

## The Next Generation

### Precision forestry

*By Andrea Watts*

While his contemporaries in the Arlington-Darrington area went to Boeing for jobs, Blair Stadin remained true to his roots and fulfilled a dream he had since he was four years old — owning his own logging equipment.

While Precision Forestry's 33-year-old owner might not have the multiple decades of experience in the timber industry that other owners have, logging is in Stadin's blood, and he has had many mentors give him invaluable advice that is making his business successful.

### Starting Young

Though his uncles and father were in the trucking and road building side of logging, Stadin went a different route and joined Pacific Logging when he was 15 years old. His early responsibilities had him sweeping floors and cleaning equipment before learning how to operate the machinery. Working at Pacific Logging gave him the opportunity to run some of the first Waratahs in the state.

Following the dissolution of the company in 2002, Maurice "Babe" Giebel, Tom Kriegal, and John Mattson started Precision Forestry in 2003 and based the company out of Arlington. Stadin came aboard as their first employee. "[Babe] took me under his wing, and John also taught me a lot about the logging," Stadin says.

The partnership remained intact until 2007, the year which saw Mattson and Kriegal relinquish ownership after the company sold its tower and the economy went haywire. Giebel continued on as owner of Precision Forestry, with Mattson remaining on as part of the crew.

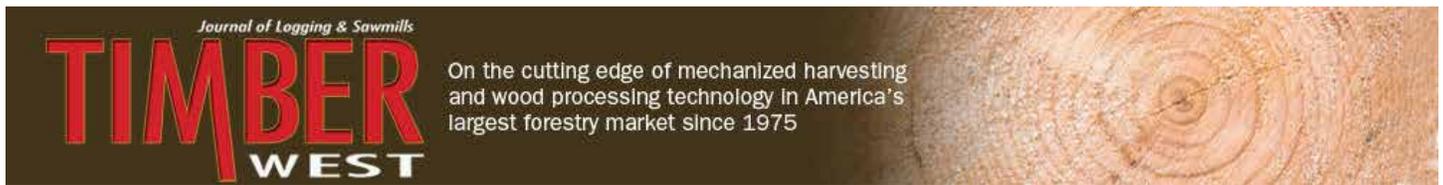
### Taking the Helm

To remain viable, Giebel and his crew took jobs along the coast, traveling down to the Belfair-Hood Canal area for five to six years and working jobs in Montesano and Moclips.

The untimely death of Giebel three years ago left Stadin running the company with Giebel's wife retaining ownership until July 1, 2013, when Stadin became the sole owner.

"That was kind of Babe's dream to pass it on, and Babe's wife, Bonnie, is pretty excited to see the company continue," Stadin says. "My family is also supportive of me assuming ownership; my wife always knew it was my dream to have a logging business."

The company's name says it all about how Giebel, and now Stadin and his crew, approach a job. "We like to have things precise," says Stadin. "Everything needs to be precise, right on time every time." He adds that while for most companies it is all about production, his crew also cares about doing the cleanup, whether on the landing or where crews will be planting. Something the landowners appreciate.



“It is about taking pride in our work,” Stadin says.

### **Business Improves**

An uptick in the demand for logs resulted in Stadin and his crew remaining around the Granite Falls area for the past two years where the Douglas-fir and western hemlock grow well and the volume of board feet on the landscape would surprise many.

“Lots of people don’t know all the timber that’s up here,” says Stadin.

At the Granite Falls job site where this article took place, Stadin feels a connection to the area. His grandmother grew up in a logging camp not far from where he is working. “It’s kind of neat [that] what we’re logging is what they logged in the 30s and 40s.”

In 2013 Precision Forestry was “slammed with work,” having already processed an estimated 18-20 million feet and usually working 50-hour weeks. This year promises to be just as busy. Precision Forestry was booked with jobs through June before the end of last year.

### **Working for Sierra Pacific**

Jobs have included volumes of ½ million to 9.5 million, the latter being the largest Stadin has worked on. His work takes him mostly onto Washington State Department of Natural Resources forestland where he serves as a subcontractor for Sierra Pacific Industries.

“One good thing about working with Sierra is they utilize all the wood. Nothing goes to waste,” Stadin says. He credits Fred Nyman at Sierra Pacific Industries for vouching that Precision Forestry could consistently produce the required daily 18-20 loads in spite of their three-person crew.

Precision Forestry performs ground-based operations. Stadin and his crew run year-round unless weather conditions, such as snow or excessive rain, shut down operations. Now that he is an owner, Stadin laughs, “there are no days off.” He also does some subcontract work for A.L.R.T based out of Bellingham, the Stella-Jones mill based out of Arlington, and Merrill Ring.

The crew includes Stadin and Martin Giebel, Babe’s older brother who started working in the industry when he was 18 years old. Now 73, he is still out on the job site working the shovel logger. “If I sit at home, I’d rust up,” Martin says. Even Mattson, who retired in 2011, can still be found out on the job site when he is needed to fill in, and Stadin consults with him on the difficult decisions.

The other crewman is 29-year-old John Spillman who Stadin met while working jobs in Belfair. I decided to bring him on because “he’s got a good background and can run anything,” Stadin says. Spillman is from a logging family in Seabeck and even before high school graduation, he was out working in the woods. He joined Precision Forestry a year and a half ago and has not regretted his decision.



## **Investing in New Equipment**

To ensure consistent delivery of 18-20 loads each day, Stadin recently invested in new equipment. When Stadin purchased a brand-new Link-Belt 350 from Triad Machinery (the Tacoma branch), he admitted having doubts whether he made the right decision because of the cost involved. "But Ken Schirman, the salesman made an offer I couldn't refuse, and it's a pretty good machine," Stadin says. He describes the machine as having the same power as the 370, and its lighter weight does not appear to affect its stability.

The investment has now paid off, allowing Stadin's crew increased production by two to three loads per day. His equipment portfolio is now all Link-Belt, and Stadin likes the brand for its reliability, quickness, and smoothness. Spillman describes the Link-Belt 240 with a 226b Waratah processing head as a nice machine. The crew's shovel logger operates the new Link-Belt 350, while Martin operates another Link-Belt 240 to load the trucks.

The hauling side of the business is contracted out. Buck Thom's Trucking dedicates one truck to Stadin's jobs, and the rest are independents. The truck boss who handles all the logistics is Jim Sawyer, another former employee of Pacific Logging who has worked with Martin for 41 years.

## **Connecting and the Future**

Along with listening to the stories and learning from the experience of other folks in the industry, Stadin is active with Washington Contract Loggers Association and Hoo-Hoo. His company also has a Facebook page, which he credits for helping him connect with others in the industry.

In the future, he sees Precision Forestry possibly branching out into cable logging or into trucking, but even with this expansion, Stadin expects to stay small. "I don't want to change. Why change something that's working?"

He also sees his company becoming more of a family affair, with his wife eventually taking over the books when Bonnie retires, and his son likely joining. His son's interest reassures Stadin that the younger generation is considering logging as a career. And having read articles that tell of the environmental groups and timber industry starting to see more eye to eye, he feels good about the future.

Stadin recognizes how unusual it is for someone his age to be an owner of a logging company, but he believes he and his company have earned the respect of his colleagues. And youth has its benefits. At the 2013 Deming Logging Show, he and Todd Covey earned the title of Best of Show Load of Logs and Best Load of Doubles.

"Even if I win the lottery," says Stadin, "I would still be here on Monday."