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Outlook Bright for Wood Fiber Business

Bevel Buddy from Precision Sharpening Devices Makes Chipping More Profitable at WOODBED Corp.

By Tim Cox, Contributing Author

ST. MARYS, Penn. – The wood fiber business has been good to Bob DeLullo, and he thinks the outlook for the future remains bright.

It's gotten even brighter lately thanks to a tool from Precision Sharpening Devices Inc. – Bevel Buddy – that has made chipping operations more profitable.

Bob, 46, is the owner of two businesses, a trucking company, DeLullo Trucking Corp., and WOODBED Corp., which manufactures a wide range of wood fiber products with an emphasis on mulch and chips.

Bob grew up in St. Marys, a small town in the western half of Pennsylvania and the northern tier of the state. The town is about 75 miles northwest of State College. Bob still makes his home and living in St. Marys.

As a young man, Bob worked for a local sawmill as a truck driver. As he drove to forest products businesses and their wood yards in the region, he gained an understanding of the ins and outs of markets for residuals and realized there was a potential for a business like WOODBED.

He started his own business in 1990. Starting with one truck, he bought wood products on the open market and re-sold them. At the time he mainly sold wood fiber material to dairy farmers for bedding for their cows; he also sold mulch to landscape and nursery businesses. As the business grew he acquired about seven or eight trucks and about 25 pieces of equipment and had an enterprise that employed about 10 people.

While he was growing his trucking business, Bob had an idea for a company name if he ever wanted to exit the trucking business or venture into something new. He put the name WOODBED down on paper – the name came from the wood fiber

bedding material that he supplied to the dairy industry.

When fuel prices began to escalate in 2000, Bob decided to produce his own

value-added products so he could reduce costs. He formed WOODBED in 2005 as a separate entity from his trucking company. He now has a fleet of 15 trucks and also re-



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**“Chip More Not Change More”**

lies on subcontractors who haul steadily for him; the two businesses employ about 30 employees combined and have nearly 100 pieces of equipment.

The company still buys material from vendors under contract and resells it, but it also manufactures wood fiber products. It primarily makes mulch, secondarily chips, and now is in the firewood business, too. All the company's operations are located in one wood yard facility.

Bob initially invested in a front-end loader and a Jones tub grinder in order to make wood fiber material for playground surfaces. He contracted with a company similar to his own based in eastern Pennsylvania. WOODBED is still a satellite facility for the other company.

Later he invested in a Peterson 4700 horizontal grinder and screeners. As the business grew, he added a Morbark tub grinder and a Peterson 5000 disk chipper-delimiter-debarker. Later he added a coloring system to offer colored mulch products. He also purchased a Multitek 2040 firewood processor to produce firewood.

The company's yard is 30 acres. Bob has an advantage because his yard also functions as a collection site for wood debris – such as the wood debris generated by tree removal businesses. He takes residual



The Bevel Buddy™ sharpeners work very well with disc and drum style chippers and conventional pocket style, face mounted, and reversible/disposable knife systems. Sharpening knives with the Bevel Buddy takes a mere five minutes from shutting down the machine to starting it back up, according to Bob DeLullo.

material left on logging jobs. In addition, he buys some wood material from land-clearing contractors, and he buys pulp logs for the chipper.

About 55 percent of the company's business is from sales of mulch, about 35 percent, chips, and the rest, firewood.

Bob's entry into chipping operations in 2008 was a matter of necessity. As the economy tanked and sawmills began to close, he was not able to buy chips on the open market and decided to manufacture them himself. His business only needs about 10-15 percent of the chip production; the rest is sold to mills that make paper or medium density fiberboard.

The Bevel Buddy sharpener from Precision Sharpening Devices Inc. has been a boon to the chipping operations. Bob heard about the Bevel Buddy from Mark Mills, a customer in Erie, Penn. that he supplied with mulch products. Mark also is the owner of an industrial supply business, Ace Supply, which is a subsidiary of Precision Sharpening Devices Inc.

