

Feature

Metal has no mettle against this company

CBG of Norfolk disintegrates and cleans out broken metal in a variety of settings

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Don't underestimate the physical size of CBG Maintenance Services LLC.

Its small office is tucked away in a tan industrial warehouse on Hampton Boulevard in Norfolk, surrounded by antique cars that are not part of the business. The company has no sign outside, and the only way to get in is through a garage door.

The office itself is much like a shop teacher's. There's a large red machine, gray tables, gray file cabinets, metal parts and pieces of metal in dusty plastic bags.

Welcome to the world of Ken Guthrie, president, and Linda Waters, operations manager. They're CBG's only two employees.

The large red machine is CBG's main metal disintegrator, a Cammann model. Guthrie has two smaller, portable machines he uses for trips to various job sites. While 60 percent of CBG's work is local, Guthrie travels frequently for work.

"We've taken parts out of sewer treatment plants, conveyors, augers, stainless steel that pushes dry sewage," Guthrie said. "We've done this upside down. You have to have good spatial concepts."

The machines are designed to take out broken studs, taps, drills and bolts. An electrode held in the machine's cutting head vibrates as it cuts through the metal, while a coolant is pumped through the electrode to wash out the leftover particles.

That's the main process, but Guthrie explains that a small chisel may be needed to take out small particles that the machine didn't. Some aren't always visible to the naked eye.

The equipment at CBG's disposal allows Guthrie to work on everything from an antique juicer to the USS John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier, now decommissioned.

"Our goal is to be there within 48 hours with all our tools and equipment," Guthrie said. For example, Guthrie and Waters like to talk about a job for Valero Energy Corp. to remove broken bolts from an expander at a refinery. An expander is a turbine used to expand high-pressure gas to drive a compressor.

"They sent a plane for him and sent him to Corpus Christi, Texas," Waters said. "We had everything at the airport in eight hours."

"Valero said, 'If you don't have this bolt out in four hours, you're gone,'" Guthrie said. "We set up the machine and had it out in 20 minutes. We had 30 bolts out in less than 24 hours."

A slogan of sorts is on Guthrie's and Waters' business cards. It reads: "Quality Metal Disintegration in Myriad Applications." The "myriad

Just the facts

CBG Maintenance Services LLC

Description: Metal disintegration and removal company.

Year founded: 2003

History: The company was started by three people: Ken Guthrie, president and owner; Jamie Creech, who left CBG in 2008; and Bill Burch, who died in 2002. Guthrie is a retired U.S. Navy submarine machinist.

Annual sales: \$150,000

Number of employees: 2

Address: P.O. Box 11754, Norfolk 23517

Web site: www.cbgmaintenance.com

applications" part is fitting.

There's the owner of an antique Chevy engine who tried a do-it-yourself approach, and broke a drill bit trying to take out a broken bolt. There's also a company executive who had asked them to burn holes in discarded hard drives so they'd be unusable.

For them, it's hard to define an unusual job when so many different kinds have been done.

"We're a niche market," Waters said. "Many people have no idea this is available."

A Google search for "metal disintegration" shows seven companies on the first two pages, with CBG the only one in Hampton Roads. The closest competition, based on Web-site scans, is in Wilmington, Del.

"We're the only company that this is our core business," Guthrie said. "The shipyards could say, 'You're taking our business.' We come in, take the bolt out, and get out of the way."

That core business nets about \$150,000 in annual sales.

One of Guthrie's hopes is to be on call for a client, ready to work if needed.

But there is one major rule for Guthrie while working an on-site job.

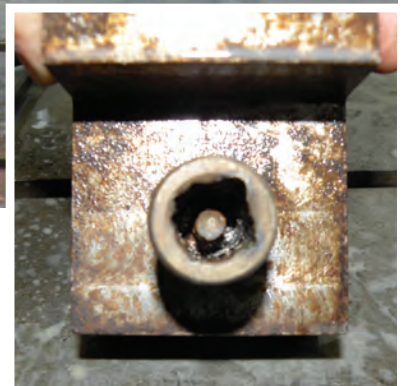
"He needs to stay totally focused and not have people ask 5,000 questions," Waters said.

Guthrie has worked around overly curious people by having someone block unwanted intruders, a body-guard of sorts.

However, Guthrie has assistants from time to time, typically employees of the client company. Asked if they considered using apprentices, Guthrie and Waters say it's a possibility.

"You have to be familiar with military environments," he said. "A lot of measurements, geometry, chemistry and machinery."

"You also have to be comfortable and familiar with terms in an industrial environment," Waters said. ▣



Above, Ken Guthrie, owner of CBG Maintenance Services LLC in Norfolk, stands back while the company's Cammann metal disintegration machine goes to work. In the other photos the machine is cleaning out a hydraulic pan, shown at right.