

ACCESS, LIFT & HANDLERS

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INTERVIEW:

**Jeff Roberts,
City Rentals
and CRA**

Telematics

**Rough
terrain
scissors**



OFFICIAL NORTH
AMERICAN MAGAZINE

MCWPs & hoists

Mixed market

Covid-19 has impacted every facet of construction. While the MCWP and hoist markets felt the effects, they also have remained active across North America. Lindsey Anderson reports.

From coast to coast, Covid-19's role regarding construction activity has depended largely on local government. Some cities experienced complete construction site shutdowns for months on end, while others proceeded with caution. Projects have faced delays that extended rental periods, complicating fleet owners' utilization plans. Company balance sheets are stressed due to the disruption of planned cash flow. And the impact on craft labor due to massive layoffs and furloughs is just starting to rear its head; worker availability could be problematic. How long will these complications prevail? The jury is still out.

However, responses to the virus have dramatically differed from location to location, says Thierry Lachapelle, executive vice president of AGF Access Group Inc., which includes Hydro Mobile.

"If you look at the global picture, not much of our work has stopped," Lachapelle says. "And if it did, it wasn't for very long."

While places like Washington and Quebec saw hard pauses on construction activity, businesses were also put under a spotlight of "essential or non-essential" work, which Lachapelle says also came down to local governments' own discretion.

"The whole management of essential work was very loosely defined from state to state, from province to province," Lachapelle notes. "What do you consider 'essential?'"

Hydro Mobile designs and manufactures mast climbing work platforms and transport platforms. The company has an extensive dealer and rental network across North America, and just months ago, BrandSafway finalized its acquisition of AGF Access Group Inc., including Hydro Mobile. AGF Access Group includes four divisions, two product groups – Hydro Mobile and Winsafe – and two rental units – AGF Access, which includes recent acquisitions Jamco Construction, IEQ/Noxxent, and Hydro Rents.

"Rental truly keeps going," Lachapelle says. "In areas like Colorado where work was stopped for a while, when it started back up, it started stronger than what it was like before the coronavirus. While some jobs were postponed or cancelled, we now expect infrastructure work to pick back up pretty soon, and that will help us to carry on."

Adapting

Prior to Covid-19, the MCWP and hoist markets were strong, with increased interest from contractors and end-users. Anthony Pini, an



Superior Scaffold says the market is returning.

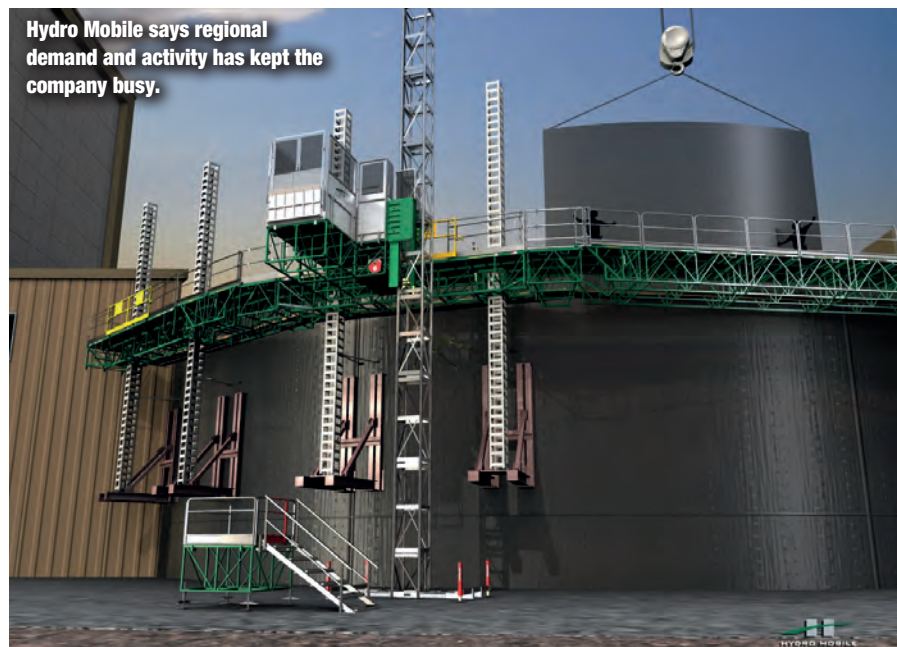
estimator for Superior Scaffold, says more and more MCWP units were being shipped to customers. "It's a great market and a great product," Pini says. "It's cheaper access; it's a way to reach your project and save labor costs assembling and disassembling huge amounts of scaffold and other access means."

