

J.R.S. Logging, Inc. Hits it Big with New Rapido Loco Woodbine Firewood Processor

By Maya Lear Brewer

Fort Kent, Maine-JR Sirois, owner of J.R.S. Logging, Inc, has had a couple of really big breaks since he started his business in 1995. After working two years as a logging operator fresh out of high school, JR's father, an oil salesman, was approached by a benefactor who wanted to help someone start a logging business. The arrangement involved an owner financing agreement where JR could operate the machinery and pay for it from his business proceeds. The gentleman owned a feller buncher and a delimer and a cutting contract. Within two years of the agreement, JR had paid off the equipment, and the benefactor gave up his contract and business to JR as well. His next big break was the Longhorn beetle epidemic in 2008 which launched his logging business into lucrative firewood production.

"I've really been quite lucky," JR said. "I am thankful for the early help...As to the Longhorn Beetle epidemic, I saw it coming. The (US) government started getting stricter with the wood we were receiving from Canada. The beetle epidemic was threatening to spread into our community. All our firewood was coming from across the border. The laws were changing, and the Canadians needed to kiln dry their wood. I saw a chance to move into the firewood market. It's been crazy since then!"

Since the beginning, JR, 36 years old, has been cutting wood with a "full tree system." He has eight full-time employees and one sub-contractor. He owns 560 acres of mostly woodlands, which he's not cutting but saving as a nest egg for his two children, a six-year-old son, Andre, and a seven-year-old daughter, Elle. His wife, Melissa, who left her career as an accomplished social worker, handles incoming firewood orders and helps JR with each day's scheduled deliveries. This year is JR's first year not operating the feller buncher. He's actually now called "the boss" by his staff, but he really

misses not being in the woods. He now focuses on delivering the loads, processing the firewood along with full-time employee, Jeff Pinnette, and managing the firewood orders. JR has a 40' by 100' service garage with a 20' by 100' attached storage area for parts. He recently added an additional 40 acres to his land holdings to cut only if needed in the event that he runs into a bad year for stumpage.

JR currently owns a 2011 753J John Deere feller buncher and a 2010 2154 John Deere Delimber with Pro Pac. JR has always subbed out the grapple skidder portion of his business to Robert Martin, owner of R. B. Logging Inc. Robert owns a 620C Tigercat grapple skidder. For six months the two men together work double shifts keeping production flowing 24 hours per day. Four months of the year they work a 13 hours shift, and two months in the spring they stay out of the woods. The main goal is to make as much money as they can. According to JR, their work relationship is quite effective and prosperous. JR also owns two Western Star Tractors with 48ft trailers with center-mount loaders to haul the wood and a 1999 Mack with a rear-mount loader to feed the firewood processor. The Mack also transports tree-length and semi tree-length wood to and from the yard.

JR cuts 65K tons of tree length mixed wood timber per year for Orion Timberlands, LLC of Bangor, ME. He buys back 5K tons of stumpage from them and then another 3K tons from Irving Woodlands, LLC of St. John Plt., ME. He also buys wood from private land owners. His hardwood species include maple, beech and birch. And he finds that the best lengths for firewood processing are from 15' to 22' long and from 4" to 22" in diameter. He's cutting and splitting from 2K to 3K cords per year. Typically 70% of his customers want 16" stove length firewood.



JR Sirois and Jeff Pinnette team together to deliver products, process the firewood, and manage firewood orders.



JR Sirois, his wife Melissa, son Andre, and daughter Elle standing as a family in front of the 40' by 100' J.R.S. Logging, Inc. service garage with attached 20' by 100' parts storage area. The family owned nature of logging and small forest products owned companies is one of the features that makes our industry strong.

"I slice my own wood, haul it to my yard and fill my yard completely in one year," explained JR. "I start hauling in the fall just after sap season. After the first of the year my yard is full and come May/June time the wood is seasoned. Then I start delivering in May until the wood's all gone."

JR's customers are all residential within a 60-mile delivery zone. He uses two delivery trucks, a GMC Kodiak, which holds up to six cords, and a Ford one ton, which holds up to two cords. He adapted each truck himself to accommodate his deliveries. JR starts taking orders in May and takes orders six weeks out. JR indicates that his customers have started to realize that they can save a lot of money using wood versus oil heat. He's doubled sales over the last year.

"A typical home in Maine burns five to six cords per winter," explained JR. "Firewood is still the cheapest method of heating around here. The consumer can only afford a certain amount to heat their home. Five and a half cords times \$195 per cord is \$1,072. Compared to the cost of heating your home with oil, using firewood saves you from \$2,500 to \$3,500 per year. That's quite a savings."

