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# Building a Business

**Video inspection helps Capital City Services continue its steady growth**

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## Building a Business

Wayne Norman took a careful, methodical approach to developing Capital City Services, a diversified plumbing and pipeline service company

By Sanford Payton

Some wasn't built in a day, and a business isn't built overnight. Wayne Norman has built Capital City Services Company piece by piece over 23 years. He has done it by steadily investing in equipment and services to meet the needs of his customers.

Today, Capital City, based in Mechanicsville, Va., offers complete video inspection services for residential lines on up to commercial and industrial facilities and municipal mainlines. The company also inspects tanks, ducts and other vessels and structures and offers plumbing, water and sewer pipeline installation, location, inspection, repair, and replacement.

Wayne started Capital City Services in 1978. "As long as I was going to stew in somebody's trouble, I wanted it to be my own," says Wayne, who worked for other companies in plumbing; heating, ventilating and air-conditioning (HVAC); and general contracting for several years before setting out on his own.

Wayne had developed a reputation for dependability and good work. Homeowners often contacted him directly and asked him to do projects for them. So, eventually, he bought a 1968 International Metro step-van and joined the ranks of the self-employed.

**A start with Sears**

After a few months, he managed to get an installation and service contract with Sears. He had little stickers printed with his company's name and telephone number, and he left them attached to something everywhere he worked. Before long, he was getting extra work from those little reminders.

He preferred service and repair work to new installations because the service jobs seemed to lead to additional work. Repairing a leaking commode might lead to carpentry work or cleaning a drain or grease trap. Wayne always tried to expand his range of skills so he would not be tied to a single craft. That way, if work slowed in one area, another might be picking up.

As it turned out, the winter of 1978-79 was especially cold, so Wayne advertised on radio that he repaired frozen pipes and stayed very busy that season. By the end of the second year, he had enough work to keep another plumber busy, so he bought another truck and doubled the size of his business.

During the early years, Wayne installed many private sewer lines, so he bought a locator to help him avoid hitting other utilities. At that time, most public



The Capital City crew: From left to right, Rosco Taylor, George Fainter, Wayne Norman, Chris Giovannetti, Darrin Cage, Frank Becker.

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Wayne Norman

P R O F I L E	
<b>Capital City Services Company, Mechanicsville, Va.</b>	
<b>OWNER:</b>	Wayne Norman
<b>YEARS IN BUSINESS:</b>	23
<b>SERVICES:</b>	Plumbing, water and sewer pipeline installation, location, inspection, repair, and replacement; video inspection of tanks, ducts, and other vessels and structures
<b>BUSINESS MIX:</b>	95% municipal and commercial, 5% residential
<b>SERVICE AREA:</b>	50-mile radius in and around Richmond, Va.
<b>WEB SITE:</b>	www.capitalcityservices.com

utilities were marked, but very few private utilities were, so he began marking private utilities for customers. As his sewer drain work increased, Wayne increasingly found septic tanks with problems, but he was not equipped to repair them. In 1983, he invested in a septic tank truck and took on septic tank cleaning and repair.

**Investing in growth**

By 1985, Wayne realized he couldn't do a thorough drain-cleaning job with the cable machines he had been using, so he

shopped around for a jet truck. He found a Myers jetter built on a 1965 Chevrolet chassis — it turned out to be the first Myers sold east of the Mississippi River. The truck had first been sold to a Virginia municipality, and then to a private plumbing contractor. It needed some work, but Wayne knew he could handle that, and the price was right.

Wayne kept that jet truck for four years and used it to open doors that had been closed to him. For the first time, he was able to venture out past a customer's service line and work on mainlines for

municipalities, federal departments, and industrial and large commercial clients.

Along with the ability to jet debris out of a pipeline came the need to pick up the debris. So in 1986, Wayne invested in a vacuum truck to clean catch basins and other structures, as well as mainlines. He used the additional revenue for reinvestment in the business and to even out cash flow.

In the early years of his mainline cleaning work, Wayne would usually be called to a job site after a full blockage had occurred. At that point, his mission was obvious: open the line. However, as his experience grew, he was often called in to solve problems before they became emergencies. Those experiences convinced him that he needed a TV inspection system.

**Easing into inspection**

In 1998, he bought a small SRECO-Flexible push camera, and it opened his eyes as well as those of his clients. "It's one thing to tell a client what you think is wrong, and a completely other thing to show him what's wrong," Wayne says. "If you haven't done a lot of work without a camera, you can't really appreciate how much time and labor they save."

Since then, Wayne has methodically built his video inspection capability. The company owns a Buchen mainline camera. For jobs involving smaller pipes and requiring more agility, he uses ROVER® 400 and 600 inspection systems manufactured by Everest VIT and purchased from MSC, a municipal equipment distributor in Richmond, Va., with help from company president Bill Alley.

