



# DESIGNED to Succeed

ENGINEERING FIRM FINDS FIT IN MUNICIPAL SEWER AND WATER MARKET AND EXPANDS THROUGHOUT THE MIDWEST

BY MARIAN BOND | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DENNY MEDLEY

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imberly and Trent Robinett opened TREKK Design Group anticipating the staff might eventually grow to a couple dozen people, serving a largely municipal customer base, with primarily transportation-related projects and engineering services.

After 14 years, the customer base remains, but the firm's water, wastewater and stormwater services have burgeoned to account for 60 percent of the company's business. Today, the Kansas City firm has 96 employees — including 32 NASSCO-trained service technicians — and eight

regional offices scattered across Missouri and nearby states.

Kimberly Robinett, an electrical engineer with a background in telecommunications, is the managing member of this Disadvantaged Business Enterprise. Her husband, Trent, has a background in transportation, civil design and survey. Their third partner, Kim Pemberton, who came on board in 2004, offers experience in transportation and construction inspection services.

"We wanted a small firm, with a niche that can be broken out to design a small piece of someone else's overall road design," Robinett says. "We wanted to provide things like survey, traffic signals, lighting design, some smaller pieces of a much bigger project. These were some of the goals we wanted to achieve."

As a DBE firm, TREKK was able to get pieces of the projects they otherwise might not have been able to land as a small firm. They did a lot of transportation work for the smaller municipalities and private developers as well as for the Missouri Department of Transportation.

Along the way, they began seeing more opportunity and gradually moved more seriously into the inspection and cleaning side of the municipal wastewater market.

By 2005, with eight employees at the time, they hired David Hamberlin in hopes that his experience as a field technician could help TREKK recognize what processes could be added or improved upon. Initially, TREKK was inspecting manholes, smoke testing and flow monitoring.

## OPEN TO PROCEED

"When I came in 2005, Hurricane Katrina had hit New Orleans, and TREKK purchased a 2001 Vac-Con so we could go down and



TREKK technicians Dennis Major (left) and Gabe Gonzalez use a winch to lower a CUES Mud Master camera into a manhole.

profile

## TREKK DESIGN GROUP LLC,

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI  
SERVING ALL OF THE MIDWEST



**OWNERS:** Kimberly Robinett,  
Trent Robinett,  
Kim Pemberton

**SERVICES:** Engineering, water/stormwater, wastewater,  
infrastructure condition assessment,  
transportation, traffic, survey,  
construction observation

**OPENED:** 2002

**CUSTOMER BASE:** Municipalities, state Departments  
of Transportation, private sector,  
federal government

**EMPLOYEES:** 96

**WEBSITE:** [www.trekkdesigngroup.com](http://www.trekkdesigngroup.com)

TREKK technician Gabe Gonzalez guides a jetter hose into a manhole while Dennis Major operates the controls on a Vector combo unit.



programs, and trying to separate sanitary lines from the storm sewers to handle excess storm flow and avoid overtaxing the treatment plants.

They have easement machines from Sewer Equipment to extend the reach of the sewer jetting trucks and help reduce overflows in many situations. TREKK also inspects lines to identify any issues that could adversely impact sewer systems.

**“WHAT REALLY MAKES TREKK DIFFERENT**

**is our ability to take the information we gather through our cleaning and televising work and deliver it in a meaningful format for our clients’ use.”**

David Hamberlin

“More and more municipalities are beginning to understand that half of the laterals in the systems in the ground today are in worse condition than the mains,” he says. “We now have four CCTV vans with lateral launch cameras to support those condition assessment efforts.

“We also do cross-bore investigations in areas where gas lines are being installed around service laterals. We use a RIDGID locator to find the location and depth of the sonde in our lateral launch camera. This helps set the depth of the boring machine to ensure that no service laterals are damaged. It also helps locate any service laterals that were hit prior to our investigation work. This type of proactive or retroactive work can help avoid having a catastrophic situation unfold.”

As a professional services provider, rather than a contractor, TREKK approaches data management and deliverables from an engineering perspective. The firm leverages its team of GIS technicians to manage data and deliver it to the client.

“What really makes TREKK different is our ability to take the information we gather through our cleaning and televising work and deliver it in a meaningful format for our clients’ use,” Hamberlin says.

help clean up New Orleans,” Hamberlin says. “In 2006, we purchased our first CCTV truck and were thus able to support the professional services and engineering studies that we were already conducting.”

