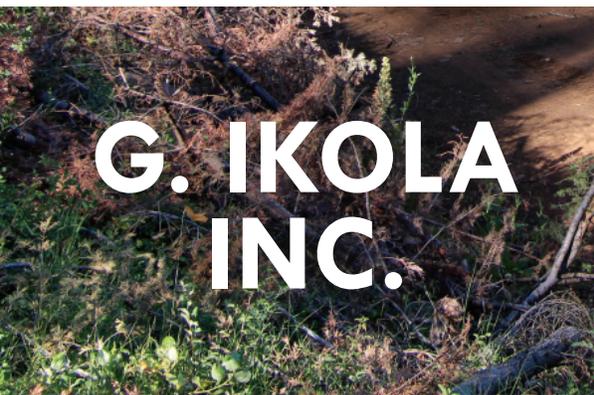




SLICE OF LIFE:



G. IKOLA  
INC.



Photo courtesy G. Ikola Inc.

## MANAGING FORESTS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

By McKenzie Kraemer

This past September, McCall's G. Ikola Inc. Logging Company was named the 2017 Logging Business of the Year by Timber Harvesting Magazine. "It was a big surprise to us," says President Gerry Ikola. "We had no idea anything like this was in the works." According to Timber Harvesting Magazine, the Ikola Logging Company was chosen for their "long-term performance, exemplary integrity and outreach efforts."

This praise extends to the entire Ikola team, a third generation family business. George Ikola, Gerry's father, grew up in McCall and worked at the saw mill. "The mill was such a central part of McCall and a lot of people got their start there," says Gerry. In 1947, George had an opportunity to go into business for himself, starting G. Ikola Inc. Gerry took over management of the company in the 1970s with his wife Capella and today, their three children, Erika, Gerry Jr., and Gabe, play integral roles in the operation.

Erika has taken on more of the bookkeeping and business management work, although she is no stranger to working in the woods alongside her father and brothers. Gerry Jr. runs the cable skidding crew as an experienced equipment operator. Gabe also holds a variety of positions, now focusing on running the grinder crew. "As a parent, I am so proud that they all get along so well," says Capella. "That is not always the case and it is really special that they have a mutual respect for one another and always try to understand things from each other's perspectives."

Mutual respect is a concept that has many applications for the Ikola family. As a logging contractor, one of the biggest challenges they face is public perception. "Many people aren't familiar with how our business works," says Erika. "As a contractor, we don't just decide to go into the woods and cut down any tree we want." Instead, the method of forest management is chosen by land managers, down to the exact trees selected for harvest, and then contractors like Ikola are hired to carry out the harvest plan.

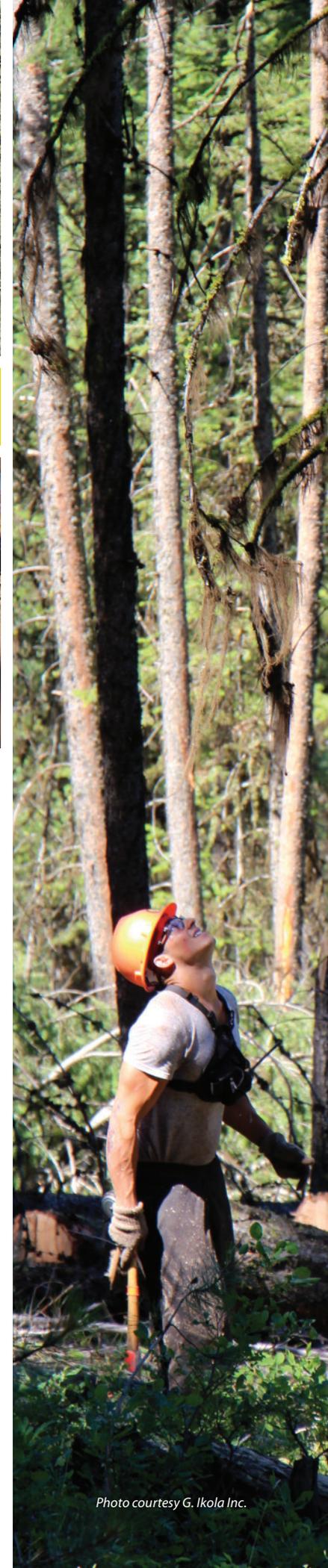


Photo courtesy G. Ikola Inc.



A big part of Ikola's business is working with land managers like the Payette National Forest to actively manage forests through selective harvest. The goal of this type of logging operation is to thin forests to help prevent catastrophic forest fires. At the same time, this also creates recreation access points for the public. "If you were to take someone to a forest that had never been logged and then to one that had been logged and ask them which area they would rather recreate in, very few would choose the untouched forest," says Capella. "You just can't get into it."

In addition to their typical contracts, Ikola Logging has also been very involved in several projects that directly benefit recreationalists in the area. Ikola was the contractor who cleared the area for the ski lifts at Tamarack Resort and is also actively working with the Forest Service to thin the area around Bear Basin for fire mitigation. "Stewardship contracts are starting to involve a lot more than logging," says Erika. "Many contracts also include hand pruning and piling brush to make areas look like a park. We have also done everything from installing signage and gates to concrete outhouses in recreational areas."

As part of the changing landscape of the logging industry, Ikola has been working hard to recognize new methods and integrate them to improve operations in an environmentally sensitive manner. "One of the biggest resources we are always working to protect is water," says Gerry. To do this, Ikola uses a machine unique to Central Idaho. Crews will go into an area on foot to fall a tree. Once the trees are down, Ikola then uses a Cat with a tong-throwing attachment to collect the timber. "This allows us to stay a safe distance away from creeks and other water sources as well as ensure that there are no tracks or trails left behind," says Gerry.

Another new addition to the Ikola arsenal is a grinding machine. In the past, slash piles from logging operations were burned each fall. "Our grinding machine turns slash into

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Pictured left to right: Gerry Jr., Caesar the German Shepherd, Gerry Sr., Capella, Erika, Gabe, Nina the German Shepherd

wood chips that are then hauled to the mill," says Capella. "This reduces the need to burn and means a lot less wood smoke in the air which reduces the carbon footprint."

The modernization of the timber industry also means that technology plays a large role in forest management. "It may surprise people to know that just about every acre of forest you see driving through the valley has been harvested not once, but twice in a lot of cases," says Gerry. "There are now sophisticated computer modeling applications that enable us to make accurate predictions on what we can safely harvest to sustain a forest indefinitely." This type of sustainable management means that there are now more trees growing in the forests surrounding McCall than there were 70 years ago.

"McCall is probably one of the most diverse areas in Idaho," says Gerry. The combination of high mountain lakes, scenery, ski mountains and recreational opportunities attract a lot of visitors on the tourism side. However, the area also has strong industry with farming, ranching, mining, logging and sawmilling. "I have always thought that is our strength as a community." And that strength continues to grow. Ikola employs between 20 and 100 people depending on demand who call the McCall area home.



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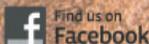
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