

Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc.

Colville, Washington – Member Since 1971



Bert Vaagen and son Dean on a logging truck in the early 1960s.

Obstacles and challenges seem to bolster the determination of Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc. During struggles of the economy, log sales and other obstacles, they have found ways to continue to be productive and grow. A strong forest is vital to all concerned, for the individual homeowner, the community, at the sawmill and to the natural preservation of the environment. Duane and Russ Vaagen have found their call in life to be involved in all of these areas. When speaking with Duane he stated, “TPM has helped us over the years with various Human Resource programs, saving us time and dollars with labor, regulatory and compliance issues, attitude opinion surveys, safety programs and training, and political involvement. Debbie and I have developed lifetime friendships and adventures with TPM members.”

Four generations of Vaagens have worked in the lumber mill industry. Great-grandfather, Valmer Anderson ran a mill back in the 1920's. Bert & Bud Vaagen began the Squaw Creek mill that operated from 1952 until 1972 when a fire destroyed the operation. The mill was reopened in Colville, Washington in 1972. Duane Vaagen, President and CEO, began working in his father's mill in 1968. His son, Russ is the Vice-President, and a third generation mill owner and has worked in the mill since 1996. Duane's son Curtis works in the mill and his daughter Emily produces the company newsletter.

Duane and Russ work together on keeping the mill progressive and to optimize all of their forest resources. They are committed to restoring the forest by specializing in small logs. They utilize logs that come from overstocked and fire hazardous stands of timber. They improve forest health by thinning the forest and leaving behind a growing, ecologically sound forest that can be enjoyed and managed for future generations. The Vaagen's feel compelled to be involved in the communities where their mills operate. They want to manage the forest resources in such a way that it brings honor to the community and its residents. It is very important to keep in the forefront of every decision what the long-term effects and action will be. A win-win relationship can be created with all parties involved – the community, the employees, suppliers and customers.

The Colville mill has incorporated the use of the HewSaw to maximize the use of small logs and processing every part of each log. The HewSaws are a completely modern, computerized system that optimizes the end results of lumber produced from each log. That is a lot to think about, but the computerization is key. Once the logs are delivered to the mill, they are run through the merchandiser, which scales them for volume, checks for defects and analyzes them for shape and length, offering a separate solution for each log.



The Mill at Squaw Creek operated for twenty years, about 13 miles from Colville, Washington.

The mill was moved to Colville after a fire in 1972.



The crane, a P&H Portal Log Crane, is an amazing piece of equipment and makes moving logs efficient.

When a log reaches the mill, among the 100s of loads each day, a 127-foot portal crane offloads trucks and distributes the inventory into over thirty sorting bins. The bins represent species, diameter and product breakdown. If the logs are brought in at the preferred 53-foot, 6 inch size, they go to the long merchandiser, before landing in the appropriate bins for later delivery to the HewSaw. Each log is cross-referenced with various products that are made at the mill and compared to get the best utilization possible.

The mill specializes in dimension lumber that primarily consists of 2x4, 2x6 and 2x8 with random lengths from 8-foot to 20-foot with a tight grain that produces strong Machine Stress Rated (SMR) lumber. Other products from wood by-products include screened wood chips, hog fuel, beauty bark, shavings and sawdust.

Vaagen Brothers Lumber also includes the PVF mill in Usk, WA. The Usk operation specializes in 2x4s and provides stock for the Colville planer. Vaagen Brothers recently signed a 10-year lease with Boundary Sawmill in Midway, BC and plans to begin operations this fall. The mill had been idle for about three years, so opening will provide the community of Midway with a positive economic boost. The logs that will be milled at the Midway plant will originate in BC and after being run through the HewSaw some of the lumber will be sent to the Colville facility to be planed and turned into a finished product.

Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc. sells a large volume of finished product to an Australian client, so the lumber that originates in Midway, BC may end up as far away as Australia! The company is also looking into the Chinese market as the demand for lumber there is rising.



Aerial view of Vaagen Brothers Lumber located in Colville, Washington.



Aerial view of the PVF Mill in Usk, Washington

“TPM and the previous generations of Bennetts, Hitchcocks, Malloys and McFarlands, have provided me and others with rich history, leadership, wisdom and perseverance. It is impressive to belong to an organization with which you have been involved with for three generations of families. TPM has also allowed us to develop broad based relationships with people from various states over the last thirty years.” Duane said. Vaagen Brothers Lumber, Inc. is a long standing member of TPM, having joined the Association in 1971. Duane Vaagen was TPM Chairman of the Board from 1990-1992. Russ Vaagen is currently on the Board of Directors and a member of the Executive Committee.

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