

Connecticut Contractor Has Diverse Business: Invests in CRD Metalworks Firewood Processor to Increase Production

By Tim Cox
Contributing Author



Woodbine Rapido Loco 20 firewood processor, manufactured by CRD Metalworks, in operation at RM Logging and Firewood.

COLUMBIA, Connecticut – Ryan Messier didn't waste any time getting into the forest products business. And although his company is small, it provides several distinct, diverse services related to timber harvesting.

Since he first went into business for himself, firewood has been a staple in Messier's company, and it still is. The importance of the firewood segment of his business is underscored by his recent investment in a new firewood processing machine supplied by CRD Metalworks.

Messier, 32, operates RM Logging and Firewood from his home in Columbia, Connecticut, where he was raised. Columbia is in east-central Connecticut, almost 25 east of the capital, Hartford.

Messier has been in the logging business for 12 years, forming his own company at the ripe old age of 20. He has an uncle who owns a land-clearing business, and he worked for his uncle as a teenager, and then worked for him full-time for a year after graduating from high school before

launching his own business.

He got his first job for firewood by contacting a landowner nearby who was having timber cut. He arranged with the owner for Messier to remove the tops and other suitable material, wood that he could use to process into firewood. His father had a four-wheel drive tractor and helped him. Messier bought a splitter and a conveyor, and he was in the firewood business. They skidded out the tops with the tractor, cut off the limbs with a chain saw, then bucked the logs and split the pieces. The conveyor was used to load the firewood into a dump truck.

Messier ran advertisements in local newspapers in order to get customers for firewood. "That's how I got my firewood business up and going," he said.

Back in those days, Messier paid a landowner for wood - \$5 per cord.

The business grew. In a few years Messier invested in a John Deere 440B cable skidder that enabled him to make a significant leap in productivity. The tractor could skid two tops at a time, but the John



Ryan Messier (on right), owner of RM Logging and Firewood, and his father Mike, work side by side.

Deere could skid the equivalent of a cord of wood.

“We still did it the hard way,” he noted, removing the limbs with a chainsaw, bucking the tops, and splitting the wood one piece at a time.

Two years ago he sold the cable skidder and replaced it with two skidders, a Timberjack 208 cable skidder and a John Deere 448D grapple skidder. Messier explained the move: he uses the Timberjack machine for skidding tops on firewood jobs, and uses the John Deere grapple for logging jobs.

After only about a year in business he bought a firewood processing machine, a Blockbuster model. The machine, using a bar saw for bucking, eliminated a lot of the back-breaking work and made the job easier.

Earlier this year, Messier invested in a bigger firewood processing machine from CRD Metal Works. The larger machine, which can process logs up to 20 inches in diameter, enabled him to increase production from about two cords per hour to as much as four cords, depending on the quality of the logs.

CRD Metalworks manufactures various models of firewood processors under the Woodbine name, and the model Messier purchased was the Woodbine Rapido Loco 20.

“I couldn’t ask for a better machine,” he said. “This machine is unreal.”

Although it is only the second firewood processing machine that Messier has owned, he is familiar with quite a number of the machines offered by various manufacturers, having researched other machines and viewed them at various trade shows.

The staff of CRD has provided strong customer service support for the machine, according to Messier.

One key aspect of the machine that attracted Messier was the powerful splitting system. “It will push anything through the wedge,” he said, even large, tough, knotty blocks of wood.

The CRD model he purchased uses a circular saw for bucking, which is considerably faster; it will buck a log up to 20 inches in diameter. The machine makes a cut “in less than half a second,” said Messier.

The firewood processor is powered by a Deutz 73 hp turbo-diesel engine. “It’s a fast machine,” said Messier.

The machine has a live log deck that can hold up to a cord of wood. “That was a good feature,” said Messier. He uses the tractor to load logs onto the deck.

The machine is “real easy to operate” and “easy to load,” said Messier.

“Another feature I like about that, it’s real easy to set up. You can set up in less than 10 minutes.”

The machine also came standard with its own conveyor that travels on top of the processor. “You can pull the whole shooting match down the road in one shot,” Messier noted, instead of having to transport multiple pieces of equipment.

CRD’s pricing also was very attractive,



Loading logs with a Bobcat loader onto RM’s Rapido Loco 20 firewood processor.

according to Messier, and the company is only about a 90-minute drive away in case he needs parts.

“I would definitely recommend it,” he said of the machine.

“We fill a truck in 12 to 20 minutes,” said Messier. That’s a one-ton dump truck with a 7-1/2-foot by 9-foot body that holds a cord of firewood.

Messier takes the machine to a job site to process the wood on location. When he contracts for timber harvesting work, he has a clause in his contract that allows him to store wood at the site for a year in order to allow it to dry. He returns a year later to process the dried wood.

He also has a wood yard in nearby Franklin, where he stores firewood logs he buys from other loggers and contractors. He takes the machine to his wood yard to process logs into firewood.

Messier does logging and also provides land-clearing services, normally working within 50-60 miles of Columbia. Logging jobs are mainly for private landowners with tracts ranging from 10-100 acres. “We do select cuts,” explained Messier, and thins.

In a typical job he may mark the trees that can be used for saw timber and remove them in order to allow younger trees to flourish and grow. Thinning jobs typically involve removing ‘junk’ trees in order to let the good ones mature. For thinning jobs, Messier contracts for the work and pays landowners for the pulp wood or what he refers to as “pole wood.” Otherwise, he works for a 50-50 split with landowners on logs that can be marketed to sawmills. He makes a photocopy of the checks he receives from a mill to provide to the landowner and writes them a check for their half.

He does a considerable amount of land-clearing work for farms and other people who need pasture land for livestock or horses as well as building construction.

