

Frank Ward
Operator
Capital City Services

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THE RIGHT STUFF

VIRGINIA CONTRACTOR MOVES BEYOND PLUMBING AND DRAIN CLEANING, ADDING HYDROEXCAVATION TO BE A ONE-STOP SHOP FOR HIS CUSTOMERS

STORY: GILES LAMBERTSON PHOTOS: JAMES ROBINSON

A small business doesn't successfully grow its services for almost four decades without doing something right. Next year, Wayne Norman will celebrate 40 years for his Virginia company — Capital City Services. How has he succeeded? By doing things right.

"He is a no-nonsense, honest individual, whose middle name is integrity," says Thomas Arezzi, Capital City Services' director of business development. One might discount such praise from an employee. However, Arezzi got to know Norman when Arezzi was a property management company manager in Richmond, Virginia, and overseeing 10 properties. Norman and his company were his go-to resource in utility emergencies. He says Norman never misled him then about whether he could do a job and treats every customer the same way today. "So I have a unique perspective. I worked with him before I worked for him."

Norman was born in eastern North Carolina before gravitating north with his family to Shanghai in eastern Virginia. He ended up in the Richmond area where he eventually launched his plumbing and drain-cleaning business before adding heating and air-conditioning services and then storm sewer and sewer services. This was the beginning of an open-ended business plan. Here's the plan: The company takes on whatever kind of work Norman decides to pursue.

In other words, Norman not only wants things done right, he's very open to trying new things. "These jobs were all opportunities and challenges that came up, and nobody else was doing them," he says, simply. So he undertook them. Successfully. His willingness to consider new business challenges successfully led Capital City Services to offer culvert and pipe cleaning, underground utility locating, and hydroexcavation.

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"I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE ABLE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS. THAT'S THE ONLY STAPLE IN ALL THIS; WE SOLVE PROBLEMS. THROUGHOUT THE YEARS, WE'VE BUILT A REPUTATION ON THAT."

Wayne Norman

Capital City Services operator Frank Ward uses a Mud Dog 1600 hydroexcavator (Super Products) to dig holes for bollards being installed around a state building in Richmond, Virginia. He is assisted by laborer Jacinto Tzoc.

digdifferent.com January 2018 23



Jacinto Tzoc (left) and Frank Ward pack up a Mud Dog 1600 hydroexcavator after completing a job in Richmond.

Capital City Services Mechanicsville, Virginia

OWNER: Wayne Norman
SERVICES: Hydroexcavation, TV pipe inspection, pipe relining, pipe repair and installation, pipe and sewer cleaning, culvert cleaning, thrust boring, manhole rehabilitation, lift station repair, pipe fusion, utility locating
SERVICE AREA: Throughout the mid-Atlantic region
WEBSITE: www.capitalcityservices.com

A GROWING MARKET

Norman's first stab at hydroexcavation was 20 years ago when he contracted to uncover a line on the grounds of Richmond's 13th Judicial Circuit Court. The digging needed to be accomplished neatly so Norman employed an industrial vacuum unit and water. Being Norman, he got the job done, of course, but soon switched to combination sewer cleaning rigs for his pressure digging. Two years ago, he upgraded to a Mud Dog 1600 hydroexcavator (Super Products), a 16-cubic-yard unit on a Peterbilt chassis with a 2,000-gallon capacity water tank.

"Hydroexcavation is a growing market for us," Norman says. "The more utilities you put in the ground, the more you need a hydroexcavator." Norman himself is apt to be where the rig is excavating. He's not an office executive. That's him in whiskers and a red hard hat on the Capital City Services website. "I'm in themud," he jokes, once you step in it, you can't get the smell off you. I do enjoy mud."

Hydroexcavation contracts account for 25 percent of the company's projects, according to Norman, with thrust boring and pipe bursting pulling in another 15 to 20 percent of the work.

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A little bit of that and a little bit of that

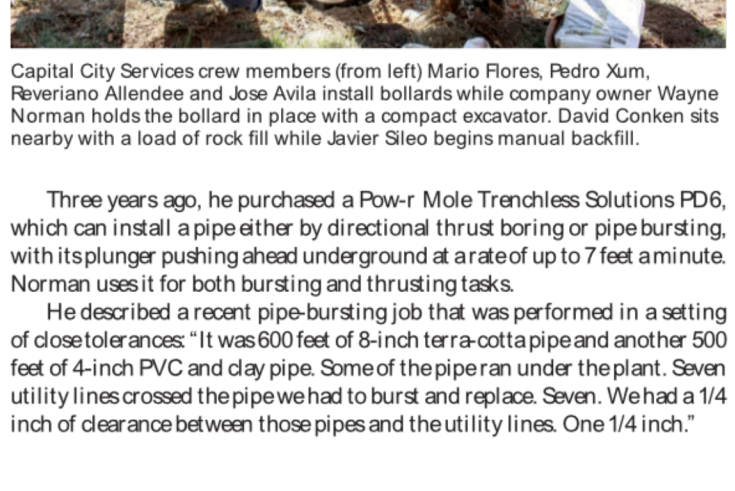
Capital City Services offers so many niche services — from environmental remediation to fixing leaking water pipes — that company founder Wayne Norman finds it difficult to identify the most essential piece of equipment in his yard. When asked to do so, he half-seriously responds, "My telephone."

