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March 2008
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PORTABLE RESTROOM OPERATOR



Taking Care of Business

Customer service is top job
for D.C. restroom contractor

Page 18

What's an Eelpout?

Minnesota PRO serves festival
honoring ugly ice-fishing catch

Page 26

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 10 From the Editor: Getting Down With Upgrades**
Here are a few suggestions to improve your portable restrooms for the coming busy season.
- Jim Kneiszel
- 14 Back at the Office: Don't Let the "R" Word Get You Down**
People still do business during a recession; just make sure they are doing business with you!
- Judy Kneiszel
- 18 PROfile: Taking Care of Business**
A customer service emphasis keeps J & J Portables on the move in a Washington, D.C., market crowded with portable sanitation providers.
- Mary Shafer
- COVER STORY**
- 26 On Location: Fishy Business**
Minnesota's ice-bound Eelpout Festival provides a significant cold weather restroom service challenge.
- Dee Goerge
- 32 Think Tank: Click & Deliver**
PROs share thoughts on when to move to inventory tracking software.
- Mary Shafer
- 34 Truck Corner: Smoking Pump Has Him Steamed**
Look for several common root causes when your vacuum pump begins to smolder.
- Bob Carlson & Jerry Kirkpatrick
- 37 Industry News**
- 38 PRO Forum Chatter: Baby, It's Cold Outside**
About this time of year, PROs fed up with cold weather issues aren't afraid to share their frustration.
- 40 Product News**
- 41 PRO Business: Silence Isn't Always Golden**
Frequent customer feedback will help you improve service and build a stronger clientele.
- Steve Washburn
- 42 Employee Motivation is Job One**
Four steps to raise the level of enthusiasm and feeling of job satisfaction among your workforce.
- George Hedley



ON THE COVER

Bucky Bennett pauses to chat with driver Ron Watson in the J & J Portables yard in Huntingtown, Md. (Photo by August Selckmann)

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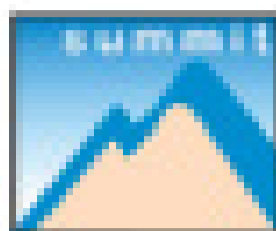












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- **PROfile:** Site Services are a critical part of this PRO's business
- **On Location:** New York market creates numerous urban challenges

COMPANY	PAGE	COMPANY	PAGE	COMPANY	PAGE	COMPANY	PAGE
A		G		M		R	
 Abernethy Welding & Repair ..33		Gamajet Cleaning Systems17		Mid-Continent Truck Sales.12		 Ritam Technologies LP.....12	
 Armstrong Equipment Inc.....22		H		Milton Foss.....40		Ronco Plastics12	
B		Hampel Corp.....2		 Moro USA East Inc.....8		S	
BEST Enterprises Inc.23		J		N		Screen Graphics of Florida35	
Black Tie Manufacturing31		J.C. Cury Company Inc.38		 NuConcepts15		Screen Tech/Div. of Roeda.....6	
C		L		P		T	
Cole Screenprint Inc.16		L.C. Tanks.....8		 PolyJohn Enterprises9		 Toico Industries.....15	
 Comforts of Home22		L.M.T. Inc.16		 PolyPortables Inc.4, 13, 29		 TSF Co. Inc.47	
D		Lely Manufacturing Inc.....37		W		W	
Del Vel Chemical11		Liberty Financial Group Inc. ..28		 Wells Cargo COG.....12		Classifieds & PRO Shop44	
Drop Box8		M					
E		Marketplace46					
 Earth Friendly Chemicals ..24-25		Deal Associates Inc.					
EZTrakR38		Great Lakes Bio Systems Inc.					
		J & J Chemical Co.					
		PTLoader					
		StarTronics Solar Lighting					
		Water Cannon Inc.					
		Marsh Industrial11					
		Micro Target Media.....5					
		R					
		R. F. Mattie & Associates Inc.....6					

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Turning the Pages

Scour the pages of PRO™ for the following entertaining and informative features that will help boost the bottom line for your portable sanitation business:

On Location grabs a tip-up and a cold malt beverage at the 29th Annual Eelpout Festival on Leech Lake near Walker, Minn. That's where you'll find Rick and Brenda Smith's company, Northland Septic Maintenance Inc., servicing portable restrooms at a frozen temporary city populated by 10,000 to 20,000 partiers. Only a small percentage of the revelers are also ice fishing for the eelpout, a freshwater burbot, known for its ugly looks and great-tasting flesh. Learn how the contractors deal with the cold weather and find out why drivers stopped delivering and servicing units hauled onto the frozen lake.

From the Editor suggests several restroom upgrades you can make to offer fresh advantages that could set you apart from the competition this summer. Are there steps you can take to truly upgrade the user experience for the no-frills guy working a construction site? Can a minor alteration to an event restroom prompt a woman with children at the county fair to seek out organizers and compliment them on the bathroom facilities? Editor Jim Kneiszel thinks so.

Truck Corner authors Bob Carlson and Jerry Kirkpatrick explain why one steamed contractor's vacuum pump started smoking while in the care of his hardworking driver. The writers are skeptical when the contractor says his employee reported the pump started smoking one day when nothing had changed from successful operating conditions the day before. "If everything was the same as the previous time, there would have been no smoke, the pumping would have been done and another successful day of work would have been accomplished," they write. "Somewhere between the last working day and the smoking day, something changed." Carlson and Kirkpatrick think they have the answers.

