

## Industry Mourns Passing Of 'Pops'

by Kit Jones, Wheelwright

Over the last week, I've had the pleasure of talking to some of Lester Luttrell's close friends, family, even a competitor or two. I received an ear-full of stories. Most of them were hilarious, some of them were serious, but all of them ended with something like: "that Lester, he was one hell of a man."

Lester Ray Luttrell, Jr., operations manager for IPR/PM Construction, passed away on Dec. 4, 2011, from cancer of the liver.

Humble beginnings defined his life and shaped others. Those closest to him said he was self-made, and simply worked harder and smarter than most.

"His first business failed, actually, but that only made him more determined to succeed," said Paul Luttrell, Lester's son. "All he had was a couple of bulldozers and a low-boy to move them from one excavating job to the next. However, after about five years,

his business had failed. Then at 32 years-old, Pops (a name most people called him), started to turn his life around. He went to work for "Shorty Chapman" as a heavy equipment operator and supervisor building highways during the warmer part of the year, and sold insurance during the winter months. I think it was a mix of talent that really defined and made him what he was. Pops was truly 'the salt and the light,' and people seemed to never get enough of him."

He was the king of sewers. Professionally, that's what a lot of folks said about this giant in the trenchless construction industry. After spending eight years working for Shorty Chapman, Lester struck out on his own again, and began building a small sewer rehabilitation company that worked in multiple states from Michigan to Florida and from Virginia to Oklahoma.

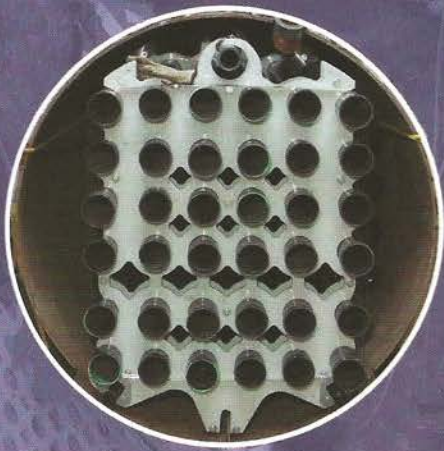
Lester quickly recognized there was a tremendous opportunity in sewer rehab and expanded his services from TV and inspection services to slip lining, and then pipe bursting. "He had vision," said Philip McAfee, former owner of PM Construction, "and a real nose for business. He really cared about his work, so he always made sure he had the best qualified sub-contractors to make sure the job was done right."

If there was a problem on the job, Lester was the "go to" guy. Lester was at his best when he was in the field. He was a problem solver and used simple common sense to resolve any problems that came up. "Lester never panicked and also figured a way to solve problems that occurred on-site, reflected Matt McAfee, Philip's son. "In Jacksonville, where he had a large sewer maintenance contract, he was the man. If a city engineer or

## "Conduit-In-Casing"

*The construction method of choice*

WHEN YOU HAVE TO GO UNDER IT, YOU NEED BORE SPACERS FROM UNDERGROUND DEVICES



When it is necessary to cross multiple power or communication cables under a highway, runway or railroad without disruption to either traffic or the roadbed, "conduit-in-casing" is the construction method of choice.

Underground Devices specializes in the design and manufacture of the bore spacers that are the key component required for a "conduit-in-casing" installation. We use state of the art Computer Aided Design (CAD) and Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM). This means fast delivery of a proposal drawing for your approval and on time delivery of full featured, quality bore spacers at economical prices.



**UNDERGROUND DEVICES**  
INCORPORATED

3304 COMMERCIAL AVENUE • NORTHBROOK, ILLINOIS 60062  
Phone: (847) 205-9000 • Fax: (847) 205-9004  
Website: <http://www.udevices.com>

Get On The *Fast Track*  
Call 800-800-2118 Now!

inspector had a question, Lester would be the one to resolve it."

He was a mentor and father figure to many. Before working for his own father, the younger McAfee, worked for Lester, and owes him a lot of credit for much of his own success. "Whenever I had a moral dilemma, I'd call Pops and he'd say: 'Son, just be honorable in everything you do, and you will be treated fairly in return.' That's just the way he was."

He trusted and respected his suppliers. Lester was always fair, never asked for favors, and in return knew that his suppliers would always treat him the same way. "When Lester called and ordered pipe from us, we knew he was good for his word," said Jim Fletcher, an industry pipe distributor. "Lester was probably the fairest contractor I've ever worked with. During the lean years, he'd pay his employees and suppliers before he paid himself."

Dave Holcomb of TT Technologies stated, "To anyone who met him, he was unforgettable and possessed a keen sense of intuition on any project he worked on. The respect he received in our industry was unmatched."

His penchant for giving was endless. No one really knows how much money Lester gave away or loaned throughout his life, but from all accounts, it was a lot. "Heck, I think Lester gave away more money than I've made in my entire life," added the elder McAfee.

If he loaned money to a friend or family member, he knew they were good for it, and he never expected anything in return. "If there were folks in the community, just down on their luck, Lester always wanted to help and give back. He'd become a successful businessman and was glad he could help in any way," Fletcher added.

Bryan Fletcher, Jim's son and business associate had this to say, "He was like the Sam Walton of the trenchless sewer industry. Very humble, very caring and a man everyone wanted to work for."

Lester left this world the way he wanted it to be, he didn't want to bother anyone. Never a complainer, very few people knew just how sick Lester was. He would downplay his ailments and joke about how he would have taken better care of himself if he had known how long he was going to live.

In fact, the Friday before his death, as he always did after a full day at the office, he said his usual goodbyes to those still there and dutifully made the 130-mile drive from Jacksonville, to his home in Leesburg, FL. When he arrived home he finally said that he wasn't feeling that well and might need to go to the hospital. Lester Ray Luttrell quietly passed away two days later; the cancer finally overtaking this monument of a man and icon in our industry.

Survivors include his son, Paul Ray, St. Johns, FL; daughters Leslie Jo Bickett,

Arcadia, FL; Laura Ann, Beaver Dam, KY.; brothers Robert Ritch, Hartford, KY., Daniel Keene, Franklin, Ky.; sister, Betty Jane McPherson, Hartford, KY.; nine grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren.

Joe Cutillo, president and CEO of IPR, said that "We all have things we will miss about Lester, but to me Lester was the true EF Hutton in our world. When he spoke, everyone listened. They listened because they knew Lester's perspective was going to be genuine and the majority of the time correct. Lester was a leader in the industry, a father

figure to all our employees and a guy I could go to when I needed to hear the truth about what really was going on or what really needed to happen.

"It is not often, as a leader of a company, that you get the opportunity to have a mentor who works for you, but I can say I learned far more from Lester than he learned from me. Lester was truly a legend in our industry and one of a kind. On behalf of those who contributed to this article, countless unmentioned friends and associates, and the IPR family — Lester, you will be missed by everyone." ■



## Dramatic Results

Achieve your boring tasks with dramatic results...on time... on target...everytime. Whether rock or soft ground, count on Barbcro Pathfinders, Directional Drills and Boring Machines to deliver bores with power to spare.

**Call Barbcro for all of your underground needs.**

# Barbcro<sup>INC.</sup>

barbcro.com • 1-800-448-8934 315 Pekin Rd. S.E. • East Canton, Ohio 44730-9462