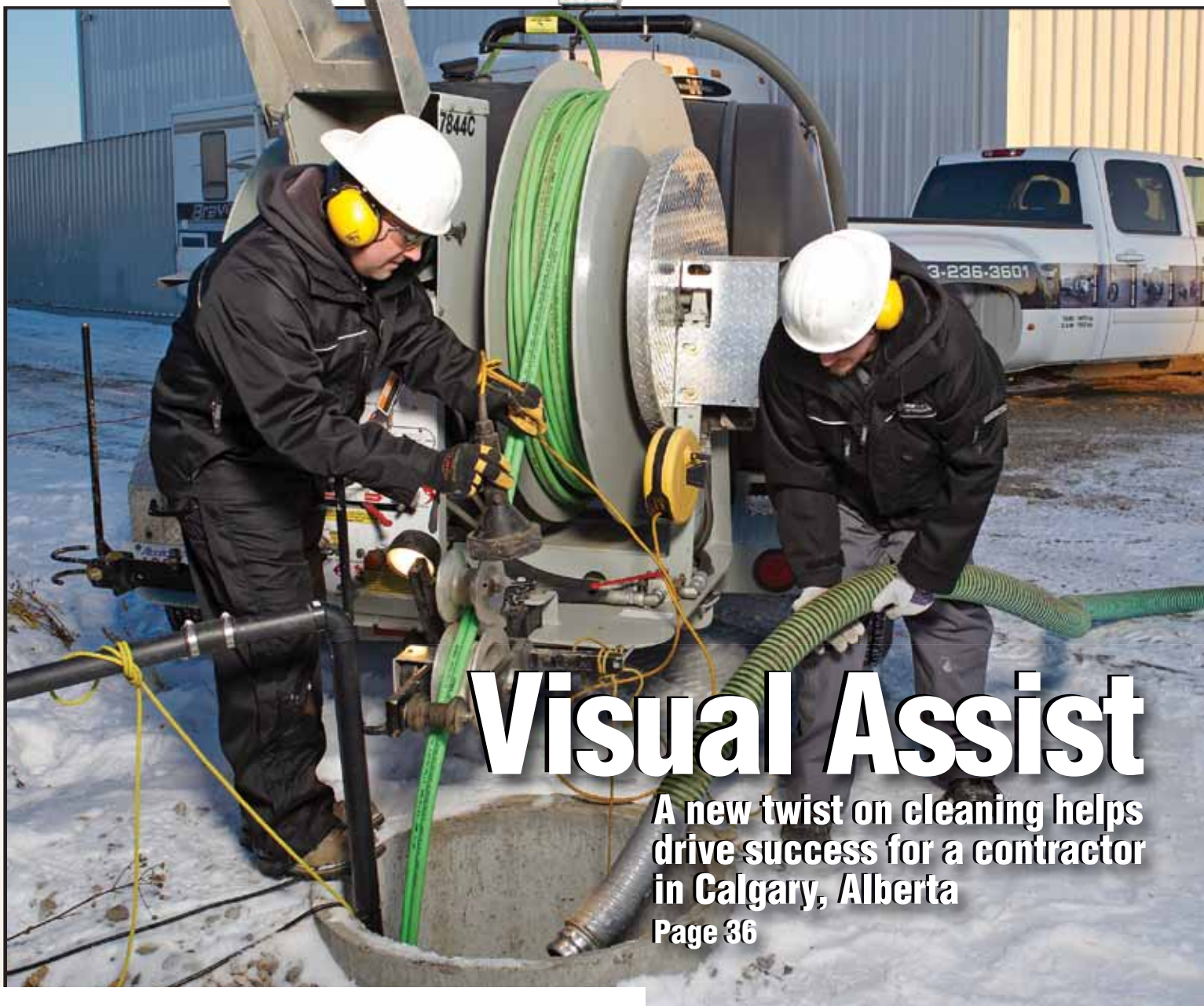


FOR RESIDENTIAL, MUNICIPAL AND INDUSTRIAL CLEANING CONTRACTORS

Cleaner



Visual Assist

A new twist on cleaning helps drive success for a contractor in Calgary, Alberta

Page 36

MONEY MANAGER

Teaching kids about money

READER PIPELINES

Selling maintenance contracts

THE LATEST IN HIGH-POWERED CABLE MACHINES

PRSTD. STD.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
COLE
PUBLISHING

Accu Jet owner Kyle Baxter and his father, John Baxter, prepare to deploy a Vac-Con combination truck to clean a storm sewer in a residential area. Kyle got his start cleaning sewer pipes with his grandfather. (Photography by Ensley-Photo.com)



Ever Independent

Kyle Baxter has never worked for a paycheck – always for himself. His growing business prospers on sharp marketing and word-of-mouth built on quality service.

By Ted J. Rulseh

From the time he was 10 years old, Kyle Baxter worked with his grandfather cleaning sewer pipes, often using an old pumper fire truck retrofitted as a waterjetter.

He worked for no pay. “Grandpa always said, ‘This is an education – it will pay off someday,’” Baxter says. “It’s paying off for me now.”

It’s paying off in the form of a growing 4-year-old business, Accu Jet Sewer and Drain Cleaning, based in Perry, Iowa, Baxter’s hometown. Baxter and his team devote about half their time to mainline sewer inspection, waterjet cleaning and other work for municipalities.

They also do preventive maintenance for restaurants, clean lines for duplexes and other rental properties, clear residential stoppages and repair sewer laterals with cured-in-place pipe lining or pipe bursting.

Common denominators include quality service, a strong brand identity and a determination to get the job done – even (or especially) when the going gets tough.

Straight into business

Baxter is proud to say he has never collected a paycheck from anyone but himself.

As he grew up, he and his grandfather used the fire truck jetter and homemade nozzles to clean residential lines in and around Perry. “Nobody else in the area had a jetter, so it worked out pretty well for what we needed to do,” Baxter says.



Kyle Baxter went into business for himself full-time at the tender age of 22.