DECALS

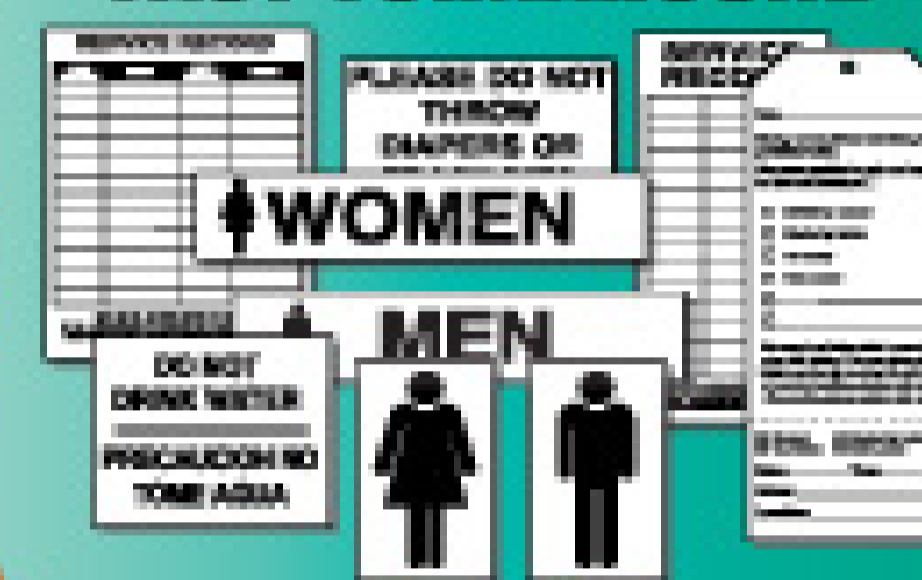


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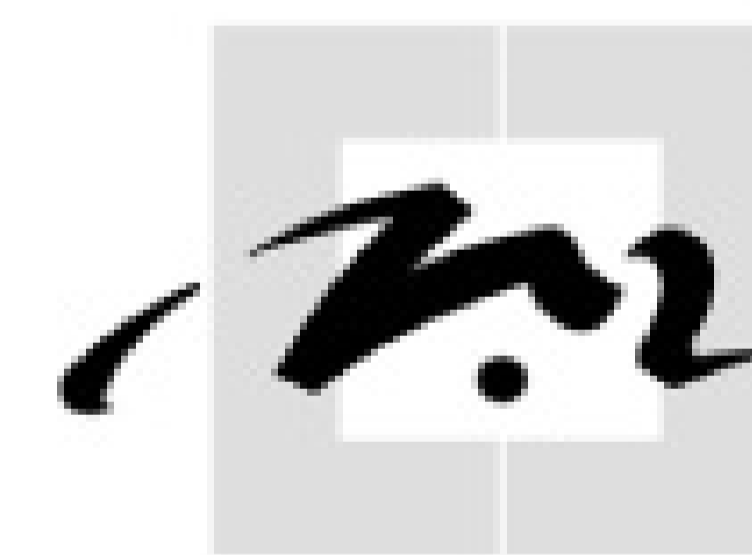
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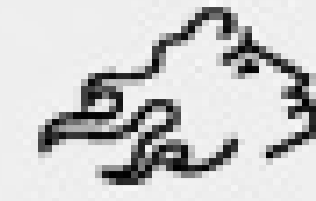
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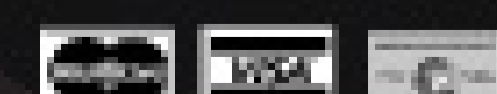
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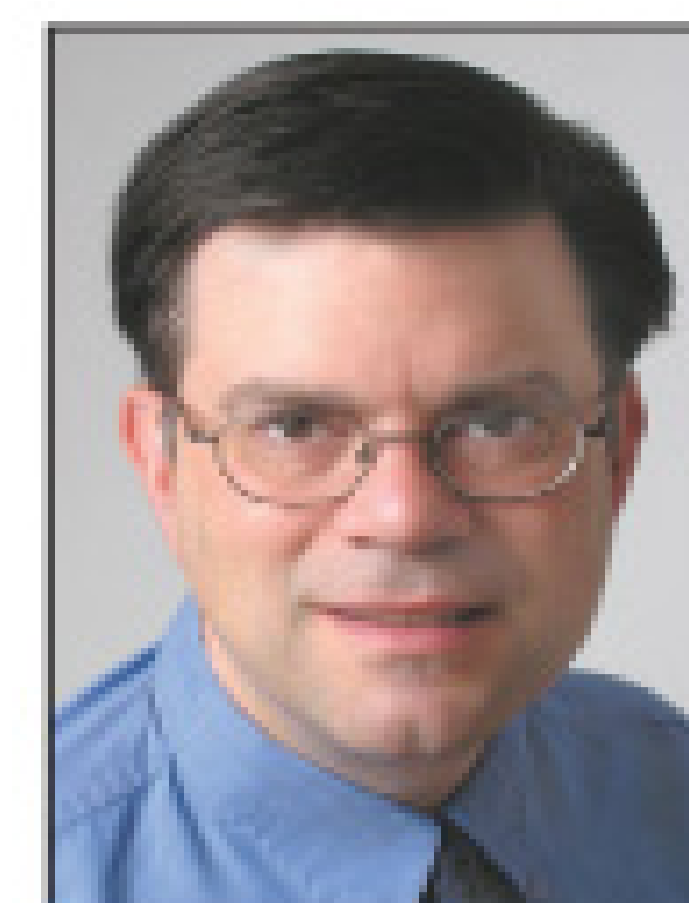
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Getting Down with Upgrades

Here are a few suggestions to improve your portable restrooms for the coming busy season

By Jim Kneiszel

Real estate experts will tell you that some home remodeling jobs or expensive luxury items provide the best return on investment when you sell the property. They say would-be buyers are impressed with a new kitchen or bathroom, while that hot tub in the back yard or your wild new shag carpeting might not generate the same market frenzy.

Can the same be said for your portable restroom inventory? Are there steps you can take to truly upgrade the user experience for the no-frills guy working a construction site? Can a minor alteration to an event restroom prompt a woman with children at the county fair to seek out organizers and compliment them on the bathroom facilities?

