

TIMBERLINE

Washington Logger Expands into Firewood

Gulley Logging Turns to Multitek Firewood Processor for High-Volume Production



Gulley Logging firewood production operations with Multitek Model 2020LDS firewood processor.

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ROY, Washington — Gulley Logging, which has recently added a firewood component to its business, was started by Andy Gulley in 1992 when he was only 22.

Given the hard times that many logging companies are going through, along with the fact that many young people are turning toward more secure ways of making a living, why did he do it?

“I’m still trying to figure out why,” said Andy. “I suppose I just wanted to see if I could do it.”

Andy was born in Yosemite National Park. The family moved to Washington the following year when his father got a job operating heavy equipment for the Centralia Steam Plant. He later worked for Mueller & Cameron, a logging company that also sold firewood.

Andy, who grew up with four siblings, worked at the same company through junior and senior high school. He worked mainly in the firewood operations and the maintenance shops, “doing whatever needed to be done,” he recalled.

After graduating from high school, Andy went to work for Erickson Logging out of Eatonville, but he started doing his own small logging jobs in 1989 part-time before venturing into business full-time in 1992.

Andy said business growth has been “fairly smooth” with no big ups or downs. “I started doing little landowner jobs, then gradually kept buying equipment to do bigger jobs for various timber companies, mills, and brokers.”

His first piece of equipment was a Gar-



ret 22 cable skidder, which he purchased used from Erickson. In about 1995 he purchased a John Deere 440 grapple skidder, then got a United 7640 truck-mounted log loader on a Peterbilt truck. About three years later he traded his John Deere grapple skidder for a 548 model, and about the same time he purchased a Linkbelt 3400 log loader. In 2000 he bought his first Hahn processor, which he still uses today. In 2004 he added a John Deere 640 skidder, and last year he bought a John Deere 690 DLC with a Waratah processing head. He has two logging trucks, a 1973 Kenworth self-loading ‘short logger’ that he bought in 1996 and a 1989 Peterbilt for hauling long wood, purchased in 2005.

The success he has achieved is due in large part to his employees and sub-contractors, said Andy. His two full-time employees are relatively recent additions. Before that, Andy did all the work himself.

Andy hired Roy Goodin in 2004. Roy, 71, “has a wealth of experience,” Andy noted. “He’s the first one there every morning and

does not stop until it’s time to go home.”

Last fall he hired Travis Andersen. Travis, 21, “is still learning the trade but is really picking it up quick,” said Andy.

“When we’re working, no one person is more important than the other,” said Andy. “We all work together as a good team.”

Andy feels fortunate to have this crew for, “Logging is hard work, and one of the problems in the industry is finding quality people who are willing to work hard. A lot of people don’t want to get up early in the morning.”

Andy gets up at 4:30 a.m. to get ready to go to work. He and his crew work from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. Plus, Andy spends an average of four hours in the afternoon and night, looking at jobs, preparing bids, performing maintenance, picking up parts and supplies, and making sure everybody has what he needs for work the next day. He goes to bed about 10 p.m.

Andy also appreciates his sub-contractors. He relies on two timber cutting contractors, Briskey Cutting out of Naches and NTC

Services of Eatonville; the sub-contractors work separately or jointly, depending on the job. Andy sub-contracts with Jeff Freitas for loading services with a Case 9030 logging shovel. Andy owns two logging trucks and also contracts for hauling.

The John Deere machines are maintained by a John Deere dealer, Pape Machinery in Fife, and S&S Repair in McKenna takes care of Andy's other machines.

Andy got a different kind of boost to his business when he married his wife, Carrie, in May 2005. She was a sales representative for one of his customers. Now Carrie does all the bookkeeping, billing and job costing for Andy's company and prepares and delivers talks for weekly safety meetings.

Andy has a lot of competition in the region, but he found a niche: Fort Lewis, an Army base. "The government is very environmental conscious," noted Andy. "They have a lot of restrictions that have to be adhered to. There's a lot of wildlife you have to be careful of, and you have to log so there is no damage to residual timber. A lot of guys aren't geared up for this type of exacting work, but once we figured out what they wanted and how they wanted it, we were able to do it. So now, brokers come looking for us. We're the prescription the government is looking for. I constantly drill the crew how it should be done. They pay attention, and we do it right."

Working for Fort Lewis has been the company's mainstay in the past, but Andy also has been able to expand into other jobs.

Treesource Industries offered Andy his first big job and was his entry to his government contracts with Fort Lewis. He worked with Treesource until 2005, when the company folded. It didn't come as a surprise because Andy was aware as Treesource sold off its seven mills, one by one.

Now, most of his work is for Mason County Forest Products in Shelton. He also sub-contracts out to Lewis County Forest Products in Winlock and Ranier Veneer in Graham. He is currently working for Central Pacific Timber out of Chehalis.

Andy is a member of the Washington Contract Loggers Association and the Washington Farm Forestry Association. He processes tree length logs at the rate of 12 million board feet a year.

