

BURSCHVILLE CONSTRUCTION, INC.

How this third-generation utility contractor is still going strong after 26 years

“We Are Family” is a good way to sum up the operating philosophy at Burschville Construction, Inc., a utility contracting firm located in Hanover, Minnesota.

“I think small family businesses are really strong businesses,” stated Karla Schendel, Burschville Construction’s vice president and wife of the company’s co-founder, President Jim Schendel. “It’s not like our people are our employees — it’s like they’re our family.”

“We treat them like family,” agreed Jim. “We go the extra mile for them if they go the extra mile for us.”

Jim, his parents, R.S. “Bud” and Ruth Schendel, and Jim’s brother, Dallas Schendel, started Burschville Construction in 1976. Dallas left the company after 10 years, in 1994, the same year Jim

purchased his parents’ share in the company. “They basically retired,” said Jim. “Since then, my wife Karla, my two children and I have run the business.”

Third generation grew up in business

The third generation of Schendels at Burschville Construction today includes Rick Schendel, who is vice president, and Cindy Johnson, Secretary/Treasurer. Both Rick and Cindy grew up in the business.

“I spent many hours riding in the truck with my father,” remembered Rick, who joined the company in 1991. “I was even allowed to help once in a while. Running a machine for five minutes was the highlight of my day.”

Rick worked as a laborer in the field for a year, then ran his own crew until 1999. “That spring I moved into the office, where I help with estimating and supervising the three crews we have,” he said.

Cindy Johnson joined the company in 1994 after she graduated from St. Cloud State with a bachelor’s degree in business. “Grandpa and Grandma retired in April and I started in May,” said Cindy.

Other family members involved in the business today include Jim’s brother, Bill Schendel, a foreman for Burschville, and a nephew, Justin Schendel. “Justin is Dallas’ son,” noted Jim. Rick’s wife, Tara, helps out in the office.

Key, longtime employees

Some of the key employees at Burschville Construction include Foremen Jerry Binsfeld and Jeff Vogt, Operator Tom Krampitz, Mechanic John Titterington and Secretary Shirley Sheets.

Burschville Construction, Inc. employs 25 people during the peak construction season and five or six in the winter months.



Two generations lead Hanover-based Burschville Construction today. They include (left to right) Karla Schendel, Jim Schendel, Rick Schendel and Cindy Johnson.



Burschville Operator Tom Krampitz is working with a new Komatsu PC300LC-7 excavator from RMS on a job near the Twin Cities.

'It's a nice machine and has a lot of power,' said Rick Schendel. 'It's fast and smooth.'

"The majority of our people have been with us for 15 years or longer," Jim observed. "We also have a handful who have joined us within the last five years. Once they come, if they're good, they stick around. We've been pretty fortunate in keeping our guys."

Concentrates on underground work

Burschville Construction concentrates on underground utility work — sewer, water and storm sewer — in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. "We've worked as far away as Crookston, Grand Marais and Northfield in Minnesota and also in Wisconsin, but not for several years," said Jim.

"Since I've taken over, I haven't left the metro area and I don't want to," he continued. "You can't live in two places and do justice to home and family. So we work for communities in the metro area, within 80 miles of home."

Burschville Construction handles strictly underground utilities. "It seems to work better for us," Jim commented. "We've talked about going into the curb business, but we're better off to hire somebody else to do the streets, curbs and blacktopping. We do a little if we have to on small jobs, but it works better to do underground, which is what we do best."

The firm's customers are mostly cities and counties. "We do a few private jobs for developers," noted Cindy and Rick. The split is about 70 percent public projects and 30 percent private.

Most of Burschville's underground work is installing utilities for subdivisions. "Probably 20 percent of it is reconstruction, and the other 80 percent is new developments," said Rick.

Some sleepless nights

Jim Schendel remembers an underground project his company tackled in 1999 as the most interesting — and toughest — job he has encountered. "It was a 44-foot-deep lift station in Lino Lakes," he explained. "We thought it was going to be easy, but it gave us a lot of sleepless nights. We encountered water and a lot of it!"

"At first it was dry," he continued. "If we would have had an hour, we would have had everything done and set, but the wall opened up and the water came running in."

