

## KGM CONTRACTORS, INC.

Quality work and integrity are the calling cards of this versatile, family-owned Minnesota firm

**W**hen it comes to moving dirt, there's not much that Angora, Minnesota-based KGM Contractors, Inc. can't or won't do. Roads, airports, landfills, treatment plants, commercial building sites — if earthmoving is involved, KGM can do the job.

"We lay pipe, we crush rock, we can do almost anything a customer wants us to do — but it's almost always associated with dirt work," said KGM president Karla Abramson. "Moving dirt and grading — that's our specialty. It's what we like, and what we do best. Sometimes we do other things because they're necessary, for example, crushing. If we can find a reliable rock supplier, we'll use him. But when we can't, we've got the option of crushing our own. It's just a way to ensure we do the best job for our customer."

"We're very open-minded about the type of work we bid, and we're not afraid to take on difficult and challenging jobs," said corporate secretary and head estimator Mark Abramson. "With our own experience and the people we

have, we're going to figure out a way to get the job done, and you can be assured, it's going to be done right."

Being able to handle a wide range of projects is a necessity for KGM. "We don't have a large population base in northern Minnesota (Angora is only about 75 miles south of International Falls)," Karla pointed out. "Therefore, we have to be versatile and be willing to travel. In addition to working throughout Minnesota, we also bid jobs in North Dakota and Wisconsin."

### Family affair

Karla and Mark are brother and sister. Two other brothers, Gary (who serves as vice president and grading foreman) and Kerry (superintendent), are also active in the company. Their father, Forrest Abramson, has no official position, but is a VIP at KGM.

"Our dad had his own business, Abramson Construction, and in many ways, this is an offshoot of that," said Karla. "He doesn't have a title or any specific duties with KGM, but he is really the guiding force around here."

Forrest Abramson worked with his father, Emil, in the logging business before going off on his own, starting Abramson Construction in the early 1960s. "We got a contract to build the Orr Airport in about 1962 and just kept growing from there," Forrest recalled.

Just as he had done earlier, Forrest's children started their own company.

"We all learned from Dad," Karla recalled. "I was the oldest and a girl, but I started on a bulldozer, just like my brothers did. We started KGM in the early 1980s, mostly as a trucking firm. As we acquired more equipment, we started doing some clearing and grubbing, so we incorporated in 1984."

(L-R) Family members Forrest Abramson, Karla Abramson and Mark Abramson work together at KGM Contractors, Inc. The diversified, Angora, Minn., construction company specializes in all types of earthmoving work.



## Employees are key

KGM has grown considerably since those early days. Today the company has about 60 core employees and will double that number during its peak season.

“Our employees make this company what it is,” said Karla. “We have virtually no turnover. The people who work here are people we grew up with and went to school with. From our operators and laborers, to our supervisory personnel, to our office and engineering staff, we have very talented and hardworking individuals here. They really are like part of our family.”

“We are totally convinced that we have the best construction people in the state,” Mark added. “They care about quality as much as we do. We count on them and they come through for us. And from our end, we don’t put any ceiling on what they can accomplish. We try to give our employees the opportunity to succeed and advance within the company.”

Key personnel at KGM include civil techs Tom Kvas and Heath Line; foremen Dan Radle, Rick Malmstrom, Vick Phillips, Dan Lamphere, Randy Konickson and Bo Draper; crushing manager Dan Soult; shop foreman Earl Kaster; and bookkeeper Pauline Rutchasky.

“We also rely on Roger ‘Butch’ Lindgren, Bill Purdy and Eino Suihkonen,” said Mark. “They worked for my dad for many years and also worked for KGM. Although they officially retired a few years ago, they all still come back when we need them to run jobs for us. They know a lot and we consider ourselves lucky to have them around as valuable resources.”

## Top-of-the-line equipment

In order to accomplish the quality work on which KGM prides itself, the company turns to Road Machinery & Supplies Co. in Virginia, Minn., for Komatsu excavators. “We’ve used Komatsu excavators since the mid-1980s and they are top-of-the line,” said Forrest Abramson. “We’ve tried all the brands and our operators prefer Komatsu, pretty much across the board.”

