



INCORPORATING NEW TECHNOLOGY

1920s-30s era humorist Will Rogers once said, “Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there.” Today’s contractors can certainly relate, as they grapple with the rapidly quickening pace of business — ranging from new regulations and equipment to dealing with the volatility of a global marketplace.

Take Keadle Lumber Enterprises, for example. This Georgia-based company started in 1947. Founded by Homer Keadle when he acquired half-interest in his uncle’s portable sawmill, the company evolved from sawmilling on the go, to a prominent lumber producer complete with a stationary pine

sawmill, hardwood sawmill, a pallet mill, and a wood-treatment facility.

When Homer’s son Steve became majority owner and president in 1997, he knew significant changes were needed in order to move the company into the 21st Century. He also didn’t want to compromise the company’s core principles of operation: provide prompt service and quality products, provide a safe and consistent working environment, be good stewards of all timber and land, and conduct all business and relationships with honesty and integrity.

So, boldly facing the changing times and new economic realities of a global marketplace,

Keadle Lumber invested in a new high-tech computerized pine sawmill, abandoned hardwood and pallet production, and sold their wood-treatment facility to another company that provides contract services to Keadle as needed. The combination of new equipment and streamlining products and processes has resulted in, at least, a fifty-percent increase in production.

Their focus today is strictly Southern Yellow Pine lumber, which can be utilized in many different ways — two-inch dimension lumber, 5/4 decking, small timbers, one-inch boards, wood chips, shavings, bark, and sawdust. Thanks to the precision of the new mill, its



The 90Z7 loader helps keep the lumber operation running smoothly — unloading logs and feeding the mill.



Keadle's mill processes over 50 truck-loads of logs a day. After the logs are cut, they are taken over to the kiln for drying.



A computerized sorting system automatically shunts product to the appropriate slot. Four straps hold a pack in place. The system can output 11 or 12 packs an hour.



After drying, the product is then taken to the planer mill where they are given their final finish — like what one would find on lumber at a retail lumber yard or home-improvement center.



Jeff Duncan, Cowin Equipment Sales representative, with Clay Watkins, Parts and Service Supervisor, Keadle Lumber.

(Below) Timber or raw material is supplied by individual land owners and wood suppliers within an 80-mile radius of the mill.

thinner saws, and repurposing the sawdust as fuel for their boilers, they now have zero waste from their mill — a significant achievement.

TIER 4 INTERIM

Another new technology Keadle is using is Tier 4 Interim equipment. So far they have two pieces — a skidder their logging crew uses, and a Kawasaki 90Z7 wheel loader equipped with Wicker logging forks.

“We’ve bought a number of Kawasaki loaders in the past,” explains Clay Watkins, Parts and Service Supervisor. “So when it came time to get another, we had originally considered buying used. But with the depreciation/tax break about to expire and Kawasaki was offering special financing, we decided to go new. Cowin Equipment, our local Kawasaki dealer, was very good about explaining the Tier 4 Interim differences, plus we were looking forward to getting something more fuel efficient. I was afraid that perhaps we bought too small of a machine with the 90, but it keeps the mill going just fine.

“Cowin has been good to us. Their parts guys are really good. We tore up a cylinder

on one of our other Kawasakis, and they took one off of their rental unit and installed it for us until a new one came one. Service is of great concern to us, and Cowin takes care of us. We trust them.”

As Keadle ventures down the Tier 4 Interim path, they’ve learned there are some things they can’t do the same way anymore — like fuel and lubricants. “We had some problems with fuel contamination with our skidder,” says Clay. “So we’ve learned the necessity of keeping the nozzle clean, the fuel filtered, and the need for above-ground tanks. So we’re good to go for the wheel loader.

“We’re also learning about zinc-free lube. That’s a new one on us. We’ve had to make a list of all the various lubes and oils for all the equipment here at the lumber yard. It turns out every gear box, every piece of equipment has their own oil. Back in the old days, you just had two oils to worry about. Now we keep up with all this and just add it to the list.

“Another thing that has changed is when maintenance is performed. It used to be monthly. You had a list of what should be done every month, including fluids

“TO STAND STILL IS TO GO BACKWARD.”
— Keadle Lumber corporate motto





Most of the company's lumber goes to the construction and housing industry, but is also used by remanufacturers in the production of many varied products.

changes. Not now. Maintenance by the hour is something we've had to get used to. And we're far more careful on what our employees can and can't do on the premises. We keep the area very clean, there's no smoking on the premises, and welders have to take extra precautions to make sure no stray spark starts a fire."

BENEFITS OF NEW TECH

With production up over 50 percent, it's obvious the new mill has been a plus. Besides being more efficient and less wasteful, it can also be programmed as needed to create whatever wood cuts are the most profitable.

"We have the capability of changing the size of wood we run by computer based on market demand. 'Random Lengths'

magazine comes out twice a week and provides the average price of lumber for the East and West Coasts. So that's what we base our price on, since we can't sell our lumber for more than the market dictates."

Keadle Lumber employs 85 to 90 people, including a five-man logging crew. Timber or raw material is supplied by individual land owners and wood suppliers within an 80-mile radius of the mill. Wood-treating companies, retail lumber yards, industrial remanufacturers, and wholesalers all purchase Keadle products. Over 80-million board feet are produced each year.

"In the old days, we didn't run by production, we ran by hours," says Clay. "You really didn't know what you had unless you went out there and counted. With the new mill, I can run out there and show you on the board how much board foot we have on

hand. We used to shut down Friday at 1 in the afternoon and do maintenance so things were ready to roll on Monday. Now, we work ten-hour days so all of Friday can be for maintenance. But if we don't meet our quota by Friday night, we'll come in on Saturday morning and get it done, leaving the rest of Saturday for maintenance. We have to keep our kilns running steady. We can't run too much or the wood will not dry properly, and we can't run too little because our costs per board foot goes up."

"To Stand Still is to Go Backward." Keadle Lumber embodies their motto, as they look for new products and machinery in order to remain competitive in today's global economy.

***Keadle Lumber Enterprises, Inc.,
Thomaston, Georgia, is serviced by Cowin
Equipment, Atlanta, Georgia.***