



GRADE A CONSTRUCTION

Quality work done on time fuels growth, solid reputation for Nashville-area earthwork contractor



Rachelle Reigard,
Owner / President

Five years after most businesses start, a majority fall into one of two categories: Either they have folded, or they have experienced minimal gains. Grade A Construction was one of the lucky companies in a third category, as it gained traction immediately and enjoyed exponential growth. In fact, the Lebanon, Tennessee-based company's first job was one most companies just starting out only dream about.

"It was a nearly \$600,000 underground project," Vice President of Operations Lance Lannom recalled. "There were several challenges, including the mass rock excavation of a deep basement bordering Nashville's CSX main rail line. Other companies were having a hard time getting it done, but we stepped in and completed it on time and under budget. That earned us a lot of respect from the general contractor, and we have worked with them ever since."

Grade A Construction's list of repeat customers is considerably long. Owner/President Rachelle

Reigard said that repeat business is because of the company's focus on quality work done right the first time and to the customer's satisfaction. The company provides services to commercial, industrial and residential developers as well as governmental entities.

"We provide a wide range of construction services, with an emphasis on managing everything from the ground down," said Reigard. "We specialize in site work and utility installation, but Grade A also offers boring, blasting, directional drilling, clearing, demolition, retaining walls, erosion control, heavy hauling, surveying, hydro excavation and industrial work. Our forte is general contracting a full package that takes a site from bare ground to the point where the structure can go vertical and pavement can be put down."

"We have three basic divisions – grading, utility and boring," Lannom added. "Each has its own long list of services. We have multiple grading and utility crews, and they work together on about 75 percent of our projects. It's our preference to provide a comprehensive site-work package, but we're not opposed to breaking out our services and doing a strictly utility, boring or mass grading project based on its size. Our boring, hydro excavation, drilling and blasting crews are specialists in those areas and often perform independently from the others."

Invaluable experience

Grade A Construction's founding goes back to 2011 when Reigard and Lannom teamed up. Reigard founded the company as a woman-owned business entity after owning a medical technology business. Lannom had worked as a general superintendent and manager for grading companies in Tennessee and Kentucky.

"At the time, the economy was coming back strong, and I was looking for something



Lance Lannom,
Vice President,
Operations

Komatsu intelligent Machine Control dozers, including this D61EXi, are used by Grade A Construction for mass and fine grading. "Rough cut to finish grade – it's all automatic, with no masts or cables to deal with," Vice President of Estimating John Hayman said. "Our production increased, and our costs went down."

▶ VIDEO





Grade A Construction hires only highly skilled employees with several years of construction-industry experience. "Our core team has close to 100 combined years in the industry," noted Vice President of Operations Lance Lannom.

new," Reigard said. "I saw construction in the Nashville area growing and believed there was a need for companies like Grade A. Lance and I met in 2004 when our kids started playing ball together and have been friends since then. I started the company and brought the business side, and Lance manages the field component for the organization. I take care of the office staff, licensing, contracting, payroll, and associated work. He runs the projects, so we complement each other very well."

Reigard and Lannom work together to hire only highly skilled employees with several years of experience in the construction industry. Key individuals include Controller Jeanie Wallick, Vice President of Estimating John Hayman, Project Manager Kenny Michael and Boring Division Manager Larry Gipson. In total, Grade A Construction has about 50 people on staff now, compared to three when Reigard started the business.

"Our core team has close to 100 combined years in the industry," Lannom noted. "That's invaluable and a big reason why we have the ability to take on large, challenging jobs. At the same time, we're not stuck on doing things the old-fashioned way. We embrace the latest in technology and innovation, such as GPS grading and software systems, to do estimating, job costing and more. We believe that adds value to us and our customers. John has been instrumental in setting us up for that."

Komatsu technology increases productivity

One area where Grade A Construction quickly embraced technology was in its equipment. The company almost exclusively uses Komatsu machinery, including an *intelligent* Machine Control (iMC) PC210LCi-10 excavator and D65EXi-18 and D61EXi-23 dozers. Topcon



▶ VIDEO

A Grade A Construction operator digs a utility trench with a Komatsu *intelligent* Machine Control PC210LCi-10 excavator on a 17-acre commercial site in Murfreesboro. "It eliminates overexcavation, so there is no costly material replacement," Vice President of Operations Lance Lannom said. "We also don't need someone to constantly check grade, so that person is now freed up to do more productive work."