“The important thing for us is dependability,” Karla explained. “If a truck goes down, you might have to haul short for a while, but you’re



A KGM operator gets a full bucket with a Komatsu PC400LC-7 hydraulic excavator — the newest addition to the KGM equipment fleet from RMS. “We’ve used Komatsu excavators since the mid-1980s and they are top-of-the-line,” said Forrest Abramson of KGM. “We’ve tried all the brands and our operators prefer Komatsu, pretty much across the board.”



The operator of a Komatsu D65PX-12 dozer stockpiles material at a KGM sand and gravel operation near Biwabik, Minn.



KGM counts on a strong team of skilled and experienced employees, including civil techs Tom Kvas (left) and Heath Line.

still hauling. But when your excavator goes down, production stops. With Komatsu excavators, that rarely happens. We’ve found them to be very dependable and reliable.”

KGM’s current Komatsu fleet includes three hydraulic excavators; a PC600LC-6, a PC400LC-6 and a new PC400LC-7. The company also owns two Komatsu D65PX-12 bulldozers, which are

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# Teamwork helps KGM achieve success

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“very good machines,” according to Forrest, and three Load King belly dump trailers from RMS.

“In addition to quality equipment, we like the service Road Machinery & Supplies gives us,” said Karla. “Our salesman Ryan Milette looks out for our needs, and Kenny ‘Jake’ Jacobsen, their shop foreman in Virginia, is very knowledgeable and helpful. We also like the fact that RMS is able to work on a number of different brands for us.”

“RMS is down the street, so to speak, and they’re good people,” added Mark. “They’re like us. When they say they’re going to do something, they do it. We appreciate that.”

## Future is in good hands

While some siblings might find it difficult to work together, the family dynamic works well for KGM. “I estimate and bid the jobs while Kerry and Gary take care of the field work,” Mark related. “Karla handles the financials and cleans up any problems or messes that may develop. Forrest keeps an eye on the big picture and advises us when we need it.”

“We work well together and that’s a credit to our dad,” added Karla. “He instilled in us the concept of teamwork and the fact that the only thing that’s really important is doing quality

work and satisfying the customer. So each of us has the same goal and we’re all on the same page all the time. If there’s a problem, we don’t point fingers. We look for solutions.”

As a result, KGM is still growing. “We go after work aggressively,” Mark noted. “We feel like we owe our employees that. They have families and they’re counting on us to provide them with steady, well-paying jobs. It’s a responsibility we take very seriously. Growth is also the only way we can continue to offer advancement to our employees, so yes, we’re definitely still in a growth mode.”

## Partnering for success

Along with aggressive bidding, Mark says KGM also keeps its eyes open for new opportunities. “If you can keep an open mind, more things are possible. Down the road, I would like to see us increase our private (non-public) workload. There’s more of a team atmosphere and more partnering on the private side. By working closely with a client in the planning stage, we can sometimes see potential problems that can be engineered out of a job before work ever begins, thereby helping the owner or developer save money on the project.”

That’s the type of attitude that earned KGM the “Partnering of the Year” award from the St. Paul District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 2001. The St. Paul District covers most of Minnesota, the western half of Wisconsin, as well as parts of North Dakota, South Dakota and Iowa. KGM was chosen from among 32 contractors who worked on Corps projects that year.

Regardless of whether it’s private or public work, KGM owners say the company will always do its best and will always treat its customers the way it expects to be treated. “Our bid is our word and it’s a commitment,” Mark explained. “If it turns out a job costs us more than we anticipated, that’s our problem. We don’t go back to the owner to make up the difference.”

“Our dad taught us that this business isn’t all about the money,” added Karla. “A deal is a deal and the most important thing is keeping your word and doing quality work. As long as we continue to do that, everything else will take care of itself.” ■

Part of the KGM team is shown below with a Komatsu PC600LC-6, the largest excavator in the company’s fleet. They include (L-R standing): RMS sales rep. Ryan Milette with Forrest Abramson, president Karla Abramson, bookkeeper Pauline Rutchasky, all of KGM; Todd Gabrielson, a service consultant for the company; (L-R top row) KGM corporate secretary and head estimator Mark Abramson; civil tech Tom Kvas and shop foreman Earl Kaster.

