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4 COVER STORY
MINNESOTA NICE
Without social media and smartphones back in the 1980s, Scottie Zuzek kept busy playing soccer, singing in choir, and discovering a love for landscaping.

8 GOOD THINGS. SMALL PACKAGES.
It’s even easier to be productive in our G-Series small-frame machines thanks to new customer-inspired enhancements.

10 TECH TIPS
Proper track maintenance on your compact track loader helps keep uptime up and costs down.

12 ROCKET MEN
Huntsville, Alabama, aka “Rocket City,” has provided the perfect platform for launching a successful underground utility company.

15 GET CONNECTED
Our augers are perfect for digging holes for trees and shrubs or in soil, rock, and frost.
Cover Story

MINNESOTA
NICE GUYS FINISH FIRST AT PRECISION LANDSCAPING AND CONSTRUCTION IN HASTINGS, MINNESOTA

T A

NICE

BACK TO THE 80s

Scottie Zuzek, chief operating officer of Precision Landscaping and Construction in Hastings, Minnesota, grew up in the 1980s and still considers himself an ‘80s guy. I still listen to that music, he says. We didn’t have internet, smartphones and social media back then. So I kept busy in Boy Scouts and playing soccer. And he probably still has a few mixtape cassettes in a drawer somewhere.

Zuzek joined Precision Landscaping in 1986, back when the few cell phones in use weighed several pounds and cost thousands of dollars. It was more or less a summer job, I went to school to become a teacher, so it was a good opportunity to be outside while getting a workout and a tan. It wasn’t my intention to be doing this 30-odd years later.

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The 1980s are back. T e 1980s were famous for their fashion, with legwarmers, Wayfarer sunglasses, Rubik’s Cubes, video arcades, boomboxes and ‘80s music. And the 80s are the subject of many popular movies and television shows, and the music is again “totally tubular.”

NICE GUYS FINISH FIRST AT PRECISION LANDSCAPING AND CONSTRUCTION IN HASTINGS, MINNESOTA
But something happened along the way. He fell in love with the work. "I’m very passionate about it. I’m sure when I retire decades from now, I’ll be bugging the guys to let me run the equipment. It’s a fun business to be in."

EASY BUTTON

In 1992, Precision Landscaping of ered Zuzek a full-time position as landscape foreman. When owner John Fox passed away in 2011, Zuzek took over day-to-day operations and partnered with Fox’s son Josh and Josh’s friend, Joby Nolan. T’ed team is greater than the sum of its parts. We have our differences, but we really mesh and have become great friends, says Zuzek. “I handle operations, Joby is the numbers guy, and Josh has the business and marketing savvy.”

Since 2011, the company has quadrupled in size. “We’ve grown far beyond what I imagined, but we all saw the potential. T’ed three of us worked our tails off to make this company succeed. Today everyone in Hastings knows our name. T’ at’s such a cool feeling. And we’re expanding into the Twin Cities [Minneapolis and St. Paul] metro area.

When Zuzek joined the company in 1986, the company had six employees and a dump truck, sharing a skid steer loader with another company. Today the company has 12 full-time employees running five lawn-maintenance and five landscaping crews. During the height of summer or snow-removal season, they hire 30 or 40 more seasonal workers. T’ed company now owns three John Deere 244L Compact Loaders, a 344L Compact Loader, four 325G Compact Track Loaders (CTLs), and a 50G Compact Excavator, along with numerous Deere lawn tractors and 22 plow trucks.

Growth has exploded in the last three years due to earning larger hardscape and snow-removal contracts. T’ed company recently added the two 244Ls mainly to complete large snow-removal projects, including at a federal building in Bloomington.

We bought our frst John Deere 244 model after getting a large snow-removal contract in Hastings,” says Zuzek. “We were running skid loaders and plow trucks, and realized we needed a bigger machine. We ran it for two seasons, and it was great. T’ed new 244Ls have allowed us to take on more county contracts and the federal contract. We also added the 344L, which is the perfect-size snow-removal machine. Its small and maneuverable enough, but still has ample power to move big piles.

When the snow isn’t flying, the loaders work in the yard, capably loading mulch, rock, and pallets of block onto trucks destined for landscaping jobs. “A nice thing about the 244Ls is the quick-coupler, which allows you to use all the same attachments as the skid loaders,” says Zuzek. “T’ey have plenty of lift capacity on jobsites, and when paired with the right pickup truck and trailer, the 244L is light enough to be transported without the need for a CDL [commercial driver’s license].

