

"People are relieved that we don't have to dig. We save their landscaping. They are not skeptical. The product and the process sell themselves. Customers get a job that has a minimum 50-year life expectancy. How can you pass that up?"

Perfecting the process

The customer gets a videotape showing every step of the process: the initial inspection, after the roots and debris have been cut out and the line jetted, and again when the liner is in place. Roots are cut with a K-1500 sewer machine from RIDGID for which McVay makes his own heads, using wire brushes he welds on with carbide. (His weekend hobby is working in his shop to develop more tools for his business.)

For jetter nozzles, McVay calls on Arthur Products. "We can go down at 3,000 psi, with the nozzle spinning and cleaning the pipe," he says. He buys camera skids from RABCO. As he has perfected the use of the Perma-Liner system, McVay found a way to adjust the equipment to do joint and spot repairs.



Members of the McVay Plumbing team include, from left, Dan Costa, registered plumber; Michael McVay, owner and master plumber; Barb McVay, office manager; Brad Plata, registered plumber; and Mike Heilmann, apprentice plumber.

"When we get to a job it's about an hour and a half to prep. We do everything in the field in our 22-foot trailer. We go in with the camera, jet the line, and then go through all the steps."

Michael McVay

"When we do our liners, we shoot within a quarter-inch of the main," he says. "I don't have to worry about what we do. We calculate the stretch on the liner and calculate the resin of the liner. We know exactly where we will stop before we shoot it. When we televise after we are done, we always find we hit it on the money. We don't shoot from the main back toward the house. We don't have to do that. We can account for where we will stop if we work from the house to the main."

Setting the standard

Much of the company's work is in the residential sector. Crews have lined from 30 feet to a record of 139 feet of 6-inch line. "That project went great, but it was a challenge, and a hard two hours for us," McVay says. "When we get to a job it's about an hour and a half to prep. We do everything in the field in our 22-foot trailer. We go in with the camera, jet the line, and then go through all the steps."

DIGGING ON THE DECLINE

As a shrewd operator, Michael McVay has found a profitable niche in CIPP lining. He has perfected the process and has established his company, McVay Plumbing, in the forefront of the industry in and around Pittsburgh.

The company has a 60- by 40-foot heated garage and a 12- by 40-foot office on a two-acre site that leaves plenty of room for equipment, but he needs much less space now than he used to.

Occasionally he needs items like a backhoe, trench boxes, trenching machines and dump trucks, as when he has to dig to fix a water main break, or handle some other emergency. But since his focus is on trenchless technology, those occasions are becoming rare. You'll never hear McVay complain, as he expands his customer base and refines the pipe lining process.

"With this particular job, we excavated a hole and shot a 4- to 6-inch transition liner under the driveway to the house. From that same hole we shot 139 feet of 6-inch liner under the grass, under the street, and 10 feet beyond, at a depth of 31 feet into the manhole. All we had to do was cut the stretch and we were done."

The new capabilities have attracted commercial customers, and the company also has contracts with two townships. These yearly maintenance agreements involve inspection, locating, repairs and lining.

"We were contacted by a firm in Atlanta to do a job on a federal building in Pittsburgh," McVay says. "The project initially was to inspect storm drains from the sixth and seventh floor to the basement."

There were cracks and leaks in 3-, 4- and 6-inch lines. McVay used the SeeSnake cameras to inspect them, using skids to center the cameras in the lines. The crew provided the client with a DVD with narration every step of the way. The inspection showed that all three lines needed repair. The crew ultimately lined a total of 137 feet, shooting liners from the sixth floor down. The total job took three days.

Expanding the footprint

McVay expects to grow the business by moving into other counties and townships around Allegheny County. He also keeps an eye open for new services he might add, attending the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo to check out new technology.

Until something catches his eye that is as good as CIPP lining, he plans to stick to his current program. However, he plans to add another employee and another lining trailer just to keep up with demand. "For me, it's not about the money," he says. "It's been so easy for the customers. It's a benefit, and we like the reputation we have. It's a win for everybody." ■

MORE INFO:

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McVay Plumbing team members, Michael McVay, owner and master plumber (standing); Mike Heilmann, apprentice plumber (left); and Brad Plata, registered plumber, deploy a calibration tube on pipe lining job using Perma-Liner technology. (Photography by Tom Fitzpatrick)



Above, Michael McVay, Mike Heilmann and Brad Plata clean a line with a RIDGID KJ-3000 jetter and a nozzle from Arthur Products. Right, Brad Plata introduces Perma-Liner resin into liner held by Michael McVay.



