



Fuel Savings Leads Florida Firm to Hitachi

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Quarries/Site Prep

In an industry where companies regularly tout lineages in decades, Steven Counts, Inc. (SCI) definitely goes against the grain. Established just six years ago by Steven Counts and three others, what the Summerfield, Florida-based company lacks in corporate history is offset by tremendous growth. Today, SCI has more than 400 employees, operates 350 pieces of heavy equipment, and heads up some of the highest-profile development projects in the Ocala area.

A DOT-certified specialist in road construction, SCI also handles onsite development projects for commercial and municipal customers. Its true forte, however, is subdivision work, with 20 to 25 projects underway at any given time. In late 2005, rising fuel costs led Counts to search for more fuel-efficient excavators. As a result, his fleet is becoming as orange as Florida's most famous crop.

EARLY-OUT BENEFITS

It's no secret that Florida's residential construction market is hot. With an estimated 1,100 new residents moving in every day, it's obviously a big part of SCI's rapid growth. However, SCI's vertically integrated strategy has made a big impact on the company's fortunes as well.

"I am a firm believer in getting a job done right, getting it done efficiently, and getting it done quickly," says Counts. "Having control of the

materials needed to support our operation removes many of the adverse variables. As a result, we own two lime-rock pits, a pair of asphalt plants, and our own concrete plant. We even make our own concrete blocks. This allows us to maintain the tight schedules we set for ourselves and, whenever possible, finish a project early. 'Early out' means we might benefit from available incentives, or that we can simply move on to another project more quickly. Either way, it's a plus for our customer and our company."

The plants used to support all of SCI's operations are large. The asphalt plant generates more than a half-million tons per month. The cement plants each yield more than 15,000 yards per month. And they've produced an impressive 42,000 concrete blocks each day, with an eye to upping that to 50,000.

PUSH FOR ECONOMY

One of the few variables SCI could not control was the skyrocketing cost of fuel; the equipment used for both plant operations and site work consumed massive quantities. Counts turned to Highland Tractor, its dealer from the get-go, for answers.

"Together, we saw the economic benefit of replacing many of our existing excavators with Hitachi Zaxis 330s and 450s," Counts says. "Our machines operate an average of ten hours a day, six days a week,



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in applications ranging from overburden removal to loading lime rock in quarries to excavation in our land-development operations. The possibility of saving three gallons per hour, per machine, looked real good to us. We liked the idea of installing Auto-Lube on the new machines, too.”

Hitachi Zaxis machines use highly fuel-efficient Isuzu engines. Their thriftiness, coupled with Zaxis' various power modes, has produced fuel savings as high as 15 percent

over comparably sized models. Counts estimates their annual fuel budget has been slashed by about \$285,000.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

SCI is the prime contractor on many of northcentral Florida's biggest developments, including The Villages — the nation's largest self-contained planned community. Located about 25 miles south of Ocala, the sprawling development spans three counties. When completed it will be home to 75,000 residences, 26 golf courses, its own school system, entertainment complexes, recreational facilities, shopping centers, and more.

“I was involved in the Villages' development as far back as 1989 when I was with my father's company,” says Counts. “Since taking over in 2000, we've moved millions of yards of dirt and created several large lakes. The scope of that project is just amazing.”

SCI is also currently clearing a 1,300-acre site for Stone Creek, one of the many prestigious planned communities by Pulte Homes. Besides general clearing work, SCI will create a number of lakes and water features. Over 4.5-million yards of material will be moved by the project's completion.

“There's no real secret to our success in this business,” says Counts. “We simply work very hard to get things done right. Fortunately, we have some excellent equipment in our fleet of Hitachis to help us do that, and an equally impressive level of support from our dealer. They understand our needs and keep us moving. They're a nice partner to have in this business.”

SCI, Inc. is serviced by Highland Tractor, Ocala, Florida.

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