T’ed 325G CTLs are the multitasking tool of choice on landscaping jobs. “T’ed Quik-Tatch™ is like an ‘easy button’ for rapidly changing attachments,” says Zuzek. “T’ed 325G’s lift capacity is amazing. It can handle pallets of brick, block, and sod, no problem. And I love the EH [electrohydraulic] controls. I’m old school and grew up on hand and foot controls, but at the end of the day your feet hurt. With the EH controls, you still feel good at the end of your day. Plus the two-speed transmission is nice when you need to get from one end of the jobsite to the other.

T’ed 50G Compact Excavator also helps lighten the workload. “I remember digging all those retaining walls with a shovel when I was younger. It was a good workout, but the 50G is just an amazing machine that can work almost anywhere. It probably takes four or five guys to dig the base out for a patio or trenches for walls, so the 50G saves a lot of man-hours — and backs. We even brought it out to remove snow from a retention pond. Who knew? But that’s the thing about John Deere machines. T’ey are so versatile and easy to run.

MAKING THE COMMUNITY BEAUTIFUL, ONE YARD AT A TIME

T’ed company’s local John Deere dealership, Frontier Ag & Turf, “backs us all the way,” according to Zuzek. “Our salesman and service manager have a wealth of knowledge, so they can get us..."
parts or in for service right away. They know if a piece of equipment isn’t moving, it isn’t making money. So they work hard to keep us up and running.

That’s especially important on snow-removal jobs, where customers expect to see asphalt as soon as the snow stops falling. Zuzek recalls a couple of times where he called Frontier in the middle of the night to repair a blown tire. “In a matter of an hour or two, they put a new tire on the machine, and we were up and running. That’s amazing when it’s two or three in the morning in the middle of a snowstorm.

Precision Landscaping has been growing at a clip of 45 percent a year, and Zuzek expects this year to set another record. Last year we plowed nine million square feet of pavement — that’s a lot of pavement to clear in about 10 hours. As business grows, we’re hoping to add another John Deere loader and maybe a CTL or two for the landscaping business.

Zuzek’s mantra is “making the Twin Cities beautiful, one property at a time. I love going into a yard full of weeds and coming out three days later on a nice patio. Or clearing snow from a parking lot — to me, even that is making something beautiful. I have a passion for making spaces appealing so people can enjoy them.

Precision Landscaping and Construction is serviced by Frontier Ag & Turf, Hastings, Minnesota.

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/worksitejournal
MEET THE IMPROVED SMALL-FRAME SSLs AND CTLs

GOOD THINGS.

SMALL
PACKAGES.
WE SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF
SO YOU DON’T HAVE TO.

Don’t let their small size fool you. Our G-Series small-frame skid steer loaders (SSLs) and compact track loaders (CTLs) deliver, big time. Our lineup includes the value-packed basic models: the 312GR and 314G SSLs. Or if it’s a more powerful, better-equipped skid steer you’re seeking, step up to the 316GR and 318G. Going beast mode? Check out the 317G CTL with amped-up specs.

To help make sure we’re continuing to meet your unique needs, we recently added a few customer-inspired enhancements to our existing G-Series small-frame models. Read on to learn about the good things we’ve included in these compact packages.

HIT THE ROAD
With weights from only 5,905 to 8,423 pounds, these compacts are easy to trailer behind a standard pickup truck. A new second rear tie-down as well as one at the front of the machine make it even easier to get rolling.

POWER LIFTERS
These loaders rise high, pick up heavy loads, and deliver remarkable boom- and bucket-breakout forces. And now you can add even more capacity with up to two sets of counterweights.

SEAL THE DEAL
Improved sealing and cab pressurization help keep the dust out and the noise down, so you can focus on work or enjoy the new hands-free Bluetooth® radio option.

GET A GRIP
Low-effort foot pedals are standard on skid steers. Electrohydraulic (EH) joysticks are standard on the 317G CTL, optional on the 316GR and 318G SSLs.

DAMAGE CONTROL
Auxiliary hydraulic lines and wiring are routed through the boom where they’re protected from damage.

SEE CLEARLY
Excellent visibility can be further enhanced with an LED side-lighting option (316GR, 318G, and 317G CTL only). An optional rearview camera is available on all models as an alternate way to view the jobsite behind the machine.

BREATHE EASY
For year-round comfort, air conditioning is available in 316GR, 318G, and 317G CTL models. New to EH models, repositioned ducts and vents maximize airflow.

EASY CLEANOUT
Coolers are now latched and separate effortlessly without the need for tools, simplifying core cleanout. Cab side windows also remove easily for cleaning.
STAY ON TRACK
MANAGING TRACK WEAR ON YOUR CTL

Track maintenance is vital to the performance and uptime of your compact track loader (CTL). By training your operators, inspecting and cleaning tracks, and maintaining proper tension, you'll extend track life and reduce downtime and operating costs.

