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FEATURED IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE



CRAIG ALASKA

Craig, Alaska is a city of over 1,000 people on Prince of Wales Island, the fourth-largest island in the United States. Craig is named after Craig Miller, who established a fish saltery on nearby Fish Egg Island in 1907. Miller created a cold storage plant and packing company on the present site of Craig. Fishing helped grow the community and logging provided year-round employment in the 1970s. Fishing, tourism and logging continues to provide jobs and economic stability on the region.

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ON THE FRONT: Alaska Specialty Woods' 2001 Kenworth W900 with a 14-ton Olympic self-loader heads out of the woods with a new haul of wood to be turned into musical instruments.

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ALASKA SPECIALTY WOODS *by Brandon Hansen*

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MUSIC ON THE ISLAND

Alaska Specialty Woods hound dogs for salvage in America's frontier for America's musical industry

STORY BY BRANDON HANSEN / For Loggers World

Along the Alaska Pandhandle is Prince of Wales Island. The fourth-largest island in the United States, it is slightly larger than the state of Delaware but is home to just 6,000 people. It's a land of mountain peaks, fjords and dense forests.

The Tongass National Forest, a temperate rain forest spanning 17 million acres, covers most of the island as the wet, maritime weather patterns deliver precipitation to the island. It's here where Brent Cole Sr. runs Alaska Specialty Woods, which makes some of the finest wood products for musical equipment in the world.

Cole Sr. started his career in the woods in Wisconsin in 1978 and hauled short logs in a self loader. The timber industry would slow down in 1980, so he followed a lot of other mid-west loggers into the oil fields. He ended up settling in Montana where he came across some buddies in the Seeley Lake area who invited him to Prince of Wales Island to find work and offered a place to stay.

"Our family of five ended up in a 24-foot travel trailer with a 12x16 wannagin in Craig, Alaska and when the owner wanted to come back and move into the trailer, I ended up renting a house," Cole Sr. said. "The owner and his son had a business, called the Spruce Shop. They would get end cuts and rounds and split out billets for various musical instrument makers."

The primary wood on the island is Sitka Spruce, Red Cedar and Yellow Cedar, so it was exceptional for the needs of unique and beautiful looking instruments.

Cole Sr. decided after 6 seasons he didn't want to work for Phoenix Logging anymore. At first, he tried his hand at carpentry but knew someone else making music instrument woods, and learned the trade from him.

"I did it for a month and got my first check for \$144 but that didn't slow me down," Cole Sr. said. "My wife worked at the store

(Continued on Page 6)
See "Alaska"



BRENT COLE SR.

Brent Cole Sr. moved to Craig, Alaska 37 years ago, and the majority of roads are still unpaved. Cole Sr. had built up a specialty woods business to provide wood for musical instrument makers.



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PROGRESSIVE
COMMERCIAL

(Continued from Page 4)

here and she could get all the music magazines and we would find instrument builders and send a mailed letter to them.”

That can-do attitude grew Alaska Specialty Woods, and now the company supplies wood products around the world.

“For about 15 years, I worked out of a lean-to shop between my shop, approx 1500 sq. ft. and the storage under one end of our 14x66 mobile home,” Cole Sr. said. “Now we’re in a 10,000-square foot facility that is two stories.”

The production facility is equipped with two 42-inch vertical band saws, planers, wide belt sander and filing equipment.

At first, Cole Sr. would go and buy logs, which were deaddowns. But economic changes and tightening of wood supplies meant that Cole Sr. had to switch to salvage logs. They can get the wood from old log floats, old log bridges and wind-fell trees from the ancient Tongass National Forest, which has often

been referred to as the “crown jewel of the National Forest Service System.”

“We go hounddog in the brush and get tips from people about blowdowns and do it in land-use designated areas that are opened for timber production,” Cole Sr. said. “Landowners that are clearing a lot purchased from the state sometimes call me. They might have a nice spruce tree or they have already cleared property but had a tree that had died that they’re afraid of it falling.”

The salvage operation has expanded to have a rubber-tired skider that serves as a winch packer, and a rubber tire log loader. To move the logs, Cole Sr. uses a 2001 Kenworth W-900 with a 14-ton Olympic loader. This can be used as a swing yarder as well to pull the logs closer to the road with five or six helicopter chokers.

“Our equipment mainly stays on the road and we use 300-500 feet of extension line to zig and zag a big log back to the road to

(Continued on Page 9)
See “Alaska”



SPECIALTY CUTS

Alaska Specialty Woods uses a 2001 Kenworth W900 with a 14-ton Olympic loader to grab salvage wood on Prince of Wales Island. The company hound dogs the brush on land-use designated areas to find wood that will work for their products. They will also haul wood off private land when the landowners want some timber removed.

