

## New Tools Help C.S. Carey Make Land Clearing Efficient *Woodcracker Attachments Boost Kansas Company That Clears Land, Makes Mulch*

By Tim Cox

KANSAS CITY, Kansas — Drew Meylan wanted to improve efficiency in his company's land clearing operations, and he turned to an Austrian company — Woodcracker — to supply a couple of tools for an excavator that have done just the trick.

Meylan, 39, is operations manager for C.S. Carey Inc., a contracting business based in Kansas City, Kansas, that also manufactures mulch for customers in the metropolitan region.

In fact, the company's primary business, which it has developed since 2001, is manufacturing mulch that is sold mainly bulk wholesale. It produces about 300,000 cubic yards of mulch annually and has positioned itself as perhaps the leading producer in the region.

About 50 percent of the company's revenues are derived from mulch sales, and another 20 percent is from land clearing. Another 20 percent is from trucking, and asphalt shingle recycling adds the remainder.

Owner Chris Carey began mowing lawns in his parents' neighborhood as a teenager and went on to develop a business that provided mowing and landscaping services. He added land clearing and grinding operations in 1999. He later bought two excavating businesses and added excavating services, but steered the company to focus on land clearing and mulch after the recession that began in 2009.

The company has an impressive inventory of grinders: four Continental Biomass Industries model 6800 horizontal grinders on tracks, a stationary Hogzilla tub grinder, and a Rotochopper horizontal grinder. It is also equipped with a Fecon FTX128 track forestry mulcher and a Komptech shredder and screen plant that it suited for processing



*The Woodcracker C550 tree shear, used for felling, can be uncoupled quickly and replaced with another attachment, so one excavator can be used to perform two different types of work.*

wood debris from storm damage.

C.S. Carey has an assortment of excavators — a John Deere, a Volvo and several Komatsu machines — for its operations. They are used for removing trees and stumps, handling wood debris and other material, feeding material to grinders and loading trucks. The Komatsu excavators have a grapple designed for occasional demolition work.

In the past the company removed trees on land clearing jobs by using an excavator to dig a trench around it, then pushing down the tree with the bucket and mechanical thumb. But the method requires numerous additional steps. A worker with a chainsaw

has to cut off the stump, and the stump has to be handled to remove as much dirt and debris as possible, then loaded onto trucks and hauled to the company's wood yard for grinding into mulch. At the wood yard, large stumps have to be split or broken apart in order to produce a size that can be fed into the grinder.

Two new Woodcracker tools the company purchased this year are streamlining the tasks and providing additional benefits. C.S. Carey bought a Woodcracker C550 tree shear in March and added a Woodcracker R1300 stump shear in June. The tree shear is used for felling, and the stump shear performs dual tasks, splitting a stump still in the



*The Woodcracker R1300 stump and root shear performs dual tasks, splitting a stump still in the ground and removing it a half at a time.*

ground and removing it a half at a time.

Drew initially talked to equipment dealers that sold logging attachments, but he had difficulty finding a suitable attachment to fit and match his excavators, and he wasn't interested in buying a purpose-built forestry carrier and paying that additional cost. "I already had a carrier," he noted.

When he talked to equipment dealers that sold logging machines and explained the kind of work his company did and what he wanted to do, their response was usually something like, "You want to do what?" recalled Drew.

"Finding one that rotated 360 degrees, could mount on an excavator — I couldn't find something comparable" to the Woodcracker, said Drew.

Logging equipment is not suitable for the kind of projects that C.S. Carey takes on, observed Drew. Mechanical tree harvesting equipment is designed for felling standing timber, trees that grow relatively straight. C.S. Carey frequently encounters trees that have been planted to grow as fences along property lines. They have lot of branches and may even grow horizontally. "They're hard to attack with a logging attachment that's designed for straight, vertical logs," said Drew.

Drew considered other companies that make tree shears and stump shears. In fact, C.S. Carey has a stump shear that it keeps deployed in the wood yard to break large stumps into smaller pieces. "It works well,"

he said, "but it doesn't split the stump in the ground."

He looked on the Internet and watched videos of Woodcracker tools on YouTube. He contacted Woodcracker after watching a few videos. "It was really built for my application," said Drew.

Another factor in favor of the Woodcracker tools was that they can be uncoupled quickly and replaced with another attachment, so one excavator can be used to perform two different types of work. "Being able to quick-couple one attachment to another and doing multiple things was what I was after," said Drew.

The Woodcracker tree shear helps prepare trees for the grinder because the stump already has been removed in the process of shearing and felling the tree. However, it's been beneficial for other reasons, too.

"One of the reasons for buying the Woodcracker is that we do a lot of technical clearing," explained Drew. The company may have to remove trees at a property boundary or trees with nearby obstacles below them. "We used to do a lot of bucket truck work," added Drew, but the Woodcracker shear has eliminated the need for that. "It allows us to do more controlled felling."

"Sometimes we're working right next to the road," said Drew. "The Woodcracker is good for that. It grabs the tree, and you know you've got it."

The Woodcracker tree shear has helped

the company overcome another challenge that some customers have encountered related to environmental issues on projects. Projects that have federal funding in many cases do not allow land clearing activity from April-November; trees can be felled, but removing a stump requires an additional permit.

"Every March we run into all these developers scrambling to get land cleared," said Drew. "They don't have all their permits, but they have to get the trees down."

The developer can skirt the land disturbance regulations by having C.S. Carey remove the trees but leave the stumps in the ground — and the ground undisturbed. "It seems like it happens more and more," said Drew. "They need to get the tree down without getting the stump out."