According to Hamberlin, the municipalities they now serve each have their own unique set of problems and challenges, but at the end of the day they share a lot in common. Municipalities are dealing with overflow control

## DOMINATE THE TERRITORY

TREKK's move beyond Kansas City began in 2007 when they opened an office in Omaha, Nebraska, to better serve that city's CSO program. Today, TREKK has offices in Columbia, St. Louis, Springfield, and Joplin, Missouri; Memphis, Tennessee; and Lawrence and Kansas City, Kansas. The firm supports combined sewer overflow programs across the Midwest and has national experience with projects in San Antonio, Texas; Rapid City, South Dakota; Denver, Colorado; and New Orleans.

Each office is overseen by their three field managers, based in Kansas City, Omaha and St. Louis.



The CCTV van and jet/vac truck set up at separate manholes at the beginning and end of sewer line segment.

## PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

As managing member of TREKK Design Group, Kimberly Robinett has the challenge of managing a staff of 96, along with her two co-owners, but also leading a normal life as a wife and mother of young daughters while still having an opportunity to pursue her personal interests and goals.

"These are challenges many face in the business world," she says. "When you are an engineer, you are an engineer at heart and design is in your blood, and at certain times I miss that. But I also realize that I actually get more fulfillment out of being a mentor and guide in teaching young engineers how to do design. In answering problems when they have a challenge.

"I'm here as a resource and my door is always open," she says. "My most productive time is after hours some evenings when no one else is in the office and I can hunker down and do the nuts and bolts of what I need to focus on. I try to empower our employees to make decisions in their area of expertise.

"David Hamberlin has been a huge asset for TREKK in an area that has been so important in our growth and development in the infrastructure investigative department. He is one of a group of very driven individuals who we depend on as we move forward."

Robinett is often asked about operating a woman-owned business.

"Engineering is a male-dominated business, as is construction and our field services," she says. "The programs put in place to help minorities or women in business, for us, have been a huge success in helping to break down the initial barriers. From there it is up to the female or minority to bridge that gap by showing the quality of work, and the asset they can be on the team."



**ABOVE:** TREKK technician Gabe Gonzalez runs a sewer inspection from the control room of a CUES inspection van.  
**BELOW:** Gonzalez uses a winch to get the CUES Mud Master camera out of the CCTV van at the start of an inspection job.

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**WE WANT EACH EMPLOYEE TO TAKE THAT TO HEART.”**

David Hamberlin

Each office actively markets the company locally and has several technicians.

Their impressive equipment list includes three Camel (Super Products LLC) jet/vac trucks, all with Myers pumps, along with two Vactor 2100 jet/vacs and two Sreco-equipped jetter trucks.

On the inspection side, TREKK has five trucks outfitted with CUES cameras and equipment, including four with lateral launch capability for the growing lateral inspection market.

Every TREKK technician is NASSCO-certified, and Hamberlin is a certified trainer for pipeline, manhole and lateral assessment and certification programs. He routinely provides training for cities across the Midwest. Hamberlin says TREKK’s technicians are given a fair amount of authority to make decisions in order to do the best job possible.

“A lot of our trust goes back to the type individual we hire to work for TREKK,” he

says. “Our technicians are not just working in a sewer — they are improving lives in the community. We want each employee to take that to heart.

“We improve lives by keeping the sewer from backing up into the basement, and keeping sewer from overflowing into waterways,” he continues. “Our employees firmly believe what they do is making a difference. We are getting the dirty water out of the house and getting clean water into the home. And we help provide safe roads for people to drive on. Those are things we stress at TREKK.

#### **DARE TO ENDEAVOR**

Trekk is excited about their research and development team, which looks at innovative solutions to help municipalities manage their systems cost-effectively, according to Robinett.

She says they started this new process about 18 months ago to offer information that would help visualize underground problems,



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Kimberly Robinett

particularly in situations where the city has challenges in spending money on things they cannot see.

They are finding the cities, particularly smaller communities with limited resources, to be very receptive to this new information TREKK can now provide.

Those involved in the project include GIS technicians, IT people and the partners.

Robinett says they have been pragmatic in their pursuit of expansion and growth.

“We have taken risks, both in opening new offices, in our hiring of personnel, but also in buying these massive trucks,” she says. “We have opened the regional offices and been able to identify key personnel in the new locations.”

Robinett believes there are opportunities for further expansion and growth in the firm’s wastewater division, and particularly so with cleaning and CCTV, and especially so because of their equipment and various capabilities.

“With our unique backgrounds, we have been in a position to provide solutions, and to impact the lives of those around us as we have realized and capitalized on the opportunities waiting for us in the wastewater industry.” **C**

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