

# A SALUTE TO A CUSTOMER



## GULF COAST UTILITY CONTRACTORS

### Quality work and diversification lead to growth for this Panama City, Fla., firm



Mike Swearington,  
Owner/President

When Mike Swearington started Gulf Coast Utility Contractors in Panama City, Fla., in 1999, the company consisted of him and three employees doing small storm-drain projects. Today, Gulf Coast Utility Contractors (GCUC) has about 80 employees and does a wide range of work, including complete site packages.

"We've certainly changed in terms of our size and the services we offer, but what hasn't changed is our commitment," said Swearington. "Whether we're the prime contractor or a sub, we're committed to giving our client the best possible job every time out. That means quality work done fast and providing customers with real value. We try to always meet or exceed expectations."

That philosophy and work ethic have earned GCUC a solid and loyal customer base.

"We don't travel very far (about a 100-mile radius of Panama City), so we need repeat customers in order to stay in business," noted Swearington. "Fortunately, we have many of them, and we've been working with some

for a decade or more. We tend to have very good, long-term relationships with all of our customers, whether they are governmental entities, developers or other contractors."

As the name implies, Gulf Coast Utility Contractors started as an underground utility contracting firm. Today, its services include not only utilities and storm drain, but also clearing and grubbing, curb, base and pavement.

"We like to do all aspects of a job with our own personnel whenever possible because it puts us in control," Swearington explained. "We're able to plan a job and execute the plan more effectively and more efficiently when we're the prime and we're using our own people. That said, we're also always happy to work with large paving contractors and other firms with which we've developed excellent relationships through the years."

#### Overcoming challenges on the job

Two recent jobs exemplify the company's work with other contractors. GCUC has completed its part of a large construction project at the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport in Panama City and is part of a team that's reconstructing U.S. Highway 331 to make it a four-lane road.

"At the airport, we assisted Phoenix Construction in digging a large pond and hauling all the dirt off," said Swearington. "We also did all the storm drain. The Highway 331 job is for Anderson Columbia. We're doing all the utility relocations and storm drain and helping them move dirt for a five-mile stretch of the road, which eventually will connect U.S. Highway 98 to I-10."

There are plenty of challenges to doing those jobs, and most other underground projects along Florida's Gulf Coast.

Gulf Coast Utility Contractors is very much a family business. The Panama City, Fla., firm does earthwork as well as utilities.







Operator Jordan Hobbs uses Gulf Coast Utility Contractors' new Komatsu PC240LC-10 to move dirt at a pit near Panama City. "Everybody was concerned about Tier 4 machines, but our PC240 has been outstanding," said President Mike Swearington. "I wouldn't hesitate to get another Komatsu Tier 4 unit whenever we need one."

"The No. 1 issue is water," observed Swearington. "We don't have to dig very deep to run into water around here. And of course, in any area that's already developed, there are existing utilities and we've got to figure out how to work around them. I'd say one of our biggest strengths is our ability to overcome issues that arise almost every day on any utility job."

### Valued employees

Swearington relies on a talented and experienced staff to help him keep jobs running smoothly. Key personnel include Vice President Operations Chris Corbin and Superintendents Jamie Schulte, Tal Richardson and Richie Williams.

"You don't do well in this business without good field supervision," insisted Swearington. "We think our people are among the best. That includes our foremen and lead operators. Most of them have been with me for many years, so they understand what we're all about at GCUC, and they're the ones who are primarily responsible for bringing our jobs in on time and on budget."

Swearington also counts on many family members to help run the business. His wife, Tammi, is Vice President and manages the office/accounting. His son Alex is an estimator/assistant project manager and another son Jordan is an operator/pipelayer. Swearington's mother-in-law, Beth Austin, also works in the office, as does Chris Corbin's wife, Stacie.



Gulf Coast Utility Contractors' Komatsu PC400 is at work at the Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport.

### Tier 4 Komatsu excavator is "outstanding"

Gulf Coast Utility Contractors has been a loyal Komatsu user and Tractor & Equipment Company customer since Swearington opened the doors.

"Before I started GCUC, the company I worked for used Komatsu and TEC, so I got a good 'up-close' look before I had to buy anything myself," said Swearington. "Komatsu makes good machines. The best thing is, they're reliable – we can count on them to work every day. I also appreciate that they last a long time so we get our money's worth out of them."

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# GCUC is a “can-do” contracting firm

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Gulf Coast Utility Contractors has several Komatsu wheel loaders in its equipment fleet, including this WA250 parallel tool carrier.



(L-R) Gulf Coast Utility Contractors Superintendent Jamie Schulte and President Mike Swearington work closely with TEC Panama City Branch Manager Chuck Tibbets. “We’ve had a long relationship with TEC,” said Swearington. “They stand behind their products and provide the parts and service we need to be successful.”

This D61 is one of two Komatsu dozers owned by Gulf Coast Utility Contractors.



GCUC has had many Komatsu excavators through the years. Swearington’s current fleet ranges from compact PC27s to a PC400 and includes a new PC240LC-10 Tier 4 Interim Komatsu excavator. “Everybody was concerned with Tier 4, but I can tell you firsthand, our PC240 has been outstanding. We’ve had no issues whatsoever. I wouldn’t hesitate to get another Komatsu Tier 4 unit whenever we need one.”

In addition to excavators, GCUC runs Komatsu wheel loaders (WA200 and WA250) and Komatsu dozers (D31 and D61). The company was recognized by Komatsu as one of the manufacturer’s “No Idle Initiative” award winners for successfully participating in a program to decrease machine idle time.

“We buy Komatsu because we think it’s good equipment that’s fairly priced for top quality,” said Swearington. “But a big factor in the quality equation is the dealer, and TEC is a very good equipment dealer. They stand behind their products and provide the parts and service we need to be successful. We’ve had a long relationship with TEC’s Panama City store and Branch Manager Chuck Tibbets, and we appreciate all they do for us.”

## Optimistic about future

Despite the recession and an otherwise slow-growth economy during the past five or six years, Gulf Coast Utility Contractors has done well. The company has grown and diversified, and Swearington is optimistic about what lies ahead.

“Florida was hit hard by the financial collapse and the housing bubble, but it looks like things are starting to turn around. The fact that we do many different types of work, and that we work in all sectors – county, state and federal government, as well as the private side – has helped shelter us somewhat.

“We’re all hopeful that the worst is behind us, that housing and commercial work will continue to pick up, and that public work will at least maintain at current levels. If that’s the case, I like what the future holds for GCUC. I think we’ve established a good reputation as a ‘can-do’ contracting firm that does quality work. If we’re able to maintain that hungry attitude, I’m optimistic that we’ll be able to continue to grow for the foreseeable future.” ■