

PROFILE

Crane Service, Inc.

When it comes to the construction of small- and large-scale wind farms, it's crucial to find a crane company that can provide efficient and safe services. Crane Service, Inc. is one such company.

By Anna Claire Howard

Founded in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1960, Crane Service, Inc., a subsidiary of M-L Holdings Company Crane Group, has served as a leading crane services provider for the heavy-rigging industry. In 1996, the company propelled itself into the wind industry through its partnership with the Zond Corporation of California, which was acquired by Enron Wind Systems in 1997 and later bought out by GE in 2001.

Bob Warianka, the business development manager, started working for Crane Service, Inc. in 1996, which was also when the company worked on its first wind turbine in Fort Davis, south of Sweetwater, Texas.

"We did a small 65-meter turbine for them," Warianka said. "Then, we found out that what we like doing in the wind industry is the maintenance. Competition is a little tough there on the new projects. We didn't have enough cranes to supply a huge project and put a big wind farm together, but we did have enough supply and services to do the maintenance end of it."

So, that's what they did. Crane Service, Inc. has become a leader in the industry by specializing in operated crane rentals and



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The Manitowoc 2250, a 300-ton crawler crane, hoists a wind turbine rotor in a wind park in Texas. The rotor, hub, and blades weigh around 90,000 pounds.

services. Those services include lifting components to the crews on-site and facilitating their ability to perform inspections and maintenance to the turbines.

"The services that we do and have done in the past include blade inspection, so we can hoist a man basket so that the crews can check the surface and leading edge of the blades where wildlife may have hit it or some other

natural element such as lightning, rain, or hail has struck the blade," said Chris Martin, marketing coordinator at M-L Holdings Company Crane Group.

Martin also said that they can hoist down the rotor assembly itself so the maintenance crews can change out blades or service the hub.

"You see a lot of gearboxes and yaw drives or motors being

changed out, and that will actually rotate the nacelle,” Martin said. “There’s a lot of different work that these wind turbines require, and we’re here to help make that work happen.”

According to Warianka, for small, light loads, Crane Service, Inc. may even provide transportation in an over-the-road truck to help the customer move the transformer around their yard.

“We don’t do the heavy haul for the nacelle or the long blade haul that requires a specialized trailer, but we do help them on stuff that is a legal load that we can haul,” Warianka said.

“Our crews are definitely efficient and fast and do great work,” Warianka said. “We come in, do the job, replace whatever they need — whether it be the generator itself, a gearbox, a blade, or whatever component they need lifted — get in and out efficiently for the customer, and move on to the next site.”

Crane Service, Inc.’s massive fleet of cranes varies from all-terrain cranes and boom trucks to forklifts and rigging systems. Its equipment also ranges from 8.5- to 550-ton lifting loads.

In the last 20 years, Crane Service, Inc. has made its mark in the wind energy industry by supplying crawler cranes to wind farm owners and manufacturers and assisting in the installation of more than 30 wind farm projects and towers.

One example of the company’s role in the wind industry was with the Trent Wind Farm, also known as the Trent Mesa Wind Project — the first wind farm Crane Service, Inc. completed in 2001. Trent Mesa is a 150-MW wind power plant in West Texas that utilizes 100 turbines each rated at 1.5 MW.



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The Manitowoc 16000, a 440-ton crawler crane, hoists a wind turbine rotor in a wind park in northern Texas. The rotor, hub, and blades weigh around 95,000 pounds.

Crane Service, Inc. has also completed maintenance work at the Judith Gap Wind Farm, one of Montana’s largest wind projects with 90 80-meter turbines, as well as the Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center, one of the world’s largest

wind farms located in Taylor and Nolan counties, Texas.

More recently, Martin said that the company has partnered with Infigen Energy, an owner, operator, and developer of utility-scale renewable energy projects in



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The Grove GMK7550 550-ton crane

the U.S. and Australia, to install vibration-monitoring technology in their gearboxes to determine when the components would fail.

“They were reporting that five of their towers were about to fail, and they had no idea when that was going to happen,” Martin said. “It could be tomorrow, eight months from now, or two years from now, but they know that they’re at that stage in life where they could be failing. We went out there with a crane we had just purchased and were able to lift their whole rotor assembly off, drop it to the ground, change out the gearbox, and do all of their maintenance work for them.

The customer came back and was impressed that we were able to acquire this equipment for their job and get it done since all of our other cranes were currently on rent with other wind projects or other construction projects.”

One of Crane Service, Inc.’s greatest strengths is its location. Its crane services span across the entire Southwest with locations in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Amarillo, Texas; Aztec, New Mexico; Sweetwater, Texas; and El Paso, Texas. The company has assisted with and completed projects in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Iowa, and Idaho and has worked as far north as Colorado.

According to Warianka, the amount of experience Crane Service, Inc. brings to the table also sets it apart from some of its competitors in the wind industry.

“We’re a growing company and a young company, but we’re reliable and we provide the best service with the most modern fleet of cranes,” Warianka said. “We’re open to new ideas all the time, and we’re looking for people to join our group. We have a really good team here, and we have employees who are third generation working here. We’re really proud of that. I’ve been here 19-plus years, and I wish I had come here sooner. It’s a great place to work.”

As for the future, Martin said Crane Service, Inc. is prepared to serve the growing wind industry.

“We have many projects lined up near the end of the year and early next year for wind park work,” Martin said. “Our crawler crane fleet, large hydraulic cranes, and lattice boom cranes are constantly performing maintenance and construction on wind parks throughout the Southwest.

“We see new projects in the works, and we’re still doing maintenance, of course, because even when you see a decline in new parts or new sites, you still have thousands of turbines that need to be serviced regularly as they’re coming out of contract,” Martin said. “For us, it looks good.”

Warianka shares Martin’s optimism for the future of the wind energy industry and Crane Service, Inc.’s role in it.

“They’re building new wind farms every day, and the technology is increasing,” Warianka said. “They’re finding out what’s the most reasonable to run a wind farm and what can make it a cheaper energy for everyone to live on. Wind is a green, free, and renewable source of energy. It’s not going away.”



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The Liebherr LR1300SX, a 330-ton crawler crane, hoists a crew to prepare the wind blade to be removed. The crane ultimately will hoist the rotor to the ground so that the gearbox can be replaced.