P R O F I L E

ACCU JET SEWER AND DRAIN CLEANING, PERRY, IOWA

OWNERS: Kyle and Mindy Baxter

FOUNDED: 2006

SERVICE AREA: State of Iowa

EMPLOYEES: 3

SPECIALTIES: Municipal pipe inspection, waterjet pipe cleaning

WEB SITE: www.accujetiowa.com



Today, after four years in business, he has three employees: his father, John Baxter, who helps out hauling water and running the jetter (now truck-mounted) when needed; Matt Hix, jetter operator; and Justin Newman, combination truck operator. Baxter himself does most of the camera work.

Getting going

From the start, word-of-mouth treated Baxter well. He had built-in connections with the City of Perry (population 7,000), and once he performed well there, his reputation grew. "In an area like this, all the guys from different cities talk to each other at meetings and events," Baxter says. "My name got out that way."

While still in high school, he did contract work for the City of Perry, digging up and repairing sewer lines and water mains and handling assorted other tasks. After high school, looking for a change, he started a hood and duct cleaning business serving restaurants. The company never took off, and he missed the sewer business, so in April 2006, at age 22, he formed his own company and bought a Model 4018 trailer-mounted waterjetter from US Jetting LLC.

"I started doing a few jobs here and there. I thought if I could get four jobs a month, the jetter would pay for itself. As it turned out, we did about four jobs a day."

Kyle Baxter

"I started doing a few jobs here and there," he says. "I thought if I could get four jobs a month, the jetter would pay for itself. As it turned out, we did about four jobs a day." He soon bought a GenEye 2 push cam from General Pipe Cleaners.

Customers began calling with progressively bigger jobs, which at first he referred to other contractors. As the calls kept coming, and the jobs got bigger, he invested in a used Vac-Con combination truck and a van-based main-line camera system from Aries Industries Inc. Six months after buying the combination truck, he replaced it with a newer (2001) Vac-Con V311 unit with an 11-cubic-yard debris tank, 1,300-gallon water tank, and 80 gpm/2,000 psi pump.

