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WORKSITE JOURNAL

Windy City wonder



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*Compact yet capable **27D** helps NPL put more work in the pipeline, in Chicago and across the country.*





IN THE CITY OF THE BIG SHOULDERS

“Remember ... we dig ditches!”

NPL is a nationally recognized leader in pipeline construction with over 40 years’ experience building energy-distribution systems. It installs over 10 million feet of pipe and wire each year. But what makes the company so successful is expressed in this phrase, which is among the company’s core values. These words express a humility that recalls a company that started out in a small town in northern Minnesota with a focus on serving gas customers.

“We never forget where we came from,” says Ken Travis, Area Manager of the Illinois and Chicago Divisions for NPL. “Our focus is Main Street, not Wall Street. We believe in taking care of our customers.”

Travis manages day-to-day operations, which includes work for NPL’s two major customers in Illinois: People’s Gas and Nicor. Of NPL’s more than 3,000 employees, over 300 work in Illinois, with 40 crews installing everything from half-inch gas service in rural areas to 42-inch steel main in urban areas. Eight crews cover downtown Chicago.

NPL almost exclusively uses John Deere equipment because of its productivity, durability, and low daily operating costs. In Illinois, NPL has a huge arsenal of Deere equipment at its disposal, including backhoes, front-end loaders, crawlers, and excavators. Deere compact equipment includes nine 27D Compact Excavators and three skid steer loaders.

Small machine, big punch

Most of the compact excavators are deployed to downtown Chicago for People’s Gas jobs. Initially, compact equipment seemed somewhat out of place in the City of the Big Shoulders. But NPL soon made believers out of the Toddlin’ Town’s inhabitants.



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“In Chicago, we do a lot of work in tight areas,” explains Travis. “The compact size of the 27D allows us to get in and out much quicker than with larger equipment, so we can be a lot more productive. We can get the same amount of work done, or more, with compact equipment, on less fuel, at less cost, and with a smaller carbon footprint. Plus we take up fewer lanes to keep traffic moving.”

The 27Ds typically attack street jobs armed with breakers and buckets. “We can quickly switch from breaking to digging, so we’re loading trucks in a matter of minutes, and that has really helped increase productivity levels,” says Dylan Hradek, NPL General Superintendent in Illinois. “The 27D provides the digging depth of larger, more cumbersome machines, and the rubber tracks are friendly to paved surfaces.”

Zero-tail-swing design allows the 27D to rotate without banging into something, and the 360-degree rotation makes it easier to work around obstacles. “We work in highly populated areas around a lot of cars and trees,” says Hradek. “We can’t always position the dump truck exactly where we’d like, so the 360-degree swing really helps with loading.”

Operators don’t have to bust their tails to perform maintenance on the 27D either. “It’s very easy,” he says. “Open just two doors to perform all daily checks and service.

“The 27D is a small machine, but it packs a big punch. It has so much power and lift that its size is not a hindrance at all. It’s a big help.”



*Ken Travis, Area Manager
of the Illinois and Chicago
Divisions for NPL*

To view video, visit [DigDeeper](https://www.JohnDeere.com/digdeeper).

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When operators are happy, everyone is happy.

A running joke at NPL goes like this: When Mom is happy, everyone is happy. And when the operator is happy, production is up.

The 27D may be compact, but that doesn't mean it's not comfortable. "There's plenty of legroom," says Hradek. "You can easily switch from backhoe- to excavator-style controls. And visibility is fantastic in every direction — there are no blind spots. And that's critical because in the city we have to dig around multiple utilities."

Uptime is also critical to NPL. "The one thing we value above all about John Deere is the reliability and service we receive," says Hradek. "We know we can depend on John Deere. Our dealer has all the parts on-hand, they're very knowledgeable about diagnosing the problem, and they always get the machines up and running in a timely manner. They've saved us a lot of time and money."

"John Deere makes great equipment, but the value they provide is much more than that," adds Travis. "It's the support we get. We don't lose production because of downtime. We don't have breakdowns. Our philosophy is that if it's not measured, it's not managed. And we can look at the numbers every day and see that our productivity is going up and our costs are going down because of John Deere."

NPL is serviced by Westside Tractor, Naperville, Illinois.