GPS base, rovers and Magnet Office products also provide some of the heavy lifting enabling Grade A to easily out perform its competitors.

"Lance and I saw Komatsu's iMC display at CONEXPO, a couple of years ago, and knew right then that the dozers were the future of grading and excavation," said Hayman. "The first Komatsu machine we bought was a D61i, and it performed just as Komatsu said it would. Rough cut to finish grade – it's all automatic, with no masts or cables to deal with. Our production increased, and our costs went down. That prompted us to continue looking for iMC machines. When we heard the excavator was coming, we were right on it. In fact, we were the first company in Tennessee to acquire a PC210LCi."

Grade A Construction uses its PC210LCi-10 mainly for digging utility trenches. "It eliminates overexcavation, so there is no costly material replacement," said Lannom. "We also don't need someone to constantly check grade, so that person is now freed up to do more productive work. Overall, the iMC machines have improved our operations and quality control. We love them."

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Plenty of growth ahead for Grade A Construction

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In addition to iMC equipment, Grade A Construction runs Komatsu Tier 4 Final PC360LC-11 and PC290LC-11 excavators. It recently added a Tier 4 Interim WA270-7 wheel loader. The company purchased all of its Komatsu equipment, as well as a Takeuchi TL12 compact track loader, from Power Equipment Company's Nashville branch with the help of Territory Manager Jeff Walker.

"We use the excavators for moving mass amounts of material, and the loader gives us versatility on the utility side, because we use it to move pipe, place bedding, load trucks and more," said Reigard. "I particularly like KOMTRAX, because it allows us to track our machines' hours, location, fuel usage, idle

time and other critical information. We can set parameters, for example, if a machine idles for a certain amount of time, it powers off. That saves hours and fuel. KOMTRAX provides us valuable data we can use for job costing, operator evaluations and more. It's such a great tool that we added it to the Takeuchi skid steer."

"Komatsu, Jeff and Power Equipment are great to work with," added Lannom. "Any time we have needed something, including financing equipment through Komatsu Financial, they have been there to help. We especially appreciate that Power Equipment does the scheduled maintenance on all of our Komatsu machines under the Komatsu CARE program for the first three years or 2,000 hours. It gives us peace of mind knowing that the services are done on time by Power's trained technicians. They let us know when a service is due and schedule the work at a convenient time and location for us."

Continued growth

Grade A Construction's project locations are generally within about a 60-mile radius of Lebanon that includes the greater Nashville metro area. Recent work includes a large commercial site in Murfreesboro that saw the company move about 45,000 yard of onsite embankment and install nearly 10,000 feet of utilities.

"That's a typical, average-sized job for us," said Lannom. "We delivered the building pads about a month ahead of schedule and are on track to complete other aspects before their deadlines. Service like that has gained us a good reputation and fueled our phenomenal growth. Grade A has basically doubled in size every year since the company's inception."

Reigard added that doubling in size every year is unlikely long term. "We will continue to grow at a healthy pace. As the Nashville area continues to expand, there is plenty of work here for the foreseeable future. By the middle of January our contracts on the books have already exceeded 2015 volumes, so this will be another record-breaker for us. Utilizing technology, innovation and good management, while providing world-class service, helps us deliver on our mission of being the premier contractor in the middle Tennessee area." ■



Power Equipment Company Territory Manager Jeff Walker (left) and Technology Solutions Expert Anthony Neely (far right) call on Grade A Construction Owner / President Rachelle Reigard and Vice President of Operations Lance Lannom. "Komatsu, Jeff and Power Equipment are great to work with," Lannom said. "Any time we have needed something, including financing equipment through Komatsu Financial, they have been there to help."

This WA270-7 wheel loader is the newest addition to Grade A's fleet, which includes Komatsu excavators and dozers. "The loader gives us versatility on the utility side because we use it to move pipe, place bedding, load trucks and more," said Owner / President Rachelle Reigard.

