



Dash 3s

Go Deep for Houston Underground Specialist

Few major U.S. cities faced the economic hit Houston took in the post-oil bust period of the late 1980s. But “Space City” bounced back with a flourish, which stands as a testament to the durability and resourcefulness of the people who live there. With region-wide redevelopment in full swing and large residential communities springing up on almost a daily basis, companies like C.E. Barker, Ltd. are capitalizing on that progress. In only a decade, the Houston-based underground construction specialist has grown from a six-person operation to 200 employees, with nearly 60 projects tackled this year alone.

MODEST START, QUICK RECOGNITION

Formed in 1996, the company has, through hard work and perseverance, become recognized as one of the area’s fastest growing specialists in the construction of underground water, sanitary sewer, storm mains, and other services in both the private and municipal markets. “Essentially,” says Connard Barker, company Founder and President, “if it’s underground utility work, we can handle it.”

Barker adds that 20 percent of their work involves excavation and creation of retention ponds, paving, and utility

rehab projects in existing subdivisions. However, a good part of their work has come from the proverbial Texas-sized developments in The Woodlands.

IT TAKES MANY VILLAGES

The Woodlands, first established in 1974, is a master-planned community located 30 miles (48 kilometers) north of Houston. Currently consisting of seven separate communities or Villages, these Villages may have as many as 6,000 lots. The development’s population growth rate is impressive, rising from 29,000 residents in 1990 to nearly 81,000 today. Barker’s company has been instrumental in provid-

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ing underground work in various parts of The Woodlands, including these Villages.

“We’ve been fortunate to have the steady growth that projects like The Woodlands, Village Creek, Spring trails, and others provide this area,” comments Barker. “And it shows no sign of slowing down. We are currently doing water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer on a development called Bridgelands. It calls for us to lay nearly 25,000 lineal feet (7620 meters) of pipe.”

Barker explains they can have up to 10 crews doing utility work and generally have a pair of excavators on each project: one to excavate and

the second to lay and cover pipe. “In addition to the utility crews, we have one crew doing land clearing, five doing excavation, and four doing cleanup — about 20 crews at work at any given time.”

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Up until about five years ago, C.E. Barker’s fleet was heavily loaded with Samsung machines. Then the area Hitachi dealer, ROMCO, paid a visit.

“It was really excellent timing on their part,” says Barker. “We had already been hearing about Hitachi breakout forces, digging depths, and cycle times — all the key areas where we needed improvement. The dealer underscored what we’d been hearing

so we decided to give Hitachi a chance. Based on the performance of those first machines — plus the support we got from the Hitachi dealer — we’ve been replacing older equipment with Hitachi ever since.”

Barker initially bought a pair of EX330s, then added a third shortly afterwards. With their latest purchase — a trio of Zaxis 350LC-3s — Barker says they are seeing benefits that surpass their expectations.

“I’ve spoken to my operators who are on the new Dash-3s, and they tell me they definitely have more lifting capacity, better response times, and a noticeably more comfortable feel in the cab. I know most manufacturers

are trying to make their machines more operator-friendly, but Hitachi has made some improvements in comfort and visibility that our operators really appreciate.”

While the performance-based improvements of the Dash-3s are winning praise from his operators, Barker is even more upbeat about the fuel efficiency.

“We haven’t done any direct cost comparisons at this point,” he says, “but all indications are that we will be able to run these new units for two days on a single tank of fuel. That’s an

impressive upturn in fuel economy for us and, given the cost of diesel these days, a real boost to our bottom line.”

FAMILY IS (ALMOST) EVERYTHING

Barker says he and his wife Sherry, who both manage their company, were recently discussing the importance of equipment maintenance when a situation arose that illustrated the point perfectly.

“We had a foreman leave to go to our competition and he took his crew — which also happened to be his family — with him. Three days later the foreman’s family returned, asking for

their jobs back. The main reason they wanted to come back was they liked the equipment we use and appreciated the way we maintained it.”

Barker says they did take them back, and adds that one example speaks volumes for the way they choose to do things. “We really believe in giving our people the right tools to do the job, and for us the right tools are our new Hitachi Dash-3s.”

C.E. Barker, Ltd. is serviced by ROMCO Equipment, Houston.



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