



LOCAL LUMBERJACKS FEATURED IN LATEST SEASON OF HISTORY CHANNEL SERIES

## Montana Ax Men

By Dillon Tabish, 1-02-12

A group of Kalispell-based lumberjacks is one of six crews featured on the upcoming fifth season of "Ax Men," a highly rated reality show on the History Channel. The new season begins airing on Jan. 8. A producer with the show said the crew from Siderius Logging would be introduced around the fifth episode in early February.

"We were really excited to go to Montana this year," said Sarah Whalen, an executive producer with the show's production company, Original Productions. "The style of logging is different than other areas. We knew it would be very dramatic and difficult logging ... We wanted to see how the crews were able to handle their environment in that terrain."

The Ax Men film crew followed the lively group from Siderius Logging for six weeks last fall as it harvested timber in the Swan Valley southeast of Flathead Lake. Dan Siderius started the logging excavation company three years ago, which presented an intriguing dynamic, Whalen said.

"Whenever you have a young company like that with a lot at stake it's interesting to follow them," she said.

The press release for the new season describes the group in a much more colorful manner.

"Still struggling to find its way, Siderius Logging is an outfit with a lot to prove and the egos to do it: over-talkative yarder operator Josh Fite, rigging slinger Travis Reynolds, hook tender Drew Koffler, and greenhorn Jesse Kelleher."

Whalen said the show's goal from the beginning has been to showcase the logging industry and its rich heritage by following crews in different regions across the country as they brave the dangers of harvesting timber.

"A lot of our shows focus on the blue-collar heroes," she said. "This (show) is very much in line with the high-risk, high-reward programming that we do."

Ax Men has become one of the most popular series for the History Channel and Original Productions, which currently has 14 series playing on seven channels, including the hit shows "Deadliest Catch" and "Ice Road Truckers." Last season's Ax Men was the highest rated yet, averaging 2.8 million total viewers.

This season will feature logging companies across the country, from Washington to Florida and back to Montana. Ax Men has previously filmed in the state; Season 2 traveled to the Bitterroot and featured R&R Conner Aviation, which does helicopter logging.



Caption: Cameraman Thomas Backer (left) jokes around with cast member Jesse Kelleher between filming the new season of "Ax Men." Local lumberjacks are featured in the History Channel show starting Jan. 8. - Contributed photo

Producers were searching for new rugged terrain to capture on film and Northwest Montana stood out as an obvious destination, Whalen said.

Logging has a rich history in the Flathead Valley dating back to the first settlers and is still an important source of income for many businesses like Siderius.

Producers typically find crews for upcoming seasons by cold calling businesses or organizations around the country. Someone recommended the local company and once staff members from Original Productions flew to Montana and met the Kalispell team, they knew they found what they were looking for, Whalen said.

“We were just crazy about the crew at Siderius,” she said. “The group of guys on the crew were young and very charismatic.”

Once producers decided Siderius was a perfect fit, they worked alongside the state’s film office going through the approval process with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to film on location. With “great” support from the governor’s office, the production was given the green light and the film crew was shipped to Bigfork where it stayed throughout production.

Attempts to contact Siderius Logging were unsuccessful.

Whalen was not able to be on location for filming but said she kept hearing from the film crew about the enjoyable time spent in Big Sky Country.

“They all said it was a great experience,” she said. “One of the things they said is that everyone in Montana was so friendly.”

And the results of their time spent in the Flathead Valley are definitely worth seeing, Whalen said.

“I absolutely think this is our strongest season yet,” she said. “The show has continued to grow in popularity and ratings. This season will continue with that trend. There’s more action and more comedy than we’ve ever had on this show.” **[End of article]**

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