

# Texan's Sawmill Business Starts Fast First Year

## Wood-Mizer Portable Band Mill Enables Entrepreneur to Prosper Despite Turbulent Economy

By Nikki Nichols  
Contributing Author

GILMER, Tex. — Home cooking, Southern hospitality, great golf, and fabulous fishing are just some of the finer features of the Piney Woods region in northeast Texas, which earned its name from the abundant pine forests in the region.

Joey Lowe is quite familiar with the many variations of pines that are indigenous to northeast Texas. He owns J. Alexander Lowe and Sons, a sawmill business in Gilmer, which is 150 miles east of Dallas.

Joey's business relies on a Wood-Mizer LT40 Super Hydraulic portable band sawmill. It features a central console for the sawmill controls, an operator seat and simple networks. He usually cuts 4-5,000 board feet per day.

The abundant pine forests keep his business busy even though he is a newcomer to the portable sawmill industry. "I tell you, we don't advertise much," he said. "Most of it is word of mouth. It's unbelievable how quickly that spreads."

In addition to cutting pine, Joey cuts quite a bit of cedar and oak for making fence posts, telephone poles, and construction grade lumber.

Rural communities have many specific needs when it comes to the market for his services, Joey has found. "We've cut many different types of species for many different types of uses. Most of the people will either use the lumber to repair their barns or make barns, decks and trailers."

Joey is willing to adapt to whatever his customers need. "We're just now breaking into the recreational woodworking market — your hobbyist woodworker," he said. "Out in the Dallas area, you're really out in the West, and there are very few trees. So any lumber you use to make your wife a table has to be mail ordered. I've had so many people comment about how really neat it is to get a piece of real sawmill lumber."

Joey bought the used Wood-Mizer from a seller in his area, and he has been impressed with the dependability of the thin-kerf, narrow band sawmill. The Wood-Mizer LT40 Super Hydraulic runs



### Sawing Service

*Changing the band blade (above) on the Wood-Mizer LT40 Super Hydraulic portable sawmill (above and right). Joey Lowe bought the mill used and has been impressed with the dependability and Wood-Mizer's service.*



remarkably, he said.

"It's a great piece of equipment, I can tell you hands down, and I have seen a lot of mills in operation. And Wood-Mizer provides unbelievable support. Any time I have had a technical question or needed a part, it's there. It's amazing."

"I wanted a company that was going to there," he added. "I was looking for a company that had been around the block. That was my first priority." Joey also wanted a mill equipped with hydraulics. "If anyone's going to do this for a living, they've got to have hydraulics."

Another reason he chose Wood-Mizer was the company's patented cantilever head design. "The cantilever head made all the sense in the world to me, especially with remote sawing. In the Piney Woods of Texas, there are many hills and valleys. It is very difficult to use a mill that has to be completely leveled. With the Wood-Mizer, you would be very surprised at some of the places I took the mill, and it did just fine."

For what Joey is doing, he finds

thin-kerf, narrow band blades to be the best choice. "Thin-kerf is very beneficial, especially on some of the more exotic woods. For example, Texas black walnut is very hard to find and is very valuable. You can see the look on the customer's face when there's lots of sawdust. Definitely use a band sawmill."

"A band saw board is easier to plane," Joey added. "I have one customer here — he's a cabinet maker who specializes in making harvest tables — who prefers red oak sawn with a band saw because of the way the band saw blade skips across the board and makes a desirable pattern."

Lowe and Sons operates on two acres of land. Joey built a pole shed for the sawmill. He designed his operations using a plant layout from some of Wood-Mizer's customer support literature.

Joey's Wood-Mizer is powered by a 40 hp industrial diesel engine. Wood-Mizer offers the LT40 Super Hydraulic model with other power options, including a 36 hp gasoline engine and a 25 hp three-phase electric engine.

Joey has a solar kiln that can dry up to 4,000 board feet of lumber, but he has his sights set on a dehumidification kiln next as his sawmill business continues to grow.

His Wood-Mizer sawmill, along with various machines to produce value-added lumber products, has allowed him to achieve a high rate of production for profitability and financial independence.

