

Utility Work Machines Attract Municipalities

These unique machines are helping municipalities increase productivity while downsizing their equipment fleets.

When it comes to grounds maintenance and construction equipment, contractors are not the only ones on the lookout for innovative new machines to make their jobs easier. Municipalities and other governmental entities are becoming increasingly mindful of advancements hitting the compact equipment market.

Cities of all sizes must purchase numerous pieces of equipment to keep their parks mowed, sidewalks plowed, and property fenced—which are just a few of the many tasks city crews perform throughout the year. From tractors to snowblowers, municipalities typically own several dozen machines dedicated for only one task. But as municipalities face shrinking budgets with less money devoted to maintaining and hiring employees, they need versatile machines that increase productivity and save their taxpayers money.

A versatile machine that has received the attention of several municipalities in the United States and Canada is the Toolcat™ 5600 utility work machine, manufactured by Bobcat Company

(www.bobcat.com). The 5600 has the features of a loader, pickup truck, and attachment carrier all in one, allowing municipalities and governmental entities to downsize their equipment fleet. Shoreview, MN, and Calgary, Alberta, Canada, are two governmental entities that use their utility work machines for tasks other than mowing and plowing.

City of Shoreview

Pat Dunn remembers the first time he got a glimpse of the 5600 utility work machine while flipping through a magazine. “It looked like quite an ingenious machine and pretty versatile, so I had them bring one out for us to demo,” says Dunn, streets supervisor for Shoreview.

Dunn and his crews tried the demo, which was delivered one cold winter day with an angle broom and snow V-blade attachments. Over the next few days, they used the vehicle to sweep snow off sidewalks and to plow areas in the city that had never been cleared that winter. “It worked really well,” Dunn says. “Not only that, but all the attachments that we had for our Bobcat® skid-steer loaders also worked on it.”

Dunn says he also was impressed by how easy the machine was to operate because of its hydrostatic drive system, which includes a drive pedal, steering wheel, and simple shifting. Ease of operation was especially important because Dunn

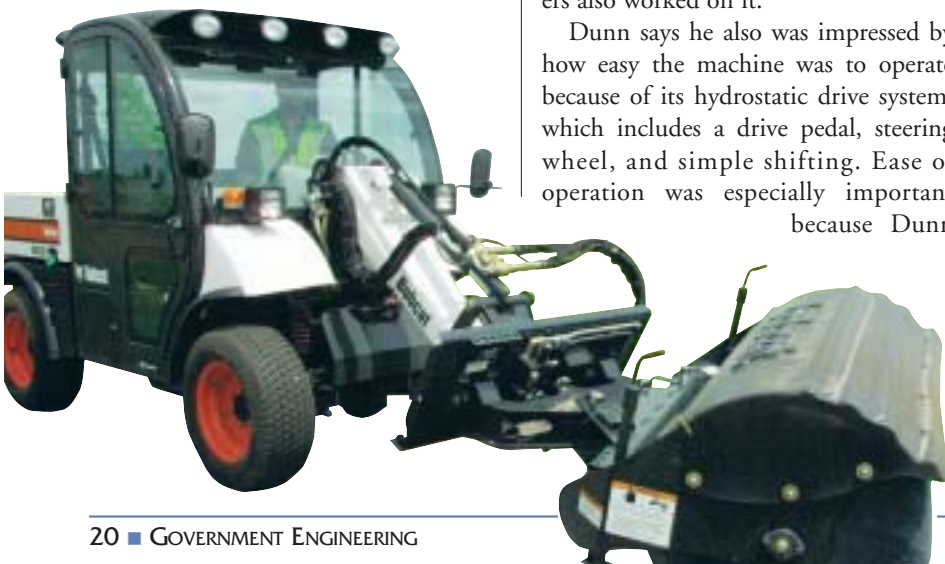
expected that part-time summer employees would operate the machine to mow along the city’s trail system. “It has been a lot more comfortable machine for our employees compared to what they were using in the past,” he says.

Now, after owning the machine more than two years, Dunn says they continue to find more uses for it. In addition to mowing and plowing the city’s trail system, Dunn says the utility work machine’s four-wheel drive comes in handy when needing to access hard-to-reach ponds for water inspections. Recently, an auger was attached to the 5600 and crews used it to place guardrail posts along a roadway. “We really didn’t expect we’d be using it for putting in guardrail posts,” Dunn says.

Dunn also did not expect that the utility work machine would provide several benefits, including increased productivity. “It will plow some of the trails in one swipe rather than having to do two passes with some of the equipment we had before,” he says. “And with some of the jobs, we don’t have to take a truck to haul the tools because they all fit on the Toolcat 5600, and it carries two people.”

While Shoreview has been using skid-steer loaders for years, Dunn says one of the biggest benefits they have with the 5600 is its all-wheel steering, which provides minimal turf disturbance. Shoreview city crews use the utility work machine to mow on delicate surfaces such as parks and boulevards, going

Attachments like this angle broom allow utility work machines to easily handle the sweeping of sidewalks and parking lots as well as quick snow removal.



places where they never go with skid-steer loaders.

All in all, Dunn says his crews use the 5600 nearly every day in the summer and at least three times a week during the winter. "I think word is spreading around pretty fast on this machine," he says. "Other municipalities are starting to realize what it can do for them."

City of Calgary

The chance of snow falling during winter in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, is as common as temperatures in Phoenix reaching triple digits during summer. And when a major snowstorm hits, it cannot prevent city employees working for the Calgary Wastewater Treatment plants from doing their jobs. Calgary Wastewater treats enough effluent to fill 128 Olympic-sized swimming pools each day.

Dave Desmeules, supervisor of support services for the Calgary Wastewater Treatment plants, says he started looking for a machine to help with snow removal because the wastewater treatment plants rank lowest on the city's snow removal priority list. "The plant staff used to do all of the grass cutting and snow removal and we had all of our own equipment, but we have since contracted out this service," Desmeules says. "We were then at the mercy of the contractor to get here. We had to wait for the plows to clear access to certain areas before we could deploy staff to facilitate repairs to the equipment."

But Desmeules says that if he could have only one machine, he wanted a machine that could do more than plow snow, which is why he says he proposed purchasing the Toolcat 5600. In addition to the angle broom and snow blade attachments, the city also has a bucket, pallet fork, and sweeper attachments that employees use to lift and move generator pumps, confined-space breathing apparatus carts, janitorial supplies, and other equipment. A trailer transports the utility work machine between the city's two treatment facilities.

"Every piece of equipment has a cost, but the 5600 allows us to do a lot of different things with one power unit," he says. "It's a snow plow, second transportation vehicle, and backup to our aging forklift."




Snowblower attachments on utility work machines facilitate snow removal off sidewalks or in tight places where only a small machine can fit.

Having a machine that is multi-functional has become even more important as Desmeules' department has gone from a staff of 28 to 13. "It just shows that with the reduction of manpower you have to compensate with machinery," he says.

Versatility Becomes Key

As government officials across North America continue to deal with budget woes, they say they will keep adding versatile utility work machinery to their equipment fleet. Though Shoreview and Calgary use their utility work machines for different tasks, both have benefited

from several of the same features on the 5600, such as its attachment carrier capabilities, all-wheel steering, and climate-controlled cab, along with its versatility.

One of the biggest advantages of purchasing a versatile machine like the 5600 is discovering new tasks for it to tackle. Both governmental entities have found that they can use their utility work machine for many other tasks than what it was originally purchased to do. That versatility brings about cost-savings by reducing manual labor, increasing productivity, and downsizing the number of dedicated machines. 



Forks and grapples hitched to a utility work machine help make short work of cleaning up trees and branches.