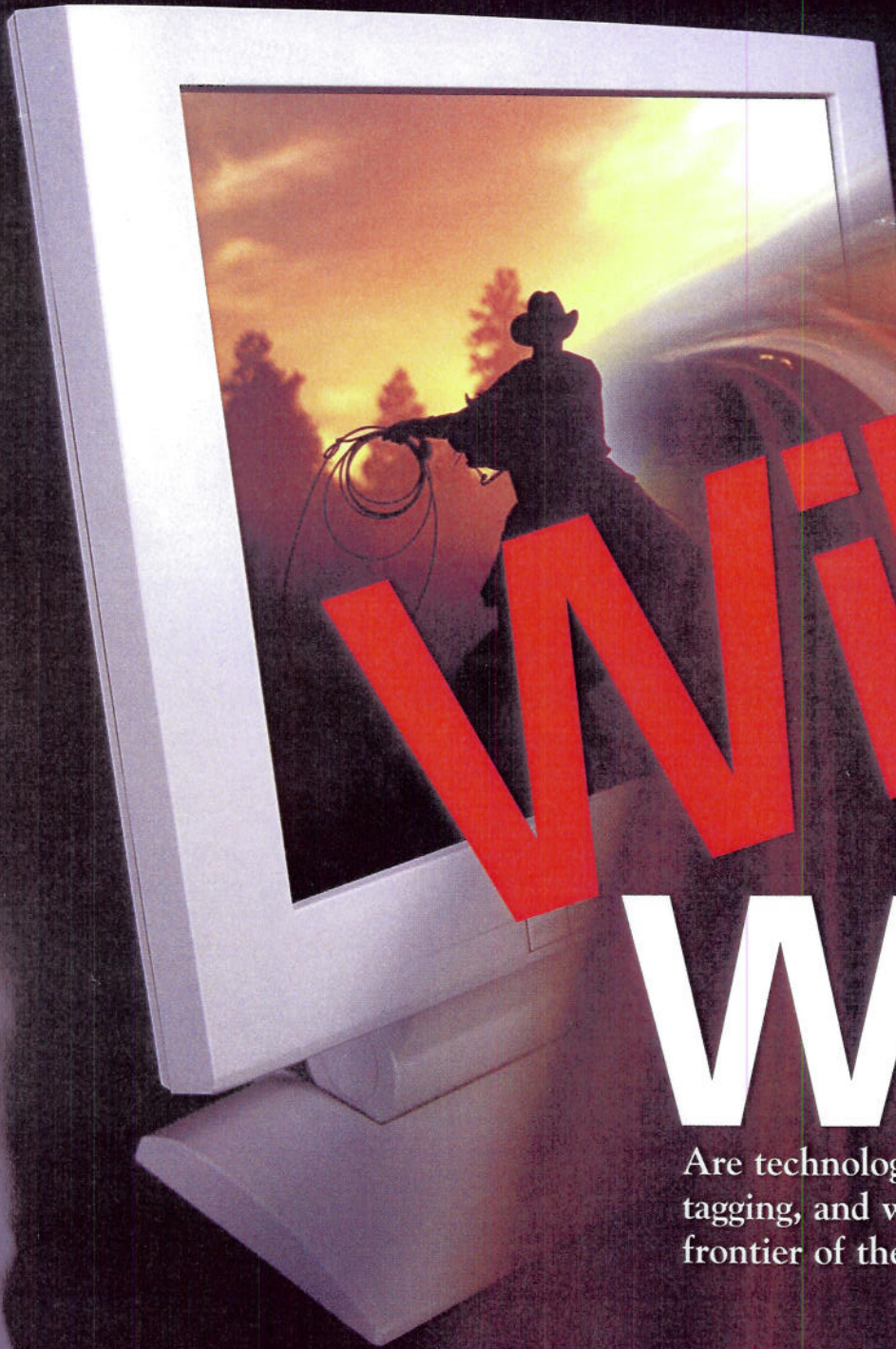


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JULY 2006

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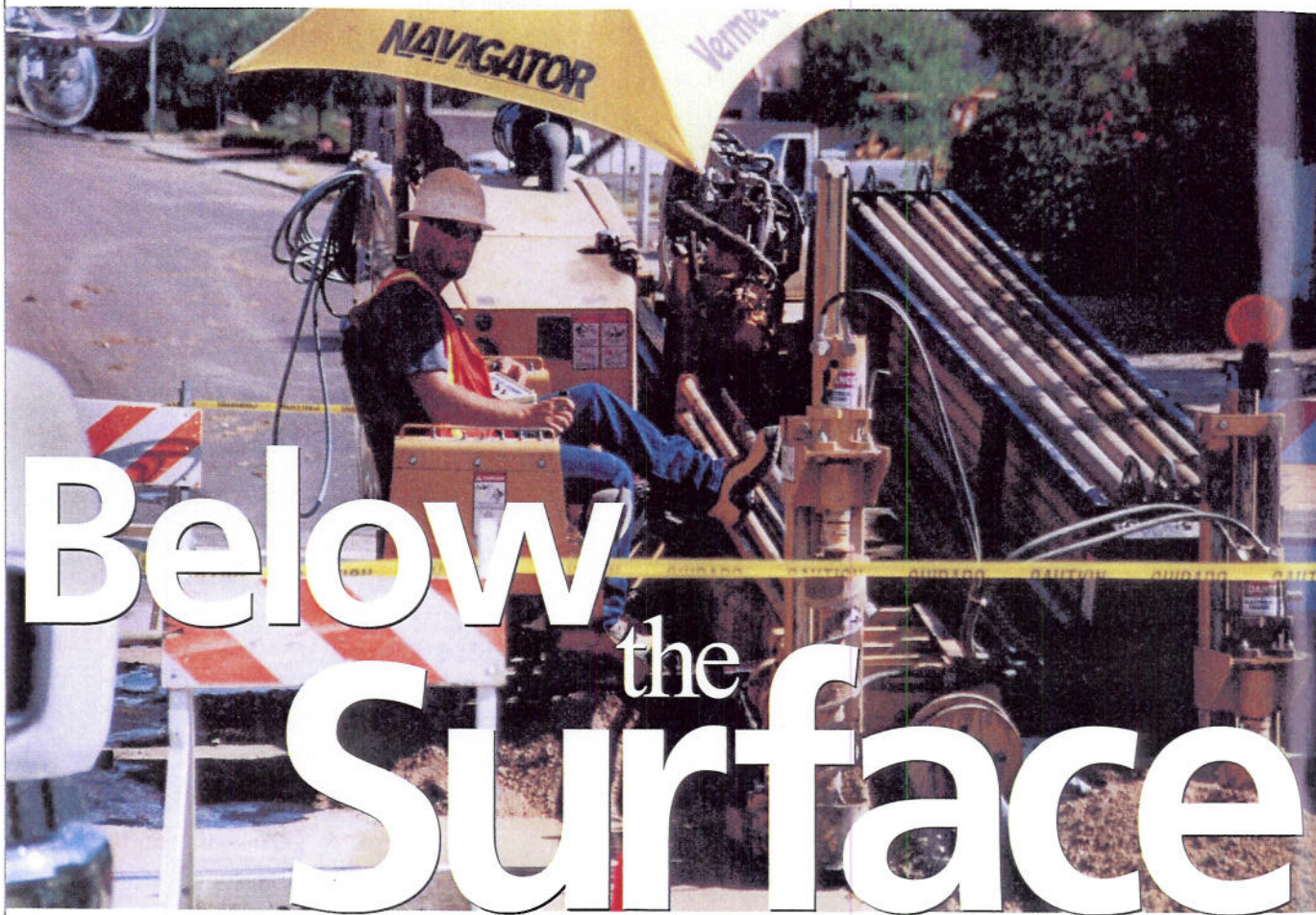
See our
OPERATIONS SUPPLEMENT
Page 48





Mike Kemper talks to Michelle Rivera about joining an industry-wide effort to help remedy issues facing underground contractors.

NPL Construction



Below the Surface

As the contractor that does more gas distribution work than any other contractor in the country, NPL is focused on becoming the full-service energy distribution contractor of choice nationwide. The company offers a wide array of turnkey services to its clients, including job design, trenchless technology, lawn and hard-surface restoration, and traffic control. It's recognized for its cost-effective solutions and customer satisfaction, installing and replacing more than 14 million feet of pipe and wire annually.

Mike Kemper, president of NPL, said the company's focus is two-fold: meeting customer needs

and doing so safely. To live up to those goals, NPL has taken an active role to remedy issues facing underground contractors when they operate in areas with unmarked sewer service lines.

