort and performance in a full-brim form factor, which is the type of hard hat our team members prefer,” he says. “We also didn’t want our workforce looking like rock climbers or bicycle riders. We now have the safety helmet of the future.”

The helmets, including a nonvented Class E version for electrical workers, are now available for purchase. **833-788-3766; www.studson.com** 

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