

# RELIABLE FOCUSES ON RELIABILITY FOR LONG-TERM GROWTH

“When it comes to machine cost, we factor in price, efficiency and machine uptime and support. That is why we use Volvo. We can't afford to have our equipment breaking down.”

—John T. Baldwin Jr., Operations Manager, Reliable Contracting Co.



The Reliable Contracting Co. headquarters in Gambrills, Maryland — aptly named The Founders' Building — is framed with reminders of the people and decisions that have shaped the site-work contractor into one of the largest in the Baltimore-D.C. metro region, employing more than 400 across its multiple operations.

Sandstone from Reliable's quarry is excavated and stockpiled over the winter at its washing and crushing operation.

A restored 1928 grader, first used by Bill and Frank Baldwin to level earth for new homeowners, is mounted above the lobby. A timeline stretches the length of an entire wall charting historic points along Reliable's 87-year history. Murals and portraits punctuate the engineering and project management work.

“Today, we do everything from storm drain and sewer installation to site clearing, excavating, grading, and paving — really anything except the actual building of the structures themselves,” says John T. Baldwin Jr., Operations Manager. Projects range from residential paving jobs to over \$10 million site work packages.

A snapshot of Reliable's accomplishments shows both their range of capabilities

and progressive approach to being a full-service contractor:

- The grading and excavation division can move up to 10,000 cubic yards of dirt per day.
- Superintendents and field managers are “green card” holders, certified in sediment controls by the Maryland Department of the Environment.
- Reliable was the first commercial site contractor in Maryland to install a new type of environmentally-friendly storm water management system, known as Regenerative Stormwater Conveyance



Design (RSCD), that uses water-absorbing plants and rocks to channel water runoff.

- The commercial paving division is fed by three asphalt plants that produce hot mix, standard and high performance cold mixes, warm mix, glassphalt and recycled asphalt and concrete base material.

John T., as he is known around the company, is a third generation member of the Baldwin/Reliable family. Despite its growth Reliable is still a family operation, with several members in executive management and most residing within a ten mile radius of the corporate headquarters. This area, known as Waugh Chapel, is where John T.'s grandfather and great-uncle started mining for sandstone in the 1950's. Through the decades quarrying would become a heavy part of their business.

John T. and his father, John T. "Jack" Baldwin, manage the burgeoning army of equipment sustaining Reliable's operations. The 260-plus fleet includes 13 Volvo articulated haulers from 25 to 30 tons and nine Volvo loaders ranging from an L70E up to an L180G. The paving division contains Volvo DD24 small asphalt compactors and PF4410 and PF6170 Volvo pavers.

"The majority of our off-road articulated haul trucks and wheel loaders are used at the sandstone quarry to haul stone or to feed the asphalt plant hoppers. The haulers also move large amounts of dirt on our site excavation jobs," John T. says.

The Waugh Chapel location, just a stone's throw away from John's office, combines asphalt and aggregate production across a 75-acre campus.



John T. Baldwin Jr., and John T. "Jack" Baldwin with John Chartier from McClung-Logan Equipment Company.

Sandstone, concrete gravel and asphalt mixes, including reclaimed asphalt and #1 millings, are processed and purchased by local contractors and concrete pipe manufacturers in addition to being an internal supply source for Reliable's operations. The company annually produces and sells approximately 150,000 tons of sand and gravel products, 500,000 tons of hot mix asphalt, 75,000 tons of recycled concrete and 150,000 tons of recycled asphalt.

Sandstone from the quarry is excavated and trucked a quarter mile by the artic haulers to the washing and crushing operation. The sandstone is mined hard over the winter months and stockpiled into man-made mountains of more than several hundred thousand cubic yards of aggregate in preparation for spring and summer runs on materials. Rocks 12-inches diameter and larger are in high demand for use in retention banks as a cost-effective alternative to riff raff.

Volvo loaders are mainstays at the washing/crushing operation and asphalt plants. A Volvo L250G loader loops continuously between the unprocessed sandstone pile and hopper, effortlessly hoisting a 5.25 yd<sup>3</sup> hoist bucket of material up the incline to the hopper without the slightest lag in power.

John T. estimates the rubber tire loaders run a full 50-60 hours each week, averaging over 2600 hours per year. But high hours do not equate to high fuel consumption, John notes. "We are seeing the newer model Volvos using a lot less fuel than the competitor models. When you are putting the kind of hours we are on a machine, those gallons of fuel savings really add up."

Operating costs are just one part of the equipment purchasing equation.

John explains, "We have been buying Volvo Construction Equipment for over 25 years. When you're buying you always start with price, but as it is becoming harder to find qualified mechanics, we are now looking at equipment that requires less maintenance and doesn't break down as much. And when it does —because it let's face it all equipment will break eventually no matter the brand— what you want is a dealer like McClung-Logan who can get your machines fixed in a timely manner. They are committed to making sure we stay up and running. So when it comes to machine costs we have to factor in price, efficiency and machine uptime and support. That is why we use Volvo - we can't afford to have our equipment breaking down."

