



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WATER WORKS

Lessons learned, hard work help Longmont excavation, utility firm build rapidly

Like many companies, Rocky Mountain Water Works' story starts small. The Longmont-based firm began putting in residential water and sewer line services about four years ago when Owners Ken Zetye and Nate Miller teamed up to found the business. Where their tale diverges from the ordinary is in the rapid growth Rocky Mountain Water Works experienced in a relatively short time frame.

"Ken and I were in the Marines together, so we knew each other long before starting the business. We were employed by other companies and decided it would be more fun to work for ourselves," explained Miller. "There was a pretty good learning curve at the start, but we remained flexible, took lessons from each job to apply to the next ones, and we worked hard. It's our belief that there isn't anything we can't handle now."

Rocky Mountain Water Works mainly focuses on large-scale commercial projects for

developers who often want the company to complete full site packages. The firm provides everything from clearing and grubbing to mass and fine grading, as well as installation of underground utilities that include water, storm and sanitary lines.

"We're often on a project from start to finish," said Zetye. "We take care of topsoil stripping at the beginning and putting it back and hauling off excess material at the end. In between, we level the site; dig for foundations and detention ponds; grade subgrade and put down base material for roads and parking lots; put in pipe; as well as whatever else is included in our contract."

"While it's our preference to do full site packages, we do break out our services," added Miller. "Developers usually ask us for two bids, one for excavation and another for utilities. Often, we give them a discount for doing both. Sometimes that goes in our favor, and there are times when they only want us to do one item. Whatever clients choose, we're willing to accommodate them to get it done on time and budget."

New ventures

That flexibility helped Rocky Mountain Water Works gain several repeat customers and grow quickly. Today, the company employs nearly 20 people, including key individuals such as Manager of Finance Justin Folkestad. With four field crews, the company covers all of northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. The owners estimate that approximately 80 percent of Rocky Mountain's contracts are commercial with the balance divided among agriculture, oil field and residential clients as well as municipalities. Within the past year, Rocky Mountain Water Works also began performing municipal utility jobs as a general contractor.

Nate Miller and Ken Zetye own and operate Longmont-based Rocky Mountain Water Works. The company offers excavation and utility services to commercial, municipal and other clients throughout northern Colorado and southern Wyoming.

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Operator Jason Anderson loads a vehicle from Fat Boy Truckers – a subsidiary of Rocky Mountain Water Works – with a Komatsu PC490LC-11 excavator on a jobsite in Greeley. “The PC490 has great power for putting pipe in the ground, loading trucks and anything else we use it for,” said Anderson. “It’s comfortable, and I really like the back-up camera so I can see what’s behind me.”



“Because we’re still a relatively new company, we had to build our bonding capacity, so that excluded us from bidding as a general,” noted Folkestad. “Fortunately, many of our large-scale commercial projects required bonding, and that gained us the history and capacity we needed to eventually make the move.”

To date, Rocky Mountain Water Works’ municipal projects have all involved utility installation, but the owners say they are happy to consider grading and paving jobs as well.

“We believe our experience in offering full site packages translates well into doing street work,” said Zetye. “Past contracts have included grading for parking lots and small roads. We have also taken on paving, and subbed that out, which is what we would likely do. We have the ability to handle nearly everything else ourselves.”

About the same time as when they expanded into municipal work, the owners of Rocky Mountain Water Works also added a subsidiary, Fat Boy Truckers. This ancillary business provides trucking services for the parent company and hires out to other contractors.

Strong Komatsu machinery

Crews for Rocky Mountain Water Works are currently busy with the Guadalupe Apartments in Greeley, which has involved putting in roughly 2,000 feet of concrete storm lines and a dozen manholes. The company also overexcavated



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Operator T.J. Fundermann moves dirt with a Komatsu WA320-7 wheel loader. “I like it for the ease of use,” said Fundermann of the loader. “It handles great and has plenty of power for digging and grading.”

the building footprint, moisture conditioned and recompact the existing soil, regraded the site and hauled off nearly 2,000 yards of dirt. In the spring, it will dig a detention pond.

One of Rocky Mountain’s most challenging jobs involved encasing an existing sanitary sewer line and installing new conduits under the Little Thompson River in Milliken. A crew had to divert the river and dewater before digging a trench,

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Justin Folkestad,
Manager of Finance

setting rebar and pouring concrete across a span of approximately 100 feet.

Rocky Mountain Water Works used its Komatsu PC490LC-11 excavator to dig and set the pipe. "Because the soil coming out was wet and heavy, we needed a strong machine to handle it," said Zetye. "The PC490 took care of it without issue. It has good reach, which was also essential to us. It's great for our deeper utility installations and larger pipe, as well as moving mass quantities of material."

The company added the PC490LC-11 about a year ago to a fleet that already included a PC210LC-10 excavator and a WA320-7 wheel loader purchased from Power Motive with the help of Territory Sales Manager John Custer.

"John brought us the PC210 to demo on a commercial site, and we ended up renting, then buying it," said Miller. "It's perfect for smaller

jobs, such as installing pipe up to about 14 inches. Before we got the PC490, we used the PC210 for many jobs that were probably too big for it. We pushed the limits of what it could do, and it always came through. The loader is a great all-around machine. We use it to backfill, move pipe, load trucks and more."

Financing for the machines was secured through Komatsu Financial with assistance from Power Motive. "They are very easy to work with, and the terms and rates are extremely attractive," said Folkestad. "We did some analysis with Komatsu and other brands. From a price standpoint, they are roughly the same. When you factor in Komatsu's financing and Power Motive's service, it's a much better value."

Routine, scheduled services are complimentary for the first 2,000 hours or three years on Tier 4 machines through the Komatsu CARE program. "It is added peace-of-mind knowing that Power Motive is tracking our equipment and that maintenance intervals are done on time," said Zetye. "John and Power Motive have been great in finding us the right equipment to meet our needs and ensuring that our downtime is minimal, right from the start. It's why we bought additional Komatsu pieces as well as Takeuchi machines."

(L-R) Rocky Mountain Water Works Owners Nate Miller and Ken Zetye along with Manager of Finance Justin Folkestad meet with Power Motive Territory Sales Manager John Custer. "John and Power Motive have been great in finding us the right pieces to meet our needs and ensuring that our downtime is minimal, right from the start," said Zetye.



Operator Brandon Allen digs with a Komatsu PC210LC-10 excavator on a jobsite in Greeley.



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Building a solid reputation

Rocky Mountain Water Works is looking to further diversify and make commercial and municipal activities a more even split. The owners also want to tap into other markets.

"We're committed to building relationships with additional developers and private individuals who have earthmoving projects," said Miller. "Our goal is to position the company so that if the commercial market takes a downturn, we have other sectors to focus our resources on, because we believe that commercial will slow down within a relatively short time."

"The size and scope of our business has exceeded where we thought it would be at this point," added Miller. "We get numerous bid requests on a weekly basis from new general contractors we haven't worked with before. That means we have a solid reputation, and our current customers are spreading the word. We want to continue to build on that." ■