



JTV, Inc.

Saint Petersburg, Florida

**Philosophy and methods
for building a successful
business, maintaining
steady growth, and
creating new
profitable markets**

By Suzan Marie Chin



Nobel Laureate Anatole France wrote, "Some succeed because they are destined to, most succeed because they are determined to." This statement is key to understanding how JTV Inc. of Saint Petersburg, Florida has built a two person TV inspection and cleaning business into one of the most successful municipal sewer and storm contracting firms in the state.

Ten years ago, JTV, Inc. founder Joyce Taylor Velitschkowski was a computer programmer in the banking industry who had hit the glass ceiling. She was ready for a major career transition and during a lunch with her father she had an opportunity to view a pipeline television inspection being done and thought, "I could do that." Never one to jump blindly, she began a month long research project into the demographics of her region to determine how much competition existed and the extent of the area's requirements for this service.

After reviewing the results, Velitschkowski realized that she could create a profitable enterprise and prepared a business plan to present to the local banks. She was politely refused since she had never been in business before and no financial institution was willing to take the risk. Determined that this small set back would not stop this venture, she took a second mortgage on the family home and ran four credit cards to the max. Within six weeks, she and

her family had built the company's first camera truck in her driveway. Before the truck was finished, JTV had its first county contract, which eventually developed into a million-foot contract over a four-year period.

Velitschkowski was the first and only employee for a while. Ten years later, she still runs multiple rigs, a camera truck, a CIPP lining truck and handles all the manhole and point repairs. "I'm out in the field with the crew every single day. I'm very hands-on but it is a real joint effort." They now run 10 rigs, have 12 crew members, two office staff, a master machinist and machine shop, as well as dedicated staff for maintenance and inventory.

JTV built their client base with the municipalities initially from a strictly low bid situation, but that has changed. They are now a turn-key operation and through them, cities have one source for anything related to inspection and rehabilitation for sanitary and storm drain lines.

"The best thing we did was to go into rehabilitation and not just stay focused in cleaning and TV inspection. You can make a good living at it but you can't be successful by just offering one or two services, you have to have multiple services to really afford growth and expansion within a company," Velitschkowski related.

Customer referral has been key to JTV's steady growth and expansion. They have gained a reputation for taking on

the difficult. Velitschkowski explained, "Something is going on inside a pipe that you don't see every day—like a metal shaft that's been driven in—you need to take extra precautions. If we don't have a piece of equipment for the rehab, we'll build something to make the repair. If someone tells a city it can't be done, they call us and we figure a way around it and complete the rehab successfully."

Another method for building business has been done through "piggy backing." Florida allows any open bid/municipality contract to be piggy-backed, meaning that any other municipality can take that contract, write it/copy it verbatim and use it in their own city because the prices have been set in an open issue bid. Using this marketing tool, JTV has been able to take one annual contract and develop it into over 35 other municipal city contracts.

With all of this business, additional equipment was needed to keep pace with the increased demand. The company had been building their own equipment for nine years. The team efforts and input of Joyce's computer knowledge, her husband's engineering background and father's mechanical ability produced some highly sophisticated equipment that had served the company well but it was time to look outside the group for their needs.

Velitschkowski related, "The industry has reached a point now that you need to have more sophisticated equip-



Top left: Joyce Taylor Velitschkowski, founder and owner of JTV, Inc., with one of her custom-built video inspection vehicles. Top right: JTV crew with a specially-equipped combination vehicle for large diameter pipe cleaning projects. Above left: Joyce and crew video inspect a lateral prior to lining. Above right: Joyce conducts a pipe survey using a Pearpoint mainline camera in conjunction with flexidata pipe survey reporting software.

ment. What we had was sophisticated, it was what we needed it to be, it just wasn't enough to do the amount of production that the business now demands. We have to maintain at least 4,000 to 5,000 feet a day just to meet the contract needs we have."

Just like every other new expansion or change considered by JTV, extensive research was done prior to expanding the equipment fleet to meet the challenging production requirements.

For those who are about to expand, Velitschkowski offered these proven recommendations. "Do all the research you can. Read all possible reference materials and call upon others in the industry. Never just trust the salesman to tell you what their equipment is going to do, go view it on a job site and verify with current users that it will perform as the manufacturer states. Make an informed decision."

The first manufactured camera system JTV chose to purchase was a Pearpoint. Along with the pan and tilt camera, they also acquired a straight view camera, an automatic cable drum, multiple tractors/crawlers and flexidata™ pipe survey reporting software.

Their decision was based on many factors. First was quality, and the ability to tie in the equipment with powerful reporting software and inclinometer reports. Safety was also an issue. JTV closely evaluated their equipment choice.

Velitschkowski related, "We wanted to be as safe for our staff as possible, including myself because I'm out there every day. Labeled and listed equipment is required by current laws and it's only a matter of time before OSHA starts to enforce this within the sewer industry."

JTV operates in a region that is tidally influenced with most of the areas along the beaches being man-made or man-dredged at one time. Because of this, infiltration in most systems is extensive. As the tide shifts, pipes will sway and this constant ground movement puts stress on the pipes, which can lead to cracks and groundwater/sand infiltration. Equipment utilized in this environment has to be completely watertight because in some inspection situations, it will be completely underwater.

But the key factor in their buying decision was the bottom line and production. "The system has proven itself for we've been able to double our production rate since the implementation of the new cameras," Velitschkowski stated.