I think so.

Just like home-remodeling experts come out with an annual list of the projects with the biggest investment payoff, I'd like to present my first list of changes you can make to impress users and generate more business. There is nothing scientific about this list; it's simply the result of talking to PROs all year long about the little enhancements they make that draw the biggest positive reaction. If you want to add to my list or take issue with a suggestion, please let me know. With your input, we can improve the list and refine user preferences for 2009.

Without further adieu, here's *Jim's 2008 Top 10 Restroom Improvement List:*

1 More square footage: Elbowroom is something your construction customers can never have too much of. Just like homebuyers today want a three-car garage, so too do construction workers want room to maneuver in a restroom. The guys are bigger nowadays. Workers carry a lot of expensive specialty tools and safety equipment that they might not want to leave laying around unattended outside the restroom. Consider whether you can offer a basic enhanced-access unit for construction site use. These units could come in handy to meet ADA requirements for other customers.

2 Scent-sational odor control: Experiment with a variety of deodorants to find the ones that best match your needs based on climate and pumping intervals. You might be surprised to find different scents and brands provide optimal odor protection in different situations and different times of the year. If you haven't done a comparison in a while, consider asking several deodorant companies for samples and compare them side-by-side when you set up several units at one event. Then ask the event organizers if they have a preference.

3 A solid foundation:

A rickety restroom on a construction site isn't exactly a confidence-builder for muscle-bound users. Go through your inventory this spring and look for wobbly panels, weak springs and sloppy skids. Stock up on replacement parts and rivets and get to work reinforcing all units so you don't have to worry about maintenance during the busy season.

Just like homebuyers today want a three-car garage, so too do construction workers want room to maneuver in a restroom. The guys are bigger nowadays. Workers carry a lot of expensive specialty tools and safety equipment that they might not want to leave laying around unattended outside the restroom.

4 Gender-specific units: Women the world over issue a sigh of relief when they walk up to a bank of restrooms and find units earmarked for their discriminating use. You can easily make this change with your existing inventory. For women's units, first remove all urinals. Add hooks, mirrors and shelves inside. Badge them specifically for women.

5 More bathroom tissue: Upsizing tissue dispensers has been a positive trend in recent years. Unless you've had trouble with users routinely wasting tissue, bolting in bigger dispensers makes a lot of sense. Going from a two-roll to a three-roll dispenser may extend the time between servicing and ensure a positive experience for more users.

6 Baby changing units: Buy a few ADA or large units, install a baby-changing table and have them available for use at festivals. You may be surprised to see your special events customers buy into placing these specialty units based on requests from families that frequent the events. Be sure to provide a wastebasket outside the unit for diapers. Consider offering sanitary wipes and placing hand sanitizers inside the units. Adequate ventilation is also an obvious issue.

7 Sanitizers and sinks: Someday soon, I think even your least-discerning construction customers will demand better sanitation. When it comes right down to it, nobody should have to use a restroom and then settle in for a lunch break without washing their hands. Whether you place sanitizer dispensers or sinks in the unit or order stand-alone options outside of the

unit, a time will come soon when hand-cleaning options will be demanded by customers or mandated by government regulation.

8 Interior lighting: With an increase in nighttime events and commercial construction customers who might work past the daytime shift, interior lighting is something you might want to offer as a standard feature. You can achieve this with simple battery-operated tap lights that stick to the wall in the unit or electric lights that require an extension cord. Or if you live in a sunny locale, consider solar lighting options that offer a convenient green answer to remote power needs.

9 Better signage: Do you want users to believe you're serious about cleanliness? Add signage inside and out of your units including a cell phone number where users can instantly report an overused restroom. While you're at it, upgrade your stickers with a more distinctive look or professionally produced logo to make a more inviting unit.

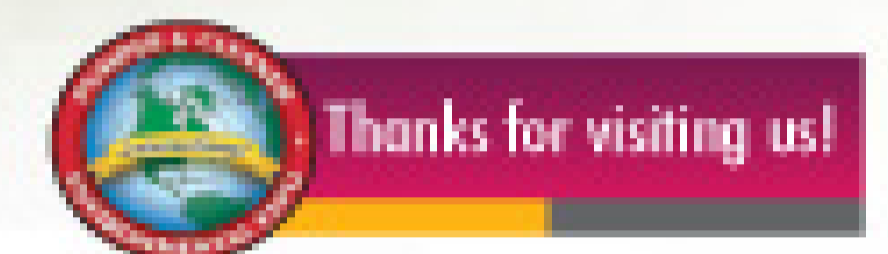
10 More frequent service: Nothing, I mean NOTHING, turns off portable restroom users more than walking into a unit filled nearly to the top of the waste tank. The most obvious answer to this problem is making sure special events are monitored closely and full units are taken out of service. If you can't add units to the order, make sure you find a way to clean more frequently. In the future, you might also place a priority on larger holding tanks when you add to inventory. ■

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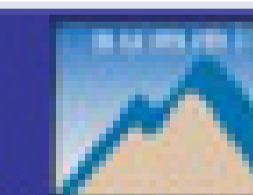
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Writer Judy Kneiszel has operated her own small business for a decade and is familiar with the many rewards and challenges of business ownership. Write to her with questions, comments or topic suggestions at thewordhouse@ameritech.net.

Don't Let the 'R' Word Get You Down



**People still do business during a recession;
just make sure they are doing business with you!**

By Judy Kneiszel

Unless you've cut yourself off from all media for several months, you know that economists, journalists and even some politicians are throwing the word "recession" around. The weak dollar, rising energy costs, the subprime mortgage crisis ... all seem to add up to a downturn.