The chipper is equipped with the recyclable Key Knife system. The knives have two sides. Ordinarily, they ran the chipper until one side was dull, then flipped the knives to use the other side. When the second side became dull, the knives were replaced. The knives were flipped every three to four hours.

Using the Bevel Buddy to 'dress' the knives while in the machine extends their life, enables the chipper to run longer, and also improves chip quality, Bob reported.



(L to R) Mark Mills, owner of Precision Sharpening Devices, Inc. (Bevel Buddy); Bob DeLullo owner of WOODBED and DeLullo Trucking; Joe Auman, chipper operator; and Mark Raubenstrauch, loader operator. They are standing in front of the Peterson 5000 chipper-delimiter-debarker.

By keeping the knives sharp with the Bevel Buddy, he averages about 12 hours of chipping time with the same blades, said Joe Auman, who operates the chipper. That's an increase of 300 percent, he noted. Sometimes he has gotten as much as 18 or nearly 30 hours of chipping time, he said.

"I believe it definitely improves production," said Joe Auman, "because once the knives are dull you're not going to get any production."

Sharpening the knives with the Bevel Buddy takes a mere five minutes from shut-

ting down the machine to starting it back up, according to Bob. The knives are sharpened in the machine without adjusting or removing them.

The Bevel Buddy is "very, very easy" to use, noted Joe. It only took about a minute of training to learn how to use the hand-held tool, he said.

"It certainly does extend the life of the knives," said Bob. "It's a great product for us."

Precision Sharpening Devices Inc. has been manufacturing counter grinding and

back beveling equipment for cutting knives since 1988. Its equipment is used by the pulp and paper, sawmill, plywood, and whole tree chipping industries. The company has thousands of its sharpeners serving the forest products industry, enabling customers to reduce costs and increase production.

The process is very simple. A chipping knife is re-sharpened – in the machine – two or three times. The edge is more effective for chipping. Sharp knives improve chip quality and production and reduce costs associated with wear and tear on equipment, maintenance, and fuel.

The company offers three models of the Bevel Buddy. They can be used with disk and drum chippers with conventional, pocket-style, face-mounted and reversible, disposable knife systems.

The benefits of the Bevel Buddy, which is trademarked, include savings on knife replacement costs, chipper parts, fuel, and sharpening costs, according to Mark. At the same time, 'dressing' the knives with the Bevel Buddy also improves production and increases production time. That all adds up to increased profitability.

Precision Sharpening Devices Inc., which has sold its series one tools for 23 years, introduced three new sharpeners this year, including the Bevel Buddy. They represent the company's next generation of sharpening tools. They can be used on more types of knives and increase production and profits for more businesses that use machines with knives, noted Mark. The applications include manufacturers and owners of brush chippers, equipment rental businesses, government agencies, land-clearing businesses, contractors that maintain utility rights-of-way, tree service companies, horticulturists, and forest products businesses that manufacture poles and plywood.

Bob, who already had one of the company's series one sharpeners for several years before purchasing the Bevel Buddy, agreed that the savings and impact on profits can be substantial.

With the Bevel Buddy, the company has averaged savings of \$825 per week alone, in knife replacement costs, said Bob. "That's a huge savings," he noted, amounting to \$40-50,000 annually. During periods of peak production, the savings in knife replacement costs may be twice as much, he added.

Fuel savings are a little more difficult to calculate, but Bob estimated them at 10 percent by keeping the knives sharp with the



Precision Sharpening Devices family of sharpeners includes the Series 1 sharpeners (shown on top) and the Bevel Buddy™ series (shown on bottom). Joe Auman, who operates the chipper at WOODBED, indicates he averages about 12 hours of chipping time with the same blades, an increase of 300 percent. Sometimes he has gotten as much as 18 or nearly 30 hours of chipping time.

Bevel Buddy. “You’re not trying to beat a piece of wood through a dull set of knives,” he observed. “You’re going to lose huge efficiencies when they go dull.”

