

# BUILDING WITH BINDER

May 2001

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Issue 18

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## **MOUNT CONSTRUCTION, INC.**

Versatile south Jersey contractor handles  
“everything from soup to nuts” for customers

*see article inside*



Mount Construction, Inc. founder and President Dave Smith (left) and Vice President Ken Landberg.

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## MOUNT CONSTRUCTION, INC.

### Versatile south Jersey contractor handles “everything from soup to nuts” for customers



Dave Smith, President and founder of Mount Construction, Inc. of Berlin, New Jersey.



Ken Landberg, Vice President.

It's ironic, says Dave Smith, President of Mount Construction, Inc., that the only type of work his contracting firm doesn't handle — concrete flatwork — was the first service Smith offered when he founded his business in 1991.

“At this point we do clearing, demolition, earthmoving, all phases of pipe work, structural concrete and milling,” said Smith of his Berlin (New Jersey) paving and earthmoving company. “The only thing we sub out is the stuff I started doing first, the flat work.”

Smith turned to concrete work after high school and vocational school, where he concentrated on carpentry and the building trades. “When I graduated, the small jobs I had been doing turned into a lot of concrete work — flatwork, foundations, brick block, that type of stuff,” he recalled.

“When I was 22 or 23 years old, I was living out of a motel in Dover, Delaware, five days a week doing concrete on a housing job,” Smith continued. “I rented a backhoe from a farm equipment sales place down there and began talking to the owner. He created a situation where I was able to purchase the backhoe. To this day, I remember my first payment was \$396.84.”

#### “Unstoppable”

Smith put everything he made with that backhoe into more equipment. “I finally got the guy down in Delaware to sell me an old truck tractor,” he smiled. “I used a hydraulic bottle jack, torches and a rented welder in my house's driveway to put a dump body on it. At that point I had a truck, a trailer and a backhoe — I was unstoppable.”

By 1992 Smith was working with one other person, Chris Campbell. “He started with me when he was 16 years old. I used to pick him up after school,” laughed Smith. “He's 27 now and one of my top operators and foremen.”

Today Mount Construction employs 100 people and divides its efforts between commercial and public

projects. “In the commercial market, we do a lot of high-level, blue-chip-only commercial projects,” noted Smith. “We also do a tremendous number of schools for general contractors.

“Because we control the whole project, we provide so much more of an appealing situation for general contractors, because we can handle everything from soup to nuts,” explained Smith. “They can forget about the sub and concentrate on what they're doing — building the buildings — and forget about the rest of the project. We can do it.”

#### Pipe work first specialty

In addition to schools, Mount Construction's public projects include road paving, construction and sewer work for counties and municipal governments. “When we first started out, we specialized directly in pipe, working mainly for other contractors, builders, developers and municipalities,” said Smith. “We'd hire other contractors to do the paving, concrete and milling for us.”

Waiting on subs to complete parts of municipal utility jobs convinced Smith that he wanted more control of Mount Construction's projects. “We felt as though we were being held back too much by the other subcontractors, which affected our ability to schedule, to control, to be competitive,” he explained. “That led us to enter the paving and earthmoving business. We started growing in 1997-1998.”

As part of Mount Construction's pipe work specialty, “we were real big in emergency utility repairs,” Smith added. “There were years that we did 40 of them and years we did 80, ranging from a little two-hour service repair to a three-week sanitary sewer collapse. We're still pretty big in that market right now, though it's become the smallest portion of our sales.”

#### Hands-on owner

Assisting Smith in running Mount Construction is Vice President Ken Landberg. “Ken's basically in charge of everything,” stated Smith, a hands-on owner who spends 70 percent of his time in the field. “Ken



Crews from Mount Construction used a large fleet of Komatsu equipment on a recent expansion project at Edgewood High School in Berlin, New Jersey. This included (clockwise from above left), the operator of a Komatsu PC400LC-6 excavator cutting a deep utility trench; the operator of a WA250 wheel loader stockpiling aggregate; and the operator of a D61 dozer using the machine's blade for grading.

answers to me and only me. We have project managers and superintendents. The project managers are involved in the actual scheduling and planning of the jobs, and the superintendents are responsible for the individual, specialized phases of construction."

Mount Construction considers the state of New Jersey its territory. "Right now we're working from the Delaware Memorial Bridge to Cape May Point," said Smith. "Our northernmost job would be Old Bridge. We're also working at Toms River, and we have some projects in Philadelphia.

"We go where the work is," Smith stated. "The area we're in is hot, and just what's in the system right now will take a long time to be used up. We want to work as close to home as possible, but we will go out as needed to maintain the level of work we expect to do."

Mount Construction, Inc., is a member of the Utility and Transportation Contractors Association (UTCA).

### Projects run the gamut

Mount Construction's current projects run the gamut of the company's capabilities. They include 11



school jobs, all the site and utility work for a new discount store in Lumberton, an emergency sanitary sewer repair in Gloucester City and reconstruction of the entrance and exit ramps for Highway 38 on Cuthbert Boulevard in Cherry Hill. "Being diversified is the key," emphasized Smith.

