

Very Good With Wood

Harmony's Lee Baxter is master logger

By Matt Bower

Harmony resident Lee Baxter has always enjoyed the outdoors. As a kid, he would often go camping.

It didn't take him long to realize his love of nature and the outdoors, so it's only natural he got into the logging business.

It all started back at Ponaganset High School when he decided to sign up for a forestry class.

"It was the first time I ever used a chainsaw, but I really enjoyed it," said Mr. Baxter, 35.

He enjoyed it so much that during his senior year, he started working a part-time job with a logging company.

After he graduated, he got his logging license and became certified in the state of Connecticut.

In 1987, after he became licensed and certified, Mr. Baxter began working for other people, performing various logging jobs and renting his own machine to accomplish the task.

The machine he uses is called a forwarder and it allows him to drag the logs from the felling site to a roadside or landing without dragging them on the ground.

"Forwarders do a much nicer job than skidders," he said.

A skidder is a wheeled or tracked vehicle that works much in the same way as a forwarder

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only it slides or drags the logs across the ground from the stump to the landing.

After two years, Mr. Baxter purchased his own machine and went to work for himself, beginning his own business Double "L" Logging.

Currently, he works as a sub-contractor for Hull Forest Products saw mill in Pomfret, Conn.

"I just sort of fell into it," he

said.

Mr. Baxter said there are both advantages and disadvantages to owning your own business as opposed to working for other people.

"One of the nice things about working for other people is that you don't have to worry about spending time or money to keep up and maintain the machinery," he said. "Although, being your own boss, you get to call the shots and there is less pressure in a way when you work for yourself."

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AT 35, Lee Baxter has a thriving career in wood cutting.

Baxter

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All of his hard work has payed off, as Mr. Baxter recently became one of the first loggers in Southern New England to be certified under the Master Loggers program.

Master Logger is a growing international program that certifies the environmental, safety, and business practices of logging companies to ensure that forest products are harvested in a sustainable manner.

The Forest and Wood Products Institute at Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner, Massachusetts, the program's administrator, was responsible for establishing the program in the Southern New England region through a grant from the USDA Forest Service.

Master Loggers must meet or exceed over 100 performance standards in the areas of water quality protection, support for forest ecosystems, maintaining soil productivity, managing visual impacts, and ethical business practices.

An initial interview, a list of current and past jobs, and professional references are required of all applicants for the Master

Logger certification.

Two trained field verifiers then visit three job sites of each applicant and assess the applicant's work based on the performance standards. Following this, a certifying board reviews the verifier's reports and the applicant's professional references.

Before certification can be granted, applicants must pledge to continue to meet the standards and sign the Master Logger Code of Ethics.

"I'm pretty happy with it," Mr. Baxter said of being recognized as a Master Logger. "I work hard to keep things working well and to protect the environment, so it's nice to be recognized for it."

Mr. Baxter thinks highly of the program and is excited to be a part of it.

"Logging kind of gets a bad rap, and I think this puts it in a better light and gives it a positive spin," he said. "It shows that we care about the environment and are taking steps to ensure it is protected."

Mr. Baxter not only looks out for the safety of the environ-

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ment, but also keeps an eye on personal safety as well.

Despite how dangerous his job is, he hasn't sustained any serious injuries.

"It's neck-and-neck with crab fishing as being the most dangerous job in terms of deaths per 100,000 people," he said.

He says the most dangerous part of the job is also the most difficult - felling the trees.

"It puts a strain on you both mentally and physically because in addition to chopping down the trees, you have to constantly be aware of your surroundings and everything that's going on around you," he said.

Mr. Baxter said it would be great to have his son, Landon, join him in the business when he gets older, but he doesn't want him felling the trees due to the danger they pose.

As far as his future plans, he plans on continuing work as a sub-contractor for landowners and sawmills.

"Hull has a great reputation and I enjoy working with them," he said. "Eventually I may purchase some of my own wood lots, but for now I'm content right where I am."