When JR jumped into the firewood business in 2008, he began with a firewood processor. While his processor was initially effective, by 2010 he began to realize that he needed to double his production volume. So, that year he sold his first processor and purchased his Rapido Loco with a 60" circular saw and a 84hp turbo John Deere diesel engine. This is the largest Woodbine Firewood Processor created by CRD Metalworks, LLC.

JR checked out several logging shows and the internet to find the most powerful product for the best price. The Rapido Loco

totally fit the bill.

According to JR, his Rapido Loco was considerably less expensive than comparable processors on the market and it does more volume than the rest. JR said, "I can almost guarantee it! It's unbelievable how well it runs and produces! It's the biggest bang for the buck out there. The cost per cord is very low. To cut, split and deliver I am burning about three gallons of fuel per cord. My Rapido Loco is burning just one and a half gallons of that per cord of wood."

According to Chris Duval, president of the family-owned CRD Metalworks, the circular saw blade out sold chain saw machines by four to one in 2011. CRD manufactures six models of firewood processors, two each of the 16" capacity, the 20" capacity and the full-sized 24" capacity. Each one of these has a cutting system that's able to simultaneously keep up with the splitting mechanism and allows multi-function use at the same time.

Chris explained the reason behind the name Rapido Loco. Chris' wife, Rosana, is from Columbia and she's very active in the business particularly in CRD's office. When Chris called her out to the yard to examine his newly designed firewood processor, Rosana exclaimed, "Rapido Loco!" Rapido Loco means "crazy fast". According to Chris, the name just stuck.

And JR is one of the many who have discovered that this Woodbine processor is indeed "crazy fast".

"The circular blade feature that JR uses affords significant power and durability," said Chris. "The durability of the cutting system is 20x longer than a Bar and Chain System. It eliminates bars, chains, bar oil, and excessive maintenance. That reduces costs. With each of these models a chip separator is integrated into the standard 24'



JR's Woodbine Rapido Loco cuts and splits from 2000 to 3000 cords of firewood a year. About 70% of his customers want 16" stove length firewood.

conveyor. It's a simple design but its considerate of what's most effective for the end user. No one wants dirty wood. Sawdust, chips, and bark are separated out which enables our customers to produce a higher quality product."

JR's typical summer production is 75 to 105 cords per week from May to the first of November. During this season, his crunch time, he runs his Rapido Loco from 3am to 6pm each day. In the winter months he runs his processor for 12 hours a week, creating 25 to 35 cords every week. He also holds the state government contract for heating costs assistance. For this service he

currently produces an additional three to five cords per week. It's not uncommon for JR and wife, Melissa, to donate cords of wood for fundraisers and to those in need. His wife has a big heart for those in need, and their family enjoys giving to others.

JR enjoys his Rapido Loco and has made some adaptations to further fit his needs, namely the addition of a cab. Four-feet by three-feet wide, it is covered, with half-inch plexi-glass for safety and protection from the elements. Included within is a heater and a fan. The standard cab sits very close to the blade, but JR said that he's never had any chips fly towards him. JR



JR's hardwood species include maple, beech, and birch. He owns two Western Star Tractors with 48 ft. trailers and a 1999 Mack to transport tree-length and semi tree-length wood and feed the firewood processor.

uses the six wedge splitter assembled on his processor.

"My Rapido Loco is so easy to run. It's a one-handed operation and I am not fatigued after operating it for a 12-hour day," stated JR. "I've never had any issues at all. This machine is as inexpensive as heck to run. The speed puts it over the edge, and its feed capacity is fantastic. No time is wasted on this machine. And the cost of this machine made it all worth it."

"We get asked all the time why we sell our products at 50% less than some competitors," Chris said. "All I can say is that we're doing things differently. It's the way we are structured and the way our business philosophy operates. We do our best to make an honest living. We sell our products at a reasonable cost. Simply put, we are paying our employees and providing for our families just like everyone else. We are a family-owned business so we have no

shareholders to answer to and no holding debt or equity partners. We want to pass the savings onto our customers."

According to Chris, CRD Metalworks, which is located in the foothills of North Western Massachusetts, focuses on three main cornerstones: price, value (as perceived from a customer's point of view), and relationship with their customers. He believes that relationships are the things that have helped his family-based company grow the most. The sale is only the beginning. Their desire is to create a positive history with timely service and long-term relationships with customers.

JR said, "If I've ever needed anything, CRD has been phenomenal. If I've called they've always been very responsive. I feel comfortable calling them anytime; they know me by my first name. They've stood behind me and watched me succeed in my business." 



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