

Cerra Inc. is

ROCK SOLID

BY LORI LOVELY

Excavating at different levels along a 170-foot wall of Diabase is a job as hard as the 110,000 yards of rock being removed. The Cerra Inc. crew is making short work of it, thanks to resilient Caterpillar equipment from Foley. “We have one 365 excavator 100 feet in the air,” muses Alan Cerra, owner of the Sparta, N.J.-based company.

The project in North Bergen that begun last March involves preparing the site for construction of a Bank of America and Walgreens. Its proximity to Manhattan dictates rock removal by ripping or hammering: blasting cannot be used because the vibration travels a great distance in the extremely hard rock. To remedy this, Cerra chose to equip Cat excavators with large rippers to tear the rock from the cliff and small H130 hammers to bust it up. There are approximately 6-7 excavators onsite, and as of the first of the year, approximately 70-80 percent of the rock had been ripped out.

Once it is removed from the cliff, something has to be done with it. Because the site sits on the Hudson River, Cerra says it’s difficult to get rid of the material, taking into consideration city traffic. Therefore, he brought in crushers to process the rock. “If the material is not processed here,

we’d have to haul it even further,” he explains. Instead, he plans to reuse about 3,000 yds. as subbase under the new parking lot. The rest will be picked up by other contractors for use on other projects. “About 90 percent of it will be used for roadbase.”

Exclusive

Cerra was first introduced to Caterpillar around 1996, when he was working on a golf course in Sparta. The former carpenter-turned-contractor did site work for residential and commercial projects until 2000. “For that project, I rented a lot of equipment: haul trucks, dozers...” he recalls. He liked the product and the service, so he began acquiring Cat equipment.

When he no longer needed Cat machines he had purchased for specific jobs, he was able to get good value in trade and sale. “We did a big job in 2004 where we moved 150,000 yds. of rock,” Cerra elaborates. “After we finished, we didn’t need the equipment anymore, so I traded in and sold a lot of it. The resale value was incredible. Cat equipment holds its value. He’s so impressed by Cat’s quality, Cerra Inc. has been an all-Cat company for years (except for one competitive brand loader). “Cat helped us succeed – especially in hard times,” he says. Currently, 10 quality new and used Cat

machines make up their inventory, but five years ago when Eric Cliff became their Foley, Inc. customer support representative, their fleet looked considerably different. Cerra admits his equipment was “tired.” “I convinced Alan to do some Preventative Maintenance (PMs) and sell off the worn out iron,” Cliff recalls. “He bought good used and new equipment.”

Cerra bought four used CAT machines from Foley in 2010, including a CAT 322 long reach excavator he uses on the cliffs in North Bergen and a CAT 328 zero-tail swing excavator. “Foley makes everything easy,” he says. **“It’s one-stop shopping: sales, rentals, credit, financing, insurance, on line-parts and service.”**

One incentive was the Cat® AccessAccount. “It’s like a credit card,” Cerra exclaims. The charge account enables customers to pay for parts, service and rental at any dealer or store in the U.S. “Through the Cat Access Account we were able to complete \$60,000 in repairs last year with 0% financing. Cat Access enables us to afford repairs.”

Service

“I had some great mechanics,” Cerra boasts, explaining that they used to do some of the machine maintenance, but when he reduced the size of his staff due to the economic downturn, he turned to Foley, Inc.

Cliff explains that he coordinated a total machine inspection and oil sampling of Cerra’s equipment. “Alan and I went over the inspection and oil reports (S•O•S) to decide what the dealer should do and what he would do. His mechanics have talent, so he can save money by having them do some of the work. Part of my job is to figure out what talent they have and help save them money on repairs.”

“I became their best employee,” Cliff jokes. “I save them money.” He may have been joking, but his experience is a valuable asset to his customers. “I’ve been in heavy equipment all my life,” he says. Until 1985 he was a mechanic in the Marine Corps. He has also worked as a field mechanic and service manager. Calling himself Cerra’s “unofficial equipment manager,” Cliff has worked closely with his customers over the years to assess their machines.

“Eric is great,” Cerra says. “He answers questions on



Foley Customer Support Representative Eric Cliff (left) and Alan Cerra, owner, Cerra, Inc.

Below: Cat excavators use large rippers to tear the rock from the cliff and small H130 hammers to bust it up.



the machines, and if he doesn’t know the answer, he goes and gets answers for us. An oil sample on a Cat 365 excavator showed water in the swing motors one time. Eric checked with the mechanics and told us to park it on an incline and let it drain. When we sampled again, the water was gone.”

It’s all about building trust, and no one knows that better than Cliff. Cerra has a Cat motor in everything, including his crushers, screeners and a 2003 dump truck. “Foley stands behind their equipment with support. They’re a great team. If Eric is not around, they still know who I am when they pick up the phone.”

Cerra’s equipment is operating in challenging, rocky conditions, but working with Foley, Inc. is easy – and that gives the contractor a firm foundation, whether he’s working on a lofty job like North Bergen or any other. 🏗️



Cerra Inc. uses a Cat 365 excavator to remove rock from a site in North Bergen, N.J.



Two Cat 320s feed cone crushers to process the rock on site.