But the global pandemic halted everything in Philadelphia, where Superior Scaffold is located. "We had machines up and we had to stop the work because everything was stopped in Philadelphia for several months," Pini explains. "But now, it's coming back."

Pini says PPE and social distancing measures have slowed processes slightly; "We can't put groups of people in the car anymore, especially when we are erecting and building on the jobsite," he notes. "We are having to make more trips than we used to with the new Covid-19 regulations. It's just slowed down the process a bit, but we are following regulations and continuing to adapt every day. It's something we have to work through if we want to continue."

As many have noted, we now live in a 'new' normal. From face masks, social distancing, constant sanitizing and safety rules, the process to simply do what we had done before now takes longer.

"It's not easy for anyone, but it's very important," Pini says. "We are incredibly proud to have a team on the ground that follows the



Hydro Mobile says regional demand and activity has kept the company busy.

rules for their safety and the safety of others.”

Superior Scaffold expects the market to bounce back in the coming 12 to 18 months. “We hope to see an increase in rentals now that construction has been approved to reopen here in Philly and New Jersey,” Pini notes. “I don’t think [Covid-19] is going to blow the lid off everything. Who knows.”

Southern viewpoints

Alimak Group USA, located just 30 minutes outside of Houston, also has experienced the market wobble, but not collapse.

“The market remains active with current projects being extended by the effects of the pandemic on project schedules, but new and planned projects have realized start delays,” says Tony Dragone, national sales manager, construction equipment, Alimak Group USA Inc. “Given the activity level we have been tracking, we expect that the market will return to modest growth compared to a rolling 12-month time period.”

Alimak says the use of larger dimension hoist cars to accommodate modular construction continues to expand. The company is also seeing interest in adding hoist cars to projects to

Alimak had a number of units on this downtown Las Vegas project.



accommodate the social distancing guidelines to allow for the transfer of more craft labor to height. The use of equipment that increases labor efficiency is also trending upward, Dragone notes, given the reduced supply of available labor in certain markets.

Dragone says new commercial building growth will be dependent upon the employment losses experienced in Q2 2020 reversing over the second half of FY 2020. He also says financing

may be a challenge for the market, but the cost of financing will not be a barrier to growth.

Increase in use

For Florida-based Beta Max Hoists, the story is similar. Covid-19 has delayed projects but not fully cancelled them, allowing business to remain cued up to resume/begin soon.

“The demand for this type of equipment has increased over the last several years,” says

Job at hand

Georgia-based Trowel Trades Inc. was brought on board recently to design custom, elevated work platforms for use on the new construction of ThyssenKrupp’s corporate headquarters and Innovation and Qualification Center (IQC) in Atlanta. ThyssenKrupp is a German elevator manufacturer and is planning on housing the first ropeless elevator in the IQC.

The IQC currently stands at 450 feet, making it the tallest building in the county.

Trowel Trades was initially

approached by the steel erector about designing custom elevated work platforms that would facilitate the installation of the steel framing for the test shafts. The dimensions of two of the shafts are 25 feet by 20 feet.

The project requirement for accessibility was no more than 18 inches from any connection point. The client also requested that personnel be able to transfer from platform to platform at working levels.

To provide the access necessary within the three shaft openings, Trowel Trades used three Hydro Mobile F-Series MCWPs with customized decking.

For the two shafts, Trowel Trades used modular bridge sections in forward and reverse extension, with custom lateral deck extensions.

“Some of the biggest challenges of this project were the drawbridges, the pass throughs for platform communication and simply keeping the units square within each shaft over the entire 450-foot height,” the company tells ALH.

