

WING FAMILY: LOGGING FOR FOUR GENERATIONS

MAINE'S WINGS SEE BIG CHANGES AHEAD, BUT NOTHING THEY CAN'T HANDLE

BY ERIC JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Richard Wing is sure of one thing after 42 years spent cutting wood for the Maine forest products industry: Big changes lie ahead. Beyond that, he's not sticking his neck out very far, because nobody knows what's coming. Considering the recent decline of the paper industry coupled with chaos in the biomass markets caused by low oil and gas prices, it's a sure bet that lowgrade markets will remain in flux for the foreseeable future. And just to keep things interesting, President Trump's

recently-imposed duty on softwood lumber crossing the border has the potential to further disrupt markets.

He says the industry in his region is experiencing the worst downturn he's ever seen.

But just because he's not sticking his neck out making predictions for a reporter doesn't mean this third-generation logging contractor and his family aren't making

plans. Their basic strategy is to diversify their business to take advantage of some new markets in the heavily-developed rural area around their home of Standish.

Joined by his wife and co-owner of the company, Lynn Wing and son, Tim, Richard recently bought a WoodMizer portable band sawmill and installed it in a building on a piece of property just up the road from their shop and office. The mill not only gives the company some new products to retail to the general public, but gives their employees something productive to do when the logging side is idle, such as during mud season or if a market stops taking wood.

Known mostly for their successful whole tree chipping opera-



(From left:) Tim, Lynn and Richard Wing with their new mascot.

tion, the Wings have shipped chips to all the major chip consumers in the region over the years. While markets for fuel chips are on the decline, the Wings still ship lots of wood to Sappi's biomass-burning boiler in Westbrook, as well as to Pine Tree Power in Tamworth. They also recently bought a live-bottom trailer for delivering chips to customers with no unloading facilities. That could be a landscaper or anyone else who needs a load of whole tree chips. They also produce sawlogs, having diverted some of their production to their own mill.

Another piece of equipment meant to diversify their operation was a Dyna firewood processor, which Tim says is a basic machine, but it gets the job done and satisfies the retail demand for firewood, along with cut-up slabwood from the sawmill sold by the bundle at the yard with the cash going into an "honor box" welded to the gate. "We've been cutting a lot of firewood," Tim notes. Stacks of drying lumber occupy space in the very neat and tidy millyard, which over the years has been home to three other mills—one down by the creek that was powered by the water, a diesel-powered mill some years later, followed by another diesel unit in recent years. The Wings bought the land and installed the new Wood Mizer, and say they're very happy with the way it's worked out.

Richard started working for his dad, Randall, when he was a senior in high school with a chain saw and horses, and has worked in the woods—mostly as an independent contractor with Lynn as his partner, ever since. Tim, who is 43, is poised to keep the ball rolling once his parents retire, and he's the driving force behind many of the changes the company is going through.

One of those is buying land which Richard says is almost always a good idea in their part of the state. With their equipment and expertise, they can tailor a piece of property to the needs of any new owner or developer. When visited by *The Northern Logger*, they were clearing a home lot.



Lowgrade markets are going to determine where the region's forest products economy goes in the coming years, Wing believes.

In addition to the WoodMizer sawmill and Dyna firewood processor, the Wings' logging side consists of a Morbark 27-inch chipper served by a Cat 559 skidder. They have two CAT 255Cs grapple skidders, along with a Timber-Pro feller-buncher, one triaxle log truck with a pup and a Rotobec loader, two Peterbilts and a Western Star semi tractor. They also recently bought a CAT 517 low-ground pressure tracked grapple skidder for sensitive sites. Tim says it does what it's designed to do and does it well, but even though it looks like a bulldozer, the weight distribution is designed to facilitate skidding, not dozing. As such, it's not much of a dozer, he notes.



The WoodMizer mill produces wide pine boards, which Tim says are popular with local customers.



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The company employs nine people in total: seven in the woods and two in the office. Richard says one of the keys to their success has been the ability to find and keep good employees over the years.

Richard and Lynn say they have no plans to retire any time soon, but they're comfortable handing the reins of the business over to their son, Tim, as needed to stay on top of an increasingly-complex business. Richard says his goal is to keep the company the same size as it is now, but he concedes that it's a difficult thing to achieve while trying to keep the business current.

There are always pressures to expand operations, "while not necessarily generating as much income," he notes, explaining that it's tempting at times to get drawn into activities and markets that are plenty of extra work but turn out to be nonprofitable.

Access to timber is not a problem for the Wings. After 42 years in business, they've revisited the same woodlots up to four times, and for the past year, they worked within 15 miles of their home base in Standish. Tim says their average woodlot is about 30-40 acres, and under normal circumstances, that takes a couple weeks to cut.

They stay away from bid sales, but do with consulting foresters on some jobs, though Richard says many landowners don't want to pay the 15 or 20 percent commission charged by consulting foresters in the area.

Having seen their share of good markets and bad markets—and dramatic changes in the industry over the decades, Richard and Lynn Wing have proven they know how to survive in uncertain times, and their confidence moving forward should be encouraging to anyone who wonders whether Maine's forest products industry will survive.

From the Wings' perspective, it always has and if approached intelligently, it should continue to provide jobs and essential forest products in the future.