"It was a mess," agreed Rick. "There was a 45-foot hole with about 35 feet of water standing in it in a matter of about an hour. And it just kept running."

The Burschville crew had to use two eight-inch pumps and one 10-inch pump to de-water the site. "When we set the manhole we were in about waist-deep water," said Rick. "It took us about a week and a half to finally get it in and set. That was a challenge."

The city of Woodbury, Minnesota, has been a steady customer of Burschville Construction. "We started working for them in 1986-'87 and we've been out there every year since," said Jim. "We've done probably eight different developments for them, with a couple hundred houses in each project. They're good people to work with."

The 2002 construction season saw Burschville's three pipe crews installing sewer, water and storm sewer in the communities of Maple Grove, Cottage Grove, Inver Grove Heights and Forest Lake, as well as in Woodbury. Crews faced 50-foot-deep cuts on the Cottage Grove project, a residential development.

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Skilled crews help Burschville Const. thrive

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Shirley Sheets,
longtime Secretary
at Burschville
Construction, Inc.

Tough equipment

The Schendels have been relying on Komatsu equipment from Road Machinery & Supplies Company since the early 1980s. "We first dealt with RMS in 1983 when we bought our first machine from them," recalled Jim. "Then we bought a Komatsu trackscavator and a D31 dozer. It was about 1986 when we bought the first new Komatsu PC300-2 excavator. I think we were the second one in the state to get one at that time."

Over the years, the Schendels have owned five Komatsu excavator series machines. "We've had Dash-2, 3, 5, 6 and 7 models," listed Jim.

Today, the Komatsu equipment in Burschville's fleet includes three hydraulic excavators — a PC400LC-5, a PC400LC-6 and a new PC300LC-7, the first one RMS delivered in Minnesota. Territory Manager Scott Laursen services the Burschville Construction account.

Jim Schendel says he likes the transportability of the PC300 and PC400s. "We can move them without taking them apart," he stated. "They've been excellent machines. We take very good care of them, and they have been pretty maintenance-free. We've run them as high as 14,000 hours, and they've been good. We usually try to trade them at 10,000 hours. Because we maintain them so well, there's still life left in them."

Rick Schendel said that their new Komatsu PC300LC-7 excavator has won rave reviews from

Tom Krampitz, the Burschville operator who runs it on a daily basis. "He loves it," said Rick. "He's on vacation this week and was worried about who was going to get to run his machine while he was gone."

Rick says he likes the PC300-7, too. "It's a nice machine and has a lot of power," he said. "It's fast and smooth. The cab is quiet — it's like driving a pickup. You can sit in there and talk on the cell phone, even while you're digging."

Jim Schendel is also happy with his relationship with RMS. "They've been good to us," he stated. "We've had good service from them, good pieces of equipment. Whenever we need them, they're there. They're a dedicated bunch, just like we feel we are. I rank them as one of the best in the metro area."

Hard work, good people

Each of the four Schendels involved in running Burschville Construction offered his or her perspective on why the company has succeeded and grown over the years. "It's been a lot of hard work," said Jim. "It's also because of the good people we have working for us."

"Capable workers are key," added Cindy. "They know that we're always here for them."

"We have also tried to put money back into the company to bring our equipment up to a higher standard," Jim added. "When we first started, we bought used equipment and got by. But it's nice now to buy a new backhoe or loader. We make sure we have good equipment, and our operators take care of it and maintain it."

Cindy and Rick credited their parents' dedication to the business for much of Burschville's success. "Mom and Dad have been good, understanding bosses," said Cindy.

"Dad is here every morning between 5 and 5:30 a.m.," said Rick. "You also have to be there when your customer is calling or your guy out on the job is having a problem. And Dad is always there for them."

Looking ahead, Jim Schendel says he would like to see his company "hang in there" for a long time. "As far as my goals, I'd like to retire young, but I feel too good to call it quits now. I enjoy working."

"When Rick and Cindy get ready to buy me out, I guess that's when it's time to quit," he concluded. "But I'd like to see my grandkids in it, and I'd like to see their kids in it. The business has been good to us. It's a lot of hard work, but it pays off."



R.S. "Bud" and Ruth Schendel,
worked many
years together in
Burschville's office
until their retirement
in April 1994. Their
retirement years
were shortened
when Bud passed
away in June 1995.