For the past two to three years Andy also had been producing firewood by hand, but in July 2005 he invested in a Multitek Model 2020LDS firewood processor. "The reason we first got into firewood is that pulp prices were down, so we couldn't drive the wood to town for a profit," said Andy. "I've been looking at firewood processors for several years off and on, but could never justify the cost. But, as more wood became available, I decided to invest the money."

As he became more and more attracted to Multitek, initially Andy wanted to purchase a used machine. "But I couldn't find a used one for sale anywhere in the U.S. or Canada. Once people buy a Multitek they

don't want to let it go."

Andy likes that the Multitek processor is heavy duty — "perfectly built," he said — and its conveyor is equally heavy duty. "I've looked at a lot of conveyors that were lightweight," he said. "It doesn't help much if the processor stands up to heavy wear but the conveyor is always falling apart."

The frame of the Multitek firewood processor is made of high strength, low weight alloy steel tubing. Andy's Multitek firewood processor is equipped with a pintle hitch hook-up and stacking conveyor.

"The shuttle grapple that feeds the logs was the deciding factor for me," said Andy. "The logs sit on an infeed deck, just like at a mill, and roll down into the trough. The grapple, which fits on a long cylinder, grabs the log and feeds it into the saw. This way you can cut straight logs or low-grade, crooked logs. It doesn't matter. The processor produces the firewood you want, and the 20-foot conveyor takes it where you want."

The Multitek can efficiently and accurately process — cut to firewood length and then split — low-grade hardwood logs up to 20 inches in diameter and 20 feet long. His machine produces about 2-½ cords per hour, Andy reported.

Andy likes the "the ease of operation. It's easy to run." In fact, the Multitek normally is operated by Andy's nephew and a friend after school, on weekends and school breaks. Last year the machine enabled the company to produce 1,500 cords of firewood in six months. Andy expects they will produce about 1,800 cords in 2006.

The Multitek firewood processor is equipped with an Oregon 35-inch bar saw for bucking the logs to firewood length. User friendly joystick-style hydraulic controls and a tandem hydraulic pump allow the operator to buck and split at the same time. The machine also features an auto-cycle splitter and interchangeable 4-6-8-way vertically adjustable, interchangeable splitter blades.

The Multitek is powered by a John Deere 54 hp liquid-cooled, turbo-diesel engine. "It's very fuel efficient," said Andy. "I'm thoroughly in love with John Deere equipment."

Andy bought the machine through a dealer, Cascade Trader, in Chehalis. He praised the dealer and also the Multitek staff. "The sales rep supplied us with all the information we needed, and they were great — absolutely great — to work with. Everything they said they were going to do, as well as the people at Cascade Trader, they did. All of the manufacturing dates, delivery dates, getting it up and running, was all done on time. A man flew in from Multitek to show us how to run the machine. It was already paid for, so they didn't have to do that."

The Multitek "is a machine as tough as you can get," said Andy. He has not had any problems with the processor, adding, "There's no doubt in my mind that if it was broken, the people from Multitek would be here right away to fix it. Now I wish I had

bought one five years ago."

Andy has two wood yards on five acres with his house and a 24x36 shop. The sawdust goes to a dairy farm for cow bedding. His logging business has grown through his word-of-mouth reputation. He runs a firewood ad in the local newspaper, but 50 percent of that business comes from referrals.

Although there is competition in logging, there are not a lot of new people entering the business, Andy observed. "The younger ones are putting their money into things where they can get a better return on their investment. I log because it's what I like to do. It's the only thing I like to do." On the other hand, "We don't have as much competition with firewood. There are some local guys who sell firewood, but they can't do the volume we can do with our Multitek."

About 50 percent of Andy's logging jobs are negotiated contracts and 50 percent are bid. When asked if he's made many mistakes starting his own business at so young an age, Andy replied, "Everybody learns the hard way, but I haven't made too many mistakes. I walk my jobs and know what my crew can do there. And I've always listened to the older guys and pay attention. That's how I've learned. When I worked for Mr. Erickson, he taught me a lot."

In discussing challenges facing loggers and others in the forest products industry, Andy noted the high cost of fuel. "Fuel prices will not go back to what they were before," he predicted. "So we have to compensate for those increases and bid our jobs accordingly."

Andy also is worried about competition from the Canadian lumber industry. "That lumber is government subsidized while ours is not," he said. "They can undercut our prices. They have problems too, like everybody else, but they bring added problems to us."

Andy is unhappy with the environmental movement. "There's too much publicity about what people feel we're doing bad and not enough positive reports. I don't believe people in the cities are in a position to tell us how wildlife should be maintained. The Forest Service needs to do salvage logging and clean up the forests and get the roads maintained. Just leaving everything to the environmentalists means there's very little left for those in the industry."

Although he works long hours, Andy enjoys being his own boss. He likes to take a week of vacation the first week in October for the state's muzzleloader hunting season. Andy hunts elk and said that he usually gets one about every other year. "Nothing tastes better than elk meat," he said, "everything from steak to hamburger."

When asked about expanding his company more in the future, Andy said, "I've always been real conservative and grew in a way that was reasonable. At the moment I'd like to stay where I am at. But even with the restrictions and problems, there are opportunities. When the right opportunities come, we'll take advantage of them."