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# "Good people" drive Mount Construction

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Typical of Mount Construction's school projects is a recently completed job at Cherokee High School in Marlton Township. The school added extra athletic fields and an addition that doubled its size. "The job involved a lot of dirt, large amounts of paving and pipe, large amounts of every phase we handle," noted Smith. "We revamped their drainage system and added a parking area. It was a nice project."

Smith finds the school projects challenging because of the intricate scheduling required. "Many people won't do them because there are a lot of deadline issues," he noted. "Oftentimes we'll have to have half of the site done, cleaned up, paved and accessible for school buses and fire trucks so they can get in for the start of school before we can do the second half of the job. A lot of phasing and things along those lines make it interesting."

One of Mount Construction's most challenging and successful projects was a water main replacement in 1998. "We ran a new water main down Broadway in Gloucester City from Brooklawn to Camden, replacing every piece of water main from one end to the other," said Smith. "That was a very difficult project, because it's a very densely populated area with high traffic. It was very utility intensive — there were a lot of obstacles in the ground. It was a pretty large success."

## Machinery-intensive business

Dave Smith relies on a wide variety of Komatsu equipment from Binder Machinery Company to handle Mount Construction's diverse project list. Smith made his first Komatsu purchases (a PC150

excavator, a D37P wide-track dozer and a WA180 wheel loader) in 1994.

"This is a machinery-intensive business, and even the best machines break and the strongest relationships are strained," said Smith. "The bottom line is how the people you're dealing with react to the needs of the contractor. Binder has always been able to get me any machines I need. They've been very good, whether I've been buying, renting or leasing. Their product support has been good, too."

With the help of Binder South Field Sales Manager Scott Warren, Smith recently added seven Komatsu dozers (two D65s, two D41s, a D61, a D58, and a D38), four Komatsu wheel loaders (two WA320s and two WA250s) and four Komatsu excavators (a PC400LC-6, a PC300LC-6, a short-tail-swing PC228USLC-2 and a PC95). Smith has also purchased three Ingersoll-Rand rollers (a DD-110, a DD-70 and a DD-32), one Ingersoll-Rand soil compactor (a SD-70) and two Blaw-Knox pavers (a PF5510 and a PF4410).

Mount Construction purchased the Komatsu PC228USLC-2 short-tail-swing excavator to handle "the pipe projects we consider the urban work," Smith explained. "The Gloucester Cities, the Camdens, the Burlington Cities, where everywhere you turn there's a utility, a telephone pole, a road sign or a car flying by at 80 miles per hour. And we do a lot of highway barrier work now, working between barriers, which makes the zero-tail-swing pretty beneficial. That was our main reason for purchasing the 228, to diversify the crews."

"Even before we bought the PC228, we always liked Komatsu excavators because they have a fine touch," said Smith. "We do a lot of digging around utilities, working in close quarters, and we like that control."

All of Mount Construction's Komatsu excavators are equipped with JRB quick couplers. "Quick couplers have definitely been the answer for us," Smith noted. "Three years ago we purchased our first machine with a quick coupler, and it's been so much better and easier for us. We utilize the quick coupler not just for buckets but for grapples and other equipment, too."

Smith has also been pleased with his Komatsu dozers and wheel loaders. "As for the Komatsu wide-track line of dozers, nothing grades like them," he stated. "Even the larger Komatsu dozers grade like the competitors' smaller dozers. We've always liked that. And we've been very happy with their wheel loader line. Our loaders work steady with the pipe crews, unloading material, shuttling material to the hoe or backfilling. The Komatsu loaders are steady running."



Dave Smith (left) visits with Binder South Field Sales Manager Scott Warren in front of a Blaw-Knox paver. Paving is one of the many specialties of Smith's versatile company, Mount Construction, Inc.



Mount Construction added this PC228USLC-2 excavator to its expanding fleet of Komatsu equipment to help crews work in confined and congested urban areas. The "short-tail-swing" excavator is pictured at left on a recent underground utility project in Gloucester City, New Jersey.



The operator of a Komatsu excavator loads a Moxy articulated truck at a Mount Construction jobsite.



To keep its large fleet up and running, the company stresses good equipment preventive maintenance practices, like investing in field service and lube trucks.

## Necessity, good people

Dave Smith credits necessity and good people for the success of Mount Construction over its first nine years. Because he was supporting his mother, sister and niece, "I pretty much had it clear in my mind what I wanted to do," said Smith. "I won't necessarily say I knew how I was going to do it. Things have definitely progressed along fast and gone well, but I couldn't say that I planned on being this far along at this point."

Surrounding himself with good people has been key to Mount Construction's growth. "I have a lot of good people working for me," Smith acknowledged. "You don't have to know how to do everything, but you have to make sure you have somebody you can trust to help you do those things. You can work as hard as you want and be lucky, but without the right people, you're not going to get anywhere."

Building and maintaining a reputation for quality work has also been important to Smith. "We've never started a job that we didn't finish," he stated. "There are going to be bad jobs along with the good, but you have to do them all the same. When everything else is gone, all you have is your reputation. That's what we sell ourselves on. We get it done fast, we get it done right, and we're customer-friendly."

Smith and his wife Jeanne have two children, David, age four, and Codi, age three, who fuel his determination to sustain a successful business. "My objective is to continue to build the company and make it strong, the kind of company that will be here in good times and bad," he said. "My goal is that 100 years from now, my children and my grandchildren will say I had some good ideas."