No Dig Means More Dough

After 20 years of dig-and-replace projects, a Pennsylvania plumber took a turn toward trenchless technology and saw a dramatic increase in business

By Marian Bond

For 20 years, replacing sewer lines was an important business sector for Michael McVay, owner of McVay Plumbing Company Inc. in Penn Hills, Pa.

In 2007, when McVay ventured into pipe lining, he hardly knew what to expect. He planned to enhance his bottom line and see growth in his customer base in the close-by city of Pittsburgh and the Allegheny County region.

“I saw this as something new that I would be the first in our area to offer,” he says. “I saw it as something I could provide to the customer that would save money and take less time and disruption. I had no idea it would be so prosperous for us. We started in February of 2007, and within three years we had completed 248 liners in the area we serve. This has changed revenue. Changed everything.”

Major shift

McVay settled on the Perma-Lateral system from Perma-Liner Industries

Inc. At the time, traditional line replacement accounted for 25 percent of his business. Today, cured-in-place pipe (CIPP) lining brings in 80 percent of revenue, and it continues to explode.

In 2010, McVay saw an opportunity to expand his territory into other adjoining counties. He offers some basic plumbing services, but lining is his mainstay, and he has retired much of the heavy equipment he once kept in his storage yard.

Beginning in May of 2010, lining work was scheduled for at least five days a week, and crews installed one or two liners per day. As a result, his people have become highly skilled. “Every municipality in the area knows that if there is a line to be shot, you have to call McVay,” he says. “We are the one they recommend. I don’t get my business from the Internet. It’s all word of mouth. It’s been fantastic.”

McVay got his foot in the door in upscale neighborhoods in communities like Fox Chapel, O’Hara, and Plum Borough, where 4-, 6- and 8-inch clay and terra cotta sewer pipes are up to 50 years old and need replacement. The com-

munities had experienced problems with other contractors who tried to make the repairs, and now McVay, with his track record of successful installations, dominates the scene.

“In these areas, when people want to sell a house, they have to complete a dye test,” says McVay. “They do this while the camera is in the wye connection of the main sewer, and if dyed water comes through that wye connection, the city knows the sewer is leaking and has to be repaired or replaced.

“We used to go in and dig. Sometimes the lines are 20 to 30 feet deep.

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Michael McVay

Now we go in, measure it up, camera it, clean it and shoot liners in place. There’s no digging anymore.”

Doing it right

McVay agreed to buy the Perma-Liner system if the company did the groundwork of getting the product approved by Allegheny County. Perma-Liner made it happen, and when the approval came through, McVay took several days of training with a Perma-Liner representative.

Then he went to work, initially completing one or two lining jobs per week. When prospective clients saw the price of trenchless lining versus digging – \$10,000 or less versus \$15,000 to \$20,000 – they appreciated the concept.

McVay has three SeeSnake push cameras from RIDGID (two mini cameras and one mainline system) and one crawler camera from Aries Industries Inc. The push cameras have transmitters in the camera heads to facilitate lo-

PROFILE

MCVAY PLUMBING COMPANY INC., PENN HILLS, PA.

OWNER:	Michael McVay	
FOUNDED:	1986	
EMPLOYEES:	4	
SERVICE AREA:	Pittsburgh and surrounding counties	
SPECIALTIES:	Trenchless sewer, water and gas line replacement, plumbing repairs	
ANNUAL REVENUE:	\$1 million plus	

cating. His jetter is a RIDGID KJ-3000 (3,000 psi/4 gpm), and he owns a NaviTrack II Locator from RIDGID.

His four service vehicles are Chevrolet 1-ton cargo vans – all white trucks with red lettering in which McVay takes great pride.

When he goes to sell a lining job, he takes a piece of clay pipe and gives a demonstration to show the customer what CIPP can accomplish. “I put my camera down at no charge,” he says. “I have to know what is in there – what I’m up against. Once I know that, I can give them an estimate as to cost.