



# MORBARK

*Building equipment that creates opportunities.*

- ▶ Cash in the Chips
- ▶ Change is in the Air
- ▶ Whole Hog for Efficiency
- ▶ Untapped Potential



## Louisiana Timber Company Works Smarter To Handle Changes in Business Climate

For years, Punkin Center Chip Co. (PCC) a subsidiary of Ewing Timber Company was the picture of success. With contracts to provide both chips and hog fuel to area paper mills—working land owned by those same paper companies—the firm grew at a nice clip, eventually running four full crews to meet the plants' demands. When a change in the way those companies chose to subcontract their chipping operation essentially locked them out, PCC revamped its own business model, got leaner, changed some equipment and forged ahead. Today, the company is once again supplying as many chips and fuel as they can possibly produce, but doing it with a new approach, better equipment and a renewed look to the future.



## ► Cash in the Chips

PCC's parent company, Ewing Timber, is a third-generation, family-owned and operated firm. Established shortly after WWII by L.C. Ewing, the company at first specialized in the buying and selling of pulpwood and did so successfully through the early 1980s. By then, son Randy Ewing, who was heading up the operation, was approached to come in behind logging jobs and process the tops and branches left behind. That led to a decision to establish a dedicated chipping division—a move which, according to current company head Brandon Ewing, was not met with a lot of enthusiasm.

"My grandfather thought my father was crazy to be pursuing the chip market," he says. "However, as it turns out, it was the right thing at the right time and that part of the business really took off. The initial focus was on providing chips to area paper mills, but that eventually grew to include material serve the biomass market."

Ewing says PCC at first provided "dirty" chips for the manufacture of containers, then, with the addition of delimb-

ing/debarking equipment, expanded that capability to include clean chips. By the latter part of the 1990s, with chipping in full production, PCC found itself generating enough limbs and bark to warrant the addition of a pair of Morbark Model 1050 tub grinders to begin production of material for use as hog fuel.

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"At our peak," says Ewing, "we were running four Morbark chippers and a pair of tub grinders to meet all the demand. It was really as good as it could get."

## ► Change is in the Air

As anyone who is even remotely connected to the timber industry will attest, in their line of work the only constant is change. PCC experienced the full brunt of that paradox in 2008 when two of their largest customers made wholesale changes in the relationships they had with their subcontractors.

"Up to that point, we had been almost exclusively working on land owned by the paper companies and providing material to those same firms. Changes in ownership, coupled with other fac-

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tors, resulted in each company rethinking its subcontracting arrangements. Simply put, we were no longer in the picture and had to begin doing some rethinking of our own.”

Fortunately, Ewing is a firm believer in another timeless adage that says “necessity is the mother of invention.” Faced with a sink-or-swim scenario, the company set out to begin redefining the way PCC would do business. It started by searching out private sources for timber and continued by paring down its chipping operation from four chippers to a pair of Morbark Model 2755 Flail Chiparvestors.

“Today we have a couple very good sales people who actively seek out new parcels of private land for us to work. The volume of business is obviously not what it once was, but we have made some changes to better deal with the new situation, and that has turned out nicely for us.”

#### ▶ Whole Hog for Efficiency

One of the major changes PCC has incorporated from an equipment point of

view, has been finding a more efficient way to process material to meet its hog fuel demand. In the past, a tub grinder was integrated directly into the chipping operation. While that was effective, PCC’s operations manager, Earl Calhoun says it was not always the most efficient way to do things.

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“Because they took material directly from the chippers, the tub grinders needed to be located next to them so they could grab the waste with the grinder’s knuckleboom loader and feed it into the tub. That not only meant a larger area was needed for the entire operation, it also meant the rate at which a hog fuel truck was loaded would be dependent on how long it took to process a load of chips. If we didn’t have enough mulch to fill up a fuel van, we would have to wait until additional chipping took place.”

That entire scenario was changed for the better with the purchase of a Morbark Model 4600XL Wood Hog. According to Brandon Ewing, the grinder was purchased with the intent of replacing the aging tub grinders and, at the same time,

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streamlining the hog fuel operation.

“We knew that this would be a better way to do it and we were proven right,” he says. “Today, as opposed to the fuel operation being part of the chipping effort, it is a standalone operation. The chippers each finish their job and stockpile the waste product at the site. Then, the 4600XL comes behind and processes the material for hog fuel. That single 4600, following behind the chipping operation, is doing the same work the two tubs did before. I’ve seen it fill one of our subcontractors’ trucks in 11 minutes, so it is definitely a far more efficient way to do things.”

#### ▶ Untapped Potential

In preparation for the switch to a horizontal grinder, Ewing says they at first considered a Morbark 3800 Wood Hog but decided it was best not to risk undersizing their grinding capability.

“Based on what we were doing at the time, we probably could have gotten by with a 3800,” he says. “But we were anticipating a growth in the fuel market and in retrospect feel we made the right choice.”

***“We are filling contracts for 1,500 tons of hog fuel a week, but I’m certain we could double that without any trouble at all.”***

PCC’s 4600XL Wood Hog features an 860hp Caterpillar engine, a 60” x 46” infeed opening, a 13.4 cubic yard infeed hopper, and an 18’ x 60” live floor with a four-strand WDH 120 chain. Grinding is handled by a 36” diameter x 61” hammermill with 36” tip swing and 25 ½” diameter rotor. Material is discharged via pair of hydraulically driven aggregate-grade belt conveyors: a 48” belly belt which offloads to a 36” wide stacking conveyor, capable of stacking to a height of 16’ 6”.

“The 4600XL has been outstanding for us,” says Ewing. “However, when asked what volumes it’s capable of producing, in all honesty, we can’t say because we’ve never had it ‘opened up.’ We are filling contracts for 1,500 tons of hog fuel a week, but I’m certain we could double that without any trouble at all. All we know for certain is that we have a new approach to our business and this equipment has helped us make that transition a whole lot smoother.”

*Opportunity created*

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