JTV has experienced a shift in their contract business from 20% storm/80% sewer to 40% storm/60% sewer, which they attribute to creative thinking and equipment. Velitschkowski related, "The talk within the industry was that the EPA would mandate that storm water must be filtered

JTV's ten tips for building a successful inspection and rehab business

1. Look for ways to use your equipment that are not typical. Find niches to put your equipment into use to expand market share.
2. Take talent where you find it. Some of the best employees can be found in the most unlikely places. Look for willingness, ethics and an aptitude for learning vs. industry experience. Teach your staff your good habits.
3. Be honest, even if it means losing a little money. Base your recommendations on your client's needs, not your profit needs.
4. Do it right and don't cut corners. You can't hide anything for long.
5. Avoid financing. It is better to pay as you go and grow slowly.
6. Plan for the lean times. Don't overextend the company financially.
7. Control peak times. Don't overtax the company/staff production capacity. Never give up quality for quantity.
8. Re-invest profits and research those investments carefully.
9. If venturing into a new market, don't play at it or test it, enter it wholeheartedly and work at it vigorously.
10. Never give up!

and treated the same way sewage is. We saw a potential opportunity to increase the utilization of our inspection and rehab services for storm lines and we got ready for it."

She continued, "We've always had large diameter cameras, however with the new system, we now have a steerable tractor with a self-leveling device which will enable us to televise pipe with the same tractor for 24-inch up to 120-inch diameter pipes with the same camera, eliminating the need for multiple systems."

Because of these features, they were able to easily adapt the equipment for sewer contracts to storm contracts. In

Florida most of the old storm water pipes installed are corrugated metal pipes. Due to a certain salt level in the ground water, the metal is eaten away. Rehab is roughly 50% the cost of conventional trenching and replacement.

Another issue in this region is that the storm lines run in-between many houses. A municipality's expenses would not only include replacing the line, but also the liability of being able to get a trench box inside a 15-foot wide area without destroying someone's property or dwelling in the process.

The same inspection and rehab processes JTV had been successfully marketing and implementing for cities' sewer systems could also be applied to the storm systems. They began marketing it to cities and successfully converted sewer contracts into additional storm contracts.

Although the core focus of JTV's business for the first five years has been cleaning and TV inspection, during the last five years they have also witnessed a shift in rehabilitation. They began to see the probability of rehabilitation becoming more extensive in the next two to three years because of current EPA mandates. The decision to enter the rehab market would again prove profitable and continue to hold prospects for excellent future growth.

"Municipalities are being required to rehabilitate their systems to address those structures that have been left dormant or nearly dormant for over 40 years. They are showing the signs of wear and tear and use. The future of this industry is wide open for rehabilitation in all forms: manhole, mainline, storm, but I believe that the prime focus for the next five years will be lateral rehab," Velitschkowski explained.

The lateral rehab market has been something the company entered slowly and it will come to fruition by the end of the year. They have just been awarded a large contract for a multiple lateral rehabilitation project. To complete the project, JTV plans to modify another compatible camera system to their existing mainline camera to create a launching device in order to do all the work from the main. This innovation will allow articulating a camera into a 4-inch lateral and be able to obtain a clear view of exactly what is occurring in the lateral, no matter how many 45- or 90-degree bends are in the pipe.

The addition of the flexidata pipe survey reporting software system improved production levels within JTV's mainline TV inspection department. "Even though it is basically the same information contained in the handwritten conventional reports, the new software generated reports, with the classification, and the codes make it so much more professional that it isn't even an option not to have



Photos above: Joyce Velitschkowski (at right in photo above) and a JTV crew prepare and calibrate equipment prior to a pipe inversion; JTV crew members conduct a lateral relining project.



the software anymore," Velitschkowski said.

With the software, Velitschkowski and her crew are able to create a database for their customers along with a printed bound report, set up in subsections of the sewer system to be used as a quick reference guide.

JTV plans to add an additional service for their clients by implementing an additional software module for their existing program that will archive and index prior survey footage and reports onto CD-ROM. This service will help cities cut expenses in archival organization, storage and eliminate the possibility of survey tape degradation, and generate an additional source of income.

With a staff of 15 and more growth planned, Velitschkowski has taken a unique approach to finding and keeping good people. JTV has an apprenticeship program in place, which offers anyone from any industry, or just out of school, the opportunity to learn trenchless technology. The only requirements for acceptance being a clean driving record, passing a drug test, and a willingness to learn.

Velitschkowski related, "We've found great people in unlikely places. We don't limit our staff choices to people from the industry, we prefer to go outside and mold them and teach them quality skills. Should they choose to leave, that's ok, they'll leave with an ability to go anywhere in the country and earn a great living."

All of the field crew members are multi-task. Velitschkowski believes in everyone being able to jump in and do anyone's job. By cross-training and being multi-task, the crew is more efficient and can handle staff

shortages effectively and reduce down time.

Velitschkowski and JTV have been able to survive peak and lean times equally well due to a practice of re-investment and planning. "Don't overextend the capacity of the company or the number of contracts you have at one time so that quality suffers," Velitschkowski stated, "quantity over quality has never been an option for us."

As they realize profits, the bulk of it goes back into building the business. Velitschkowski related, "It's tempting to take the perks out that come with owning a successful company, but I know the economy is fickle and by reinvesting, rather than financing and over-spending, we extend the life and stability of the organization."

In fact, their re-investment plans include the retrofit of the second of their inspection vehicles with a Pearpoint camera system and a third inspection vehicle retrofit to include another camera system and grouting capabilities.

Velitschkowski has been amazed at the recognition she has received in her community and has wondered if its because she's a woman in construction or because her story is truly the "Great American Dream" of building something out of nothing into a multi-million dollar enterprise. Her sheer determination and willpower to succeed are highly visible. She shared her "secret of success," a philosophy and way of thinking that she has held fast from the beginning of this endeavor.

"Never give up. If they tell you no, think about it, dream about it, and figure out a solution. There is very little that is impossible." ■