

PROFILE



GIVING THE CUSTOMERS MORE

EXPANSION INTO PIPE BURSTING AND MANHOLE REHAB OPENS MAJOR REVENUE STREAMS FOR PLUMBING AND DRAIN CLEANING COMPANY

BY SARAH UMHOEFER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ????????





Jeff Crigger's career experience is diverse, and so are the services he provides.

Dependable Drain and Plumbing was initially a one-man operation with a slim equipment inventory, specializing in drain cleaning, sewer repair and plumbing. Today, its team of 15 also provides pipe bursting, manhole rehabilitation and catch basin service, repair and replacement, with a customer base that stretches across three states.

This diversification of services directly correlates with the Clinton, Iowa-based company's success: It has grown at least 10 percent each year, with record growth last year.

"We grew all of 23 percent last year. It's huge," Crigger says. "Now we're trying to figure out our game plan and financials for this year, which is key. My wife, our office manager and our accountant play a big role in this now. When we first started, we didn't have to worry about this stuff beyond paying taxes.

Now it's a whole new ball game. I learn a lot every day. There have been many sleepless nights — believe me — in trying to figure this out. If it wasn't for our support staff, I'd be in a lot of trouble."

GETTING STARTED

Crigger got started in the industry in 1987 when he moved from his hometown of Clinton, Iowa, to Colorado, where he worked for a plumbing and drain cleaning company for 10 years. He went through the ranks as a service tech, supervisor, lead supervisor, safety supervisor and assistant manager. "I missed running service though, so I went back as the lead supervisor," he says.

From Colorado he moved to Florida, but after just a year in the Sunshine State, he knew it was time to head home. "It was just too hot for me. At Christmas time, it was 75 degrees, and I didn't like that. So I came back to Iowa and worked for Roto-Rooter for 2 1/2 years.

profile

DEPENDABLE DRAIN AND PLUMBING

CLINTON, IOWA

OWNER: Jeff Crigger

ESTABLISHED: 2000

EMPLOYEES: 15

SPECIALTIES: Drain cleaning, sewer repair, plumbing, pipe bursting, manhole rehabilitation, catch basin service

SERVICE AREA: Illinois, Iowa and Missouri

WEBSITE: www.dependabledrainandplumbing.net



ABOVE The team at Dependable Drain and Plumbing in Clinton, Iowa, includes (front, from left) Joe Hughes, Troy Crigger, Shane Foltz, Vince Jackson, and Nick Mangusing; Back: Ted Dann, Tony Cozzolino, Jim Vilmont, Adam Otto, Lonny Melchiori, Jess Snyder, Jeff Crigger, Tracie Crigger and Mario Betties.

>> Ted Dann loads Permaform 10,000 manhole liner into the mixing hopper to feed the Permaform Bi-Directional Spin Caster that sprays the liner onto a manhole interior.



“Starting my own company wasn’t even a thought when I came back to Clinton. But then my wife said, ‘You know so many people here. Why don’t you give it a shot?’ I was head over heels and thought it was a great idea. The very first day when I started my company, I remember sitting there at my house thinking, ‘I don’t have a job. I don’t have a truck. I don’t have equipment. What the heck did I get myself into?’”

Instead of poaching customers from local plumbing companies, Crigger approached them with a proposal: He would do drain cleaning contract work and direct any plumbing-related questions and work back to the contractor. “I told all the plumbers I approached that while I am on a drain cleaning call, if a customer wants me to do something, I’ll tell them to call you.”

The approach helped push the young company forward. “For my very first job I had to borrow my dad’s truck

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<< Nick Mangusing (left) helps Mario Betties with the Bi-Directional Spin Caster while applying Permacast MS-10,000 manhole liner.

GREAT EMPLOYEES MAKE IT WORK

Jeff Crigger, owner of Dependable Drain and Plumbing, makes sure to give credit where credit is due.

"I can't say enough about my employees," he says. "They always go above and beyond."

