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Wisconsin Firewood Business Gets in High Gear

Company Seeking Year-Round Business Expands with Multitek Pro 2020CSC Firewood Processor

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HATLEY, Wisconsin — Josh Werner took over an established firewood business from his father, Joe, in 2001. Along with a change of owner and name to Werner Firewood LLC, Josh also decided to change equipment.

Josh wanted to ramp up production immediately, so he invested in a Multitek SFP18 firewood processor. That gave him the edge he needed to increase production so he could go after more customers.

He found them, and sales escalated. In fact, sales increased so much that by 2004, Josh was ready to sell the machine and replace it with another Multitek, a Pro Model 2020CSC firewood processor.

With early winter daytime temperatures in the negative double digits in the Upper Great Lakes region, Josh was too busy making firewood to take time to talk to *TimberLine* for this article. So he asked his father to fill in and discuss the business and its operations.

"I started the business 25 years ago, back in 1979," said Joe. "I started it basically because I needed wood to heat my house. I cut extra pulpwood to sell." Firewood sold for about \$65 per cord then, and it was good way for Joe to earn extra income.

Joe had extensive experience in heavy equipment repair, including welding and hydraulics. He drew on his mechanical expertise to make a home-built firewood saw rig and saw splitter.

Over the years, Joe adapted his business to tailor it to market conditions. He



Multitek Model 2020CSC firewood processor is equipped with integrated stacking conveyor for easy top-loading of trucks.

even did a stint in logging. "Back in 1991, I incorporated with another guy, and for about four years, we cut for lumber companies, pulpwood and saw logs," he said. "I ran a Tree Farmer C4D forwarder with a Barko loader" attached. Felling was done by hand with chain saws.

Even after they ceased logging, the Tree Farmer stayed with Joe. "I kept the forwarder. I cleared lots for developers, again with chain saws. In about 1995, Josh came into the business and helped me clear lots." Josh was still in high school then.

When Josh took over the firewood business, he wanted a processor that would enable him to increase production enough so that he could have a viable, year-round

business. He began in 2001 with the purchase of the SFP18 firewood processor from Multitek Inc., which is headquartered in Prentice, Wis.

The Multitek SFP18 enabled him to increase production immediately. "We did a cord an hour, up from a cord a day," said Joe.

Not only did the Multitek SFP18 allow Josh to automate the process for making firewood and increase production, it held its value. "Josh wanted to expand again in 2004, so he sold the Multitek SFP18 and got the same amount of money he paid for it three years earlier," said Joe. "It didn't lose any value."

Joe was not surprised by the way the

Multitek SFP18 firewood processor retained its selling price. "They build a very good product," he said.

When Josh sold his first Multitek, he already had his sights trained on his second. In fact, he bought the Multitek Pro Model 2020CSC Firewood Processor at the Green Bay Logging Congress in 2004. With the Multitek 2020CSC, Josh was able to increase production to two or more cords of firewood per hour.

Josh needed to increase production because he had a list of regular customers, such as restaurants and homeowners, lined up to buy two to six or even 10 cords of firewood for the heating season. He also had contracted to supply firewood on a wholesale basis to a business in Illinois that packages the firewood for eventual retail sale.

With the addition of the Illinois business as a customer, Josh needed to be able to load semi-trailers. When he bought the Multitek Model 2020CSC, which is equipped with an integrated stacking conveyor, he ordered an optional 5-foot conveyor extension so he had the capability to load semi-trailers easily.

The Multitek Model 2020CSC firewood processor is a heavy-duty machine designed for high volume firewood production. It automates the processes of bucking logs into firewood length and then splitting the sections of the log into finished firewood.

The frame is constructed of high-strength, lightweight alloy steel tubing. The processor features Multitek's exclusive in-feed shuttle grapple carriage that allows the operator to process the most crooked logs. The processor can cut and split low-grade hardwood logs up to 20 inches in diameter and 20 feet long.

Designed for low operating costs and easy maintenance, the Multitek 2020CSC is powered by a John Deere 54 hp turbo-diesel, liquid-cooled engine that carries a two-year warranty. A tandem hydraulic pump allows the operator to buck and split at the same time. The saw head is equipped with aggressive Oregon Micro Chisel cutters and a .404-inch pitch, .080-inch gauge, 35-inch bar saw. The firewood processor features operator-friendly hydraulic joystick controls, hydraulic oil cooler, auto-cycle splitter, and interchangeable 4-6-8-way vertically adjustable splitter blades.

For handling logs in his wood yard, Josh relies on a New Holland model 865 skidsteer equipped with a Multitek LG-200 log grapple attachment. (The Tree Farmer



Multitek's exclusive in-feed shuttle grapple carriage, visible above logs, enables operator to process the most crooked logs.

was traded in to get the skidsteer and log grapple attachment.) The Multitek log grapple attachment is very effective for handling crooked logs, said Joe, and Josh buys low-grade logs that usually are not straight.

"He's buying pulpwood in 100-inch lengths from loggers or lumber companies," said Joe. He buys primarily oak but also other species, including hickory, white birch, hard maple, white ash and yellow birch.

Josh buys all his logs delivered, but he may go back to a practice his father once used for obtaining logs. "He's considering going into land clearing," said Joe.

Another thing that Josh likes about the Multitek 2020CSC is the three-strand live deck, said Joe. It keeps short pieces from falling through, he explained.

For now, Josh uses the Multitek 2020CSC on one site. The Multitek firewood processor is made with a pintle hitch hook-up, however, and can be towed with a 1-ton dual-tire truck.

With the optional lights, Josh can operate the Multitek 2020CSC firewood processor in the early morning or evening. He plans to build a shed in the summer to house the Multitek 2020CSC. Until then, the firewood processor is used in the elements, and Josh covers it with a canvas at night.

"They've got a pre-heater on the engine," said Joe, so even in freezing winter temperatures the Multitek 2020CSC cranks up immediately and performs as expected. "Once the key is in the engine, it goes."

Josh did a considerable amount of re-

search before deciding to buy the Multitek 2020CSC, said Joe. "He looked at a lot of different processors out there, and he kept going back to Multitek."

Josh and Joe have extensive mechanical expertise. Besides repairing heavy equipment, Joe also helped his brother build elevator shafts at one time.

Josh earned a two-year degree in autocad technology from ITT Technical Institute in Milwaukee. "But he didn't want to look out the window," said Joe. Josh prefers working outdoors and being in business for himself. So he was interested when the opportunity arose to take over his father's business.

Werner Firewood is located in Hatley, which is in center of the Badger State. The town has a population of about 2,500 people. The region is a favorite destination of outdoor enthusiasts in all seasons.

Joe lives in Rothschild, a town of about 3,500 people located about 30 miles away. His home is just four miles from a rail line and a pulp mill.

"Although I would like to be part of (the business), I can't," said Joe, who has forced out because of an ailing shoulder joint.

Joe has been taking up a hobby he was never active in as a youth: model trains. "I've been collecting Lionel trains, especially the old ones," he said. "I never had trains as a kid. That's something I always wanted to do." He is building a room in his basement for model trains and is doing research in preparation for getting into trading of model trains.