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# Sanco Equipment Celebrates Two Decades in Business, Continues Evolution



## SANCO 20 EQUIPMENT ANNIVERSARY



(L-R): Joe Graham, sales and rental manager; Matt Greibrok, vice president of business development; and Brian Santarsiero, president, and CEO look over building plans for the new Mankato location.

By Giles Lambertson  
CEG CORRESPONDENT

**A**fter 20 years in business, Sanco Equipment is just getting started. It's firming up its organization around core values that are a sure foundation for growth, looking for new machinery lines to enhance an already strong product lineup, and keeping an eye out for additional store locations across the upper Midwest.

"We feel Sanco Equipment is going to continue to evolve as a successful business," said Brian Santarsiero.

One would expect the company's president and CEO to say that, of course. What is more telling is the hard evidence that the company is, in fact, on the move.

"We feel Sanco Equipment is going to continue to evolve as a successful business."

Brian Santarsiero



Sanco's equipment division was formed in 2003 when the family bought an existing Bobcat dealership in Albert Lea, Minn.

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(L-R) are Andy McKinney, sales, Albert Lea; Nick Stadheim, sales, Mason City; and Alex Ross, rental, Albert Lea.

Bobcat is a terrific family of machines to build a future on. The iconic brand is a Minnesota original.



A new kind of machine was conceived and given birth to in the small town of Rothsay, Minn. It grew up in North Dakota, and was given the name Bobcat.

\*\*

Progressive change is a genetic characteristic of the company. The CEO's great-great-grandfather, Salvatore Santarsiero, launched his legacy company nearly 70 years ago after he heeded his entrepreneurial instincts and changed his career.

Santarsiero owned a small trucking firm that made medium distance runs between

Minneapolis and Chicago. When running a company on the road didn't appeal to him anymore, he parked his truck but didn't completely leave the trucking industry. Rather, he bought a Thermo King trailer refrigeration franchise in Roseville, Minn. From that humble start came Sanco Enterprises.

In succeeding generations of family

management, the umbrella company added Thermo Leasing (a refrigerated truck, trailer and company), Sanco Services (an upfit and installation service for trucks ranging in size from vans to tractor-trailer rigs), Sanco Spotters (a dealership offering specialized vehicles for moving trailers in freighting yards), and, of course, Sanco Equipment.

The equipment company division was formed in 2003 when the family bought an existing Bobcat dealership in Albert Lea, Minn. In the ensuing two decades, Sanco Equipment has expanded to four locations — three in Minnesota and the most recent one in neighboring Iowa due south of the original store.

Needless to say, Bobcat is a terrific family of machines to build a future on. The iconic brand is a Minnesota original, a new kind of machine conceived and given birth to in the small town of Rothsay and growing up in neighboring North Dakota, where it was given the name Bobcat. The machine heralded an age of compact equipment that still is in its heyday.

The skid steer loader — originally a three-wheeled contraption — was built at the behest of a turkey farmer who needed his barn cleaned. In the intervening 67 years, the machine has been adapted for numerous work situations, yet agriculture is still a mainstay market.

“We sell a lot to ag customers,” said Sanco Equipment Sales Manager Joe Graham. “Agriculture is a significant part of our sales. Dairy and turkey farmers hauling feed, loading manure, hauling hay bales... and cleaning barns.”

Still cleaning barns after all these years.

Yet the most vital customer base for the compact machines is comprised of construction contractors and landscapers and the agriculture industry. The company president cites the volatility of farm produce prices as one reason these can change.

“If someone in Chicago drops the price of a bushel of beans, it impacts our ag customers and their ability to possibly purchase a new machine that year,” said Santarsiero.

“We sell a lot to ag customers. Agriculture is a significant part of our sales. Dairy and turkey farmers hauling feed, loading manure, hauling hay bales... and cleaning barns.”

Joe Graham



The expansion into Mason City resulted from a combination of factors. Located just an hour south of Albert Lea, the city appealed to Brian Santarsiero, president and CEO of Sanco, because “the territory is congruent with our Minnesota territory and there was a need for the product line. It was a good opportunity.”







Sanco Equipment's mobile units are available and can service equipment on site or will pick up and deliver equipment for service.



Factory trained technicians can do repairs and maintenance, on-site diagnostics, perform warranty service and machine inspections on the road.



Mobile technicians are able to help maintain equipment and save customers time by coming to the jobsite.

Santarsiero believes the construction industry offers more underlying stability.

"I think the construction side is where the growth in sales will be in the next two or three years. Regardless of what the economy is doing right now, there still are a lot of government infrastructure initiatives in place. There are a lot of infrastructure needs out there and that will keep the construction side of business going."

