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Brutal Weather is No Match for Ohio Company's Family Effort

Caudill Chipping cites several generations—and a number who might as well be family—as key to its successful chipping function.

As the news broadcasts filled the airwaves with stories relating just how unusual the spring of 2011 had been, logging professionals throughout the country were no doubt collectively thinking: “tell us something we don’t already know.” Areas that weren’t hit by extended winter weather saw everything from fierce tornados, to unrelenting wildfires, to record-setting floodwaters, to a rainy season seemingly without end. For Caudill Chipping, it was a non-stop deluge that plagued them to such a degree that, for a while, it looked as if a job they were working might never get done. The southern Ohio company, however, is a family affair in every sense of the word and, pulling together, they literally weathered the storm. Today, the region has dried out, and Caudill Chipping has moved on to new tracts. But not without realizing that, working as a single unit, even the toughest jobs—in the worst possible weather—can get done.



▶ Old Kentucky Home

Caudill Chipping, Inc.'s roots lie not far from its current Hamden, Ohio, location. The family's patriarch, Virgil Caudill, was himself a lifelong logger, first working in eastern Kentucky, then continuing when he moved to south-central Ohio in 1949. It was there, according to Corbett Caudill, the company's current owner and timber buyer, that Virgil, his wife, Delie, and a growing family began the business that is today Caudill Chipping.

"My dad first started in this area as a logger, working hard just to support a family of nine boys and five girls," he says. "Then, as my three brothers—Bo, Jim and Denver—and I joined him in the business in the early '60s, we all saw the potential of providing chips to area companies. That's grown over the years to where we are today: a combination logging company and chip supplier."

Caudill has a tendency to downplay almost everything about himself and most things about the company. Yet, truth be told, their hard work and commitment to their trade over the years have paid off; they are currently one of the larger chip suppliers in the south-central Ohio region, generating about 100,000 tons of chips for area mills and other users.

▶ All in the Family

While many companies are, indeed, family-owned and operated, few can compare to Caudill Chipping in just how deep family runs. As mentioned, the company was started by

Virgil and Delie Caudill, then expanded with the addition of four of their sons: Corbett, current owner and timber buyer; Bo, who has been a timber cutter since 1976 and has done just about anything the company has needed; Jim, who is the firm's night watchman; and Harold, the company's chief mechanic. But it hardly ends there. Also playing prominent roles in Caudill Chipping's daily operation are nephews Larry Caudill, a long-time dozer operator who has also done just about any job asked of him; Kevin Caudill, a truck driver/skidder operator; Carl Caudill, a mechanic; Jamie Caudill, a night watchman; as well as Jerry Caudill and Johnny Rose, who also drive truck and operate skidders. An additional generation came into play when Corey Caudill, Corb's son, assumed duties as a loader operator, and Timmy Caudill, Carl's son, began operating a chipper for the company.

"We love the fact that we are one big family when we come to work," says Corb Caudill. "And that extends to those in the company who aren't necessarily related. That includes Everett Coy, who's been a truck driver for us for more than 30 years and is a good reason for our success; Steve Bob, who is an excellent timber cutter; Gary Vickers, Eric Newman and Billy Newman, our truck drivers; Mark Saunders, Eric Coleman and Kenyon Stewart, who are skidder operators; Mike Perry, another of our mechanics, and Myrta Caudill, who has been the secretary in our office since day one. Every person we have working for us has helped get us where we are today."

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While Corb Caudill and his wife, Margaret, are adamant that family and faith have both gotten them through some hard times and rewarded them in the good ones (growing up he thought that everyone's dad was either a logger or "an old regular Baptist preacher" or both), he is also a huge believer that having the best equipment possible helps to bring it all together. Not surprisingly, he also believes that, once you've found something that works, you stay with it.

"When we were first building up the operation, we went with a Morbark Model 18 whole tree chipper, and it worked great for us," says Caudill. "It was at a time when Morbark itself was a fairly young company, so we actually had one of Norval Morey's nephews as our serviceman for that first unit."

Based on that level of satisfaction, Caudill Chipping has had a regular fleet of orange machines at work ever since, owning everything from that first Model 18 to feller bunchers, to stationary chippers, to loaders. They currently run a pair of Morbark 22RXL whole tree chippers and have a third unit on order. That particular model, which features a patented feed system and infeed beds, ensures that the wood flow is synchronized and fed at a controlled rate, producing uniform, high-quality chips.

"The Model 22RXL is proving to be an outstanding machine for us," says Caudill. "It is powerful and reliable and gives us a nice, consistent, high-quality chip; all things a company like ours needs from its equipment."

► **When It Rains It (Really) Pours**

When the rains started in the Ohio Valley in spring of this year, they literally did not stop for weeks, with both Cincinnati and Columbus reporting the wettest April on record. For

Caudill Chipping, which had just begun work on a piece of land near Chester in the southeast part of the state, the timing could not have been worse.

"That job was about 152 acres of very hard-to-log timber," says Corey Caudill. "To get trees down, we use a Timbco

445 feller buncher, which is generally great on steep slopes. But some of those areas were so steep, even that wasn't possible, so we had to resort to cutting a lot of it by hand."

As a rule, says Caudill, they probably cut 95% of their timber using machines. On the Chester job, because of both the terrain and the unbelievably wet weather that made any kind of machine movement and tracking difficult, he estimates that they hand-cut 30% of the trees.

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The challenge was not without its rewards though—Corb Caudill reports they pulled roughly 30,000 tons of chips and 300,000 board feet of logs from that single site.

▶ Wood for Steel?

Caudill Chipping’s markets for its chips are fairly standard, with material going to plants such as Gladfelter Paper in Chillicothe, Ohio, and Smurfit Stone in Coshocton, while logs go to both Glandon Lumber and Superior Hardwood in MacArthur. What is a bit of a departure from the norm, however, is Caudill’s contract with a steel company to supply chips for their steel-making process. Though not widely known, plants in the electrometallurgical industry throughout the U.S. use wood from a range of sources—including material from sawmills; trimmings from pallet, flooring and furniture plants; and material from logging operations such as Caudill’s—as part of their custom-mixture in their electric smelters.

“Globe Metallurgical, near Marietta, Ohio, has been a good customer of ours for some time now,” says Corb Caudill. “They’ve told us that they have worked with others in the past, but really prefer the quality of chips we

provide. That’s a market that we never would have foreseen when we first started, and the quality of chips we get from our Morbark chippers helped make that happen.”

▶ Moving On

Corb Caudill says the rains finally did stop, things dried up quite a bit, and they moved on to another tract of land not far from their shop

in Hamden (they generally work within a 50-mile radius of home). He says it has been one of the more interesting spring seasons in his long memory, but adds that, with God’s help, he never had a doubt they would get things done.

“We have an outstanding group of people working for us, every one of whom loves what they do. That, to me is the most important thing about Caudill Chipping: the sense of family that exists throughout the company. People here really believe that, together we can do just about anything under God.”

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Opportunity created