



## It's in the details

Ward Weare Logging Contracting--the Canadian Woodlands Forum Atlantic Contractor of the Year--may have a simple business philosophy, but the outfit does an expert job of taking care of the details that make that philosophy work.

*By George Fullerton*

Ward Weare and Marilyn Leopold are modest about their logging operation being selected Canadian Woodlands Forum's Outstanding Contractor of the Year for Atlantic Canada for 2009.

"It was a real honour for us to be selected as the Outstanding Logging Contractor for Nova Scotia, and then to go on and be selected for the entire Atlantic region is especially rewarding for us," said Marilyn.

"I don't think that we do anything special in our operation," Ward says. "We just try to keep all the equipment operating well, meet all the guidelines for the woods operation and deliver the best product we possibly can."

A pretty simple philosophy, but it's quite a handful when you consider the operation includes three Timberjack 608 processors, a Timberjack 608 buncher, two TreeFarmer forwarders and two Fabtek forwarders. The equipment list is rounded out with two trucks; one for floating and one assigned to log hauling. They also have two hired log trucks. The operation has eight full time operators, in addition to Ward and Marilyn.

The provincial awards and the Atlantic Outstanding Logging Contractor Award were developed to raise the profile and recognition of the logging profession and its contribution to managing the forest resource. Nominations are made by woodlands staff from the four Atlantic Provinces, and the award is made during the CWF's annual spring meeting.

Rod Babcock and Breck Stuart, foresters with Abitibi-Bowater in Liverpool N.S., jointly nominated Ward and Marilyn. Babcock contends that Ward Weare Logging Contracting Ltd. is indeed a pretty special operation, and certainly worthy of the honour.

"I think Marilyn and Ward have an exceptional operation, in just about any aspect you want to look at," says Babcock. "I have never seen a contractor operation that paid so much attention to detail, in every aspect of their business."

Babcock went on to point out that Ward has a natural mechanical aptitude, and that the uptime of his equipment reflects that. He added that the logging outfit receives consistently high marks for utilization, and there is a concentrated effort from the stump to the mill to keep the wood looking neat and organized.

"Each operator takes time to ensure their wood piles are neat and orderly, and that extends right through to mill delivery. That attention to presentation leads to consistently high wood quality evaluation at every mill they deliver to," explained Babcock.

"Their service trailer is the best organized and equipped that I have ever seen. There is a place for every thing, and every thing is in its place. Everyone puts a lot of effort into keeping the work site neat and meeting utilization and production



targets.”

“Part of their business success is due to their low employee turnover,” said Babcock, “Ward and Marylyn maintain a positive work environment, and their employees buy into that, and carry out their tasks in a highly effective manner.”

Ward had humble beginnings in the industry. “I started in the woods, behind the horse, working with my father,” he explains. “Marilyn and I then bought a cable skidder in 1989 and went to work for Harry Freeman and Sons, and part time with Mersey-Bowater. In 1997, we bought a new Timberjack 608 processor and incorporated the business as Ward Weare Logging Contracting.”

In the early years, Marilyn handled the payroll, paperwork and other business while working as a health care professional in the Bridgewater Hospital. She took early retirement in 2007, and focused full time on business management.

“By 2007, we had seven or eight operators, plus we were seeing increased demand from Mersey-Bowater for paperwork for safety certification, MSDS sheets and that sort of thing, which takes a lot of administration time and effort,” explained Marilyn.

One unconventional aspect of the operation is that they work a single ten hour shift.

“We tried working a double shift, but it was just crazy running around in the night trying to fix broken machines,” says Ward. “We did that for a while, but we decided it was not worth it. We switched to single shift, and everyone likes it a lot better.

“Our contract is for 45,000 tonnes of wood to Bowater and they don’t care if it comes from a single shift or double shift operation, as long as it is on schedule. If we have some bad weather, or expect winter storms, the crew will come in on Saturdays or put in a few extra hours through the week, just to make sure we make our production targets. Single shift provides us all with a better quality of life, and we keep the operation profitable.”

Their current harvesting team consists of a Timberjack 608 buncher with a 22 inch Koehring head (usually with Ward operating), and the in-the-woods processing continues with two 608 processors with 762C heads, and a 608 with a 762B head. The forwarding side includes two four-wheel-drive TreeFarmers, one six-wheel-drive Fabtek and one four-wheel-drive Fabtek with floatation tires.

“I was planning to change from floatation to conventional tires, but never quite got around to it,” says Ward. “But since we have floatation, we put that machine into soft areas and get the wood out with very little disturbance, and that’s good for our operation and the forest.”

Ward says they have had good luck with used machines. “We have bought only one new 608. Part of our good luck is the knowledge we have built up with the machine, so we can fix things before they fail. Each operator also keeps a log of their individual maintenance and repairs. Over the years we have only had one major engine failure while a machine was working.”



They keep a close eye on the equipment, and they know when an engine or pump is worn out. “We’ll plan to take that machine out of production and make the repairs,” says Ward. “We use Hydrostatic Services in Moncton for our major hydraulics work. If we need a pump rebuild, we schedule our machine downtime with their schedule, so that the pump is back in the shortest possible time.”

Most of the mechanical work is done in the woods, and for bigger repairs they take the machines to their shop at West Clifford, north of Liverpool.

Ward remarked that the consistent machine uptime they enjoy is a direct reflection of the good relations with suppliers like Wallace Equipment in Halifax, their source of supply for Timberjack parts. For Fabtek and TreeFarmer parts, he relies on Wilson Equipment in Truro.

“We get our bars from KG Chase Ltd. and chain from ALPA Equipment,” says Ward. “I’m not afraid to shop around to find the best deal. We also bought our BWS trailer and Rotobec loader from ALPA.”

While they certainly have good iron, Ward says that teamwork has been the key to their business success.

“I don’t come to work expecting to tell my employees what they are going to do. I look for input from each employee about day to day operations, and how we are going to get the job done. It’s the same with safety. Even though we have a formal monthly meeting, safety is a day-to-day issue that we discuss and work at all the time.

“If we didn’t have the men I have now, we simply could not operate,” noted Ward. “They are all committed to seeing our operation succeed, meeting our production targets and to us staying profitable. I have a lot of confidence in their commitment.”

Trucking is a relatively new addition to the operation. The fleet consists of a 1997 and a 2008 Western Star tractors, one dedicated to a Talbert float and the second to the BWS trailer with a Rotobec loader, and two owner-operator truckers.

“When Bowater first suggested we handle the trucking, I said no, but then we thought about it for a while, and we figured it might help our overall operation,” he explained.

“When you are relying on someone else to haul your wood, you have less control. When we handle the trucking, we know our trucks are dedicated to hauling our wood, and the wood will get to the mills. We get paid on delivered wood, so that helps us plan our overall operation a lot better.”

Receiving the Nova Scotia and the Atlantic Outstanding Contractor of the Year award was Ward and Marilyn’s first experience with Canadian Woodlands Forum meetings.

“I was aware of the Woodlands Forum meetings, but I always seemed to be working,” Ward says. “Our first meeting was when we picked up this award, and I have to admit I was quite impressed. There is an awful lot of information that is exchanged at the contractor meetings and I’m thinking maybe we should have been attending all along. It seems like a good chance to pick up ideas that could help make our business more profitable.”