HANDLE WITH CARE

CTLs excel in soft underfoot conditions like dirt and mud. If you work primarily on asphalt or concrete, a wheeled skid steer loader or compact wheel loader might be a better choice, as these conditions wear the rubber surfaces of a track at a faster rate. If you must run a CTL on hard surfaces, consider sprinkling sand or dirt in the machine’s path to reduce track wear.

Train operators to take wide turns instead of counter-rotating like on a skid steer to help minimize wear. They should avoid spinning the tracks and go up and down slopes rather than across to reduce wear. In general, teach them to keep the full length of the tracks on the ground as much as possible. When going over a curb, they should approach slowly and in a perpendicular direction to reduce pressure on the tracks and rollers.

INSPECT AND MAINTAIN

Daily inspection and maintenance are critical to avoiding premature track and component wear as well as unnecessary repairs. Check your tracks daily for the following:

- Examine tracks for caked-on mud and debris. Do not allow mud to dry or freeze in the tracks. Use a shovel or pressure washer to remove material.
- Inspect track tension (see PAY ATTENTION TO TENSION below).
- Look for cuts or tears perpendicular to the tracks, missing chunks, or uneven wear around the sprocket/roller area.

If cuts run parallel with the track, it's usually okay to continue operation for a while, but perpendicular cuts or tears often result in complete failure. Steel or fiber belts run the length of the track similar to a radial tire. If the cords are intact, the track will usually last, but if they are severed, failure is probably imminent.

PAY ATTENTION TO TENSION

Over- or under-tensioning is the main cause of track failure. A track that is too loose will wear faster and could even slip off the sprocket, exposing components to damage. A track that's too tight causes component wear, robs the CTL of horsepower, and burns more fuel.

ADJUST TRACK SAG

The track tension on your CTL can be adjusted in a few minutes using a grease gun and a crescent wrench:

1. Bring the CTL to a full stop.
2. Lower the boom to raise the front end of the tracks approximately eight inches off the ground.
3. Remove any debris between the track and the sprocket.
4. Locate the third roller from the rear of the machine and measure the distance between the bottom of the roller and the top of the track.
5. Check your operator’s manual for track-sag specifications.
6. If the track needs adjustment, remove the cover plate located on the undercarriage frame.
7. If the track needs to be tightened, connect a grease gun to the grease fitting and add grease until the track idler extends far enough to bring the sag within recommended limits.
8. To loosen the track, slowly turn the track-adjuster valve counterclockwise, allowing grease to escape through the bleed hole. Clean any excess grease from the zerk and dispose of it per environmental regulations. When the amount of track sag is satisfactory, turn the valve clockwise to tighten.
9. With the track sag within the recommended limits, reattach the cover plate.

Refer to your operator’s manual to learn more about proper track maintenance and machine inspections. Contact your local John Deere dealer with questions or to schedule a technician for a thorough assessment if needed.
Sprawling around the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in North Alabama, Huntsville is nicknamed “The Rocket City” for its long history with the U.S. space program. The city is the home of NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center, which developed the Saturn boosters for the Apollo program as well as key systems for the International Space Station and the Space Shuttle program. Today Huntsville is the fourth largest and fastest growing city in Alabama, spurred by burgeoning defense, aerospace, and other tech-related industries.* In other words, it’s the perfect place for a company like Weaver Environmental Services Company (WESCO) to launch its business.

Owner Shaun Gonzales bought WESCO, an underground utility installation company, 18 years ago from his grandfather, James Weaver. “I worked for my grandfather ever since I can remember,” recalls Gonzales. “After high school I started bidding jobs for the company. My grandfather always preferred running equipment — he hated being cooped up in an office and bidding jobs. But I’ve always loved the competition of the bidding process.”

*Sources: huntsville.org, huntsvilleal.gov, and al.com.
LIFTOFF

Gonzales remembers Huntsville as a small town. “Growing up, I lived in the country,” he says. “It’s really grown in the last few decades — it’s crazy how much it’s grown.”

As tech-related companies flocked to Huntsville, subdivisions began sprouting up all over, along with grocery stores, restaurants, and other commercial businesses. Gonzales saw an opportunity.

Today Gonzales’ grandfather is 82 and still operates equipment and oversees a crew for WESCO. But 18 years ago he was ready to turn over the reins. “He wanted to stay small and do residential work, but I really felt we could grow. When I took over, we had eight employees and were working in subdivisions. Now we’ve got 37 employees and work on many big commercial jobs, as well as doing manhole rehabilitation for the city of Huntsville and offering material-hauling services.”

WESCO now has more work than Gonzales ever dreamed of, but finding workers is a challenge. “Back in the early days, finding employees was easy, but finding work was hard. Today we have plenty of work, but it’s hard to find people.”

