



MORBARK

Building equipment that creates opportunities.

- ▶ Whole new direction
- ▶ The right stuff
- ▶ Distinguishing features
- ▶ Listening to customers
- ▶ Future opportunities



Largest Chipper Helps Indiana Firm Re-Tool Clearing Business

In light of how razor-thin profit margins are today, contractors are (or should be) continually looking for ways to reduce expenditures, streamline efforts, improve efficiencies. "Business as usual" ended what seems like an eternity ago, replaced by efforts to rein in continually-rising costs to remain profitable. And Brett Kramer understands that as well as anyone. But for the owner of Kramer's Landclearing, boosting profitability involved upgrading the chipping facet of his operation with the addition of a new 1050 Hp Morbark 50/48B WCL Track Whole Tree Chipper, the largest track chipper available today. While that meant initially spending more money, the Indiana-based landclearing professional has no doubts that, given the resultant upturn in production and the new opportunities it will present, he will recoup his investment in short order.



▶ Taking a Turn

Founded in 1987 as a weed and vegetation spraying company, Brett Kramer Custom Weed Spraying steadily grew their business over the years. Today, as they are closing in on their quarter century anniversary, they continue to pursue that side of the business, but have also taken it in a whole new direction.

“Over the years, we have done a good deal of work for several area utility companies, spraying vegetation in advance of their projects,” he says. “That eventually led us to begin doing the actual clearing for those pipeline and power line jobs. So we purchased a full range of equipment to do clearing, cutbacks, canopy work, stump grinding and more. Today, we are one of the larger companies in central Indiana doing this type of work.”

Kramer’s equipment inventory is impressive indeed, and includes a pair of mid-and large-size forestry mowers to process underbrush, stump grinders, a mid-sized chipper, a horizontal grinder, and a unit he calls a “giraffe,” a huge four-wheel drive machine with a 75-foot fiberglass telescopic boom and two-foot saw blades for overhead cutting. He says his firm’s chipping capability was, until recently, handled by a pair of mid-sized, 250 Hp units.

“That changed last year when one of those chippers caught fire and was burned beyond repair. I started to look for a replacement and that search eventually resulted in a dispute with our equipment manufac-

turer, a re-thinking of our whole approach to chipping, and the purchase of our first Morbark machine: the 50/48 whole tree chipper.”

▶ Looking Ahead, Thinking Big

Kramer says his justification for selecting the world’s largest track chipper is based on a number of factors, but is largely driven by the growth he is seeing in the land clearing side of the business.

“We operate a number of different companies including our original ditch spraying/ground-clearing company, a residential tree services operation, a trucking firm, and the one that specializes in clearing for pipeline right-of-way. As a result of the relationships we have with the area utilities, we are seeing a nice steady source of landclearing work. So we felt that was where the bulk of future growth would be and knew we had to react accordingly.”

He adds that choosing the Morbark 50/48 was a quantifiable decision as well, and bases that on his newfound capabilities versus a more traditional approach to clearing. He cites a project they recently wrapped up: clearing for 8.5 miles of natural gas pipeline. “On that job we pretty much did it all. We cleared through fields, though heavily wooded areas, alongside residential areas, you name it. We generated a good deal of debris, much of which was decent-sized material. If we were using the smaller 18/50 chipper rather than the Morbark, it would easily have taken us five times longer and we would have left a lot more wood on the

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ground. My biggest problem, quite frankly, is finding enough material to keep in front of it. At one point, we stacked debris for three hours, then brought in the Morbark 50/48. It was chipped in about 25 minutes—it's just an amazing piece of machinery.”

▶ Distinguishing Features

While an upturn in production was the main goal of adding the new machine, Kramer says there are a number of additional features which sold him on the 50/48, including its extended undercarriage.

“Having a longer undercarriage is a big plus for us, given the type of work we do and the terrain we have to cover,” he says. “I like the fact that when we go down into heavily sloped areas or ditch bottoms, the tracks, being longer, raise the front end up so it can't dig into the ground. Longer tracks also have more torque than shorter ones so we are never at a loss for power.”

Kramer says he also values the unit's Morbark Integrated Control System (MICS), an onboard diagnostic system which is designed to monitor hydraulic pressures, temperatures, clutch systems and engine efficiency, as well as to make automatic adjustments to maximize performance.

“The system has already come in handy,” he says. “At one point, we were having some trouble with the chipper's reversing

fan and technicians were able to look at it directly from the Morbark plant in Michigan and narrow it down to a check valve that had loosened a quarter turn. They told me to tighten it, I did, and the issue was resolved. That could easily have been a service call, downtime, and lost production.”

▶ Swamp Thing

One of the key sections in the 8½ mile pipe clearing project was a wetlands area called Busseron Bottoms which, according to Kramer, really put the track chipper to the test.

“It is really nothing but a swamp in there, so the tracks played a huge part in keeping us on schedule. We built a pair of roads using 30-foot wide wood mats which we

used to get trucks into and out of the area. We established staging areas, dragged our material to the chipper, chipped it, blew it into the vans and hauled it out. Despite those challenging conditions, even that portion of the project went unbelievably well.”

Kramer adds that, because his was the first Model 50/48 available, Morbark was extremely interested in—and receptive to—his suggestions for changes. One of those included a major alteration he'd been wanting for a long time.

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ity to load and move at the same time. So I asked Morbark to build that in—and they did. Now, I can track and swing, and pick up material as we're moving. That, to me, was a huge plus. They also made some changes to the cab itself, including adding the ability to raise it for better visibility during operation."

The level of production he gets from the chipper, says Kramer, continues to impress him as he takes on more and more work. "We recently put a 65-foot cottonwood in there that easily measured 28-inches in diameter with huge laterals coming off the side of it. It was fully-chipped in 45-seconds; many of the men in my crew couldn't believe what they were seeing."

five acres a day—which is a realistic target for us—it would take eight track hoes with eight operators, and another unit behind them feeding a horizontal grinder."

By comparison, Kramer says he can see easily doing five acres a day with just three operators and three pieces of equipment: a feller buncher, the Morbark 50/48 and a stump grinder—plus one man on the ground cutting timber.

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"Equipment like the Morbark 50/48 allows me to be just as competitive with one-third the overhead and pick up more jobs as a result of it. How can you argue with that?"

▶ Running Lean, Seeing the Green

Kramer says the addition of the 50/48 has opened his eyes to new, exciting changes that could still lie ahead, specifically the possibility of adding a feller buncher to his arsenal.

"I've run the numbers and it makes a whole lot of sense," he says. "In a traditional clearing operation, one person operating a track hoe can generally clear half an acre a day; that includes grubbing the tree out of the ground with the stump on it. So if I want to get four to

Opportunity created

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