C.S. Carey, which has 15 full-time employees, tackles jobs that range from a handful of trees to 50 acres. The average job is clearing 2-3 acres for a building site, infrastructure improvement, or some other project. The company clears land for water lines, sewer lines, utility right-of-way, and widening roads.

Mulch sales have been a source of steady revenue and have been trending upward. "Even after the housing market crashed, mulch sales were fairly stable," said Drew. Most mulch is sold by the trailer-load. C.S. Carey has four Mack walking floor trailers and just recently purchased two Wilkins open-top belt trailers. Customers are large landscape contractors and garden centers.

C.S. Carey operates a 16-acre yard, and wood material is hauled there to be processed. The Hogzilla, a model 1564, is stationed at the yard, which also is equipped with a couple of Volvo wheel loaders and a Colorbiotics Sahara X3 mulch coloring system. Three men usually work in the yard, but during the peak grinding season the number can range up to six or seven who may float back and forth between other tasks. If the winter is mild, grinding operations start up in early February. If the winter has been cold with snow, mulch production will be delayed until early March.

"Typically, from February to May the yard is extremely busy," said Drew. When sales peak, the company deliver 150-200 loads of mulch per week.

The Hogzilla was a diesel-powered machine for many years, but it was converted over to electric. It is powered by two 500 hp electric motors with another 150 hp motor for the hydraulics. The grinding operations

can be supplemented by one of the CBI machines as needed.

C.S. Carey produces four colored mulch products: dark brown, red, cherry brown, and black. Brown accounts for about 80 percent of the company's sales. The company has used different suppliers for liquid mulch colorant, negotiating for the best price before the start of the grinding season. It buys colorant in 300-350-gallon totes.

The Woodcracker tools make the company's operations more efficient. "You speed up and grind more efficiently," said Drew. "The grinder is the most expensive machine...If you make it more efficient, it's a win...We don't have to go back and pick up stuff and take it to the yard."

With the Woodcracker attachments, the tree shear can fell trees up to 24 inches in diameter and stack them. Then the stump shear is put on the excavator, and it goes back and splits the stumps in the ground and pulls them out.

"The stump is processed while pulling it out," said Drew. The two attachments prep the tree for grinding and take care of processing the stump on site. "All the stumps have been quartered or split so they go through the horizontal grinder okay. We don't have to haul them back to the yard...It streamlines the operation."

"Some jobs lend themselves to the old-

fashioned way of doing it," he continued, "but I utilize that equipment as much as I possibly can. Typically, a job that's more than five acres, I try to put every piece of equipment on the job."

The company has rented logging equipment for felling trees at times in the past. It rented a Cat wheel feller buncher as recently as March to help on some jobs.

The company has owned the Fecon track mulcher about two years. "We use that on most land clearing jobs," said Drew. The Fecon mulcher goes over the job site and mulches all the small vegetation. It is also used sometimes to mulch a path around the boundary of the job.

The Woodcracker tree shear came directly from the factory in Austria; the Woodcracker stump attachment was supplied by Woodcracker North America. Established in May of 2016 to serve the North American market, Woodcracker North America is headed by Kenneth Luker and has been developing a network of dealers.

Woodcracker makes shears for felling brush and trees, attachments for splitting logs, shears for cutting stumps flush with the ground, root shears that split the stump and pull it from the ground, and excavating grapple rakes for removing and handling stumps, rocks, and other material. The 12-year-old company designs, engineers, and

manufactures all its products under one roof in Austria. Woodcracker tools, which are in use around the world, can be matched with any excavator; they come in different sizes for different size excavators.

(For more information about Woodcracker, see the company's website at [www.woodcracker.com](http://www.woodcracker.com), or contact Kenneth at [sales.us@woodcracker.com](mailto:sales.us@woodcracker.com) or (617) 401-5584.)

Drew had no hesitancy about purchasing a tool made in Europe. "We already went down that road with Komptech," he noted.

The Woodcracker tools are "pretty robust," he said. "It's a little different when buying a grinder...A grinder has a lot more components to go wrong."

As operations manager, Drew bids all jobs and ensures they are properly carried out, but it's not unusual for him to be operating a machine, either. The evening he was interviewed for this article followed a day of working in the field, and the next day he also expected to be operating equipment. He oversees day-to-day operations and also has other duties, like invoicing.

The company sold off the excavating part of the business in 2002. It was hard to make excavating profitable, said Drew, especially given more competing contractors in that field. By contrast, land clearing work has been a consistent profit center.

C.S. Carey did work for the federal Emergency Management Agency during the recession, contracting to provide services to clean up wood debris after several hurricanes. "That kind of helped us through the recession," said Drew.

C.S. Carey employees perform most maintenance on the company's equipment. "Most employees have a strong mechanics background," said Drew. Although the company does not have a full-time mechanic, it has a few employees who are fully qualified.

"We definitely try to take care of our employees," said Drew. Three-quarters of the workers have been employees for eight to 10 years.

The company once contracted to demolish houses at an Air Force base. Afterward they were asked to pull out the foundations and haul away the concrete, and Drew was quick to fulfill that request. "The ability to stay fluid," and to respond to requests like that, "has kept our company strong," he said. Diversifying and strategically positioning the company going into the future are frequent topics of conversation with owner Chris Carey. 



*The 360° rotation allows the Woodcracker tree shear to address "crooked" timber, even horizontally growing branches.*

The root stock clearing device for removing large stumps

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