

TOWING IT ALL

THIS MINNESOTA TOWER LOVES A CHALLENGE. THERE AREN'T MANY JOBS HE WON'T TAKE!

You name it, Collins Brothers Towing will tow it. Cars, trucks, heavy equipment, large safes, cows, horses, pigs . . . yes, even large farm animals. When you practice towing in rural areas of Minnesota, all kinds of interesting jobs arise.

"We'll tow just about anything," says owner Phil Collins. "Whatever our customers need towed, we'll try."

And that's just what Collins Brothers towing does. The 13-staff company, located in Elk River, Minnesota, has quite a few interesting jobs under its belt:

- Pulling horses and cows out of the mud. "We typically attach a strap to the animal and pull a little; let the animal rest and then pull a little more. Eventually we are able to get them back on their feet."

- Pulling out a pickup truck with a lift kit that was half sunk and frozen in a lake. "We've done a lot of close-to-the-shore work before, as well as work in neighboring ponds, but towing a large truck from the middle of a lake was a new experience for us."

The key to it all, according to Collins, is reliable equipment.

Choose carefully
"The No. 1 thing our customers want from us is quick response," he explains. "Fifteen to 20 minutes is fine, but once they are required to wait 30 minutes, they become anxious. The only way we can meet their needs is to have reliable equipment we can count on EVERY time."

Collins turned to Jerr-Dan for his company's towing needs 10 years ago shortly after he started his own towing company. With 24 years of experience under his belt, he knows what works and what he wants in towing equipment.

"I standardize my fleet with Jerr-Dan equipment," he says. The reasons he cites:

- Aluminum body. "The paint doesn't chip off aluminum bodies and they are nicer looking," he explains. "And as long as you take care of them, they last a long time."

- Standard, easy-to-find parts. "All our Jerr-Dan equipment uses the same parts."

- Common controls. "I don't have to worry about the operator grabbing the wrong controls in the middle of the night; all Jerr-Dan



The majority of the towing equipment at Collins Brothers Towing is manufactured by Jerr-Dan. Pictured here clockwise from top left: an HPL 60 with a 1994 GMC chassis; an HPL35 with a 2002 Ford F450 chassis; a 21-ft. standard aluminum body carrier with a 2005 Ford F650 chassis; an HPL 35 with a 2001 Ford F350 chassis; and an HDL 500/280 25-ton wrecker with a 1999 Peterbilt chassis.

controls are universal and located in the same place."

Be involved

In addition to having equipment that works, being involved in the daily activities of the towing business is another key to running a successful towing company, according to Collins.

"It's critical for the owner to physically be at the towing company every day," he explains. "Your

employees want to see you come in and do what they are doing; they want to see you get dirty. They know that if you're there, you're watching everything that is happening."

The equipment at Collins Brothers Towing is known for its spotless appearance. (People have been seen taking pictures of the equipment with their mobile phone cam-

eras as the trucks travel down the freeway.) Keeping it that way is a result of owner involvement.

Collins says he sees it all the time; companies with involved owners have nicer looking equipment than companies with absent owners.

Collins falls into the category of involved owners. The appearance, and performance, of his trucks is a

top priority.

"Your trucks are traveling billboards advertising your business," he explains. "I want them to look and perform their best at all times."

To aid in the performance department, the company employs a full-time employee to perform routine maintenance and ensure each truck is kept in tip-top shape.

Owner Phil Collins is one of two to operate the company's new 25-ton wrecker.



OWNER PROFILE

Collins Brothers Towing
Elk River, Minnesota

Jerr-Dan Fleet Profile:

Wreckers:
Two HPL 35 light-duty wreckers
One HPL 60 light-duty wrecker
One HDL 500/280 25-ton wrecker

Carriers:
One standard-duty rollback carrier with a 21-ft. aluminum bed and wheel lift

Services

- 24-hour roadside service
- Light-, medium- and heavy-duty towing and recovery
- Vehicle storage

JERR-DAN Owner Profile

Aluminum beds are the right choice for Collins Brothers Towing. Here owner Phil Collins uses the remote operating option on his Jerr-Dan 21-ft. standard-duty rollback carrier.



Serve the needs of the community

In the rural areas surrounding Elk River, Minnesota, staying visible in the community is important.

The majority of the company's business consists of towing for the general public and several area repair shops in addition to towing for the Elk River Police Department, the Minnesota State Highway Patrol and the Sherburne, Wright and Anoka county sheriff's departments. Collins Brothers is also a service provider for AAA, Cross Country, USAC, ERS, Mr. Rescue and other auto clubs.

With visibility in the community comes responsibility. Collins is the vice president of the Minnesota Professional Towing Association and a captain on the Elk River Fire Department, of which he has been a member for 18 years. His company

is also nationally certified through the Towing and Recovery Association of America.

Responding to the needs and challenges of the community is also a top priority for this company.

Fuel prices and rising insurance costs have forced Collins Brothers Towing to increase prices, but in a creative way.

The company set standard business hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After 5 p.m., the call rate is raised \$10 per call. There is also a fuel surcharge on impounded vehicles. This increase has balanced out fuel and insurance costs for the company.

Another challenge is abandoned motor vehicles. The company is required by law to hold all abandoned vehicles for 45 days. After that, the company is allowed to sell the vehicle, either for scrap or in the rare instance, as a drivable vehicle.

Keeping up on the latest in towing methods has helped keep Collins Brothers ahead of the competition. Monthly driver meetings find participants "testing" different types of towing situations from rollovers

to recoveries.

"The best training is hands-on," says Collins. "The drivers have to want to do well; if they don't want to, we don't want them here."

Drivers are compensated differently. Some are straight salary; some are salary plus commission; and some are straight commission. Collins realizes that every one of his drivers is motivated differently, and he compensates them with a payment style that reflects their personality.

Moving along

Collins has plans for his towing company. One of those plans is to expand into more specialized equipment transport.

Additional Jerr-Dan equipment is also on the horizon. The HPL 60 will be replaced with a new 14-ton Jerr-Dan wrecker in the near future. More equipment will be added as necessary.

"I've been using Jerr-Dan towing equipment for years," Collins concluded. "I'm happy with its performance and I see no reason to buy anything else." ■

Collins Brothers Towing is a family business. Phil poses here with his stepson, Cody, in front of his new HDL 500/280 25-ton wrecker. Although there are no brothers involved in the actual ownership, Collins Brothers employs several family members including brothers and nephews.



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Industry News

The Wall of the Fallen UNVEILED



On Saturday, September 9, the International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, unveiled its memorial to fallen towers as it dedicated the Wall of the Fallen. The event was attended by towing operators, local officials, museum members and others from around the industry and around the world, including representatives from Jerr-Dan Corp.

The memorial honors those in the industry who have been killed in the line of service. Its purpose is to not only honor those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, but also to generate public awareness of the dangers involved in the towing and recovery industry and to permanently record and commemorate those involved in fatalities in the towing and recovery industry.

For more information, visit www.internationaltowing-museum.org.

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