



## Youthful Logger's Success Secrets

### Urban Forestry, founded in 2003, succeeds at a time when other companies struggle

By Jeff Mullins

At the young age of 27, John Myers, founder of Urban Forestry of Thompson Falls, Mont., has accomplished a level of success many loggers only dream about during this industry slowdown.

The quiet, yet energetic, man is more inclined to express gratitude rather than boast as his company continues to work profitably, while many industry veterans idle millions of dollars worth of machinery and struggle just to stay afloat.

While still in high school, John dreamed of being a logger like his uncle, rather than working on his family's eastern Montana ranch. His first step was climbing trees for a tree service company at age 17. Upon high school graduation, he relocated to North Carolina and logged for awhile, before returning to western Montana where he began felling timber for an established commercial logging operation on their line side.

About two years later, the 20-year-old struck out on his own and founded Urban Forestry. While admired by some, others thought John's youthful entrepreneurial spirit would soon be quenched by disappointments and financial burdens too great for a young upstart company to endure in Montana's competitive logging industry. Yet John demonstrated a savvy beyond his years. He says the secrets to his success are not really secrets at all.

#### Niches for Success

As John began to learn the ropes of logging in western Montana, he soon saw a need for a type of "urban logger" — a company that could provide rural landowners logging services that balanced merchandising timber with rural timber stand management.

"Although most landowners want to get the most value for their timber, rural small acreage landowners often are more concerned about "post logging" aesthetics than maximizing profits," he says.

In 2003, Urban Forestry was founded to specifically meet the desires of small landowners. For the next two years, John Myers built his company "harvesting timber" on a lot of 20-acre patches, equipped with only a chainsaw and a Komatsu D31 dozer with a winch. Other equipment was slowly added to improve efficiency, including an ASV RC 100 with a Fecon masticating head.

His operation grew and today includes mechanized commercial harvests. John says, "Urban Forestry's continued profitability is tied to filling a niche with superior services clients need."

#### Networking

John recalls invaluable advice offered by his former employer, Gerry Miller, when John shared his intent to start his own logging company — "Be careful not to grow too fast." John admits in retrospect that he should have followed more diligently.



In hindsight John says, “Any success I have experienced is related to the help that I have received from other loggers. Although we are in competition, we are also friends. I have benefited so much from industry veterans who have shared suggestions and ideas.” He adds, “When I began, there was so much I did not know, that I did not know how much I did not know.”

Today Myers serves on the board of the Montana Loggers Association and considers his relationship with other loggers as one of his greatest assets.

### **Knowing the Numbers**

From the beginning, Urban Forestry has benefited from detailed evaluation of the cost of production for each aspect of the operation and each piece of equipment. This careful scrutiny governed equipment decisions as the young company slowly grew.

Company growth focused on being more efficient in harvesting rural timber parcels while implementing landowner management plans — leaving sites looking more like parks than harvesting operations. Slow and sequential steps toward self-sufficient mechanization were taken.

John says this same attention to the numbers has allowed him to scale down his operation from a 6-man crew to only two today. Knowing precisely the cost/production relationship of each machine and operation makes it easy to decide what equipment to keep working and which to idle or sell.

“We do not move as much wood today as previously, but we keep expenses down and we keep working longer,” says John. “We could easily double production, but that could mean working ourselves out of a job too.”

In 2010, felling is accomplished on a State timber sale with a Timbco T435 feller buncher with a Quadco hot saw. A John Deere 548E grapple skidder pulls turns to landings where a Samsung SE210 carriage equipped with a Denarco DT3000 stroke delimeter processes, sorts, and decks logs as well as stacking slash into piles.

A Serco 20 log loader mounted on an International truck loads long logs onto the company’s Peterbuilt log truck and, for each load delivered to the mill, a “pup” is loaded with short logs to maximize transportation efficiency.

When needed, pre-commercial thinning and cleanup after harvest operations are accomplished with a Fecon masticating head mounted on an ASV RC100.

### **Gathering New Ideas**

The same “outside the box” thinking that gave birth to Urban Forestry in the beginning continues to be an important part of its formula for success.

“Bids are often accepted based on the “best value” rather than the lowest bid,” says John. “The creative thinking process involved in economically accomplishing the goals of rural land owners is similar to generating bid proposals to meet the challenges of adding value to a project that will win the bid without breaking the bank.”

He adds, “I am always thinking about innovative solutions to problems and challenges.”



## **Love for the Job**

Maybe one of John's biggest secrets is a passion for the job.

"Often logging is simply a whole lot of hard work and, most of the time, the money is not that great," he says. But his love for logging enables him to keep his "nose to the grindstone." Also his aspiration to perform a notch above the pack gives him that slight edge that keeps him gainfully employed when more seasoned veterans may be finding it hard to keep working.