While Crigger is more than capable of covering the plumbing and drain cleaning side of the business, manager Troy Crigger takes it to a new level. "Troy has taken it a step further because people request him all the time. We always laugh that it's too bad we can't clone another Troy."

Even when Jeff Crigger is available to take a plumbing call, customers still ask to work with Troy because they "just like the guy."

"I've never seen him lose his cool, either," the boss says. "He can get into some of the gnarliest, toughest drain cleaning jobs in the world, and he'll think it through, figure it out, get it done and move on."

Dependable Maintenance Systems — Crigger's second company that does manhole rehabilitation — is managed by Ted Dann. Crigger brought Dann to the WWETT Show to look at manhole rehab equipment, and Dann ended up being a natural fit to oversee the service. "Ted was giving me some really good insight, and I thought, 'Well geez, this guy seems to care.' And now he's just turned into a rock star," Crigger says.

"The engineers call for him, and the guys respect him. Ted's a super guy, he works hard, and he takes care of the DMS side of things. He picked up on how to use epoxy, on how to use the spin trailer, he troubleshoots problems, and he calls to fill me in on how their day goes."

When it comes to the concrete-associated work and catch basin rehab in the local area around Clinton, Iowa, manager Tony Cozzolino has that branch of DMS covered. "Tony manages that whole crew. If there are any issues, he doesn't call me — he'll just take care of it," Crigger says. "He deals with the city engineers, he deals with the local utility companies, he gets parts and materials."

"I can run a trowel, but for the most part if I'm trying to trowel something with these guys, they'll take the trowel out of my hands and give me the look, and I'll say, 'I'll go back in the office, I guess,'" Crigger laughs.

While Dann, Troy Crigger and Cozzolino keep things running smoothly on job sites, office manager Jess Snyder is "the glue that keeps us together. She cares about this company, and it impresses the heck out of me. When it comes to office managers, I would have a hard time believing there's anybody better out there."

That caring personality enhances the customer service Dependable Drain and Plumbing provides. "She'll calm down customers and reassure them — I've seen it firsthand," Crigger says. "And she's such a people person that sometimes I'll walk into the office and she's talking to a customer, and the next thing you know she's talking about baking a cake or something like that with them."

"Again, these key players in my company have made a huge difference. I don't know what I'd do without them."

BELOW Nick Mangusing finishes troweling on Permacast liner material in a manhole in Clinton, Iowa.

RIGHT Ted Dann (left) and Mario Betties monitor progress and safety from above as Nick Mangusing works in the manhole below.



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WHAT THE HECK DID I GET MYSELF INTO?”

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and a sewer machine from another contractor until my equipment got here. At that time, my ad in the yellow pages didn’t come out for another six months, so all the work I was doing was from word-of-mouth, and I hand-delivered 10,000 fliers. It was a lot of footwork.”

It didn’t take long for Crigger to realize he needed to take on some help. “At that point about six months in, some days I’d be replacing a sewer line, and I’d hire some friends I knew that had an excavation company to dig for me. I would lay the sewer, and as soon as it was bedded and the first layer of dirt on it, I would start taking calls,” he says. “That turned into 9, 10 o’clock nights real quick. . . . All my other jobs before owning my own company were commission-based, so I was used to working sun-up to sun-down and then some, but I just couldn’t get to everybody.”

Help came unexpectedly. “One day I was sitting there on a job, and as I walked out to my truck these two young guys were standing there, and one of them said, ‘We’ve been in the park across the street watching you. Do you need a hand? . . . My dad owns a drain cleaning company in the Quad Cities, and I know how to clean drains.’”

Both of the impromptu part-time employees helped out for a summer or two. Crigger’s first full-time employee was his nephew, Troy Crigger, who’s been with the company now for almost 16 years and manages the plumbing division.

