

# 2 for ONE



## Backhoe loader options help agency keep pace with growing service demands

At the controls of a Cat® 420E Backhoe Loader, an operator for the Gas Board of the City of Fultondale, Ala., carefully maneuvers the machine's hydraulic thumb to grasp and lift an abandoned section of pipeline from a trench to make room for a new main.

Without the thumb, the crew would have cut the abandoned pipe into shorter lengths, and lifted them out of the trench separately. Using the thumb to simply grasp the pipe and pull it out of the trench in one piece was much quicker, said Leslie Shipp, general manager of the Gas Board of the City of Fultondale.

The hydraulic thumb is just one of the features that stands out



## WAY TO GROW

To expedite new commercial development, the City of Fultondale, Ala., created five non-profit corporations which deal in buying, improving, and re-selling property to attract new businesses into the city. In order to buy and improve property for future development, these corporations are able to raise capital for new commercial development through bank loans and bond issues.

These entities have been very successful in attracting new businesses, which have helped spur new residential development throughout the city. Located only minutes from downtown Birmingham, Ala., Fultondale is one of the fastest growing communities in the Birmingham area, both commercially and residentially.



on a pair of 420E Backhoe Loaders that the agency purchased earlier this year.

"We're finding that the thumbs are very useful, and may be a required option for machines we purchase down the road," Shipp said. "The more we use the thumbs, the more uses we seem to find for them."

Hydraulic thumbs are available factory-installed, which is the option the gas board chose.

Operators are also finding the thumbs useful when lifting materials, such as broken sections of asphalt and rocks.

The optional extendible stick (E-stick), which increases backhoe reach and digging depth by approximately four feet, enables crews to reach deeper into ditches and more easily and safely load materials into dump trucks.

With the E-stick extended, the 420E has a dig depth of 17 feet, 11 inches and a loading height of 13 feet, 7 inches.

The spacious E-Series operator station has improved ease of operation. "There's a lot of room. With the new design, it's easy for the operators to move around the cab," said Shipp.

### Fleet Responsibilities

Other Cat machines in the agency's fleet include two 416C Backhoe Loaders and a 320D Excavator.

The agency uses backhoe loaders for routine maintenance such as

excavating for leak repairs, as well as installation of new mains when installing natural gas service to new subdivisions.

Using backhoe loaders enables operators to drive directly to jobsites, rather than loading the machines onto trailers for transport to the sites. "The Cat machines drive real well on the road," said Shipp. "All of our work is in the area, so driving is a lot quicker than loading them on trailers."

Crews are responsible for maintaining approximately 200 miles of gas lines, and extending service to new businesses and homes in Fultondale, Gardendale and Mountain Olive. The agency's employees provide natural gas service to approximately 8,500 residential and commercial customers.

The agency's service area is fast-growing—the population of the city of Fultondale increased by 27 percent between 2000 and 2010—and Cat backhoe loaders have helped the gas board keep pace with the increasing demand for services spurred by the development of new subdivisions.

"The machines met the challenge. We kept up with the new subdivisions. We've laid a lot of mains the last few years," Shipp said. "Also, they have been very helpful in our cast iron replacement program."

With the purchase of the new backhoe loaders, the 416Cs that had been the workhorses in the gas board's fleet since 1996 are now used

primarily to load gravel into dump trucks at the yard. "It's helpful to always have a backhoe loader at the shop," said Shipp.

### An Easy Decision

The long life and dependability of the machines made the decision to stay with Cat Backhoe Loaders an easy one.

"We plan to keep the new machines for a long time. That's the way we like to do it," said Shipp. "We knew the life of the machines would be long, and that the dealership will be there for the life of the machines."

Dealer services and parts availability from Thompson Tractor are another plus. "The dealer is just a couple of miles away from us. That makes it easy to get parts. They always have the parts, or they get them the next morning," Shipp said. "It's nice that they're local."

S•O•S<sup>SM</sup> Fluids Sampling provided by Thompson Tractor will keep the machines running in top shape for the life of the equipment. "It's a good way to be aware of a potential problem before it becomes more serious, or causes other problems," said Shipp.

And customers in Fultondale, Gardendale and Mountain Olive will continue to enjoy outstanding service from the Gas Board of the City of Fultondale. ☺