Recession is defined as an extended decline in business activity, but extended can mean anywhere from two to six consecutive months or more depending on whom you ask. And the severity and length of a recession will vary by region. Weathering the current economic storm may require some creative thinking. Here are some strategies that can help as you try to make your business recession-proof:

LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES

Your staff are the eyes and ears of the company. They are out in the field every day experiencing how the economy is affecting the company and the customers. If you have treated employees fairly in the past they will be willing to help the company through the tough times. If you come up with a plan to deal with difficult times but keep it a secret from employees, morale will drop, making the situation worse. When dealing with a slowdown, take a team approach so your employees know you are all in business together. Brainstorm with staff for money-saving suggestions. Ask employees for input and ideas. Seriously consider their thoughts on route consolidation, areas where you can extend coverage and ways to save money.

THE CUSTOMER IS KING

It is crucial during tough times to keep the customers you

If and when there is a downturn in your local economy, focus on the long term. Don't panic and make hasty decisions. If the foundation of a business is strong, it should be able to stand up against the winds of a recession.

have, but you may have to work harder than ever to make them happy. Don't slash service or cut the quality of supplies just to save a few pennies. That might push customers to leave you for a company that offers more for their money. Put yourself in the customer's shoes. The economy is as tough for them as it is for you. Be willing to work out a flexible payment plan for them. Try to lock them into longer service contracts

whenever possible. Throw them a few bones in order to keep their business.

KNOW WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Watch every penny. Search for ways to save money on office long distance service, Internet, company cell phone service, office supplies and utilities. Consolidate suppliers where you can if it will save you money.

MANAGE CASH FLOW

In good times you can carry slow-paying customers on your books without much difficulty, but in lean times this can put a lot of stress on the business. It's not going to mean much to your creditors when you show them how much money customers owe you. They want to see the actual money. It's not fun, but spend more time on collections. Be aware of who owes what and be persistent in your billing. Work out payment schedules with slow remitters if necessary to keep some cash flowing in.

WATCH THE DEBT

Think twice about taking on any unnecessary debt in an uncertain business climate. And if you have debt, don't make the banker your enemy. Work with lenders to find ways of making payments affordable. Keep them abreast on how business is going. They'd rather work with you through a slump than get a phone call out of the blue that your company is sunk.

DON'T NEGLECT MARKETING

If all things are equal when money is tight, customers will choose the lowest price, so you've got to make sure all things are not viewed as equal. You've got to stress what makes your business unique. Show customers that you offer something others don't. Make yourself indispensable to customers. While you may be cutting discretionary spending out of your own budget you don't want customers to view YOU as discretionary.

INVEST IN SALES

Ignoring sales and blaming a downturn in business on the poor economy creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. People still do business during a recession. The whole world doesn't grind to a halt. You may just have to try harder and that means sell harder. Build a referral reward system where existing customers earn a discount by bringing you a new client. Scour your files for old clients and give them a call just to let them know you are still in

business and would like to do business with them again.

And finally, while I don't want to encourage anyone to be a vulture circling around waiting for competitors to fail, if you hear of a competitor going out of business, consider that their equipment, employees and customers have to go somewhere. Place a well-timed, well-meaning phone call to inquire about purchasing equipment or supplies, snatching up their best employee or taking on their remaining customers. Their loss could be your gain.

If and when there is a downturn in your local economy, focus on the long term. Don't panic and make hasty decisions. If the foundation of a business is strong, it should be able to stand up against the winds of a recession. Will it be the most profitable year ever? Maybe not, but remember that a company can stay in business indefinitely just by breaking even, as long as enough cash is flowing in to flow out again and pay the bills. So if you can hold your own, you can outlast a recession. ■



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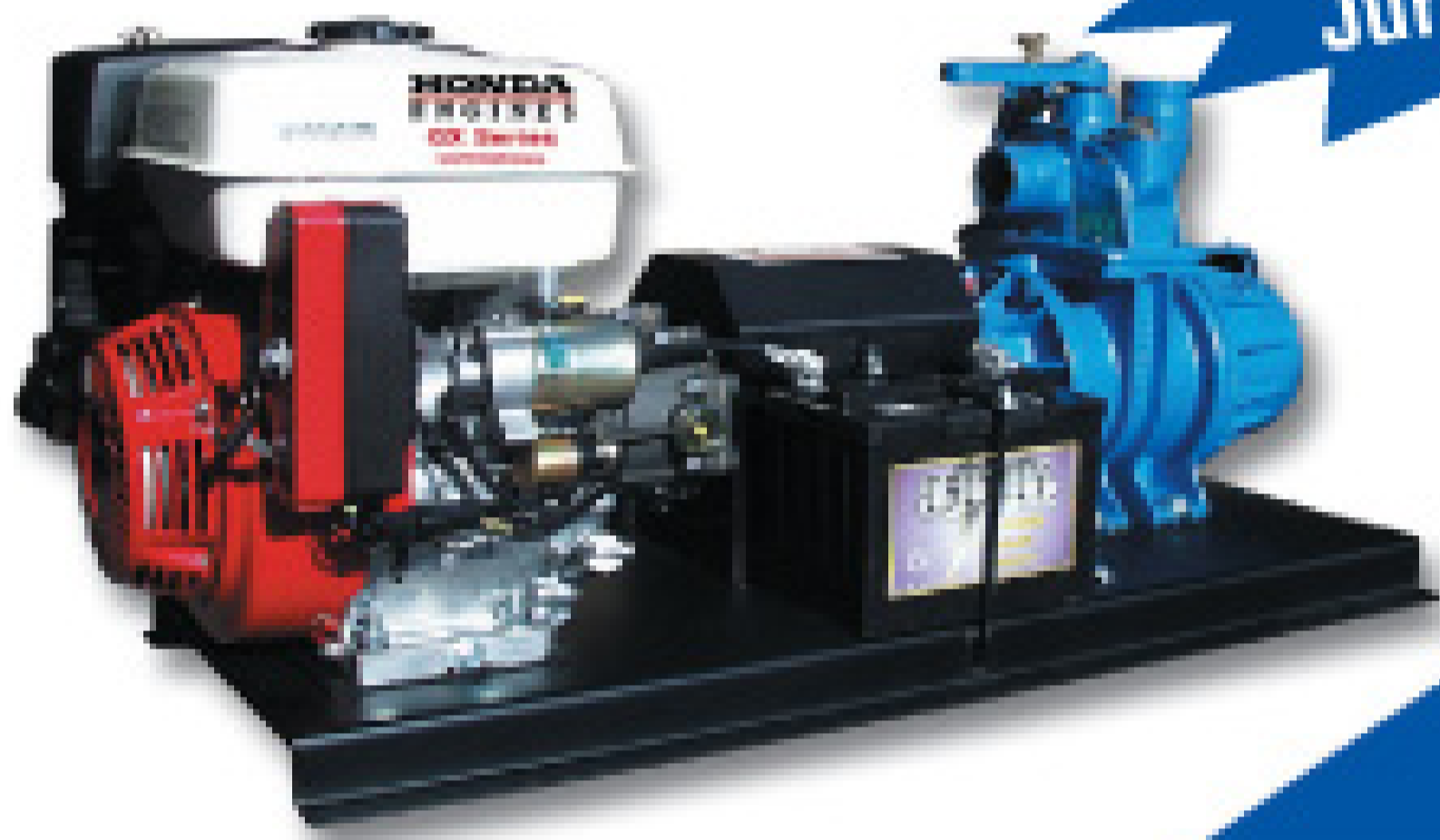
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**J & J Portables
Huntingtown, Md.**