Accu Jet uses a variety of nozzles to get the job done when waterjetting. Favorite tools include the Grenade and the Bulldozer, both from ENZ USA.





Left photo: Kyle (left) and John Baxter prepare to launch an Aries Pathfinder camera. **Right:** Kyle monitors an inspection inside the company's camera van from Aries Industries Inc. Equipment includes a Saturn III control unit, a tractor control unit and a laptop computer and auxiliary monitor.

To help push things along, he sometimes spent a day or two a week on the road, "stopping at every city shed I came to, dropping off my information and business card, and talking to them." The company now serves communities from 500 population to as large as 30,000.

Word-of-mouth also helped Baxter connect with farm drainage tile companies, who began calling to have tile lines cleaned and cleared of roots. The 4,000 psi jetter gave him plenty of root-cutting power, especially with a Warthog (StoneAge Inc.) or Bulldog (ENZ USA Inc.) nozzle at the end of the hose.

"My logo is very important to me. I put it on everything. If it has room for a logo on it, I put it there. Pens, shirts, hats, stocking caps. My pickup truck and my camper have the logo on them. Pretty much wherever I go, I wear an Accu Jet sweatshirt."

Kyle Baxter

Today, he advertises in telephone directories covering a 150-mile radius around Perry. He also sends targeted postcard mailers. For example, nearly every plumbing shop in Iowa received a card promoting the company's CIPP lining service (MaxLiner USA). City public works directors got cards advertising inspection and cleaning services. Often, Daryle Bennett, a municipal contractor with whom Baxter has an alliance, follows up on mailers with personal visits.

A strong brand identity helps. The Accu Jet logo, which Baxter designed with a little help from his mother's graphics shop, covers almost the entire sides of the company's 16-foot box truck service vehicle.

"My logo is very important to me," Baxter says. "I put it on everything.

If it has room for a logo on it, I put it there. Pens, shirts, hats, stocking caps. My pickup truck and my camper have the logo on them. Pretty much wherever I go, I wear an Accu Jet sweatshirt. The logo is on discs of our inspection data. It's on the covers of our inspection reports. Anything I give a customer, I want my logo on."

Delivering value

Of course, an identity has to be backed by quality work. To Baxter, customer satisfaction starts with "a good job at a fair price." He looks at the first job with a customer as an investment in a long-term relationship.

Cities especially demand responsive service. "Being there when they call and working according to their schedule is very important," Baxter says. "If they need us there at midnight, we're going to be there for them, because they may have homeowners who are upset, or a line that's giving them trouble. If they need us at six in the morning so they can get something done after we finish our work, we'll do that for them, too."

Inspections are key to the municipal business. The inspection van is equipped with a Pathfinder camera, Badger wheeled transporter, and PipeWorks Pro survey software, all from Aries and purchased from the local dealer, Mid-Iowa Solid Waste Equipment Co. Inc.

"We use the Pathfinder setup for 8- to 18-inch lines," says Baxter. "It's designed for up to 24-inch lines, and it will go down a 6-inch pipe. It's a light-weight tractor. You're not having to try and get a 70- to 80-pound tractor down a manhole. It weighs about 35 pounds, and one man can easily deploy it by himself."

The firm does post-construction cleaning and inspection, as well as pre-construction inspections to pinpoint the locations of laterals in pipes scheduled

LESSON FROM THE MEAT MAN

Kyle Baxter, owner of Accu Jet Sewer and Drain Cleaning, got a lesson in sales persistence from a friend in the meat business.

"He owned a meat-packing company," Baxter recalls. "When he first got into the business, he would call people every day, trying to sell them meat. Mostly they would just hang up on him. But he kept at it. He would call them and call them and call them.

"He said eventually they would get sick of hearing from him, so they would buy something, just so maybe he would quit calling. And then they would like what he sold them and become his customers.

"That has always stuck in my mind. I came to believe in that approach. If they tell you no, just keep after it. Don't give up. Once they try us out, they'll start using us, because we do a good job for them."



