



Bridging Time

Boettcher & Sons builds bridges across the Pacific Northwest

By Tillie Vuksich

What can be said about a business that has been serving its customers for generations? They must be doing something right!

Companies that find a need and fill it, while supporting others in their trade, stand out as trusted and respected businesses that stand the test of time. Caleb Boettcher is at the helm of one such company: Boettcher & Sons based out of Eatonville, Washington.

Decades of Experience

Caleb's grandfather, Ernest Boettcher, a German immigrant who settled in Alder, Washington, built a homestead while working for the Weyerhaeuser Company filing the cross-cut saws that the loggers used at that time. Ernest taught the skills needed to log land and build a home to his son, Bill, while also passing on his faith and perseverance. Later in life, Bill started Boettcher & Sons with his four sons (Daniel, Caleb, Seth, and Ben). The family business specialized in logging and cattle.

During the 1980s, the logging and cattle industries took a downturn, leaving the small family-run company to look for other sources of revenue to stay in business. Caleb was fresh out of college and saw the potential for bidding on local construction jobs that utilized the company's skills and equipment. "We got creative to keep getting jobs," says Caleb. "We used the logging equipment to do jobs for construction to keep the company moving forward and to avoid hard times."

Small Outfit – Successful Business Strategy

For the Boettcher family, keeping the outfit small and local has been a successful business strategy. The current seven-member crew is made up of brothers Caleb and Daniel Boettcher, Brian Rath, Alex Isom, Joe Pugh, Mike Harris, and Ken Ames.

Boettcher & Sons also employs college kids during the summer and others as needed for specific jobs. Sarah, Caleb's wife, does the books and handles all the administrative responsibilities for their business. Caleb's children, and the children of the crew, have worked summers with Boettcher & Sons. The hope is that one day, after these children finish college and gain job experience in other lines of work, they will see the value of being their own boss and come work in the family business. After all, the biggest perk of working for this company is working with your friends and family day in and day out.

Wide Range of Clients

Over the years, Boettcher & Sons has been contracted by Weyerhaeuser and government agencies like the Department of Natural Resources. The jobs Caleb bids on, however, are mostly for public entities. Recently, the company put in a 100-space campground at Lake Cushman. The company has also built several public parks in Western Washington: Ashford Park in Ashford; Kettle View Park in Olympia; Alder Street Park in Eatonville.



One of the benefits of installing these family play spaces is that they bring a community together. In 2014, they put in the Bud Blancher Trail in Eatonville. The project consisted of clearing the 2.5-mile trail and grading it before laying down a 10-foot wide trail of crushed gravel. They installed two 12-foot wide wooden pedestrian bridges over the Mashel and Little Mashel rivers. They had to remove the old bridge center concrete pier that had collapsed before starting the installation of the new bridges. Keeping with state regulations, they did habitat restoration on the riverbed by bringing in tree stumps and forest debris that will create habitat for spawning fish and frogs.

Boettcher & Sons relies mainly on their trusted John Deere equipment to complete their jobs. They have in their lineup a host of Deere equipment: 700H dozer, a 135 reduced tail swing excavator, 270 Log Loader/Excavator, 330 excavator, 35D mini excavator, 544 wheel loader and a 548 skidder. They also have a Hitachi 250 Keto Processor. They purchase most of their equipment through Papé Machinery, and that's working well. "We've had a lifelong relationship with Papé Machinery and Cascade Trader out of Olympia for equipment," says Caleb.

Keeping the Crew Happy

One of the biggest challenges for Caleb is finding projects that are fun and rewarding for his crew—and for himself. Caleb enjoys working with his crew to tackle jobs, both big and small. The team is experienced in handling the "unknowns" that cause the most issues on the job site. "It's when common sense goes out the window that we have the most problems," says Caleb.

Partnering with quality suppliers allows Boettcher & Sons to keep many issues from cropping up. Caleb says they have had great success working with local companies such as Concrete Technology Corporation out of Tacoma and Knife River out of Oregon. They have also used Western Wood Structures out of Tualatin, Oregon, for bridges they have installed, like the ones in Eatonville. And for culverts, they have relied on Contech Engineered Solutions, also headquartered in Tacoma.

Building Bridges

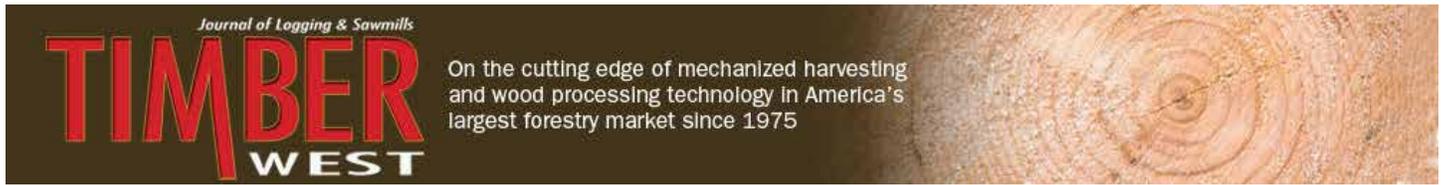
Caleb says they have been building bridges and putting in culverts over the last 10 years. They have installed bridges up to 120-feet in length, mostly pre-cast concrete bridges. The culverts they have installed range from 10 to 12 feet on average. Most are put into logging roads where big rigs are depending on safe passage to get the timber from mountain to mill.

Caleb and crew make it look easy, but they run into a variety of obstacles. "One of the challenges of building bridges is often the tight sites, giving us very little lifting radius," says Caleb. "Snell Crane Service is one of the companies we use regularly."

Boettcher & Sons has even worked inside town limits to put in roads and sidewalks. Caleb can list many local jobs they have worked on that have made communities better and more accessible to its citizens.

Looking Back and Ahead

Successful businesses are a sum of many decisions. Early on, Caleb's grandfather, Ernest Boettcher, believed in his family's ability to survive and thrive. During his life, he had many opportunities to sell his land and cash-in big on their hard work, but he kept it all in the family.



Today, the original homestead still stands and the barn is still in use. Ernest and Bill left their family a legacy of faith, love, and a hard work ethic that is carried on with the family name and business.

Caleb credits the shared faith of his family as the cornerstone of what has kept the family business strong and still a trusted name today and tomorrow.