

# CIRCLE H CONTRACTORS

## New owners keep utility installation niche as focus for Midlothian, Texas, contracting company

CONSTRUCTION



► VIDEO

Blake Norwood,  
Owner



► VIDEO

Brad Owens,  
Owner



Discover more at  
[KirbySmithConnection.com](http://KirbySmithConnection.com)

At the beginning of this year, Brad Owens and Blake Norwood took full ownership of Circle H Contractors, opening a new chapter in the company's history. Both were familiar with the Midlothian, Texas-based company because they had worked with Circle H Contractors at various times during its 20 years in business.

Norwood was a partial owner in a company that focused on utility boring and subbed work to Circle H Contractors. Owens worked in the banking industry and had relationships with several area developers and construction companies. The two are also longtime friends, so it made sense when the previous owner approached them about taking over the business when he retired. They joined the company last year in preparation for taking ownership.

"We believe our skills make a solid mix," said Norwood. "I oversee the field operations and help out in the office, and Brad handles the financial aspects of the business and does some bidding. Taking over an existing business was a

good move. Work was on the books, and we've added to it. Our experience and contacts have been a tremendous help in making a smooth transition, and we have plenty of upcoming projects."

Despite the ownership change, Circle H Contractors' niche remains the same – providing underground utility installation through open cut and boring. The company installs water, sanitary and storm-sewer pipe; electrical conduit; and transformer pads in all types of markets. Its boring division does wet, dry and directional boring for Circle H Contractors' projects and also works as a sub to other contractors. Norwood's experience brought the addition of directional boring, which Circle H Contractors didn't do previously.

"We're probably the only contractor in this area that offers wet, dry and directional boring, which is a great advantage for us," said Owens. "I don't know of any company south of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex that offers all three, other than us. We work in that market from a boring standpoint, but we do very little open cut in that area. We're based about 30 miles south of the DFW metroplex, and most of our work is done in Ellis and Johnson counties."

### Change in work mix

Circle H Contractors' mix of work has changed significantly. For many years, the company almost exclusively focused on public works projects for municipalities and water co-ops. Today, the owners estimate about 25 percent of their jobs fall under commercial development, while the remaining 75 percent is nearly evenly split between public works and residential subdivision utility installations.

A Circle H Contractors operator digs into a pile of backfill material with a Komatsu WA270-7 wheel loader on a project just outside of Midlothian, Texas.

► VIDEO





"Residential work has gone up significantly in the past few years as more people move into the area," said Owens. "In turn, that creates a need for additional commercial building to support the population base, which also increases the need to upgrade and add on to existing public utilities. We've put ourselves in a position to take advantage of the situation, and we work with everyone from the single residential homeowner to municipalities and large developers. To meet the demand, we're growing, and during the past few months, we've added staff members."

Nearly all of the 45-person staff stayed on board through the ownership change, and now Circle H Contractors employs about 70 people. Among them are key personnel such as Superintendents Terry Smith and Vance Schmidt. They help oversee seven pipe crews, four boring crews, two concrete crews and one electrical crew.

"A business is only as good as its employees, and we believe Circle H's success has been largely due to the outstanding group of people who work here," said Norwood. "Their experience is invaluable, and it's a big reason why customers continue to call us. In fact, repeat clients make up about 75 percent of our business."

### Variety of projects

Nearly every Circle H Contractors project has some boring involved, according to the owners. Often there are several bores on one job, such as the 7 miles of 12-inch water line it installed for the Rockett Special Utility District. Crews directionally bored under the Waxahachie Creek and dry bored under a major highway as part of the installation of a main transmission line.

Recent projects include utility installation for new, large subdivisions in Midlothian and Waxahachie, as well as 7,000 feet of new rural water line. Circle H Contractors will soon start a large job for the City of Midlothian. The company will lay about 4,000 feet of mainly 18-inch sanitary sewer, and install it as deep as 35 feet for a new community park and street expansion. It will include installing a 10-by-10-foot box culvert.



### ► VIDEO

Circle H Contractors' main production machines are Komatsu excavators, including this new PC210LC-10 used to dig trenches and set pipe on a project in Waxahachie, Texas. "Komatsu excavators are our main machines because of their production and reliability," said Owner Blake Norwood. "We're confident they will start and dig every day."

"We'll go about 20 feet deep with a large excavator, then use another excavator in the trench, as well as trench boxes, to dig the other 15 feet," said Owens. "It's a challenge, but we don't shy away from complex projects. Our expertise and experience allow us to tackle even the toughest projects and complete them on time and on budget. We expect this to be no different."

### Main production machines are Komatsu

Digging for that project, as on nearly all projects, will be done with Komatsu excavators.

*Continued . . .*



Terry Smith,  
Superintendent



Vance Schmidt,  
Superintendent



# Circle H Contractors takes care of customers, keeps promises

... continued



Nicole Norwood,  
Office Manager

Circle H Contractors has several units, ranging from Tier 4 Interim PC210LC-10s to a PC400LC; as well as a tight-tail-swing PC138USLC. The company uses various sizes of Komatsu wheel loaders, including Tier 4 WA270-7 models, for backfilling and moving pipe. Its total fleet consists of about 25 Komatsu pieces, many purchased from Kirby-Smith Machinery, Inc. with the help of Territory Manager Ron Weaver.

"Komatsu excavators are our main machines because of their production and reliability," said Norwood. "We're confident that they will start

and dig every day, and so was the previous owner, who was a die-hard Komatsu user. He kept adding them to the fleet, and we intend to continue that trend. The operators love the speed, and we like the resale value that Komatsu offers when it's time to trade.

"We especially like the PC138 because it allows us to get into tight spaces and keep working without sacrificing power, and the rubber tracks let us go through sensitive areas without worrying about tearing up the ground or concrete," he added.

"The wheel loaders give us quite a bit of versatility," said Owens. "We equipped them with quick couplers so we can make fast changes from buckets to forks and back. We carry pipe and bedding materials, and we can load and backfill with them. They're great all-around machines."

Circle H Contractors keeps track of its Komatsu equipment with KOMTRAX, monitoring vital information such as hours, idle time and location. "It's a great tool for ensuring our fleet maintenance is up-to-date," said Norwood. "Kirby-Smith monitors the machines too, and on the Tier 4 machines, a technician comes out and does the routine scheduled services complimentary for the first 2,000 hours or three years under the Komatsu CARE program. That's a great value to us, and another reason why we have a great relationship with Kirby-Smith, Ron and our Product Support Representative, Matt Gardner. Anytime we need something, they respond right away."

## More controlled growth

Owens and Norwood see continued growth, although at a slower pace than Circle H Contractors has been experiencing throughout the past few years, and especially during the past year.

"We're looking at more controlled, manageable growth," said Owens. "The markets are good and hopefully they'll stay that way for a while. We've taken care of our customers and have kept our promises, and we want that to continue. Growth for growth's sake is not what we're after. Quality work done right has been the key to Circle H's success, and we want that legacy to continue." ■



Kirby-Smith Machinery, Inc. Product Support Representative Matt Gardner (left) and Territory Manager Ron Weaver (right) meet with Circle H Contractors Owners Blake Norwood (second from left) and Brad Owens. "We have a great relationship with Kirby-Smith, Ron and Matt," said Norwood. "Anytime we need something, they respond right away."

A Circle H Contractors operator uses a Komatsu PC200 excavator to dig a bore hole.

## ► VIDEO

