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# ZAK DIRT

## Longmont excavation, concrete contractor offers long list of services

Walk or drive around Longmont, Colo., and you can see the diversity of projects completed by hometown company Zak Dirt. For example, it recently removed and replaced the Main Street Bridge with a new one that's wider and longer.

Running underneath the bridge is the St. Vrain River, where Zak Dirt is widening the channel to mitigate flooding. In addition, the company is currently the prime contractor for a \$13 million infrastructure project in that channel for a new city of Longmont water park. Crews are constructing drop structures made from boulders that are grouted together, putting down riprap, creating deflectors and riffle features as well as installing three pedestrian bridges.

In total, Zak Dirt will move nearly 300,000 yards of earth to shape the park and create proper drainage. A subcontractor will install piping for a sprinkler and irrigation system and another will put in more than 200,000 plants. Started in February, the project is scheduled to run through May 2018.

"When the St. Vrain flooded in 2013, Longmont was cut in half," explained President Jim Sewczak. "The city wants to reduce the risk of that happening again, and the bridge and

channel widening are part of that. Now, the bridge is double the width and length of the original, and we're increasing the flood plain. The city decided to incorporate the water park and add a recreational component where people can enjoy kayaking and other outdoor activities."

### Two components

Zak Dirt takes its name from the end of Sewczak, the name of the family who owns and operates the company. In addition to Jim, it includes his wife Kerry, who is the Corporate Secretary. Their sons, Pete and Jess, are Vice President and Superintendent respectively; son-in-law Angelo Mancina is Corporate Treasurer; and nephews Dan and Mike Sewczak serve as Operations Manager and Superintendent respectively.

"Zak Dirt is a heavy civil contractor with two components – earthwork and concrete," described Jim. "Ideally, we like to do things that involve both areas, such as a job moving 50,000 yards of dirt that also includes installing a new bridge. Those tasks allow us to combine everything we're good at. The water park is an example."

On the earthwork side, Zak Dirt does mass excavation, grading, roadwork, water conveyance and storage, in addition to utility installation on both public and private jobs. Often, it provides complete site packages that include clearing and grubbing, mass excavation, subgrade prep, installation of wet utilities and more. Typically, the company serves as the prime contractor and self-performs close to 80 percent of the work, subbing out traffic control and asphalt paving.

"We self-perform nearly everything on the concrete side as well," said Pete. "We offer full bridge construction; curb and gutter; sidewalk

(L-R) The ownership and management team at Zak Dirt includes President Jim Sewczak, Vice President Pete Sewczak, Corporate Treasurer Angelo Mancina and Superintendent Jess Sewczak. Not pictured is Operations Manager Dan Sewczak.





▶ VIDEO

Zak Dirt Operator L.T. Snyder cuts grade and loads trucks with a PC490LCi-11 on the water park in Longmont. "I really enjoy running it," said Snyder. "The *intelligent* Machine Control really saves a lot of time and money. I can take four to seven feet of material out and cut grade at the same time."

and street paving; and installation of box culverts and other structures. We consider ourselves a one-stop shop for concrete and dirt."

### One-man to multi-phase jobs

When Jim founded Zak Dirt 41 years ago it was a one-man operation primary for digging basements. He had a loader, a lowboy and a 1962 pickup.

"There were a lot of big earthwork companies doing large developments, and I basically took what they didn't want," Jim recalled. "I got in with some custom builders, who required more complex basement digs. The housing market was climbing at the time, and the business quickly grew to where we had 15 loaders digging basements, and we also did some grading. Based on history, I knew a downturn was inevitable, so in the early 1980s I decided to trade some loaders for motor graders and excavators and look into the public works sector."

Zak Dirt began by subcontracting, but before long Sewczak realized he would rather prime contract. He built up the company's bonding capabilities and began bidding directly on Colorado Department of Transportation projects, such as box culverts and bridges. In addition, the firm performed rehab on dams that involved replacing them with concrete structures and new outlets.