Owners: Jim, Joe and Bo McKenny

Year
Founded: 1988

Employees: 11

Service Area: Metro Washington, D.C.,
and Baltimore suburbs

Annual Billings: \$925,000

Specialties: Portable restroom and septic service

Affiliations: Calvert County Chamber of Commerce



Jim Sipe of J & J Portables prepares to wash restrooms at a work site. (Photos by August Selckmann)

COVER STORY

Taking Care of Business

A customer service emphasis keeps J & J Portables on the move in a Washington, D.C., market crowded with portable sanitation providers

By Mary Shafer

Customer service is the watchword these days, so it's no surprise that J & J Portables of Huntingtown, Md., takes every opportunity to pound that message home to office staff and field technicians.

What may be surprising is the comprehensive way the company's business structure supports that goal. From the hiring and training process to the way jobs are performed and the manner in which telephones are answered, J & J has built its entire business to accommodate the highest possible level of customer care. PROs seeking guidance on best practices in this area may take a page from the J & J playbook.

"We're a family-owned business," says J & J president Joe McKenny, whose portable restroom and septic pumping business serves the Washington, D.C., metro area. "That means everything to our



The J & J Portables crew includes (from left) Jim McKenny, Clarence McKenny, Joe McKenny and son Colin, and Bo McKenny.

customers. They can get hold of us 24/7, no matter what the circumstance. If they call at any time, we're on it. We pride ourselves on our service."

Their service mix is 90 percent portable sanitation and 10 percent septic pumping. "We have one full-time

pumper," explains McKenny, "and the rest of the guys drive portables routes."

The portable sanitation side of the business consists of about 15 percent seasonal special events. The remainder is commercial, with about three-quarters of the units serving construction contrac-



Above, Clarence and Joey McKenny set up restrooms for an event at the Calvert Marine Museum. At right, Bo McKenny and Mark Gray strap restrooms to a trailer for delivery.



tors. The other 25 percent serves industrial customers, with a liquid natural gas plant renovation providing their largest current industrial account.

Septic pumping remains a minimal part of the business. Most of it involves residential customers, with a small portion of commercial accounts. J & J pumps strictly septage, as they can't dispose of grease at Solomon's Wastewater Facility, the municipal treatment plant in Lusby, Md., owned by Calvert County.

KEEPING THE FLEET

J & J handles a small amount of pumping for Calvert County government,

"Our fleet also makes a big difference. We keep our vehicles clean and good-looking every day. Our employees are proud to be out there in a good-looking truck. We get calls from people who figure if we keep them that nice, we'll do a good job on their projects."

Joe McKenny

including some wells, emergency pump-outs for sewer mains and other small jobs. The company holds no other municipal pumping contracts, as it's only licensed to pump septage in Calvert County, and has no plans to dilute its market focus. In fact, J & J is so focused on its strengths, it never planned to pump at all — but again, customer service demands drove that decision.

"We had no intention of getting into the septic pumping side," explains McKenny, "but demand grew and we were missing so much business because we

didn't have a (larger) truck that we decided to get into it."

Now J & J has a fleet of five vacuum trucks, including a 1987 International 9370 with 4,000-gallon tank, a 2003 Ford F-550 with an 800-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater tank, two 2006 and one 2007 International 4300s with 1,100-gallon waste/400-gallon freshwater tanks. All tanks are from Abernethy Welding with pumps from Masport Inc. The fleet is rounded out with a 2003 GMC pickup/delivery truck carrying Crescent 750-gallon waste and 300-gallon freshwater tanks.

J & J's restroom inventory includes 1,100 units: 1,010 PolyPortables Inc. Integra II models, 15 PolyPortables Senator ADA units, 10 PolyPortables Ambassador flush units with sinks, 30 PolyPortables Standard units with waterless sanitizer dispensers, and 35 American Polystar standard units. Special events are serviced by four Ameri-Can Engineering restroom trailers, an 824 Oasis, 818 Royale, 814 Tailgater and 615 Royale Dooley model.

THE ACCIDENTAL PRO

In 1997, McKenny was a deputy sheriff. He was also serving as his own general contractor, building a new house for his family. The city put a stop work order on the project because he didn't have a portable restroom onsite. "There wasn't yet a law requiring it," he remembers, "but it was coming," and inspectors were preparing contractors to accept the new



The restroom carrier is up as Jim Sipe stops on his daily rounds through the Washington, D.C., area.