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JUST ANOTHER DAY IN ALASKA!

Brent, Jr. and his faithful dog "Sister" are admiring their work before the bucking and ripping started. This big log was 74" dbf and they ended up ripping it to get it on the self loader.

"Just another day in Alaska!"



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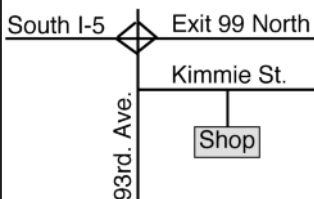
WELL, THAT'S A LOG

Brent Cole Sr. uses his Olympic loader to handle this mammoth log on Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. The Tongass National Forest is a temperate rain forest spanning 17 million acres that covers most of the island. It has Sitka Spruce and red and yellow cedar.

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Alaska

(Continued from Page 6)

where I can haul it,” Cole Sr. said.

If the tree can't be taken as a full log, Alaska Specialty Woods will break it down into blocks and take it out that way.

Prince of Wales Island isn't what you would call a pavement paradise. The road systems first were laid into the island for logging contractors and most of it is not paved.

“I've been here 37 years and when we first came here, there was only 19 miles of it paved,” Cole Sr. said. “Now it's probably 120-150 miles but there is also 800 miles of logging roads.”

Cole Sr. had obviously driven truck before in his career, and the self-loader gives him the versatility to utilize the road system on the island and get his raw materials back to where he can work it.

“Our custom shop is fairly high production,” Cole Sr. said. “My sons, wife and I all work on production and we process about 50,000-board feet of Sitka Spruce, we produce 24,000-25,000 guitar tops and other products.”

Sometimes, Cole Sr. is asked to do some hauls to local saw mills by land owners, but mainly he uses the self-loader for his own business.

“We've been so busy we haven't had a lot of time to do it,” Cole Sr. said.

People buy with their eyes, so Cole Sr. and his family have to be on the

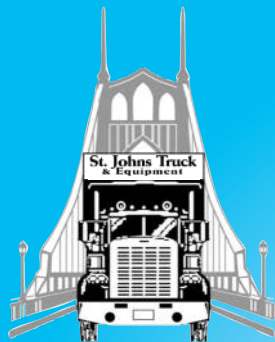
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LOADING UP

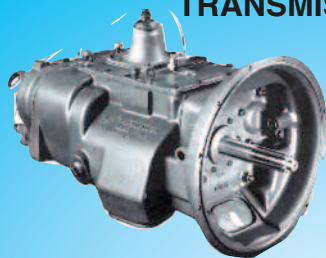
The salvage wood that Alaska Specialty Woods finds, ends up making 500 different products for musical instrument makers around the world.



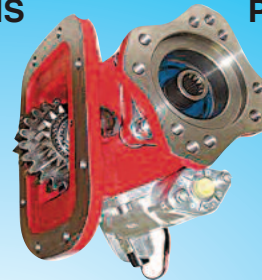
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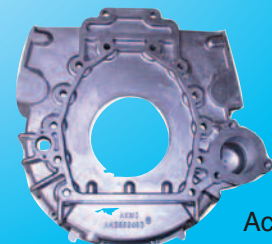


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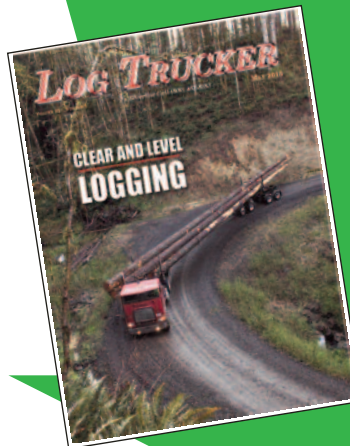
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SWINGING IT OUT

The Olympic self-loader can provides lift to help pull logs out of the brush on Prince of Wales Island in Alaska. Alaska Specialty Woods is very resourceful when harvesting logs.

Alaska

(Continued from Page 9)

look out for end grain and color that is pleasing for musical instruments.

“When we salvage, we’re getting everything nature provides so we see many more characteristics,” Cole Sr. said “If you look at my store we have something like 500 different products. The challenge is marketing this and make a sort for things and offering it to people.”

Timber is getting a bit harder to find as forests get closed up, but Cole Sr. has mitigated this somewhat by having two log yards - one by his shop and another near Hollis, AK. Most of the logs stay under the canopy of the forest so it keeps the high-grade wood from rotting. Some of their salvage is also float logs so they roll them up, the water evaporates in the summer, keeping them from rotting.