Regular maintenance can also win bids. Governmental projects are a significant part



of Reliable's portfolio and it is increasingly common for contractors to have all of their equipment on the job site under a service maintenance program. The clients require documentation of each machine by serial number with last serviced and next service dates. "If you do not have this documentation you cannot operate that piece of equipment on their project," John says.

Reliable has an in-house maintenance department but also relies on McClung-Logan for 100% servicing of equipment that is still within the warranty period. John says, "McClung-Logan knows Volvo equipment. My dad and grandfather relied on their dealership. It is about more than buying and selling equipment. They are committed to keeping us up and running whether that be with getting parts or repairs on time or even providing a loaner machine. That responsiveness plays heavily into why we choose McClung-Logan."

Headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, McClung-Logan Equipment Company has been a leader in the mid-Atlantic region for heavy equipment sales, service and rentals since 1939. Currently the dealership operates eight full service branches across Maryland, Virginia and Delaware.

Reliable Contracting uses the Volvo CareTrack telematics system on its haulers and wheel loaders to keep pace with its fleet. "It pays us to have the system so we can get service alerts and monitor how many hours the machines are working, if they overheated or had hot shutdowns, and show us exactly where each piece of equipment is," John adds.

Russell Hatfield has dual roles as Equipment Maintenance Manager and CareTrack Administrator. "We use the telematics system primarily to track machine hours and maintenance alerts. Every four to five weeks I also run operation reports to monitor idle time and fuel consumption. Compared to some other manufacturers' systems, CareTrack is much easier to use," he says.

Efficient machines and technology help ease the labor pinch, which Reliable is not alone in feeling. A recent poll by the Associated General Contractors of America trade group found that 83% of contractors are facing a workforce shortage. "Overall we have been lucky. A full 75% of our employees have been with us 10 years or longer, some up to 40 years. That retention is what has made our company successful. But we are still moving



L180G loader operator Michael Nelson has more than 15 years of experience running equipment. He notes, "I have run other brands but this Volvo is a more operator-friendly piece of equipment."

ahead and growing. We need mechanics and operators who see the construction field as not just a summer job but as a lifelong career. We go into the local high schools and vocational schools (through a partnership with Associated Builders and Contractors) to find students who might not know exactly what they want to do after they graduate, but they are ambitious and have a strong work ethic. It can be easier to take someone who is unskilled as an operator and teach them how we want our operators to use our machines versus taking an experienced operator who is set in their ways and retraining. Their way might not be the 'Reliable way' that we want our equipment run to be most efficient," John says.

Reliable runs a mentor program, now in its third year, for new college graduate hires to cycle through all aspects of the company, from operating equipment to project management and estimating, before taking up their permanent position.

Over at the asphalt plant, Michael Nelson is one of those long-tenured Reliable employees. Michael has operated wheel loaders at Reliable for 15 years, logging 10-12 hour days in the seat.

"I have run other brands of loaders but this Volvo L180G is a more operator-friendly piece of equipment. When you are an operator you want your controls right in front of you and to be comfortable," he says. "This machine moves well and is much more stable (than competitor brands). When you are loading a truck you don't lose any material and you can travel faster. It's nice to travel across a yard like this and not worry about spillage," Michael says. That is due to the Volvo-patented

torque parallel linkage that keeps the load level throughout the entire lifting range and the boom suspension system option which absorbs shock and limits bouncing.

He adds, "I am considered the 'floater loader.' In a day's time I go everywhere across this plant - from moving concrete sand to loading CR6 to pushing up asphalt - and I don't miss a beat. This machine does not stutter. It rolls along with whatever you are doing."

Michael also takes advantage of Volvo's OptiShift technology for short cycling. When the operator wants to change direction, with OptiShift activated it senses the loader's speed, direction and acceleration and slows the machine by automatically applying the service brakes. "This feature is nice when, for example, you are feeding the asphalt plant you can keep your foot on the pedal and start right into reverse and it disengages perfectly. There is no hitting the brake," he says. OptiShift also reduces wear on the torque converter.

For John T. there is also no hitting the brakes anytime soon. The company is taking more of a general contractor role specializing in project management and value engineering. Reliable is also active in local commercial and residential development, including the upmarket Waugh Chapel Town Centre, which coincidentally sits on one of their first quarry sites. Reliable Contracting and the Baldwin family are also strong proponents of their community, supporting Anne Arundel County schools, contributing to four major home renovation projects through Rebuilding Together Anne Arundel County, and a sponsor of the Chesapeake Conservancy. - October 2015