

Subtle Operator

■ Arkansas's Suttle Equipment has quietly built long-term success and a solid reputation.

By David Abbott

DE QUEEN, Ark.

With its headquarters location



here and two branches in Arkadelphia and Dardanelle, Suttle Equipment Co., Inc. has been selling Prentice machines and serving customers in northeast Texas, southeast Oklahoma and central and southwest Arkansas for the better part of the last four decades.

Suttle has earned Blount's Eagle award for outstanding sales for the past six consecutive years 2001-2006, and can also boast the highest market share in its territory of any Blount dealer nationwide for the last seven years, 2000-2006. No doubt the company is aiming to maintain its title for 2007.

"The success that Suttle Equipment has enjoyed across the years stems from a dogged determination to properly and promptly service whatever we sell," according to company President Doug Suttle, son of founder Gene Suttle. "Our customers rely on (us) to keep their downtime to a minimum."

Suttle says the company's philosophy has remained the same since its inception. Its mission statement is "to sell quality equipment and provide the best service in the area while maintaining a parts inventory that is unequalled."



David Whisenhunt, Doug Suttle and Jimmy McCloughlin

History

The roots of Suttle Equipment go back to 1964, when John Suttle and Roy Hobbs started the business together in Sheridan under the name Hobbs and Suttle. Hobbs owned the building, which had previously been his welding shop. John's brother Gene came on board as a salesman in 1965.

Although Hobbs retired in 1966, when John Suttle built a new building in 1967 he kept the name Hobbs and Suttle. In 1969 John and Gene split into two separate companies, Gene forming Suttle Equipment Co. in De Queen. The

company was officially incorporated in September 1970.

Originally, Suttle represented Prentice and Franklin equipment, but dropped the Franklin line in 1972, picked up Timberjack. This arrangement lasted until October 2001, when Suttle was forced to drop Timberjack due to the John Deere buyout, as Deere already had a dealer contracted for the area. Ever since, Suttle has exclusively represented the full Blount line of Prentice skidders and loaders and Hydro-Ax feller-bunchers, as well as Peterson, CTR, CSI and Rotobec. Doug joined the team in 1971,

followed by Jimmy McCloughlin, the company bookkeeper, in 1973. Gene Suttle retired in 1978, leaving Doug in charge along with Frank Grady, who was over sales. David Whisenhunt came on board as a salesman in 1990.

Gene Suttle died in 1990. Whisenhunt took over as sales manager in 1997 when Grady was diagnosed with cancer; he died in 1999. Today, Doug still oversees the company. David Whisenhunt is still over sales, while Jimmy McCloughlin is second-in-command and takes care of the com-



Suttle's home base in De Queen, Ark.; there are two other locations in Arkadelphia and Dardanelle.

pany's computer systems as well as bookkeeping. Doug has one daughter and two nephews active in the company.

Parts, Service

Whisenhunt says he would put Suttle's service and parts department second to none. At De Queen there are actually two shop foremen. Tony Johnson oversees field mechanics while Justin Smith is over shop mechanics.

Doug says in addition to servicing the machines it sells the company sees a lot of service work from its competitors. Loggers who have bought other brands from other dealers in the area often bring those purchases to Suttle for repair and maintenance. Suttle's top priority remains backing up the machines it sells. "Our dedication to our customers dictates that we service equipment we sell before accepting work on competitive brands," Doug says.

The computer system was upgraded to an IBM eServer iSeries system in 2005, Doug says, in order to properly track parts inventory and service jobs in all locations. "The system presently employed allows us to track and maintain inventories and service records for each machine sold," Doug says. Suttle worked with IBM Business Partner, CRT International Inc., in upgrading to the new system. Doug adds that the internet has also been instrumental