During the 1950s through the 1990s, different logging companies made large rafts from old-growth Sitka Spruce trees because of how inaccessible the areas of Southeast Alaska were. The rafts

were used to moving logging camps and equipment and ranged in size from 60-to-100-feet long and 40-to-80-feet wide. While most have been lost, a few still remain and Alaska Specialty Woods goes about purchasing them. They’ll tow these rafts to a manageable area and break it down. While the logs are big, about 20-50 percent of them are usable due to damage by mollusks that burrow into the wood. Still, the water helps preserve the wood for the long term.

The production shop for Alaska Specialty Woods also has an equipment bay where they can work on the truck and their machines as well.

“It also doubles as a fish and meat processing plant,” Cole Sr. said. “We do live a semi-subsistence lifestyle up here and protein is important.”

So while Prince of Wales Island might be isolated, Alaska Specialty Woods is reaching the world with its 2001 Kenworth W900 self-loader and entrepreneurial spirit.



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BLAST FROM THE PAST

By Quinn Murk
For Loggers World



BUILDING ROAD IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS

This is a nice example of building road before bulldozers were equipped with blades. Pulling a heavy duty grader-like attachment called a "road builder" or "terracer," the dozer would go cross country with the "road builder" cutting grade. Here the road bed has been constructed and they are spreading piles of ballast dumped there by dump wagons. Once smoothed out, tracks would be laid or trucks would start going over the new road. By the way, this old tractor is a "Best."

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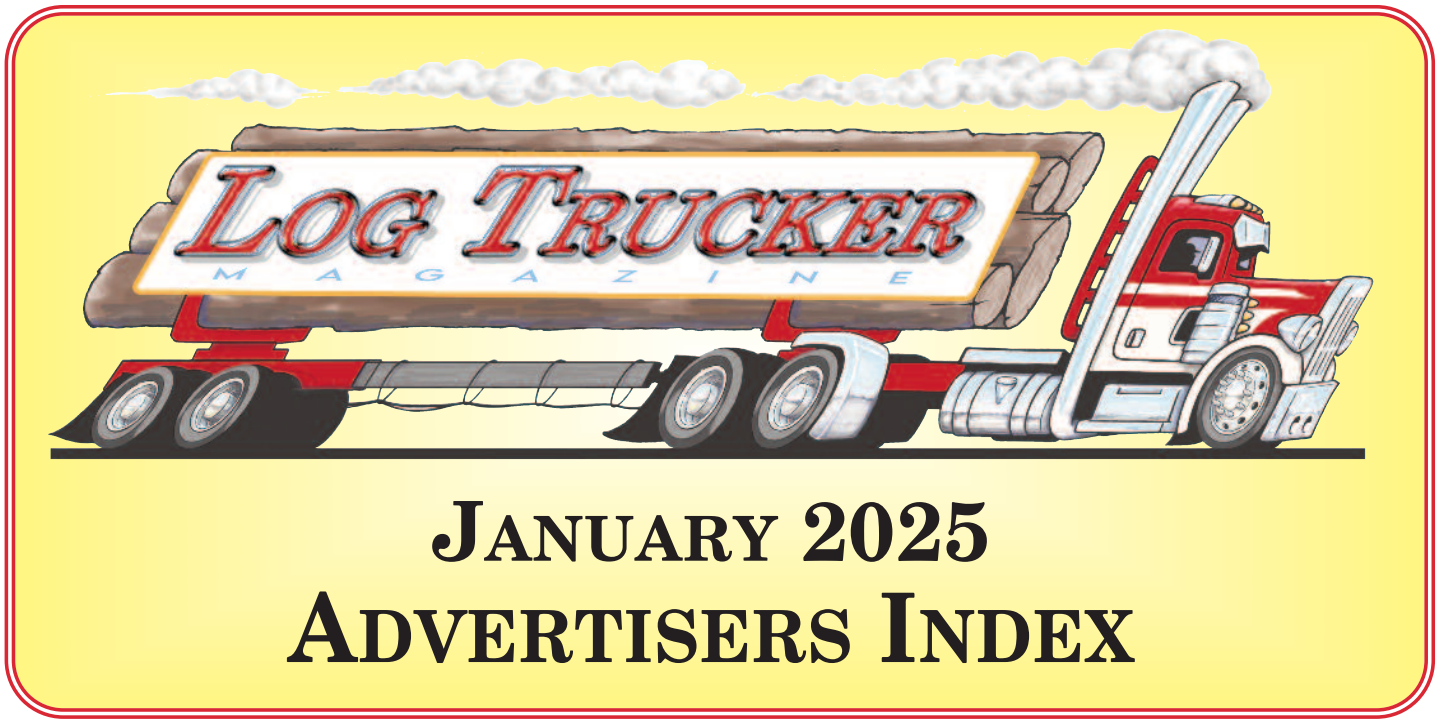
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