The phrase “hurry up and wait” may have originated in the military, but it applies to contractors too. That explains why Atlantic Heating & Cooling Service Inc., a well-diversified company based in Virginia Beach, Va., owns a fleet of six street-sweeping machines.

At first glance, street sweepers and plumbing/drain cleaning services appear to be an odd combination. But to Aaron Lawyer, the company’s president and owner, the purchase of six Schwarze M6 Avalanche mechanical sweepers within the past year made perfect sense, especially in the context of the other ancillary and complementary services the business offers, such as roll-off containers/dewatering, traffic control and right-of-way mowing. In short, they all represent logical extensions of the company’s core services.

“The street sweepers go hand in hand with what we do,” Lawyer says. “We already were cleaning storm drain systems, and the sweeper guys who come in before us often held us up … they need to go first so they don’t sweep stuff down into the drainlines we just cleaned.

“We got to the point that we were subbing it out or our customers were hiring other companies … and there aren’t a lot of firms that provide street-sweeping service,” he continues. “And if the sweeper guy gets backlogged, it pushes our work back.”

Providing bundled services also makes Atlantic, which serves customers throughout Virginia and in Atlanta, more attractive to customers who prefer to deal with as few contractors as possible. “It makes us a little more

Clean Streets

Fleet of sweepers provides contractor a lift in terms of efficiency and service diversification

By Ken Wysocky

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Providing bundled services also makes Atlantic, which serves customers throughout Virginia and in Atlanta, more attractive to customers who prefer to deal with as few contractors as possible. “It makes us a little more
competitive when we can do a whole project,” Lawyer points out. “It saves our customers a lot of time and paperwork if you can offer them one-stop shopping for services.”

Each unit features a Freightliner truck chassis; a 5- or 8-cubic-yard debris tank; a 300-gallon water tank; a 58-inch main broom; 44- or 49-inch variable-speed gutter brooms; a Deutz diesel engine; and a scissor-lift dumping system that off-loads debris from the side of the unit at heights ranging from 16 inches to 11 feet 6 inches.

“That feature saves us a lot of downtime and driving time back and forth to landfills,” Lawyer notes. “We can dump right into a dump truck and keep on working. On other street sweepers, you have to take them to a staging area or a landfill and empty it through a rear door. But with this one, when one dump truck fills up, another one pulls up and we just keep on sweeping. We can clean several more curb miles per day, being able to dump right on the job site.

“Most of our contracts pay by the curb mile,” he adds. “So the faster we work, the more profitable the job is … and we can complete more jobs per year.”

The units are fairly easy to operate, so it doesn’t take long to train operators. When properly

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maintained, the Schwarze sweepers are reliable too, Lawyer says.

Demand for stand-alone street-sweeping services is rising as road construction and other infrastructure upgrades increase. “There’s a need to keep down all the silt and dust created by road and infrastructure projects,” Lawyer says. “In addition, more and more laws restrict debris runoff into storm sewers … so a lot of contractors are being proactive about removing the silt that collects in gutters.”

The street sweepers also provide another opportunity for Atlantic to cross-promote its other services, which include pipe inspections and scanning, pipe relining, septic tank and grease trap cleaning, and HVAC and plumbing.

“The sweepers are starting to generate a significant revenue stream,” Lawyer says. “There’s definitely a risk in [investing in equipment for a new service], but you have to own the equipment before you can get the work.

“In this case, we’re aggressively going after full-service infrastructure maintenance,” he says. “There’s definitely a service gap we can fill. The street sweepers give us another tool in our tool belt … and provide our customers with the convenience of another in-house service.”

SHOW US THE MONEY (MACHINE)

Money Machines, a feature in Cleaner, reports on innovative work vehicles that help contractors operate more efficiently, satisfy customers and earn more profit. We’d like to know about your Money Machine — be it a service van, camera truck, jetting rig, vacuum unit or any vehicle that really helps drive your business. To nominate your vehicle for a feature in this column, send an email to editor@cleaner.com. Tell us briefly but specifically what features make it a great producer. And send a picture — because appearance counts. We look forward to seeing your Money Machine.