

# Combined Strength

Merger Leads to Continued Growth for Huxted Trenchless

By Bradley Kramer



Huxted Trenchless management team (from left): Chris Bauer, senior project manager; Brian Haynes, shop manager; Ray Post, senior vice president; Harsha Reddy, project manager; and John Langford, operations manager.



**W**hat's in a name? In the case of Huxted Trenchless, a new name comes packed with decades of experience and expertise in HDD and microtunneling.

Huxted Trenchless was formed in 2022, with the consolidation of Huxted Tunneling and ECI Drilling, two long-standing trenchless construction firms owned by JAG Companies Inc. By combining the two companies, Huxted Trenchless is better poised for growth, expanding its revenue and geographic reach.

Ray Post, senior vice president of Huxted Trenchless, says the company specializes in complex, large-scale HDD

work and all types of microtunneling projects, with occasional sliplining and guided boring projects.

Post joined Huxted in 2015 and helped shepherd the company through a move in 2020 from its original location in Palmetto, Florida, to Conroe, Texas, to co-locate with ECI Drilling. That move eventually led to the consolidation.

“Everyone wants to see growth,” explains Roly Acosta, president and CEO of JAG Companies. “Both companies were feeling stagnant, with one solely in Florida and one solely in Texas.”

Moving Huxted to Texas served as an opportunity to see how well the two companies could work together.

“Ray and his team were willing to move, and we were able to combine the expertise of the two companies,” Acosta says. “Now, they’re more than a microtunneling crew or an HDD crew, now we are a skilled trenchless crew.



Pull back of 1,305 lf of 30-in. HDPE pipe in a hard rock formation under the Catawba River.

That team approach leads to more success and continued growth.”

Post adds that the combined personnel has created crews “that can flow

between disciplines,” regardless of the project scope.

“We’re able to overcome obstacles by combining our strengths,” Post says.

Today, Huxted Trenchless brings in a revenue of approximately \$35 million per year and employs about 50 people. In addition, the company has been certified by the National Minority Supplier Development Council as a Minority Business Enterprise (MBE).

## A Brief History of Huxted

Huxted Tunneling was formed by Dwayne Huxted, who had moved to Palmetto, Florida, from British Columbia, Canada, in the late 1970s.

When Dwayne arrived in Florida, he became a partner at Kerr Construction, an underground utility and tunneling business that was owned by his sister and brother-in-law. Dwayne eventually purchased the company and became sole owner.

Under Dwayne’s leadership, Kerr Construction became a cutting-edge microtunneling and jack-and-bore business. He later renamed the company Huxted Tunneling and brought his wife Ruth and daughter Kimberly on board to help run the company.

Huxted Tunneling experienced significant growth in the 1990s, according to Post, and the company began to focus more on microtunneling projects, winning the 2003 *Trenchless Technology* Project of the Year for New Installation with the Potomac Yard Offsite Sanitary Trunk Sewer Project.

Unfortunately, the Huxted family experienced serious medical problems in the late 2000s, leading to JAG Companies purchasing Huxted Tunneling in 2010. Sadly, Kimberly died in 2009 at age 45 and Ruth died in 2010 at age 71, with Dwayne passing away in 2016 at age 76.

However, their name and legacy lives on with Huxted Trenchless.

## Growing the Footprint

Huxted Tunneling mainly worked in Florida and neighboring states, roughly the footprint of college football’s Southeastern Conference (SEC), Post explains. ECI would work on projects all over the United States, and in some cases internationally.

“Now, the combined companies are pursuing work from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean and down to the Gulf of Mexico, but if it’s the right job, we will pursue work in any state,” Post says.

Under the ownership of JAG Companies, Huxted Trenchless continues to seek continued growth.

“My family has a long history in the construction industry,” Acosta says. “This is our 45th year in business, with Northeast Remsco Construction as our first business.”

Northeast Remsco Construction was formed in 1978 as Northeast Utilities Inc. by Juan A. Gutierrez, who had immigrated to the United States from Cuba. JAG Companies was formed in 2009 to become the parent company of Northeast Remsco and Caldwell Marine International Inc. (CMD), a subaqueous utilities and heavy civil marine construction firm that Gutierrez acquired in 2003.

“We were looking at growth opportunities, and that led to the acquisition of the original Huxted Tunneling in 2010 and ECI Drilling in 2014,” Acosta says. “Then we had an opportunity to consolidate those two companies to become a bigger trenchless powerhouse in the industry.”