Capital City has constructed two fully equipped inspection trailers. "We buy the trailer, guy it, insulate it, put in interior walls and aluminum decking, then add cabinets, lighting, electrical, and air conditioning," Wayne says.

Wayne finds the ROVER 400 unit well suited for pipes as small as 4 inches in diameter. He uses the model 600 for pipes from 6 to 36 inches. Its 6-wheel-drive, steerable crawler is 12 inches long and weighs 16 pounds. "This unit is like driving a sports car," Wayne says. "You can chase rats with it, or climb over debris in a pipeline. And, you can turn



Capital City's video inspection equipment includes small, steerable Rover cameras and crawlers, 12 inches long and weighing less than 25 pounds.

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Wayne Norman



Careful planning and teamwork speed projects and reduce errors for Capital City Services Company.

around in a pipe and come back the same way you went in."

**Building the business**

Wayne has worked his way into line inspections for municipal and other government clients. His customers include

Lee military installation, where Capital City inspects, vacuums and repairs storm and sanitary sewer facilities.

Wayne has built the inspection business largely by word of mouth, but also by advertising in the Virginia Blue Book building trades directory and in the Yellow Pages. He also promotes the service by offering free inspections to customers who have potential for repeat business.

"We show them the problem, make the repair, then go back and wait for the phone to ring with the next job," Wayne says.

**Challenging jobs**

Wayne's first job with the ROVER 600 system was at the military base, where there was trouble with a 125-foot-long, 8-inch discharge line connecting a water/oil separator with a sanitary sewer. Since the military personnel had never seen a remote-controlled inspection camera before, Wayne said he would not charge to inspect the line.

About 20 feet into the line, the tractor went under water, but since the water was clear, Wayne continued to inspect the next 90 feet of pipe before discovering an offset joint just before the line emptied into the sanitary sewer. After the military engineers reviewed the videotape, Wayne negotiated a contract to repair the pipe.

"That inspection was the best thing I ever gave away, because I got a very nice

contract," Wayne says.

He next inspected an old brick sewer for the city of Richmond that had been built on a series of granite slabs, offset like stairs to allow the sewer to follow the contour of the street down a hill. Bricks had fallen from the wall of the pipe and lay in piles along the length of the sewer. The camera had to crawl over and around the bricks and negotiate the stepped slabs to work its way down the pipeline.

"The city had another kind of camera," Wayne says. "Their camera couldn't go down that pipeline, much less turn around at the cave-in we found, and climb back up the line to the manhole."

"The collection and distribution systems for water, gas, and sewage have all been neglected for a long time, but now

### Finding a Niche

"Business is all about providing a valuable service," says Wayne Norman, founder and owner of Capital City Services Company. "When you can provide a needed service that others can't, you'll get that business."

Wayne has found a niche for his TV inspection business by using a "camera on a stick" digital video system to examine tanks and other vessels. The unit includes a high-resolution digital color video camera with zoom lens, spotlight and floodlight mounted at one end of a metal pole that can telescope from 6 to 18 feet long.

Wiring extends through the pole from the camera to a control panel mounted on a battery belt worn by the operator. The operator can control camera zoom and focus and turn each light on or off. The system also includes a Sony MaviCap unit with a 2.5-inch LCD screen and a 3.5-inch floppy disk port.

The MaviCap unit, normally worn around the operator's neck, is protected by a sunscreen pouch. The operator uses the screen for visual inspection and can store still images in JPG or BMP format on a standard floppy disk.

"The benefit of this camera is that one man can inspect a tank, manhole, or other tight-space area alone, and without danger," Wayne says.

The Virginia Department of Transportation asked him to inspect a buried steel fuel tank that had only an 8-inch-square access port. "I was able to stand on the ground, slip the camera into the tank, and zoom in on each area that appeared damaged," Wayne says. "The tank was eaten up with holes. You could see the water running in. After the engineers saw the pictures, I got the job to replace the tank."

Wayne finds the zoom lens useful when inspecting large tanks, open-ended pipes, or the first 50 to 100 feet of any pipeline.



Wayne Norman prepares for an inspection using a Rover crawler. Wayne has built a thriving video-inspection business for Capital City Services.

citizens and government agencies are demanding that these systems be maintained," he says. "That means there's work for those who are willing and able to do it."

"However, anyone thinking about starting a business needs to be aware that it's not easy, even in the best of times. You need to be prepared to work very hard for very little money during the early years, and you have to be tough enough to stick with it. The fewer services you have to offer, the tougher it is to survive. That's why I have worked so hard to diversify. It evens out the work flow."

"I also believe in getting good tools and doing good work. Good tools allow you to do a better job, and they'll last longer than the cheapest thing you can find. They are the cheapest thing you can find. They are just a good investment. When you're investing in yourself, there's no reason to settle for second best."

**Business outlook**

Wayne is optimistic about the future of his business and the sewer maintenance and repair industry in general.

"The collection and distribution systems for water, gas, and sewage have all been neglected for a long time, but now