In addition to the skidders and other equipment mentioned earlier, he also owns a Bobcat with grapple forks for moving, sorting, and stacking logs and a Vermeer

chipper that can handle wood up to 14 inches in diameter.

It’s a diverse mix of business, and Messier is not heavily dependent on any one particular sector. When asked to pinpoint his ‘bread and butter,’ he replied, “All of it.”

The firewood business certainly is strong through the winter, he noted. “There’s not much work going on,” he noted, otherwise. He sells 300-400 cords of firewood annually.

Work has not been as plentiful in recent years with the weak economy. “Logging jobs are hard to find,” said Messier, as landowners are hanging onto their wood. In addition, the land-clearing work has fallen off, particularly jobs related to building construction.

The region is predominantly hardwoods – 80 percent, Messier estimated. He works in red oak, white oak, black oak,

hickory, ash, hard maple, soft maple, and birch.

Saw logs go to one of several well-known hardwood sawmill companies in Connecticut, such as Hull Forest Products, Rossi American Hardwoods, and Burrell Brothers Sawmill.

Messier’s father, Mike, 60, still works with his son part-time. Mike worked for years at Lydall & Foulds Co., which operated a paper mill in Manchester that closed in 2001. Mike works with Messier three days a week and also has a lawn care business that keeps him busy the rest of the time. Mike has an employee in his lawn business who works for Messier from time to time, and they also add a few guys part-time when business is busy.

Messier does the felling, cutting the timber manually with a Stihl chainsaw. Mike usually operates the Bobcat, which is used to sort the logs into piles, then uses one

CRD Metalworks Sells Woodbine Firewood Processors Factory-Direct

CRD Metalworks is located in western Massachusetts, less than 30 miles north of Springfield. It manufactures various models of firewood processors under the Woodbine name, machines that use either circular slasher saws or bar saws, with different capacities, engine choices, and other options. Production ranges from three cords per hour to six. The company also manufactures splitters.

The Woodbine Rapido Loco 20 model number indicates the log diameter capacity. In this case 20 inches uses a Simonds 50-inch circular saw blade to buck logs to length. It is powered by a Deutz 73 hp oil-cooled, turbo-diesel engine. Splitting is accomplished in a cycle time of less than four seconds with an eight-way wedge and the company’s patent-pending, push-button splitting system.

Hydraulic pumps and valves supply power for splitting and other processes, such as the live log deck and log clamp.

The 13-foot log deck can accommodate logs up to 24 feet long.

The machine is designed to buck logs into blocks no more than 24 inches long and then split them automatically. The cut, split firewood then feeds automatically into a conveyor.

The firewood processor comes standard with a 24-foot conveyor that rides on top of the machine for transport. It can be attached to the processor in less than five minutes. The trailer package is a dual-axle, DOT-approved trailer with brakes.

CRD Metalworks sells factory-direct, not through dealers. It sells throughout the U.S. and into Canada and other countries. The company’s machines come with a one-year limited warranty.

For more information about the CRD Metalworks Woodbine line of firewood processors, visit the website at www.crdmetalworks.com or call the company at (888) 667-8580.



Cutting and splitting firewood at RM Logging and Firewood on its CRD Rapido Loco 20. This larger machine can process logs up to 20 inches in diameter. Messier said, "I couldn't ask for a better machine. It will push anything through the wedge. It makes a cut in less than half a second."



Messier said, "My Rapido Loco 20 has a live deck that can hold up to a cord of wood. It is easy to setup; I can set it up in less than ten minutes. It has its own conveyor that travels on top of the processor. You can pull the whole shooting match down the road in one shot."

of the skidders to get the wood out to a landing.

For the firewood business, Messier prefers having customers within 30 miles.

"The economy has affected us big time," he said, in several ways. The chief reason is that with unemployment high, people are looking for other ways to generate some income. They operate on the edge and cut into Messier's business. "They pick up roadside wood, take it home, cut it and sell it," said Messier. "That's put a hurting on us." Last year's storms in New England knocked down a lot of trees, making more wood available for these small entrepreneurs as well as homeowners willing to do the work to cut their own firewood.

In a good year, Messier will sell 400-500 cords of firewood. In recent years that figure has dropped to "couple of hundred," he said. In addition, he has been forced to cut prices. Last year he got \$200 per cord; this year he is selling firewood for \$170. His prices are for cut, split firewood delivered by dump truck. If the customer wants the wood stacked, Messier will hire a couple of teenagers to do the stacking.

He still advertises for firewood customers in local newspapers. Of course, he has repeat customers, too.

He also uses opportunities like local fairs to have an exhibit for his business to promote its land-clearing and logging services.

This winter Messier is planning on selling some firewood wholesale – by the tractor-trailer load. It will be delivered to other businesses on Cape Cod in Massachusetts and elsewhere to be eventually sold to homeowners.

"I'm just trying to expand the business to make more revenue," he explained, but will continue the retail side of the firewood business.

Land-clearing for business had dropped off "tremendously" in recent years because of the slumping construction industry, he said. "Builders are not building houses." He is still clearing some land for pasture land for dairy cows and horses, but sawmills "are up and down."

Messier is a member of the Connecticut Professional Timber Producers Association, also known as TIMPRO, a trade organization representing the forest products industry in Connecticut.

Messier's chief hobbies are hunting – deer, pheasant, and turkey – and fishing along with target shooting and four-wheeling. With his girlfriend, Rebecca Bickford, he also cultivates an interest in horseback riding and participates in rodeos and related activities, such as barrel racing and roping steers. She has a quarter horse and a paint horse, and they attend events in New England and New York.

As tough as the economy has been in recent years, Messier considers himself in pretty good shape. "We have over a year's worth of work lined up," he said.

"We have people call us every day for jobs," Messier added. "We pretty much pick and choose the jobs we want to do now."