At a home construction site, Sipe returns a washdown hose to his portable restroom service vehicle.

Chesapeake Bay job offers service challenges

Perhaps the most unusual service-oriented job J & J Portables handles is the annual pumping of the holding tank at the Dominion Cove Point Liquid Natural Gas works offloading facility, in the middle of Chesapeake Bay. The platform is a round-the-clock operation, and usually 5-6 people work there during normal operations. During a recent facility upgrade, there were 20-30 people there, requiring the addition of two portable restrooms.

"Once a year, we barge our truck to the offloading platform about a mile-and-a-half out into the bay," explains Joe McKenny. Dominion rents the barge, and barge personnel escort the truck across the water on a six-hour trip to the service platform. The barge only moves 4 mph with J & J's 4,000-gallon service truck aboard. This large unit is required to provide enough pumping strength to move the waste from the 250-gallon holding tank 300 feet to the barge, which is too large to position any closer.

Getting the barge to the platform is a six-hour trip, and the J & J crew has to go through a brief safety course before the pumping operation begins, so it ends up being an all-day job. "We don't want to spend any more time than necessary, and we don't want to be an added liability to our customer by being on that barge," explains McKenny. "So we get on bicycles and ride for 15-20 minutes through an 8-by-8 tunnel beneath the water," which is used daily by platform workers, also on bikes. "I have a claustrophobic brother, so you don't get in front of him," McKenny says, chuckling.

"We come up through an elevator into the facility tank. It's a five-man operation. We all three go out, and take two employees with us. The platform on the dock is 100 feet high, and a huge drain sits atop the platform, like a small oil rig.

"The logistics are a headache. We'll have two or three people get on the barge to run the septic truck, and two of us go up to rig the hoses on top. A crane lifts the hoses, and we secure them all. You have to make sure all your hoses are strapped off — you can't afford to have an ounce of spillage, because of the bay's sensitive environment. It's a high-security project, but not really dangerous. Actually, it's pretty neat, and it's fun. We look forward to it every year."



Bucky Bennett (left) and Jim McKenny plan the service routes through the busy Washington, D.C., territory.

rules with these stop orders. McKenny rented a unit from the only PRO in the area.

"Our suburb of D.C. was really starting to grow then," says McKenny's brother, Bo McKenny, "and I got the idea that it would need more portable restroom suppliers. I went to a few builders I know, and asked if they'd use me if I started a portables business. They said they would, and so I did."

His vision was prescient. "We grew by leaps and bounds, and in 1999, I brought my brother onboard full time," Bo McKenny recalls.

At that time, Joe McKenny was injured while training some new recruits at the

Sheriff's Academy. "I had to retire on disability, so I came on here full time," he recalls.

Their father, Jim McKenny, owned a hydro-seeding company, and was helping his sons two days a week. In 2004, he also moved to J & J full time.

The tight-knit McKennys found they shared a similar attitude toward service and decided that was how they'd differentiate J & J from its competition. "When you call here, you will talk to an owner," says

Joe McKenny. "We tried an answering service, but it just didn't work for us. So, we'll always answer

your question right away. We're hands-on, too. We're out there every day, working with our business to keep a handle on what's going on.

"Our market is saturated with other operators, but we've thrived because of our service. We could grow a lot — we could have 2,000 units if we wanted them — but we feel if we get any bigger on the construction side, we may not be able to maintain the unparalleled service we do now."

Bo McKenny concurs. "The level of service since the market's been saturated has increased, but it still needs to be brought up. Everybody needs to be held to the highest standard for responsiveness."

Staying responsive and effective includes building a strong employee base.



Mark Gray straps PolyPortables Inc. restrooms to a carrier on the way to a delivery. At right, Shawn Bennett (left) and Bucky Bennett service restrooms after a concert.





At left, image is everything to J & J Portables. Clarence McKenny spruces up a unit with the company sticker. Above, Sierra Stewart (left) and Patty McKenny help with traffic flow in a restroom trailer parked at a Lynyrd Skynyrd concert.

HELP WANTED

"It's one of the hardest things about being in business, finding good help," admits Joe McKenny. "We've been through a ton of employees, but have now had a stable crew for more than a year. We treat them with respect and compliment them when things are done especially well. We get calls, letters and cards all the time about our service and professionalism, and pass that on to our employees. We tell them, 'Hey, you're out there in our truck. You have to treat it as if it's your own business,' and they do."

Retaining good employees remains a challenge. "One of the things I found is that we had to offer health insurance and other benefits," says McKenny. "We try to give bonuses occasionally for a really big job, or when our guys bend over backwards to help us out."

"Our fleet also makes a big difference. We keep our vehicles clean and good-looking every day. Our employees are proud to be out there in a good-looking truck. We get calls from people who figure if we keep them that nice, we'll do a good job on their projects."

The McKennys make a point to pass on service orientation to new hires. "We go out with new guys the first week, give them a pad and pen, and let them write down their directions," says McKenny. "We go through and make sure new recruits know what we expect. We show them how we clean out the units. They take over the second week, and we just stand back and watch, to make sure

they're doing it the way we want it done. By the third week, they're on their own, they're ready."

STRATEGIC PLANNING

J & J services a number of high-visibility events in the nation's capital. Such contracts require a strong trust with security organizations, and J & J's service record has cemented that bond with the U.S. Capitol Police.

"They know we plan thoroughly and allow for contingencies," says Joe McKenny. "We take care of all events on the Capitol grounds, including having serviced the funerals of Rosa Parks and Presidents Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford. We sometimes work with two other larger companies for the big events on the Mall: fireworks displays, the Million-Man March, and for the Preakness Stakes horse race at the Pimlico Race Course in Baltimore, Md. Some of these are 700-900 unit events, and no one business can handle all that."

