

# A SALUTE TO A CUSTOMER



## L.G. ROLOFF CONSTRUCTION COMPANY

### Versatility is this contractor's key to success

**W**hen Larry Roloff, president of L.G. Roloff Construction Company, looks back to 1975, the year he founded his Omaha (Nebraska) contracting firm, he admits he might have had better timing.

"In 1975 the economy was down, and fuel prices were sky high," recalled Roloff. "But on the other hand, I didn't have any overhead, and I only had two employees. So it worked. I bought a pickup and a few hand tools, and we started doing repair work."

Roloff was in his mid 30s at the time. "I worked as a superintendent for a contractor for 12 years and felt that if I was going to do this the rest of my life, I was going to try and do it on my own," he said. "I put out my name to the engineers and to the cities in the surrounding Omaha area and negotiated some repair work — paving repair, utility repair. In developments, there's always something that needs to be repaired."

In the beginning, Roloff's wife Janice was the company bookkeeper. "We estimated at night and

she did the books and took phone calls during the day," said Roloff. "The office was in our home." Today the Roloffs' daughter, Kara Habrock, is the firm's office manager.

#### First contract job

"The first job we landed under contract was a taxiway and water, sewer and storm line extension at the Omaha airport facility," Roloff remembered. "We got a job with the airport authority and one with the county. So those were the kind of jobs we went after, plus small sewer and water jobs."

Today Roloff Construction employs 65 people and concentrates its efforts within a 100-mile radius of Omaha. "We've worked in northern Nebraska and in Iowa, but in the last 10 years it's been mainly around Omaha," commented Roloff.

The company still performs utility work and added concrete paving in 1990. That area is overseen by one of Roloff's original employees, Bob Norris, who is company vice president and general manager. Other key employees include estimator Dick Noble and paving superintendent Ron Meyers. "Bob and Ron have been with me the longest," Roloff noted.

The company fields a paving crew and four sewer crews. "The paving crew is basically three crews," Roloff explained. "We have a grading crew, a paving crew, and then we have a fellow who does the structures and inlets and a crew that does the intersections and so forth."

#### 50/50 split

Roloff Construction's business is split 50/50 between public and private work. The private work is mainly for subdivision developers, while the public work is mostly municipal. Roloff noted that his company's utility projects often create work for the firm's paving crews.

"Here in Omaha they have a sewer separation program," explained Roloff. "They put a storm sewer

President Larry Roloff (right) and Vice President Bob Norris guide L.G. Roloff Construction Company of Omaha.





Larry Roloff uses a Komatsu PC228 “short-tail-swing” excavator on a recent site-development project in west Omaha.

in an area and dedicate the sanitary sewer just to sanitary. It's a good market for us. We're pretty familiar with the people who work for the city, and our people understand what has to be done.

“We make those alterations, which many times involve tearing up the paving, maybe relocating water and gas lines, putting in the storm sewer, reconnecting it, rebuilding inlets to dedicate all the storm water to the storm drain, and modifying the sewer just for sanitary sewer,” he listed. “This generally involves a lot of restoration. And when we finish that restoration work, it also gives us paving work. The paving crews can follow up, whether it be slip form paving or hand work.”

### Downtown area is specialty

Roloff Construction also performs boring work. “As we got into business, we did a project that needed an outflow sewer for the city of Ralston and then we also had pipe with boring, so we started doing boring,” Roloff stated. “We bought a boring machine. We also do tunnel work. We've made it our specialty to work in the downtown Omaha area.”

Roloff crews installed several tunnels as they prepared the site for the Omaha Convention Center as part of a \$6.5 million contract. “The project included 36-inch sanitary sewer, a 144-inch storm drain, plus it had a tunnel for the sanitary sewer and a tunnel for the storm drains running under the Union Pacific railroad tracks,” said Roloff. “We did 250 feet of pipe jacking and we built a shaft, dewatered it, and so forth.”



Larry Roloff and L.G. Roloff Construction Company have been innovators in the construction industry in Nebraska. Here he stands next to a bucket that was fabricated by his company to incorporate a modified hitch for a quick coupler.