His difficulty to pin down a key machine lies in the regular usage of heavy machinery across projects. An example is how he frequently resorts to using two key machines to complete tasks: his hydroexcavator and pipe-bursting unit. "I get a pipe-bursting job, and I need a hydroexcavator to expose a pipe or set the pipe bursting. I do a hydroexcavation job, and I see a pipe that I need to burst. Not long ago, I had a pretty extensive pipe-bursting job, and I had to hydroexcavate a pit every time I placed the pipe-bursting unit. Some holes were 15 to 20 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 6 to 8 feet deep."

As a consequence, Norman can't only pin down what type of projects dominate his work schedule. Yes, a quarter of his work requires a hydroexcavator but often in concert with other machinery. "It's such a mix. We do a lot of this, and we do a lot of that. Recently, we've been really lucky to get a job with the electric power company here in Virginia. We've been involved with that company a lot. We started off hydroexcavating; then, we did some sewer cleaning for them; then, we did some foam injection on some joints."

"And that's the way it is. We are all over the place. As soon as I start thinking we are doing a lot of this kind of work, we start doing a lot of that kind of work."

Wayne Norman, owner of Capital City Services, started the company in 1978 providing plumbing, drain cleaning, and heating and cooling services. Today, the company works in all areas and phases of general construction, utility work, mechanical and infrastructure, and water and wastewater industries.



Capital City Services crew members (from left) Mario Flores, Pedro Xim, Reveriano Allende and Jose Avila install bollards while company owner Wayne Norman holds the bollard in place with a compact excavator. David Conken sits nearby with a load of rock fill while Javier Sileo begins manual backfill.

Three years ago, he purchased a Power Mole Trenchless Solutions PD6, which can install a pipe either by directional thrust boring or pipe bursting, with its plunger pushing ahead underground at a rate of up to 7 feet per minute. Norman uses it for both thrusting and thrusting tasks.

He tolerated a recent pipe-bursting job that was performed in a setting of close tolerances: "It was 600 feet of 8-inch terra-cotta pipe and another 500 feet of 4-inch PVC and clay pipe. Some of the pipe ran under the plant. Seven utility lines crossed the pipehead to burst and replace. Seven. We had a 1/4 inch of clearance between those pipes and the utility lines. One 1/4 inch."

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He calls the precision project a "very good job with a lot of challenges." Asked if the dicey conditions of the project might also have been described as a headache, Norman dismisses the thought. "Some people call them opportunities." He recalls another pipe-bursting project at Virginia's Colonial Williamsburg when he replaced a 4-inch PVC waterline buried 30 inches deep. He used high-pressure air to excavate a working area for his Power Mole Trenchless Solutions PD6. Again, the overall challenge was welcomed by Norman.

Capital City Services eventually expanded its array of services further to include water treatment plant maintenance and repair, camera inspection of pipes, and turnkey project management of pipe installations. That's a partial listing. The company also fixes leaky pipes, does point restoration on stainless steel pipes, injects foam to seal bad joints, performs historic restoration work, repairs lift stations, dredges ditches, and — come winter — is on call to remove snow from parking lots.

"I didn't really plan to expand into any of those areas," Norman says. They were just opportunities that arose and he took advantage of them. "I've always wanted to be able to solve problems. That's the only staple in all this: We solve problems. Throughout the years, we've built a reputation on that. Our company slogan is, 'Solutions only experience can provide.' That's how we work. If we can't do it right, we aren't going to do it."

GETTING EXPERIENCE AND EQUIPMENT

Advertising a company's experience is only possible after acquiring experience, of course, which Norman did over 39 years by mastering an array of utility-mechanical-industrial tasks. He was asked how he characterizes his company now that it certainly is not the plumbing shop it started out as. He pondered the question. "I'm licensed as a general contractor, but I don't know

"HYDROEXCAVATION IS A GROWING MARKET FOR US. THE MORE YOU USE YOU PUT IN THE GROUND, THE MORE YOU NEED A HYDROEXCAVATOR."

Wayne Norman

how to answer that." He does acknowledge that being a full-service, many-services company is a "good hedge" against downturns in any one segment of the company business. "Doing so many specialty services has helped us a lot."

The company's diverse skill set has grown Capital City Services from one employee (Norman) and a stepvan to a dozen employees, an annual business volume of \$2.3 million, and a 4-acre equipment yard containing more than 20 pieces of heavy machinery. The variety of equipment attests to the range of projects Norman is willing to undertake. Besides the aforementioned Mud Dog and Power Mole Trenchless Solutions machines, parked in the yard are a pair of Camel sewer cleaning combination trucks (Super Products), two a Vactor

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www.superproductslc.com
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"WHAT DETERMINES GROWTH IS WHO YOU CAN HIRE TO WORK WITH YOU NEED TO HAVE COMPETENT PEOPLE, AND FINDING GOOD EMPLOYEES IS REALLY DIFFICULT."

Wayne Norman



The Capital City Services crew includes, from left, laborers David Conken, Javier Sileo and Mario Flores; operator Frank Ward; owner Wayne Norman; and laborers Jose Avila, Pedro Xim, Reveriano Allende and Jacinto Tzoc.

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