Three generations: Kyle and Mindy Baxter, daughter Reese, and Kyle's father John Baxter (standing, left) are shown with key components of the Accu Jet fleet. When not at work, Kyle and Mindy like to escape in their camper trailer.

to be repaired, replaced or lined. Accu Jet also does routine inspections that help communities identify infiltration and inflow (I&I) sources and other defects and plan repairs.

When it comes to pipe cleaning, Baxter relies solely on jetters. "We don't do any snaking," he says. "With a jetter, the pipe is 100 percent clean when you get done. You can also cut roots out right to the wall of the pipe."

Going underground

Accu Jet doesn't rehabilitate municipal lines but does perform trenchless repair on residential laterals with CIPP lining or with a Hammerhead PortaBurst PB30 pipe bursting system (Earth Tool Co. LLC).

Here, the company stands apart with a willingness to tackle jobs no one else wants to try. "We replaced a sewer lateral last year that came out in back of a house, under a concrete patio, under a great big tree, under a driveway and into an alley," Baxter says. "There wasn't enough room on either side of the line to dig it up. So we cut it off inside the house, dug a hole in the alley, and were able to pipe-burst it. Nobody else in our area has the technology to do that."

"We've also done quite a few challenging lining jobs. Normally we shoot liners about 70 feet, but we shot one 125-footer. It was a lake house with a garage and concrete patios in back, and the sewer went through there. If the lining job had failed, it would have been a great expense to dig up and replace that pipe. I was very nervous through that whole job."

Basic cleaning jobs can get difficult, too. "In tile cleaning, you may have

When not dealing with a customer's issue, Baxter may be found at home brainstorming or working at his desk.

To keep life balanced, he and his wife, Mindy, and their two-year-old daughter, Reese, enjoy camping in their 33-foot slide-out trailer, usually traveling with a group of friends. "We go camping just about every other weekend, from the time it's warm enough to go in spring until it's too cold to go out of the driveway in fall," Baxter says. "It's my time to relax and get away from everything. We pretty much stay in central Iowa. We try not to get too far from home, because you never know when the phone will ring."

The travels also include annual visits to the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International, where Baxter checks out new technology and enjoys talking to engineers and product designers in the show floor exhibits.

Looking ahead, Baxter envisions getting more involved in municipal work. "The Department of Natural Resources is coming down on these communities a lot more on I&I issues," he says. "I think they'll be needing us to televise their systems to satisfy DNR requirements." The company recently bought a municipal foam applicator for RootX root control, a service it already offers to residential and commercial customers.

Always alert for opportunities, Baxter sees nothing but more growth ahead. It's a good bet he won't be working for a paycheck anytime soon. ■

"As an owner-operator, I want to get the job done and make the customer happy. It's going to cost him a lot more if he has to replace that line, so let's get it working for him. My mentality is that I don't want to give up. I'll stay on it until the job is done."

Kyle Baxter

100 to 200 feet of tree root growing into a line," Baxter says. "Nobody else wants to take the time for jobs like that. They'll get in there and start on it, and when they see it's not opening up, they just want to quit."

"As an owner-operator, I want to get the job done and make the customer happy. It's going to cost him a lot more if he has to replace that line, so let's get it working for him. My mentality is that I don't want to give up. I'll stay on it until the job is done."

Always on call

For Baxter, getting the job done means working almost around the clock.

MORE INFO :

Aries Industries Inc.
800/234-7205
www.ariesindustries.com

ENZ USA Inc.
630/692-7880
www.enzusainc.com

General Pipe Cleaners
800/245-6200
www.drainbrain.com

HammerHead by Earth Tool Company LLC
262/567/8833
www.hammerheadmole.com

MaxLiner USA
276/656-1225
www.maxlinerusa.com

RootX Inc.
800/844-4974
www.rootx.com

StoneAge Inc.
866/795-1586
www.stoneagetools.com

US Jetting LLC
800/538-8464
www.usjetting.com

Vac-Con Inc.
888/491-5762
www.vac-con.com