He also has experienced about a 10 percent savings in disk parts “because we’re keeping everything in better shape,” said Bob.

Improved safety also is a factor. By reducing the frequency of servicing the knives, employee safety is heightened. “It’s a quick place to get hurt – big machinery, sharp knives,” noted Bob. “It’s definitely improved safety.”

(For more information on the Bevel Buddy, visit www.bevelbuddy.com or call (814) 899-0796.)

WOODBED’s list of products includes compost, fresh sawdust, kiln-dried shavings, raw bark, and single, double, and triple-ground bark mulch of various species, a wood fiber material for playground surfaces called Woodcarpet, and wood fiber products for oil and gas exploration operations.

When he decided to add production of colored mulch, Bob invested in an Amerimulch coloring system and colorants. The system is computerized and can be operated by one man from the seat of the loader.

WOODBED serves customers within about 150 miles, which includes northwest Pennsylvania and into New York and Ohio.

“We push the envelope every year to grow,” said Bob.

The company’s raw material is mainly hardwood. “There’s a great raw material



Mark Mills of Precision Sharpening Devices (left) offers sharpening devices such as the Bevel Buddy to quickly sharpen knives without removing them from the machine. Bob DeLullo (right) owner of WOODBED sells mulch (55% of product mix), chips (35%), and firewood (remaining 10%).



WOODBED offers five different types of colored enhanced mulches. Primary grind material is loaded into Peterson 4700B by Volvo L110E loader to be reground into a higher quality material before being colored in an Amerimulch system. Colored material then travels up the 100’ radial stacker to be dropped into conical piles for drying.

base here,” Bob said of the region. “It’s not construction and demolition or pallet material.” The company uses wood fiber from the forest to make its products, he noted.

The sawmill industry in the region has been on the decline in the region for the past 20 years, noted Bob. However, the paper and medium density fiberboard industries are still healthy.

“There has always been a fiber scare,” said Bob, a fear of not being able to get enough raw material. “But we pull from so many sources we never run out.”

Land-clearing activity, which is a source of raw material, is not necessarily tied to housing or commercial development. Pennsylvania has experienced a boom in natural gas exploration in recent years, and those operations spur land-clearing activities.

“Our team as a whole is extremely important,” said Bob, referring to all the company’s employees. “That’s what makes the whole thing work.”

In the mulch season, he noted, it is not uncommon for employees to have to work six or even seven days a week. They rise to the occasion, according to Bob. “When it’s time to pick up the pace, they do a wonderful job with that.”

The company offers a complete package of benefits that includes health insurance, life insurance, a 401(k) retirement plan, paid training, vacation, holidays, and personal days. “We’ve been doing that for a long time,” said Bob.

Every truck driver has a company

credit card to take of incidental expenses while traveling. Their meals are paid for while on the road, and they also get extra pay for overnight trips. In addition, drivers are eligible for monthly safety and fuel bonuses, and they participate in a quarterly breakfast safety meeting at a restaurant downtown.

Bob’s companies are members of the Allegheny Forest Alliance, Pennsylvania Forest Industry Association, Pennsylvania Motor Truck Association, Pennsylvania Forest Products Association, and the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association.

Bob is married with three children – two daughters and a son – ages 11, 14, and 17. His son, Sam, the oldest, is a junior in high school and also works for WOODBED; he helps out by servicing and greasing loaders, operating loaders, and loading trailers. Bob and his family enjoy raising miniature goats, boating, and riding ATVs.

He is optimistic about future business prospects. “I think the future is real good for this business,” said Bob. “There is a lot of potential out there, a lot of different avenues we can take,” mainly in mulch and chips.

The next logical move would be to add another wood yard at some location 100-150 miles away. “That probably would be the next move, but it’s not in the plans now,” said Bob.

For more information on WOODBED, visit the website at www.woodbed.com or call the company at (800) 247-5522 or (814) 834-1464. 