"Those early public works jobs were the genesis for our dirt and concrete components combining on a singular contract," Jim noted.



▶ VIDEO

Operator Kory Lesniak digs a utility trench with a Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control PC360LCi-11. "It's very accurate and smooth," said Lesniak. "You can't make a mistake. You get down to grade, and it stays right there. It can make an operator fat in no time."

"The business did fairly well with those, but it really took off in the early 2000s when the second generation started joining the business. Angelo, Dan, Jess and Pete all had formal training in engineering, mining and project management. They brought a fresh perspective, and we blossomed into doing more complex, multi-phased work."

Today, Zak Dirt typically carries a large anchor project that spans a year or longer, in addition to five or six other smaller jobs in varying stages of development. Staff numbers fluctuate depending on the amount of work. They have helped complete several large, high-profile projects related to the floods of 2013 as well as other highway and non-flood-related contracts.

Continued . . .

# 'Integrated excavators take GPS to another level'

... continued



▶ VIDEO

Steven Dungey,  
Equipment Manager

## Adding intelligent Machine Control

Nearly a year ago, Zak Dirt was looking for a new 100,000-pound trackhoe and went on a fact-finding mission, calling upon several dealer representatives. Among them was Power Motive Sales Rep Jeremy Griebel, who explained the benefits of Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control excavators with factory-integrated GPS that requires no masts or cables. Zak Dirt demoed one on a dam project.

"We were immediately impressed, so we purchased a PC490LCi-11 and a couple of months ago added a PC360LCi-11," stated Pete. "Our productivity increased while our material costs decreased because these excavators eliminate undercutting or overfilling. I think what stood out the most to me was using the PC490LCi to cut a slope, and when it was done,

the slope was as smooth as glass. We loaded the plans, and it cut right to grade with no stakes or grade checkers. There was no need for a second machine to come behind it and clean up. That's a huge savings."

Zak Dirt also uses the *intelligent* Machine Control excavators for digging utility trenches, and put them to work constructing the drop structures at the water park in Longmont. "Each one is very wavy, so they are complex digs," said Mancina. "With *intelligent* Machine Control, we did it all without a stake and in a lot less time than if we had used traditional excavators and methods. They helped us get, and stay, ahead of schedule. We are longtime users of GPS technology. The integrated excavators take it to another level."

In addition to the newer excavators, Zak Dirt continues to use an older PC400LC that has approximately 13,000 hours on it. "We seek longevity from our equipment, and the PC400 has certainly given us that," said Pete. "It's still going strong. We are aggressive regarding maintenance, so we appreciate that Komatsu and Power Motive are as well, with programs like Komatsu CARE. It shows they are committed to standing behind the machines and ensuring our uptime. Jeremy, Technology Solutions Expert Mike Snediger, Parts and Service Rep Roudy Redenbaugh and the entire Power Motive team are great to work with."

## Fun and exciting

Zak Dirt continues to take a measured approach to growth, letting it occur naturally. The company's leadership wants to continue that philosophy going forward, although it has explored other opportunities and markets.

"We often pause and assess ourselves to see if we are still on the right track and ensure we are taking care of our customers properly," said Jim. "It's also important to us that we don't stretch ourselves thin and lose our passion for the business. What we do is fun and exciting, and we want that to always be the case."

"I believe it will be, because Dad has done a great job of mentoring the second generation," added Pete. "We have good core values and a family atmosphere with the staff. They deserve a lot of credit for our ability to get jobs like the water park and bridge in Longmont done on time and budget. We believe the future is very bright." ■



This Zak Dirt operator places material and smooths a bank with a Komatsu WA470 wheel loader on rent from Power Motive.

(L-R) Zak Dirt's Jim Sewczak, Pete Sewczak, Angelo Mancina and Jess Sewczak meet with Power Motive Sales Rep Jeremy Griebel and Parts and Service Rep Roudy Redenbaugh. "Jeremy, Technology Solutions Expert Mike Snediger, Parts and Service Rep Roudy Redenbaugh and the entire Power Motive team are great to work with," said Pete.