SERVICE PROGRESSION

Dependable Drain and Plumbing has steadily diversified its services over the years, starting in 2001 when Crigger read about pipe bursting in *Cleaner*. “I started looking into it and said, ‘Are you kidding me? We don’t have to dig a 100-foot-long trench? We only have to dig two holes?’ It was a win-win situation for us: not as labor-intensive, and it wouldn’t look like a bomb went off in the customer’s yard.”

In September 2001, Crigger purchased a TRIC pipe bursting system, along with a SeeSnake camera, K7500 and K3800 drain cleaning machines and a locator, all from RIDGID.

Pipe bursting was an instant success for the company. “It took off. That was so in demand that we would do a residential home in a neighborhood, and we wouldn’t leave for three weeks because the neighbors would come over and ask us to do theirs.

“From there, we just kept building — doing sewer lines, waterlines, service and repair plumbing — and then in 2009 we started doing concrete-associated work for municipalities.”

>>>> Nick Mangusing uses a remote switch to control the spin caster on a manhole rehab project in Clinton, Iowa.

Repairing and replacing catch basins paved the way for a new service — manhole rehabilitation — and a whole new business: Dependable Maintenance Systems. “At that point in 2010, I was looking to diversify and we were looking into porta-potties, we were looking at a jetting service, and we were looking into directional boring. And then I stumbled across manhole rehab.”

Crigger brought his son, Nate; his cousin, Ted Dann; and Dependable Drain and Plumbing’s plumbing manager, Troy Crigger, to the WWETT Show in 2010 to learn more about the process. They decided to make the investment in a Permaform Bi-Directional Spin Caster and a Parson Mortarman 120 Plus Mixer, and thus Dependable Maintenance Systems (DMS) was created.

“With the truck and trailer, we had about \$100,000 invested. And basically not having any idea if this was going to take off, it was a big gamble,” Crigger says. “We were definitely fortunate: Right now the revenue that DMS creates is about 15 to 20 percent more than the plumbing and drain cleaning. It’s really taking off.”

So much so that Crigger made another significant investment last year and purchased an epoxy truck — a Raven Lining Epoxy SP50 Graco. “That was a big whoop-de-do. Once again, I had no idea if we absolutely needed that. We had worked six years without it, but things have changed in those six years and it’s working out for us.



and heavy-duty equipment include a John Deere 310 Extendahoe tractor, LHI mini-excavator, Wacker ST45 track loader, Manitou forklift, and Ultra Shore shoring. Other essential equipment includes a McLaughlin Mole, Doolittle trailer with Machines Technology pump and mixer (Graco), Generac GP17500E generators, and a Vanair Viper air compressor.

SPREADING OUT

In the next five years, Crigger hopes to expand his company’s manhole rehab. “What I’d like to do is have Ted running two crews on the DMS side of things. We can easily get another trailer to do that just because of the amount of work that’s out there.”

Although nothing is set in stone yet, Crigger says that could easily change. “My wife knows how I am when I get the itch to do something else,” he says. “I don’t have any plans right now, but that could change in a year and I could get into something else. I think as far as any big changes, it will probably be on the Dependable Maintenance side where we’ll spread our wings.” **C**

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“With the epoxy pump, the box truck to put it in, and the compressor, we were at about \$85,000. Maybe for some big companies that’s not a lot, but to me that’s a chunk of change,” Crigger says.

Building their reputation for manhole rehab took a lot of footwork again. “At the time, Ted, Nate and I went door to door. We finally figured out we needed to go to the general contractors who get these jobs. We thought it could be a lost battle just going to engineers and the townships, because for the most part they’re not going to be doing this work. They’re going to be contracting this out,” Crigger says. “Now we have an awesome relationship with half a dozen general contractors.”

Today, DMS’ service area spans three states: Illinois, Iowa and Missouri. “We have certain areas that we cover with our Permaform equipment. They were so impressed with the way we operate — and I have to blame that on Ted — that they let us leak into other areas because their contractors weren’t taking care of the customers.”

After nearly two decades, Dependable Drain and Plumbing has built up a substantial stable of equipment to back its diverse services. Excavation

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