GROUND CONTROL

Expanding into commercial work has also made it harder to be productive. Jobsites are much tighter and more congested than residential jobs. Gonzales needed to find ways to be more efficient and do more with less.

He struck pay dirt when he discovered John Deere compact machines. “It’s like we won the lottery when we started adding Deere mini excavators and compact track loaders (CTLs). They’re compact and versatile, which makes them very handy in close quarters.”

The company owns three Deere compact excavators, including a 35G, as well as a 331G CTL and a 333G CTL. The 35G has been the perfect fit for the type of work WESCO does. “It’s great for putting in septic systems, fixing water lines, and putting in small water systems — it just does a really good job. The zero-tail-swing design allows us to get into tight areas and rotate within the tracks without worrying about hitting something. And we really like the machine’s power and the long reach with the extended boom. Plus it has an angle blade for backfilling.”

“IT’S LIKE WE WON THE LOTTERY WHEN WE STARTED ADDING DEERE MINI EXCAVATORS AND COMPACT TRACK LOADERS. THEY’RE COMPACT AND VERSATILE, WHICH MAKES THEM VERY HANDY IN CLOSE QUARTERS.”

— Shaun Gonzales, owner, Weaver Environmental Services Company
The CTLs excel at multitasking. “We can hook them up to augers, forks, buckets, four-in-one buckets, grapples, bush hogs, and trenchers. What can’t they do? You only need one machine to do so many jobs. They’re just so versatile.”

WESCO has its own in-house mechanic. “He always tells me everything is easy to get to and simple to service,” says Gonzales. “And if we need additional support, our local dealer, TriGreen Equipment, really takes care of us. They get right on it, and we rarely have downtime. John Deere machines and TriGreen Equipment have been a real big part of our business and helped us succeed.”

“WE CAN HOOK THEM UP TO AUGERS, FORKS, BUCKETS, FOUR-IN-ONE BUCKETS, GRAPPLES, BUSH HOGS, AND TRENCHERS. WHAT CAN’T THEY DO? YOU ONLY NEED ONE MACHINE TO DO SO MANY JOBS. THEY’RE JUST SO VERSATILE.”

— Shaun Gonzales, owner, Weaver Environmental Services Company

TRANQUILITY BASE

Gonzales finds all John Deere compact machines comfortable to run and easy to transport. “Despite being compact, there’s plenty of room inside the cab, and they’re really stable. And we can use a small trailer to haul them around, so we can pull up to a jobsite, unload quickly, and be on our way.

“We’ve just always had good luck with Deere machines,” he adds. “They are built really well, really tough. We put them through a lot, and they always hold up really well.”

WESCO has been holding up pretty well, too. “I’m proud that we’re a family business and we’ve been able to grow. My grandfather, father, and mother all work for the company. And I hope someday after he gets out of college, my son will take over the company. He’s been learning the business by working on a pipe crew and has a mentor he really likes to work with.”

The younger Gonzales has a few other good mentors, too, including a great-grandfather who loves running equipment and a father who loves running the business. He’ll be in good hands as he launches his own career.

Weaver Environmental Services Company, Inc. (WESCO) is serviced by TriGreen Equipment, Huntsville, Alabama.

Check out the video at: JohnDeere.com/worksitejournal
Getting Connected

John Deere augers are great for digging standard holes in various types of soil, rock, and frost, or for digging landscaping holes for trees and shrubs. Our augers feature sealed, hydraulic planetary-reduction motors. These motors have a higher-rated operating pressure than previous models and feature a larger, more durable motor-shaft seal.

Three models — the PA15B, PA30B, and PA40 — deliver up to 5,000 ft.-lb. of maximum torque. On the PA30B, maximum torque has been increased from 4,166 ft.-lb. to 4,500 ft.-lb. over the previous model, with improved gear reduction. The number of planetary gears in the PA30B gearbox has been increased from three to five.

On all models, the planetary gearbox is set closer to the motor than previously, increasing efficiency and decreasing stress. The gearbox also features a sturdier input shaft to improve durability.

Bit diameters up to 36 inches are available. On the PA40, we offer heavy-duty (HD) difficult-ground bits, which incorporate a durable cast-tooth holder instead of fabricated-metal mountings. These bits are designed to handle compacted soil, heavy clay, asphalt, frozen ground, and fracture rock. HD, tree and shrub, and rock bits are also available in a wide range of diameters to match your application.
SERIOUSLY UPGRADED.

INTRODUCING OUR UPGRADED G SERIES SMALL FRAME SKID STEERS AND CTLs. With more than a dozen new features and options that deliver more operating capacity, visibility, and convenience. On top of it all, a host of creature comforts in the cab. Visit your dealer and see why everyone loves a good upgrade.