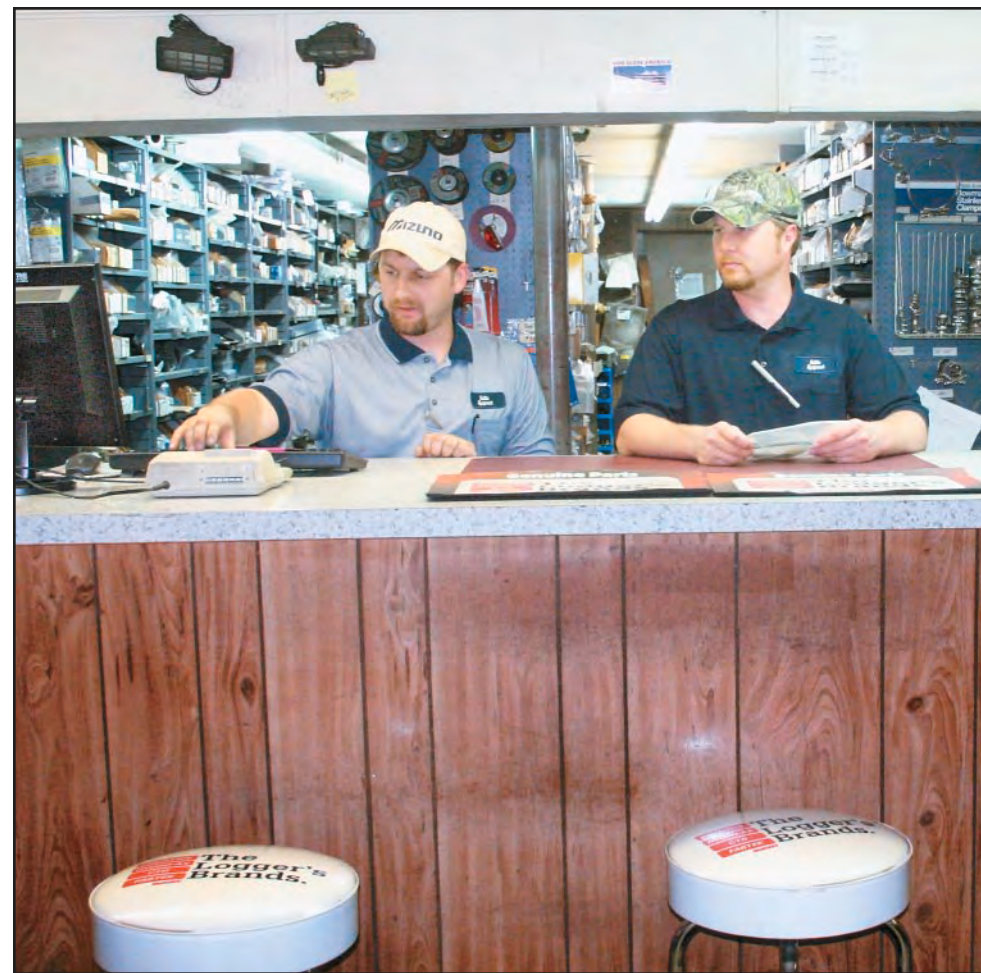
in assisting Suttle in maintaining its parts inventory and service records, although not as useful for sales. "Our customers can count on Suttle Equipment, to continually upgrade and maintain an adequate parts inventory."

Suttle has 47 employees, including 27 in De Queen, 18 in Arkadelphia and two at Dardanelle, which is a parts store opened in 1996. In De Queen, this includes 16 service technicians, three machinists/welders, and the rest salesmen and parts clerks. De Queen has nine in-shop mechanics and three road mechanics. Arkadelphia has six mechanics. The De Queen location has 10 drive-through bays; Arkadelphia has two. Both locations have three service trucks for field mechanics.

Market

Whisenhunt says the last five years have been the most unpredictable. The busy months are all turned around, he says. Before sales were greater in the winter and slowed down in the summer, but that seems to have switched. There is still a lot of buying at tax time and in November, to get tax breaks at the end of the fiscal year.

Doug Suttle notes that slowdowns in housing starts are hurting the timber industry, but Suttle is still selling machines, although he has noticed more sales in used equipment and trade ins. Suttle does have a web site but hasn't seen



Parts clerks Kris Downing and Chris Suttle.

much traffic. Business is still done more or less the old fashioned way.

Rumors and questions abound, according to Suttle and Whisenhunt. One big question on the minds of many loggers is who will own the timberland in years to come? Instability in land ownership is making many of them nervous.

Will Weyerhaeuser, which controls much of the resource in Suttle's region, sell its lands or not? The board says yes, the CEO says no. Suttle assures his customers, though, that whoever buys the land will still need loggers, and Suttle will always be around to provide the sales and service they need. **SLT**

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