

WATCHING THE FIR FLY IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

If there's one commodity the Pacific Northwest really knows about, it's trees — and how to get the most out of them. Lumber and paper mills, after turning out a wide range of products, gather up the chips, shavings, and other wood wastes, and run them through a hog or grinder to create hog fuel — an unprocessed mix useful for animal bedding, path surfaces, animal feed, and fuel for energy plants and mills.

Hog fuel is also a cousin of sorts to the more familiar bark mulch, and that brings

us to West Coast Bark Products, Inc. of Burnaby, British Columbia. Until about six years ago, the company's name was Vancouver Mill Fuels.

"I changed the name when I bought the company," says Tony Steer, Managing Partner. "It's been around since 1959, and originally started out by making hog fuel for power and heat. I got involved about 30 years ago because my father was a primary shareholder. Then I bought it outright. So we are the oldest and largest bark company in

the Lower Vancouver area. Today our company is family-run, with my wife, mother, daughter, and son all involved in the business."

Rather than supplying hog fuel, today the company specializes in providing landscapers three grades of bark mulch as well as top soil. In fact, they are the Lower Mainland's number-one supplier of Douglas-fir bark mulch.



NOT USING KAWASAKI WAS LIKE BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE

“In 1984, we got a Kawasaki 80,” recalls Steer. “We moved to a smaller property and went to a 65, and had that for a number of years. Then we went to a competitor, which was a big mistake.”

After about five years of the other brand, and after moving to a slightly larger property, Steer made a beeline back to Kawasaki.

“Our Kawasaki 70ZV-2 has met and exceeded our expectations. The machine is fabulous. The fuel economy switch is outstanding. I don’t need to have all the power of the 70, so to have that fuel economy switch on, well, it’s noticeable the amount of diesel we DON’T use over the year. Fuel keeps going up, but my costs have gone down somewhat since I’ve had the Kawasaki. That’s remarkably different from the competitor’s machines.”

West Coast Bark’s current property of 1.5 acres only has room for one loader. So in order to load out the varying capacities of pickup trucks and trailers, as well as efficiently handle the various material densities of their products, the company has four bucket sizes — 1-yard, 2-yard, 6-yard, and 10-yard. To change buckets, they use a third valve with pins that run off the main control valve for more oil flow, rather than using the electrical switch that pulls oil off the steering circuit. They find the third valve

approach much faster, especially since they may make as many as 60 bucket changes in a day.

NO ROOM FOR ERRORS

Only having one loader can also create problems if the machine goes down.

“That’s why we count on Kawasaki,” says Steer. “And that’s why the dealer’s reputation is so important. I need my machine up and running. I’ve been with Douglas Lake Equipment, our Kawasaki dealer, for four years, and with Kawasaki for about 25 years. The manner in which Kawasaki has dealt with us has been outstanding over the years, and the primary reason I have gone back to them. The people within the Kawasaki organization have just been first class. Douglas Lake is that type of company as well. They’ve been very good for us.

“Rather than having a dealer tell me we have to go through them to talk to the manufacturer, I can tell you that, through the years, I’ve had full access to Kawasaki. I think that is very special. I mean, I’ve got the main support guy from Kawasaki in here shaking my hand when he’s in town, and I don’t have a whole fleet of Kawasakis, I just have one! I could tell a number of above-and-beyond stories about Kawasaki I’ve received through the years. That’s why I couldn’t wait to get a Kawasaki back on my property.”

West Coast Bark Products, Inc. is serviced by Douglas Lake Equipment Ltd., Langley, British Columbia.

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– Tony Steer, Managing Partner