Risky business

NPL was founded as Northern Gas Line Constructors in a small Minnesota town in 1967. Initially, the company focused on building local farm lines, but as it grew, it increased service offerings and expanded its reach.

NPL has grown from a \$34 million regional contractor in 1987 to a 2,500 employee, nationwide organization with more than \$250 million

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in revenue. In the last year, NPL has grown an estimated 20%, with more than 95% of that growth coming from repeat customers. "We look at the customers' needs, wants, and goals, and we work with them to find solutions that lower their total costs and achieve their objectives," said Kemper.

Utility companies face a major challenge in their everyday operations because of the potential of breaching a sewer line during the installation of an underground utility line using trenchless technology. For instance, when a contractor is installing underground lines, he or she often doesn't know where the sewer lines are—and if there are any—and that can lead to huge problems.

"Contractors and utilities install the lines using trenchless technology, punching or drilling a hole underground, and then pulling the gas, telecom, or electric line back through the hole," explained Kemper. "If the utility line is pulled back and it happens to be that the drill went through a sewer line, the contractor may end up leaving a gas, telecom, or an electric line inside the sewer line."

This is when the process becomes extremely dangerous. Once this happens, a home or property owner will be faced with a sewer back-up, and he or she typically calls a plumber to clear the blockage. The plumber generally uses a mechanical rotary device to do this, which risks piercing a gas or an electric line that may have penetrated the sewer lateral. Such lines can go undetected for months, or even years.

"If it's an electric line, the maintenance person runs the risk of getting electrocuted," Kemper said, "and subsequent leaking of gas through a sewer service lateral and into the house or building can lead to catastrophic consequences." If a gas line is breached, gas can escape into the building. "Once gas leaks into a building and there's a source for ignition, it can ignite," Kemper said, noting that there's a low chance this will happen. "But when it does happen, it can be devastating. The industry is working hard to identify solutions, both from the legislative and the construction points of view."

Working inside the lines

The majority of sewer laterals in the country are not required to be marked by state law, leaving

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HammerHead has been providing innovative, customer driven solutions to the trenchless construction industry for nearly 20 years. The relationship with Northern Pipeline (NPL) is a perfect example of customer/major manufacturer partnerships. NPL's thorough product testing and communication with the HammerHead engineering team results in superior, efficient equipment being developed to fit the needs of an ever-changing marketplace.



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the utility company and its contractors with a high risk of striking the lines.

There has been an industry-wide movement aimed at passing laws that would require all of the owners of sewer lines to mark them. "There's also a push to find technology that makes finding those lines easier, including more widespread use of internal cameras," said the president.

Numerous states are changing their laws to place this important task in the hands of the system owner/operator, who is clearly in the best position to identify the location of the laterals. "It's unreasonable to expect private homeowners to

be responsible for locating and marking; they do not possess the expertise or the means," said Kemper. "It's also unfair to burden utilities and excavators with the liability associated with unmarked sewer lines."

Several states are in the midst of passing laws requiring that a locating device be installed at the same time the sewer lines are installed, Kemper said. "One idea that is starting to catch on is to require the installation of a metal tracer wire that would go in with the installation of the sewer line. When a contractor has to dig something up, he or she can run an electrical current through the wire and find out where the sewer line is in order to avoid it."



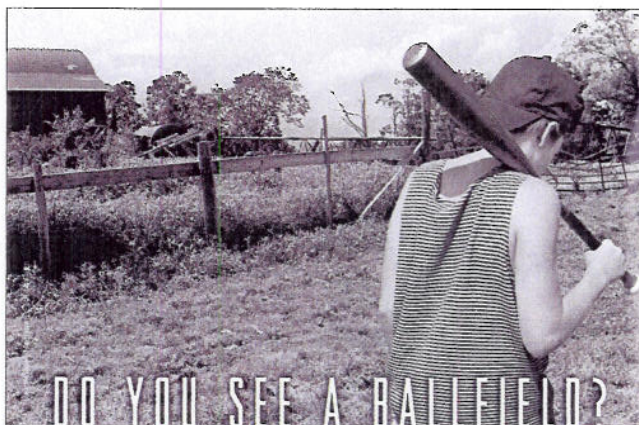
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