

BE SAFE. WORK HARD. HAVE FUN.

If you flip over Mike Hammes' business card, you'll see three phrases: **BE SAFE. WORK HARD. HAVE FUN.** These phrases describe the heart of Hammes' company, RAM Construction General Contractors. And they're a formula for success that's working out nicely with the help of some Hitachi equipment.



Mike Hammes, owner of RAM Construction General Contractors, first caught the construction bug at an early age – he was 12 years old and working for his uncle's company.

"I worked for my uncle when I was younger and decided construction was where I wanted to spend my career," he said. "I started RAM Construction in 1992, following a passion that I'd had my whole life."

Based in Bellingham, Wash., RAM Construction is primarily a heavy civil contractor completing underground, environmental and concrete structures. The company also engages in some commercial above-ground construction with commercial tenant improvements and small building projects.

Hammes experienced Hitachi equipment while working for his uncle. So, when buying his company's first excavator, he decided to stick with what he knew.

"We're still running the first machine we ever bought; it's a Hitachi I20-2," he said. "It's passing by 12,000 hours and all we've had to do with that machine is change the oil. We have a handful of machines that are in that range, and all we've done is change the oil."



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WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT

These days, RAM Construction’s Hitachi fleet stays busy. One of the company’s high-profile undertakings is work on the Port and City of Bellingham’s Waterfront District project.

The project covers 237 acres of the city’s downtown waterfront, most of which is the former site of a Georgia-Pacific Corp. chemical plant, and pulp and tissue mill. This industrial redevelopment will include a mixed-use neighborhood with new parks and trails, as well as public access to the waterfront.

RAM Construction will help provide that public access by completing the \$8.6 million Granary Avenue and Laurel Street project. Along with two new streets, the project also includes new public and franchise utilities, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, parking, landscaping and street lighting. RAM Construction began work in October 2017 and anticipates completion in late 2018.

“It’s the City of Bellingham’s first investment into a large waterfront redevelopment, and we’re proud to be part of it,” Hammes said. “We’re bringing the main line roadway and utilities in for future development.”

This isn’t just any jobsite. It’s classified as a “brownfield” site, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines as “real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant.” But Hammes isn’t intimidated – it just means his excavators are doing a little bit of everything.

“Our Hitachis are doing demolition work, crushing concrete; a lot of mainline digging for sewer, water, storm infrastructure; and power infrastructure,” Hammes said. “Since this is a brownfield site, they’re also doing some environmental remediation.”

CHOOSING HITACHI

In addition to the waterfront project, RAM Construction’s fleet can be spotted working on new subdivisions and completing commercial work in and around Bellingham.

“We’re currently running about 30 or 35 Hitachi excavators where they range in size from a ZX50 up to a 670 and everywhere in between,” Hammes said.

With an ever-expanding project list and his Hitachis in high demand, Hammes continues to partner with his local dealer, Papé Machinery, to grow his fleet.

“We have a long history with Papé Machinery, and they have supported us over the years, been great partners in our business and in getting equipment for us, and providing us with the latest technology and updates,” he said.

Hammes also empowers his team to choose the right equipment for the company’s projects.

“The comfort and overall happiness of our employees is what’s driving our productivity,” he said. “Hitachi lends itself to that. The operators are comfortable, they don’t go home beat up and tired at the end of the day. We do give them the opportunity to change brands, if they think that’s what they want to do. And when we demo other machines, they keep coming back to Hitachi. So, it’s really an organic decision that’s made with the men and women in the company, and they keep us coming back.”

BUILDING A LEGACY

While Hammes enjoys his equipment and the work, his greatest passion and pride is his team.

“Our goal, when I first started the company, was to create a place that the cream would rise to the top; the best of the best from the area would come to our front door and say ‘Hey, I want to be part of what you’re doing here,’” he said. “And so far, it’s been successful. We have two metrics that we measure: safety and kindness. And if they can work on those two and do a good job, we feel that the bottom line takes care of itself.”

Hammes, who was named 2015 CEO of the Year by the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce, looks toward his company’s promising future by appreciating and taking care of those who matter most.

“It’s a great honor to be at the helm of this operation and it’s gotten to a point now where it’s bigger than me, it’s self-perpetuating,” he said. “I have the good fortune of leading a great group of individuals. I take their personal well-being to heart and to bed every night, and that’s what gets me up in the morning. I know that they don’t want to let me down; I don’t want to let them down; and at the end of the day that’s what keeps me going.”

RAM Construction General Contractors LLC is serviced by Papé Machinery, Mount Vernon, Wash. ■

WEBWATCH
Check out the video at
HitachiConstruction.com/RAM