For several years, J & J has been using the Internet to locate and bid contracts, and to research suppliers. The McKennys frequently visit eMaryland Marketplace (<https://ebidmarketplace.com>), a clearinghouse for state contracts, where they're registered as specialty contractors.

"They send us every bid that comes out for registered contractors in specialty areas," explains Bo McKenny. "The site generates an e-mail to let you know a new contract is open, and you follow a link to download a Microsoft Word form from

their site. We fill it out, then send it back via e-mail."

EVERYDAY EFFICIENCY

Customer service also drives fleet tracking utilizing Global Positioning System technology. "If we get a call, we can prove that the driver was where he

should have been, and it lets us know if a call got skipped. Then we can check and find out why."

Drivers are coached in customer relations, especially with construction contractors. "The first thing we have drivers do is get to know each worksite superintendent and exchange phone numbers. This way, in case there are vehicles blocking the units, they can call directly to have them moved. It makes us more efficient."

J & J also tries to accommodate individual customer needs. "We'll pick up a unit if there's an unplanned work stoppage, or work with them if they need flexible payment schedules."

"This is a service-oriented business," says Bo McKenny. "We pick up work from large companies every day because quantity has pushed quality out of their grasp. You have to keep everything you're doing geared toward your customer. If you don't have the service, you're not going to have a business." ■

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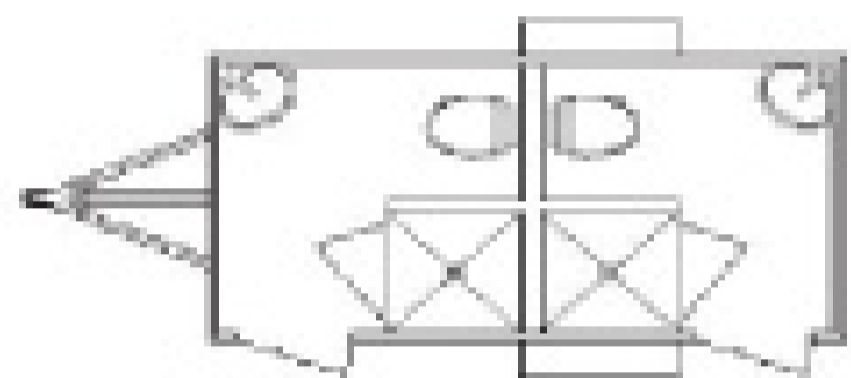
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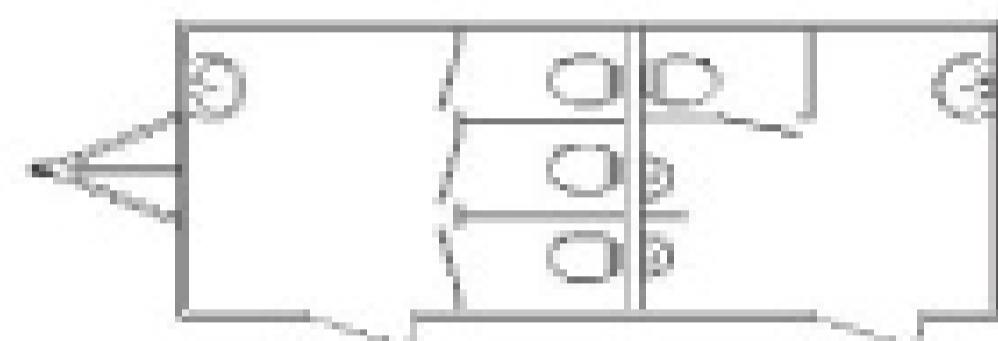
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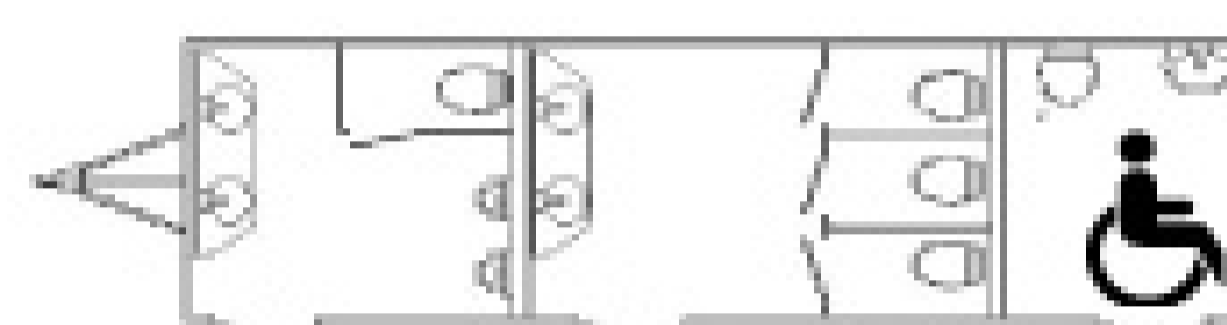
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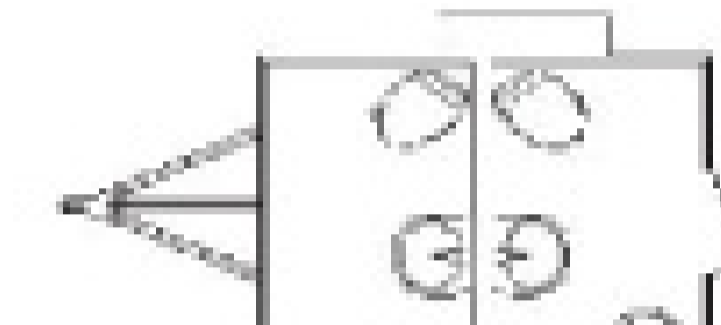
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Walker's city park is the location of 16 Satellite Industries Tufway restrooms that serve as the main rest station for the festival. Inset, the catch of the day is the snakelike fish. (Photos courtesy of Northland Septic Maintenance Inc. and the Eelpout Festival)

FISHY Business

Minnesota's ice-bound Eelpout Festival provides a significant cold weather restroom service challenge

By Dee Goerge

THE TEAM

Rick and Brenda Smith own the business, in partnership with Rick's father, Robert Smith. Three workers handle delivery, service and pick-up for the event.

