

AMERICAN TOWMAN

The Road Calls

Treetop Cessna *Expert Recovery*

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a Statistic

STEEL
Chain
Basics

Improving
the Hiring
Process

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Cutting through heavy woods to recover a small plane trapped high above the ground required the experts at Mike's Towing. *by Jim "Buck" Sorrenti*



Mike's Towing & Recovery in Bridgewater, New Jersey, were called out for a Cessna in the treetops.

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by Dom Galdo and Chris Young



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2019 AT Expo Recap

In the 31st Expo's one-year return to Atlantic City, towers from around the country and the world turned out in force for a look at the newest products and tools, networking, education, awards and recognition.



First on the scene since 1977



Treed AND Freed

by Jim "Buck" Sorrenti



**Expert Jersey tower
coordinates the recovery
of an airplane**



The Cessna was transported out of the wooded area and set onto MTR's Landoll.

Recovery is a process. Sometimes the process requires one operator and one wrecker, but sometimes it requires much more. On Sept. 25, 2019, Mike's Towing & Recovery in Bridgewater, New Jersey, was called by the Central Jersey Regional Airport requesting that he handle the complete recovery of a single-engine Cessna 172 airplane that had crashed the day before.

A 32-year-old pilot was on his way to the airport in Hillsborough when the Cessna 172, owned by Tri-State Aviation, suffered an engine stall and crashed into the trees. The pilot was stuck in the trees about 75' up for about four hours before Keiling Tree Care, could rescue him. The plane remained suspended about 75' up on State Park Commission land for about three days.

MTR owner Mike Sena was the go-to guy to coordinate this difficult recovery situation. He spent a day meeting with the proper subcontractors at the crash site to see who would be able to do what he needed when he needed. Once the companies involved agreed, all heavy equipment needed, including two large excavators, a Caterpillar 325 excavator with bucket and a Cat 333 with clamp attachment, as well as a Cat D6 dozer, were brought to the site after hours. MTR also brought in a 2014 Peterbilt 388 tractor and 2017 Landoll trailer.

At 7 a.m. on Sept. 26, the crews were in full swing road cutting and land clearing and they did not stop until a road was complete and the site was cleared of obstructing trees and brush. Besides the heavy equipment, there were five men with chainsaws dropping ▶



Once on the ground, the rigging was removed from the plane and it was re-rigged with straps.


Author's note: Many thanks to MTR operators Gene Meeks and Rich Weinreich for the outstanding photos and to Joyce Powers for providing much needed additional information on this recovery.



A full day of road-cutting preceded the recovery clear a path to get all the needed equipment on-scene.

trees to be cleared with the machines.

"This particular recovery proved to be a challenge due to the heavily wooded area where the plane went down," Sena said. "After waiting for the FAA and NTSB inspection, we had the entire land cleared in a single day. Under normal circumstances this would have been a two-day job minimum.



Whether it was the person
high in the tree line
or those on the ground, we
had everyone covered.

"This was a very time-sensitive recovery because the park police could not leave the location until the plane was recovered and off of the property. Police were stationed there 24/7."

Sena was lead supervisor on scene; other MTR operators responding included Gene Meeks, Dirk Beasley and Rich Weinreich. All necessary equipment was scheduled to arrive at 8:30 a.m. on Friday, Sept. 27. MTR's 2020 Peterbilt 389 tractor with sleeper hooked to a 2019 Landoll 440 rolled in carrying his Gehl 552 all-terrain extendable reach forklift. The Landoll would also be used to transport the plane to hangar no. 7 at the airport. MTR's 2006

Peterbilt 335/Century 3212 16-ton medium-duty wrecker arrived pulling the 18' Featherlite recovery trailer. This trailer was equipped with everything that might be needed for any recovery situation: straps, shackles, clevis pins, chainsaws, etc.

"Perhaps the most important pieces in the trailer are the safety radio headsets used on all recovery jobs," Sena said. "We have [eight] sets of Sonetics wireless headsets. These proved invaluable throughout the entire recovery process. Every person on scene had a headset on and was able to communicate with one another. Whether it was the person high in the tree line or those on the ground, we had everyone covered. For safety reasons everyone was in constant total communication. This absolutely helped make a smoother and faster recovery.

"The 50-ton truck-mounted crane with a 135-foot stick was also setting up, so we had the crane and our 135-foot shooting boom truck on one side and Keiling Tree Care's specialized 8748 spider articulating 85-foot boom lift remote-control track machine on the other side."


Once everything was in place, the airport was shut down, the boom on the crane was extended to 135', all straps were installed for safe lifting and the plane was safely lifted off and out of the trees, boomed around and set gently on the ground. The airport was called and given the OK to re-open.

Once on the ground, the rigging was removed from the plane and it was re-rigged with straps,

transported out of the wooded area and carried out to the roadway via the Cat 333 excavator and set onto MTR's Landoll. The casualty was properly strapped down and transported back to the CJRA.

The Gehl 552 all-terrain extendable reach forklift was brought to the airport and the plane was lifted off of the Landoll, set on the ground and pushed into hangar no. 7 for investigation.

"We contracted, managed and coordinated all the subcontractors required for a successful and professional recovery," Sena said. "Thank you to Adamsville Maintenance, Skyhigh Erectors, Keiling Tree Care, Central Jersey Regional Airport, FAA, Park Police, Manville Police, Park Commission, Flemington-Raritan First Aid and Rescue Squad, the crew at Mike's Towing & Recovery and anyone we may have forgotten.

"Without the cooperation of all these organizations, this job could not have been done. It was truly a team effort." 



About Mike's Towing & Recovery

Mike Sena started out in 1980 single-handedly repairing cars in a small shop in Bridgewater, New Jersey. Over the past four decades, Mike's Auto Service, a state-of-the-art repair shop, has evolved with the addition of Mike's Towing & Recovery and Mike's Fuel Delivery, an off-road diesel fuel delivery service.

Along with these new ventures came state-of-the-art equipment including light-, medium- and heavy-duty tow trucks, 50-ton rotators, tractors, trailers, forklifts and a knuckle-boom crane. The team at Mike's continually attends ongoing training.

February 2020 marks the 40th anniversary of Mike's start in Somerset County; his companies now employ some 40 employees, including his two children.