

SHIP TO SHORE

Marine contractor relies on Cat®
Material Handlers and Excavators
to do the heavy lifting



Ben LeBlanc always loved the marine life, becoming a scuba diver at age 15 and starting his own one-man diving service in Delcambre, La. the following year. The idea came from a former Navy diver who lived in his hometown. He taught Ben how to do “wheel jobs,” which involve underwater removal of ropes and cable from propellers of shrimp boats.

Upon graduation in 2000 from Commercial Driving Academy in Jacksonville, Fla., Ben went to work as a self-employed commercial diver performing wheel jobs, and expanded into the oil and gas industry, working on crew boats and tugboats on the Louisiana coast. Not long after, he learned the underwater repair process on hopper barges, eventually doing permanent barge repair work at the salt mines in southern Louisiana.

In 2004, LeBlanc Marine opened for business, starting with three employees who performed mobile topside barge repair and crew boat services for Carlin Fleet—an owner of barges, tugboats, cranes. As a subcontractor for Carlin, LeBlanc Marine expanded to 15 employees in 2007 and was able to take over contracts working directly for salt mines and barge lines for large companies such as Ingram Barge Line, ACBL-American Commercial Barge Lines, MG Transport, and ARTCO.

In 2009, Ben purchased all of Carlin Fleet and expanded into coastal restoration work. A few of LeBlanc’s clients include the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, and the Coastal Protection Restoration Authority (CPRA).

“We do a lot of shoreline protection projects, and most of the things that we put in place are called artificial living shorelines,” LeBlanc says. “Basically, these are man-made structures weighing 2,000 pounds apiece, which are an alternative to limestone or rip rap, that are placed in shallow water along the shoreline to prevent the waves from hitting the shoreline.”

Today, the business has grown to 35 full-time employees consisting of tugboat captains, deck hands, crane operators, welders, truck drivers, laborers, and office personnel. LeBlanc owns everything from barges and tugboats, cranes and excavators, to lowboys, and is expected to off-load over one million tons in 2017. About half of the company’s work takes place at its home base in the Port of Iberia, while the other half is at various locations on the Gulf Coast.

Over the last two years, LeBlanc has expanded into the construction industry, which has broadened all aspects of his business. LeBlanc has also moved into the gas industry, with its west yard—supplying door services—and has grown the off-loading (unloading barges) sector in Texas and Mississippi.

The contracting side of LeBlanc Marine currently represents the largest growth segment of the business, providing dredging, coastal restoration, bulkheads, and also marine construction such as levees, boat ramps for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Louisiana and state parishes.

“The contracting work is awarded via public bids, so for us, it’s all about the production we get from our Cat® machines,” LeBlanc says. “That helps us get the jobs.”

Counting on Cat reliability

LeBlanc counts on Cat Material Handlers to unload barges and Cat Hydraulic Excavators to lift concrete structures into place for coastal restoration projects. The durability and the uptime of the Cat machines are critical in getting the job done on the water.

“Most of my jobs are in remote locations, so a lot of time cell phone service doesn’t work and having equipment breakdowns and repairs can be an issue,” LeBlanc says.

“When you’re out on the water, it’s not as easy to swap out equipment as it is on land,” he continues. “When one thing breaks it shuts down the whole

operation. You have a huge support team that’s out there to make these projects happen. There are tugs and barges and crew boats and supporting personnel, and if one machine breaks it shuts down the whole project.

“The dependability of our Cat machines is something we count on to keep working in these conditions, which can sometimes be rough depending on the weather.”

On land, Cat Material Handlers are workhorse machines for LeBlanc Marine, loading and offloading barges at the company’s home base at the Port of Iberia, and elsewhere.

continued on page 10



LEBLANC MARINE

President: Ben LeBlanc

Location: New Iberia, La.

Established: 2004

Employees: 35

Services: Towing and shifting, barge fleet, barge repair and inspection, cargo handling and more from the Port of Iberia. Barge off-loading, marine construction and coastal restoration projects in Louisiana, Texas and Mississippi

Cat® Equipment: Skid Steer Loaders: 242, 246C, 262D; 299D 2 Compact Track Loader; 308 Mini Excavator; Telehandlers: TL642C, TL943; Hydraulic Excavators: 316E L, 320E LRR; Amphibious Excavators: 320, 329; D5K Dozer; Material Handlers: 345C L, 365C L, 385C L (2)

Working at the Port of Iberia, LeBlanc utilizes a 345C Material Handler for offloading. The track machine is built for strong performance and long service life, and features excellent lift capacity and working range whether operating close in or at full reach. The C13 engine with ACERT™ technology delivers power, reliability, fuel economy and low emissions.

A cab riser positions the operator at an operating height with excellent visibility for loading or unloading. Access to the cab is provided by a work platform with safety railings that extends around the riser to allow windshield cleaning.

LeBlanc Marine also utilizes small, powerful Cat Skid Steer Loaders to perform cleanup inside barges

once they are offloaded, and Cat Telehandlers for a variety of tasks such as loading and unloading project materials onto barges, and yard handling.



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— **BEN LeBLANC**
President, LeBlanc Marine

Dealer support

LeBlanc counts on Tommy Fernandez, manager of the industrial division at Louisiana Cat, to provide the machines he needs to keep the business running.

“The material handlers are unique pieces of equipment, and you can’t just go and get one off the showroom floor,” LeBlanc says. “So, as people trade them in, we usually get used material handlers from Louisiana Cat. We have a good relationship with Mr. Tommy, and he meets our needs.”

“You can’t find a better person than Mr. Tommy,” LeBlanc adds. He is definitely the one that holds it all together for us on the equipment side. He does lots of different projects like this for customers who have unique needs.”

Parts and service from Louisiana Cat is another area where the dealer provides unparalleled support. LeBlanc cites an example of a 385 Material Handler that was working at a jobsite when the hydraulic oil cooler malfunctioned. The machine was returned to LeBlanc’s home base in New Iberia overnight via a barge, and the part was delivered to LeBlanc the following morning.

“They hot-shotted the part overnight from Oklahoma, and we had the machine back up and running by the following day,” LeBlanc says.

“It takes a great team to get things accomplished in our line of work, and having Louisiana Cat on my side