One of the notable evolutions of Bobcat loaders was the addition of tracks. While tracked and tired versions of the loaders

function the same, the added traction from tracks combined with the additional flotation turned track loaders into a top seller.

In Minnesota, however, skid steer loaders remain popular.

"We sell a lot of skid steers," Graham said. "They perform better in snow, so landscapers can use them year-round by doing snow removal jobs in the winter. And some farmers still prefer skid steers. While sales of skid steers across the U.S. are less than they used to be, up here in the north we still sell a fair amount of them."

\*\*

Sanco Equipment's original store in Albert Lea is today only the third largest of four locations. The store in Stewartville, a suburb of Rochester, is the largest followed by the Mankato dealership. The three-year-old outlet in Mason City is the smallest but is growing. Each is a parts-and-service dealership offering full lines of equipment and technicians working on machinery in modern service bays — eight bays in the case of the Stewartville facility.



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“Service is what separates us from other dealerships,” said Joe Graham sales and rental manager. “Pricing will only get you so far. It is how quickly we react to customer service needs that is the difference.”



The store in Stewartville, a suburb of Rochester, is the largest followed by the Mankato dealership.



Cratos offers a dumper and mini-skid steer. The battery powered machines are perfect for indoor work. These are available at Sanco’s Stewartville location.



Sanco offers a variety of attachments for compact excavators, skid steers and wheel loaders to help with any job.

“Service is what separates us from other dealerships,” Graham said. “Pricing will only get you so far. It is how quickly we react to customer service needs that is the difference. We really are providing solutions, not selling equipment.”

The expansion into Mason City resulted from a combination of factors. Located just an hour south of Albert Lea, the city appealed to Santarsiero because “the territory is congruent with our Minnesota territory and there was a need for the product line. It was a good opportunity.”

However, the first year in Iowa was “kind of rough,” acknowledged Santarsiero. The reason? The store’s opening coincided with the onset of COVID. Balancing safety and function was especially difficult for the new store’s crew, but it all worked out.

“We set about getting the right team in place and have a good, solid team there now,” he said.

The Iowa store might have been the only good thing to come out of the pandemic. All the Sanco Enterprises units were negatively affected by COVID to some extent.



Brian VanderPloeg, service manager of Mason City



Easton Jacobs, rental, Mason City



Lori Wiarda, parts, Mason City

“Managing 12 locations and 180 people was a challenge, all the while abiding by government regulations. It was difficult, but getting product was the biggest challenge.”

The company president said production in factories still hasn’t caught up with customer and dealership demands of the last three years.

Smaller manufacturers have bounced back much quicker, said Graham.

“I would guess it is going to be another 12 to 18 months before larger manufacturers catch up. Certainly, it’s taken a lot longer than people anticipated.”

Among the lingering effects of the pandemic and the governmental responses to it is an economy stuck somewhere between stagflation and recession. Higher inflation than has been experienced in some time is beginning to erode the confidence of equipment-buyers, according to Santarsiero.



Michael Fedders, service technician, Mason City



Aron Willaby, store manager, Rochester

“Sales have been pretty steady for us,” he said, “but pricing and inflation are starting to have an effect on customers. Prices on equipment went up 10 or 20 percent over the last three years and some customers probably are thinking they will just hang onto a machine a year or two longer rather than get a new one.”

Adding to stress on sales was a just-ended winter that idled equipment and discouraged equipment-owners. The 2022-23 snowfall in the state was one of the largest on record all across Minnesota. Ironically, winter temperatures also were milder than usual, so it also was a rainy season. All in all, the winter was one of the wettest ever.

\*\*

Bobcat unquestionably is the flagship brand at Sanco Equipment, with the full Bobcat line in demand. The bread-and-butter product is the T66 track loader, a 74-hp, 9,000-lb. unit featuring a vertical-lift-path working end of the machine and a sealed operator’s cabin with an innovative dashboard display.

“It’s a popular power size class,” noted Graham. “The next largest size — the T770 — is popular, too, but it’s a little big for certain projects.”

The manufacturer’s telehandlers also are in demand.

“We do really well with the telehandlers, primarily for ag applications, like turkey farms loading crates.”

The telescoping loaders range in size from 74 hp to the 135-hp, 9-ton TL923 model.

An array of machine attachments is offered at Sanco Equipment, including augers, mulchers, rototillers, grapples and on and on.



Trevor Wiles (L), business manager, and Joe Graham, sales and rental manager, of Sanco Equipment

Another leading Sanco Equipment brand — Toro — now offers a telescoping unit, too, the Dingo TXL 2000. It is a stand-on machine powered by a 49-hp Kubota engine with arms that can extend up to 4 ft.