Huxted Trenchless boasts a fleet of about 18 machines across all its specialties, including five HDD rigs from such manufacturers as American Augers, Iseki and Herrenknecht, ranging in size from 200,000 lbs to 1 million lbs and diameters from 24 to 120 in.

Post explains the strategy behind how Huxted Trenchless chooses its projects.

“Considering diameter and length on a microtunneling project, we’ll look at anything, long, short, straight or curved,” Post says. “We’re more selective on HDD projects.”

On the HDD side, Post says that the company targets “larger, more complicated jobs,” giving such examples as 3,000 ft of 48 in., 2,000 ft of 24-in. through rock, or 8,000-plus ft of 12-in. with an intersect.

“It would not make sense for us to bid on a 100-ft job in our competitors’ backyard,” he says. “But we’re not afraid to pursue any type of micro-tunneling job, including underwater retrievals for intake and outfalls.”



Site setup for 72-in. RCP crossing of I-275 in Tampa, Florida.

## A Partnership Approach

When working with customers, Post says there can be a “tremendous amount of education” involved in explaining the benefits and capabilities of trenchless. However, Huxted works with its clients to provide the best solution.

“We like to take a partnering approach whenever possible,” Acosta adds. “Certainly, there is education involved on what certain methods might be a better solution for the project. Ultimately, we strive to deliver the project that the owner wants. The last thing we want is when the project is done, and everyone walks away with their backs to each other. We want those high fives at the end.”

The way Huxted Trenchless approaches its customers and overall business is through the company’s three core values of reputation, work ethic and team accomplishment.

“One key point on partnering is that it can be hard at times,” Post says. “Sometimes you have to tell someone that they’re not looking at the right trenchless solution. I could lie and say it’s a microtunneling project when it’s not, but being truthful in the pre-design phase helps build that level of trust.”

In addition to partnering with customers on projects, Huxted Trenchless also partners with the industry

at large through participation in organizations such as NASTT, NUCA and NAMA.

“Collectively, as an organization we’re active in various industry trade associations,” Acosta says. “We’re definitely out there advocating for funding from the national level and local level for infrastructure investment.”

One of the big challenges that Acosta and Post see for the utility construction and trenchless industries is finding people to perform the work, from entry-level labor to management positions and everything in between.

“How do we get young people engaged in the trades and construction? We need to get them to understand that this is a respected industry with well-paying jobs,” Acosta says. “It is important for our industry to advocate for support for the trades and engineering communities.”

## Expertise and Scope

Among the key personnel at Huxted Trenchless, Post estimates that the organization has more than 200 years combined of education in the trenchless field.

“That’s a lot of history, a lot of years figuring out how to do things right,” Post says. “I know I won’t stop learning until I retire. I was interviewing a soon-to-be college graduate and was asked, ‘How long did it take you to learn microtunneling?’ My answer was, ‘I never stop learning. No job is the same.’”

Huxted Trenchless serves a variety of markets, including water, wastewater, power and gas.

Acosta adds that renewable energy has become one Huxted’s highest profile project areas, citing offshore wind as an especially strong area for the company.

One of the biggest projects Huxted Trenchless is currently undertaking is the Champlain Hudson Power Express (CHPE) project, which is bringing renewable energy in the form of hydroelectric power from Quebec, Canada, through Lake Champlain, across the Hudson River and into New York City.

Huxted was subcontracted to perform the marine drilling work on the project by sister company CMI, which was awarded multiple marine phases of the project by NKT, a global provider of turnkey AC/DC cable solutions.

Developed by Transmission Developers Inc., a Blackstone portfolio company, the CHPE represents one of the largest infrastructure investments in the history of New York state. The project combines CMI’s expertise of marine cable laying and Huxted Trenchless’ expertise of shore end drills.

Posts adds that Huxted is also involved with a major force main project in Virginia that crosses under the James River, as well as another project to reroute an existing storm drainage system so that the merger of two major interstates in Tampa, Florida, can be reconstructed.

“One of the advantages of relocating to Conroe, which is north of Houston, is that it allows us to reach out to more of the United States to pursue work,” Post says.

Acosta believes the work that Huxted Trenchless, as well as its sister companies, are making a difference in the world.

“This is an exciting, dynamic industry,” Acosta says. “Every job we complete is improving something for someone. Every time we drill or mine, we must be ready for the challenges. Those are driving forces for our business.”

**Bradley Kramer is a contributing staff editor for *Trenchless Technology*.**