Another challenging job was a sewer separation in the Benson area of Omaha, Nebraska, in 1996. “We did the sewer separation plus 760 feet of tunnel for storm drainage,” Roloff stated. “We had another one on 50th Street in Omaha with 500 feet of 90-inch tunnel. It involved pipe jacking plus sewer separation and paving. It was a good-sized project. All these sewer separation jobs are a challenge, but these were probably the most challenging and successful jobs.”

Roloff is a member of the National Utility Contractors Association. “Being in this type of organization I've learned one thing,” he commented. “The people who put in pipe have the same problems overall. And it's surprising how many of us do things quite alike. I would say underground people are probably the most outgoing — I've found they will tell you anything you want to know. I'm that way, too. Underground and heavy highway people are pretty straight forward.”

**Komatsu machines like this PC400LC-5 have been mainstays of the L.G. Roloff equipment fleet.**

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# Company “blessed with good people”

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## Appreciates reliable equipment

Larry Roloff has been depending on reliable Komatsu equipment since he bought his first Komatsu hydraulic excavator in 1987. RoadBuilders district sales manager Dru Davidson services the Roloff account.

“Komatsu equipment has treated us well,” recalled Roloff. “The excavators don’t have a lot of problems. They start, they run every day. Parts are always available, and the service is good. They’re simple to work on. The 300 and 400 Komatsus are probably the mainstay of our company.”

Roloff Construction’s fleet includes several Komatsu excavators — three PC400LC-5s, five PC300LC-5s, a PC200 and two PC228USLC-2 short-tail-swing excavators. “We rented one of those big PC1100-6s for four months, and we also have a Komatsu WA450 wheel loader that we use as a utility machine,” Roloff added. “We have forks and a JRB quick coupler on it for lifting heavier pipe.”

Roloff added the short-tail-swing PC228s to his fleet “for the city work,” he said. “A lot of storm drain lays along the curb line, and you’re always swinging against a pole or a tree. It’s nice to have that short tail swing, because you have the ability to swing around, load a dump truck and get him going.”

Roloff praised the Komatsu PC228’s power, lift and balance. “The 228s run as economically as the 200s. They have the extra reach and they’re stable,” he explained. “They’re very comfortable. And I like the fact that you don’t have to worry about that end sticking out and knocking over a pole.”

Master mechanic Ed Group oversees preventive maintenance, including oil sampling and repairs at

Roloff Construction, which moved into new facilities near Interstate 80/Highway 370 in west Omaha two years ago. “We live in Louisville,” explained Roloff. “We purchased this place two years ago. We needed to get a little closer in for logistical purposes, and it’s been a good move for us. It’s a lot handier than driving that extra 10 to 15 miles to the office. Our work is mostly here.”

In addition to Group, Roloff Construction employs “a full-time welder and a full-time lube service technician, who takes care of all the oil changes and keeps records on all the parts,” noted Roloff. “We do a lot of things ourselves. When it comes to the more technical stuff, we call RoadBuilders’ service people. They’ve always treated us well and the service has been great.”

## Good people, solid relationships

Larry Roloff credits excellent employees and the relationships he has built with customers for his company’s longevity and success. “There is no business that can run without good help, and we’ve been blessed with good people,” he emphasized.

“We also react pretty well to the things that have to be done,” continued Roloff. “The city will call with an emergency in the middle of the night, and we try to accommodate things, like a collapsed 36-inch sanitary sewer. We do a lot of work for Ash Grove Cement Company in Louisville, and if they have a breakdown or major problem, we go any time of the day or night. We’ll put a machine in there or people and do what we have to do to help them get going again.”

Vice president Bob Norris added that L.G. Roloff Construction is also known for quality work. “We do it right the first time, which comes from doing a little bit of planning before you start,” said Norris. “We hired good people as we grew, and we do a lot of training.”

When he started, Roloff did not anticipate his company’s diversification into paving and complex underground work. “Of course, jobs come along, and if you’re aggressive, which you almost have to be to keep the bottom line down, you begin doing other kinds of work,” he said.

Roloff noted that while private projects may slow down with the weakening economy, “our infrastructure work is still going on as far as sewer separation,” he stated. “The highway systems have to be built and repaired. So while I see a slowdown, the infrastructure work is going to keep us busy. The more utilities and streets that are put in, the more there are that will eventually have to be rebuilt.”

From left, Dru Davidson of RoadBuilders with Bob Norris and Larry Roloff of Roloff Construction Company.