The ThyssenKrupp HQ will feature an Innovation and Qualification Center.

Shaft 1 is divided latitudinally so that it forms a 25 foot by 9 foot clear shaft opening, and an 11-foot-deep test shaft observation deck. However, access is still required at all four corners of the 25 foot by 20 foot shaft area for steel erection. To provide access between the steel framing of the test decks, 11-foot drawbridges were designed to cantilever off the front of the MCWP. The drawbridges manually actuate by a hand winch, include fully integrated guardrails, and have a 600-pound capacity.

The platform-to-platform transfer (communication) was made possible by using standard industry components from conventional scaffolding and swing stage platforms, such

as swinging gates, aluminum guardrails and guardrail posts.

The custom decks for each F-series base unit were designed and fabricated to be modular so as to expedite initial set up and erection of the platforms, the company says. The substructure and custom guardrail system for each bridge section were pre-installed so that only standard component connections had to be made during set-up. Erection of the three units to 250 feet in height took only seven days to complete due to the design considerations made during the pre-mobilization mock-up of the platforms.

Trowel Trades assisted on building ThyssenKrupp’s HQ.



Troy Palmer, director of marketing and sales for Beta Max. "This is partly due to the construction industry booming in general, but also because the use of hoists and MCWPs has become more and more common as developers and contractors work to improve safety, efficiency and productivity, and to shorten project timelines."

Palmer says Beta Max is closely following the situation at hand, but the company believes once the floodgates open, business will boom. "This is why we strategically stockpiled product over the past few months," Palmer says. "We wanted to be ready for the rush!"

In late May, Beta Max announced it had increased its inventory of lifting systems and equipment to ensure construction sites across North America would have access to necessary products once demand ramped back up.

"The Beta Max Hoists team is fully prepared to ensure our customers have the lifting solutions they need as soon as they need them," says Brian Bollinger, Beta Max Hoists' vice president

of sales. "We made the decision to ramp up our production during the short slow-down to be 100 percent ready to support our customers as soon as their workflow bounces back."

Palmer explains that within the MCWP and hoist industry, there's a need for "extreme productivity with fewer people present." He also says the use of newer technology seems to be gaining momentum.

"The construction industry has not necessarily always been the fastest to embrace new technology, but in general that seems to be changing," Palmer notes. "Demand for hoists to streamline material handling on the job has definitely been increasing steadily. Another key factor is that using hoists reduces the amount of material that is moved up and down by hand on multi-floor projects, which reduces the risk of injury."

Beta Max has units working at Paramount Condominiums, a new 10-story condo development project in Melbourne, FL. Equipment on the job includes: cranes, forklifts,

boom lifts, swing stages, a Beta Max Leo Hoist (supplied by Sunbelt Rentals) and a Beta Max MC3000 Transport Platform (supplied by Trekker Group.)

The MC3000 Transport Platform is being used to move personnel and materials up and down from the ground to every level of the building. It is also being used to move debris and trash out of the building.

Transport platform popularity

Hydro Mobile says transport platforms offer intelligent, cost-effective complements to current systems. Any material required by a subcontractor can be easily and rapidly transported (internal framing and finishing, doors and windows, HVAC, plumbing, electrical and more, including debris removal.)

Lachapelle says the company sees big growth potential for the units, despite setbacks from local governments.

"The biggest challenge is acceptance of the product and regulations that make it easy to use that product," Lachapelle notes. "Transport platforms are a tool of the trade and they make the jobsite safer, more efficient and easier. But there are many regulations across the States that make this product either non-usable or very hard to utilize."

In some areas, transport platforms are fairly well-accepted, Lachapelle says, but, for example, the western U.S. has been slow to adapt.

"This is why we need to get more GCs to manage facade access as a whole on their jobsite which would result in a more common use of mast climbers and transport platforms," Lachapelle says.

Beta Max recently stockpiled all product to ensure availability for customers once demand ticks up.



A Hydro Mobile MCWP on a recent jobsite.