“We just got our first couple of telescoping Dingo units in March. We think that’s going to be a good line for us,” said Graham.

Expected customers for the Dingo model are larger landscapers and nurseries. Graham noted that Bobcat also offers an articulated loader with a telescopic boom, the L28.

“I think all the telescoping loaders in our lineup will keep growing in popularity. You can always use a little more reach.”

Other key brands offered by the company include Diamond brush cutters; Wacker Neuson compactors and generators; TM wood splitters; and B&B trailers.

“Trailer sales is a very competitive market, a tough market,” said Graham. “But a majority of our customers have their own trucks and trailers or are looking to add to their fleet, so trailers is an important part of our business.”

An array of machine attachments is offered at Sanco Equipment, including augers, mulchers, rototillers, grapples and on and on. These hitch-ups to core machines are some of the most popularly rented pieces of equipment, according to Graham.

“And some of the more unique attachments are among the most rented. People don’t want to spend the money on something they may only use once or twice a year.”

Track loaders lead the rental side of the ledger at Sanco Equipment, Graham said, with mini-excavators being another frequently rented machine. All in all, the renting of powered equipment and attachments constitutes about 20 percent of Sanco Equipment’s business activity.

“We’re looking to grow that. Rentals is my industry background. I’m a big fan of it. When you can get machines in customers’ hands by renting them, it leads to sales down the road.”

Santarsiero fully agrees. He would like to see rentals increase across Sanco Enterprises.

“As for Sanco Equipment, specifically, we’d like to see it double in the next two years. The prices of equipment going up will play a big role in that happening. It gives customers a reason to rent.”

\*\*

At Sanco Equipment, the future is big, in more ways than one.

For one thing, Santarsiero said the average size of equipment offered by the dealership is going to increase. Bobcat already offers some decidedly non-compact excavators, such as its 19-ton, turbocharged 131-hp E165 model and slightly smaller E145 model.

“They are mid-sized so they still can be hauled around behind a dump-truck,” Graham said.

But Santarsiero wants Sanco Equipment dealerships to offer full-size excavators, too.

“In mostly offering compact construction equipment, we miss a whole sector of the industry. We want to expand into the large excavator market. We want to offer customers more of a full equipment lineup. It will give customers a one-stop shop option,” he said.



Ryan Bluhm and Kim Wendt, rental and parts department, Rochester



Brandon Ray and Erin Kloempken, service department, Rochester



Carter Behnken, technician, Rochester



One expansion is in the books: In April, the company purchased a 17-acre property near Mankato and will relocate its Mankato store there in the months ahead.



Sanco Equipment and its parent organization continue to evolve as an organization to meet changing times and marketplaces.

“We’re going to build a brand-new dealership there on a piece of property about six times larger than the current location.”

**Brian Santarsiero**

The equipment company also is going to enlarge its footprint in the next few years. There is nothing to announce yet, Santarsiero said, but stay tuned.

“In our two-year projection for the company, we’re planning to add two to four more locations. We always prefer for them to be congruent to the territories we already have, but if the right opportunity comes up, we’ll take a look at it so long as it makes sense for our culture and our growth.”

One expansion is in the books: In April, the company purchased a 17-acre property near Mankato and will relocate its Mankato store there in the months ahead.

“We’re going to build a brand-new dealership there on a piece of property about six times larger than the current location,” Santarsiero said.

Bigger equipment. Bigger equipment display area. Bigger future.

All that being true, the company owner nonetheless said the people of Sanco Equipment, rather than the machinery, will determine the size and brightness of the company’s future.

“We as a company wouldn’t be anything without our employees and what they do for the company every day. The team makes it happen for our company and our customers.”

Santarsiero is relying on the company’s set of core values to keep his team functioning at a high level. The values are... Serving the team and customers with excellence... Being a self-starter... Being a dedicated team player. He believes the set of three work tenets is helping mold employees into a unified work force.

“People definitely are coming to understand that the values apply to each of us. We are trying to shift our workplace culture to where it needs to be for the future.”

Signs bearing the core values have been prominently posted in each company store.

“Our intent is to have customers know that, if they are not seeing the posted values in their interactions with employees, they can give us a call. As for employees, I think the signs are helping them hold each other accountable. We feel the values are being embraced.”

In all these ways, Sanco Equipment and its parent organization continue to evolve as an organization to meet changing times and marketplaces. The company CEO plans to be there to watch it all bear fruit. Santarsiero is 37 years old and said he hopes his relative youth inspires younger generations in the company.

“I have another 25 or 30 years to put all my energy into this. If I were an employee, I would think having a younger man leading the company would be exciting and would give a little more visual stability to a person wanting to build a career in the company.” ■

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# Construction Equipment Guide®

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