

Versatile Selection

Custom homebuilder buys first boom lift for safety and efficiency.



Since Collins Construction Co., Kerkhoven, Minn., began building custom homes in West Central Minnesota in 1973, the company's reputation for constructing high-quality homes at a competitive price has made it the premier custom homebuilder in the area.

Chuck Collins and his son, Keith, who joined the organization in 1990,

attribute the success of their business to delivering quality products and watching costs. Almost all the company's business comes from personal referrals and building the house that fits a customer's needs improves the opportunity to work with repeat customers and gain new customers by word of mouth. The other factor contributing to the company's success is how father and son carefully

watch their costs. This not only applies to the components they buy and subcontractors they use, but it also relates to the equipment they own and maintain. Both trucks and trailers need regular maintenance, as well as the Lull® Model 844B telehandler they use to move heavy loads on remote jobsites.

Because they don't own many pieces of lifting equipment, the father and son pair had to do their homework when they started looking for a new straight boom lift – their second lifting equipment purchase. Although they already use a work platform on the telehandler, Chuck said they wanted something specifically for lifting personnel that easily complies with safety requirements. Since founding the company, Chuck said he's never had a workman's compensation claim – and he's not about to now. "My main reason [for purchasing a boom lift] was to make the workplace safer," Chuck Collins said. "Safety is the biggest reason we buy most of our equipment." Keith agreed with his father's reasoning and added, "It's a lot more efficient – you get a lot more done in the day."

When the Collinses started to seriously look for the new machine, they interviewed three representatives from different aerial work platform manufacturers and talked to other contractors. In one instance, Chuck Collins noticed a jobsite in nearby Willmar, Minn., where a hospital addition was under construction, and a number of different brands of boom lifts were used on the job. He stopped and talked with the workers using the boom lifts to see which brand they preferred. Ultimately, they decide to purchase a new JLG Model 460SJ straight boom lift.

Laura Berger, the sales representative at United Rentals' Aerial Division in St. Michael, Minn., was contacted about the Collins' needs, and in December 2003, Collins Construction Co. received a new JLG Model 460SJ boom lift. The machine's standard specifications include a 46-foot platform height, 40'6" horizontal outreach, and 500 pounds of platform capacity. Chuck also said he liked the machine's extra operational flexibility provided by its 6-foot jib.



Collins Construction Co. uses its boom lift to install fascia, soffits, windows, sheeting, and more.

While all the work to date has been outdoors, Chuck said, "We didn't want diesel because of the cold starts in the winter." The Collinses also wanted to be prepared for any indoor work that might be ahead, so they decided on a model with an 82-hp Ford engine that uses gas and LPG for dual fuel capabilities. Additionally, they put on foam-filled tires because there's always a chance a tire could be punctured by a nail or some other debris on a construction site.

This JLG 460SJ unit also was equipped with the SkyPower[®] electric generator, which is installed inside the engine compartment and powered by the machine's Ford engine at 1,800 rpm using a belt drive system. A power line is integrated within the boom and connects to GFCI outlets in the platform. When JLG installed the power lines in the boom, it added a 1/2-inch air line from the compartment to the platform to power additional accessories. The engine has plenty of power to operate all the boom lift's functions and the generator, which supplies 10.1 hp with no loss in operational capability.

Meeting the new trend

At present, 75 percent of Collins' jobs are on two-story houses, 20 percent on one-story, and 5 percent on three-story homes. But three-story home construction is the new trend in home building, so this percentage is expected to

increase. On all houses Collins Construction Co. has built since early 2004, they've used the JLG machine – including work on single-story homes. On these sites, the boom lift takes the place of ladders and scaffolding when installing fascia, soffits, windows, and while doing overhead work. "Everything that's more than five feet up, we use it," Chuck said. "I think sometimes they use it too much."

From an operational viewpoint, Chuck expects the \$90,000 machine to pay for itself in the first year. He said that when scaffolding or ladders are used, not only are assembly and take-down time involved, but it's almost always a two-person job with one person in the air and another on the ground to hand-up materials. As labor costs reach \$50 or more per hour, the machine's cost is recouped in 1,800 hours, which



The SkyAir compressor securely fits behind the boom lift's engine, hidden from all except for the pressure gauge mounted in the platform.

is almost the expense of an additional employee. Today, Chuck said the company uses scaffolding "only if we have to – maybe 3 percent of the time. Other than that, we're using the boom lift or the Lull."

Retrofit function

It wasn't long after the boom lift was put into operation the father and son team decided the machine needed one more function – an air compressor to power the pneumatic nailers. "We talked to Laura Berger and told her that's something they should put on here," Chuck said. According to Keith, within three to

four months after they purchased the machine, their need was met with JLG's SkyAir[™] compressor accessory. Since there was already an air line running from the base to the platform, the boom lift was returned to United Rentals in April where the compressor was installed.

The SkyAir compressor fits neatly behind the engine in the boom lift's body. And with the service doors closed, an onlooker wouldn't know it's there except for the pressure gauge mounted in the platform.

The 2-hp SkyAir compressor runs off the SkyPower generator and has a 10-gallon capacity air holding tank with pressure adjustable up to 125 psi and a delivery rate of 9.3 CFM. With the 1/2-inch hose leading to the platform, it's large enough to power two nailers simultaneously driving 3-1/2-inch framing nails, and there's still single phase electric power running to the platform so workers are able to use their electric-powered reciprocating saw even with the compressor operating. "With that on top, you don't have to carry the big, long air hoses," Chuck said. "You can hook your air guns right up to the top."

The addition of the SkyAir compressor eliminates the need for a separate portable compressor and generator unit with air hoses running all over the site. Now the Collinses don't have to stop and move the compressor every time they move the boom lift, the compressor is quieter, and it's contained inside the machine base, making it more secure than a portable generator.

United Rentals Service Manager Curt Abfalter estimated that it took about four hours to install the unit as a retrofit. All the parts arrived from JLG in a single kit, and from his perspective, it was a friendly install. Chuck said the entire machine package keeps his business more versatile, but he also said his wife loves it – they used it to put up Christmas lights this year. ■