“We use 20-inch planers, jointers and shapers,” said Joey. “We make a lot of tongue and groove cedar. We saw rough or plain, dry or green. As of late, we’ve been cutting red oak, maple, some mahogany, and some cherry.”

Joey comes from four generations of sawyers and loggers, dating back to the early 1800s. He chose different career paths before following the family tradition.

Born and raised in the Carolinas, Joey joined the U.S. Marines and served two hitches before returning home, then headed for Texas. Thanks to his experience in the Marines, he landed a security job at the 1984 Republican National Convention. Joey was a member of the ‘lead and chase’ crew, which secures areas for arriving presidents.

He found himself face to face with one of the most powerful people in the world, having an opportunity to shake hands with President Ronald Reagan. “He’s a big man,” said Joey, “and he always had a kind word for everybody.”

Joey pursued a career in law enforcement and joined the Dallas-Fort Worth Police Department. After several years as a police officer, however, he became interested in woodworking. He started a small cabinet making shop, but he found a formidable stumbling block as he began to build his business. “The cost of lumber was outrageous,” he recalled. “We were looking at ways to cut costs. Next thing we knew, we were looking at a Wood-Mizer sawmill.”

After purchasing the Wood-Mizer LT40 Super Hydraulic, Joey launched into some unique niche markets and experiences and innovative sawing techniques.

He frequently works with a guild of chair makers in the Houston area. They require a special type of red oak material. In order to cut to specification, Joey sets a wooden jig on the sawmill bed in order to peel the sapwood off the log. The ‘rived’ wood is then split with chisels.

Joey had a brush with Confederate history in one sawmill job. “This walnut tree that we cut was close to 200 years



*Prepping large log with a chain saw prior to milling on the Wood-Mizer LT40 Super Hydraulic.*

old, and while cutting the tree, we hit metal. We found the hand guard to a Confederate sword lodged in the tree. The gentleman who owned the tree made some beautiful furniture out of it. The property had been in the customer’s family for generations.”

Joey has experienced a boom in demand for sawing material for timber frame homes. He and his crew recently finished sawing beams that a local dentist is using to build a new home.

Along with the growing demand for cutting for timber frame homes, Joey has discovered a niche market forming right in his own back yard. It appears to be a direct result of Asia’s growing furniture-making business. “From talking to people, I learned that logs were being harvested here, trucked over to the Mississippi River, shipped to the West Coast, then sent off to China.”

As a result, many big sawmills in Texas shut down. “There is a huge market for the little guy,” said Joey. “It’s created a niche for us smaller guys. I can’t do a million board feet in a month, but I am constantly getting phone calls from people with those demands.”

Since Wood-Mizer launched its new Web site, which features a link to Joey’s business, he has noted a dramatic increase in business. “I’ve noticed a real pick-up in business,” he said. “We try to stay two weeks ahead. We’re now booked up two weeks in advance.”

Joey started his company in January

2002. With no advertising and a turbulent economy, his business nevertheless has flourished. Joey is thrilled that his business has thrived so quickly and expects it to continue to prosper and endure.

“I’ve done fairly well for myself,” he said. “We invested \$100,000 in this to get started. It is paid for; the business has paid for it. I paid \$25,000 for the sawmill, and used savings. I’ve recouped that cost and then some. It’s debt free.” Joey expects to gross a little more than \$220,000 this year. Besides supporting him, the business has three other full-time employees — his two sons and his father-in-law.

Joey credited his Wood-Mizer portable sawmill with enabling him to achieve the kind of success he has enjoyed. “Wood-Mizer has an outstanding product,” he said, “and the support is unbelievable. I would say to Wood-Mizer, ‘Don’t mess with anything. Whatever you’re doing, it’s working.’”

*(Editor’s Note: to contact Joey Lowe, call him toll-free at (877) 815-2417 or send e-mail to [sawyer@loweco.com](mailto:sawyer@loweco.com). If you own a Wood-Mizer sawmill and would like to have your sawmill business linked to Wood-Mizer’s Web site, visit [www.woodmizer.com](http://www.woodmizer.com) and go to the customers/links section.)*



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