THE JOB: Eelpout Festival

LOCATION: Leech Lake near Walker, Minn.

THE PRO: Northland Septic Maintenance Inc.

COMPANY HISTORY

Rick Smith learned the owner of Northland Sewer Service wanted to retire and recognized an opportunity. With a business degree in hand, he took a pumper training class at the University of Minnesota and purchased the business in 1996. Smith ran the septic business part-time for five years. He bought out three septic and portable restroom competitors through the years to build

up the business. Today, Smith's full-time business has an office in Hackensack and two shop locations, servicing communities in three counties in a 40-mile radius. He has 200 portable restrooms from Satellite Industries Inc., Tufway and Maxim 3000 models, with sanitizing stations. The company's fleet of vacuum trucks includes a 2006 Ford F-350 with a 300-gallon waste/150-gallon freshwater tank from Imperial Industries; a 1999 Ford F-450 with a locally fabricated split 200-gallon waste/200-gallon freshwater tank; several septic-pumping trucks, most from Imperial Industries and most using Masport pumps.

UP NORTH EVENTS

"This is one of the most beautiful places in Minnesota for sure," says Smith about the northern lake and forest region he lives in. The area's biggest town, Walker, swells from 1,000 year-round residents to 10,000 in the summer with vacationers and residents with second homes. With tourism comes the need for restrooms for campers, reunions and community celebrations, plus



After a large hole is cut in the ice, brave revelers take a dip at the Polar Plunge area on Leech Lake.



An unusual parade of vehicles are seen on Leech Lake, including this aluminum boat put over a snowmobile and the vintage sled in the background.

The Northland Septic Maintenance fleet of nine vehicles includes six yellow vacuum trucks, four for septic service and two for portable sanitation. Below, a portable sanitation truck is shown on location.



For winter rentals, Smith starts with a light methanol mix, and as it gets colder he adds stronger salt brines. The richest winter mix of 2 pounds of salt per gallon of water and 25-30 percent methanol usually handles temperatures to minus-20 degrees.



Rick Smith

there are many special events: Cajun Fest at Northern Lights Casino, Walker's Moondance Jam — a music festival, and Hackensack's National Chainsaw Sculpting Invitational, for example.

THE JOB

The most unusual special event occurs during the winter, when 10,000 to 20,000 people come to Walker's Leech Lake to catch fish that are usually thrown back with disgust the rest of the year. "It's the world's only true game fish," Eelpout Festival organizer, Jim Gerchy, says tongue-in-cheek. The concept for the Eelpout Festival was developed on a bar napkin by Walker businessmen hoping to bring winter business to town. The idea caught on, and the 29th festival was held Feb. 15-17 (www.eelpoutfestival.com).

Eelpout are chin-whiskered, bottom-feeding fish, freshwater cod that taste good despite their off-putting appearance. "People line up for eelpout nuggets from vendors," Gerchy says. Also called burbot, ling and lawyer, they thrive in deep, cold-water lakes. In January/February they swim up to shallower water to

spawn — dozens in a swirling ball. They put up a good fight when caught on bait that ranges from minnows to Vienna sausages.

A small percentage of festivalgoers actually fish, Gerchy says. The rest come for the show. Two- and three-story fish houses, wall tents, themed encampments, costumed fisherman and vehicles of all types cover frozen Leech Lake. There's also the polar plunge, Eelpout Peelout 5K race, rugby on ice, auto race and snowmobile radar run. Many prizes are awarded and about the only rule is that the eelpout must be caught on Leech Lake.

BY THE NUMBERS

Smith inherited the festival when he bought out a competitor who provided portable restrooms for the event. "I placed them on the ice a couple of years," Smith says. It was a challenge navigating through the "little villages" that popped up on the lake to deliver restrooms to about 20 private renters. He made maps so he could find them for servicing and pick up through the maze of people, especially when there were white-out conditions. He recalls one restroom was easy to find near a flashing beacon on an



Technician Jeremiah McMillan loads water on a vacuum truck, using a mix of 10- to 30-percent methanol and 2 pounds of salt per gallon to avoid freezing.



Rick Smith oversees the loading of a portable sanitation truck with water used to recharge units out on winter service.

Thousands of Eelpout Festival partiers crowd the ice of Leech Lake. At right, a typical winter Satellite Tufway placement in northern Minnesota.



800-square-foot, two-story fish shanty. One private rental became an "indoor toilet" when it was placed inside a 1,200-square-foot fish house. Organizers contract with Smith to provide 16 units on shore at Walker's city park.

SUNKEN TREASURE

Lake delivery service ended after the 2005 festival, when temperatures climbed to 50 degrees, leaving 10 inches of water on the lake's surface. It was messy and risky retrieving the rentals on Sunday. To reduce risk — possibly losing a \$50,000 vehicle — and

to cut back on labor, Smith now delivers and picks up the portable restrooms at the edge of the lake for private renters, who provide credit card information and sign a damage waiver form. Renters haul them out with ATVs or on small trailers. Smith charges \$150 if he has to pick up the unit on the lake.

KEEPIN' IT CLEAN

"We always pray for good weather on that weekend," Smith says. With heavy usage diluting a chemical mix meant to prevent freezing, it can be difficult to keep the restrooms thawed in subzero temperatures. For winter rentals, Smith starts with a

light methanol mix, and as it gets colder he adds stronger salt brines. The richest winter mix of 2 pounds of salt per gallon of water and 25-30 percent methanol usually handles temperatures to minus-20 degrees. Using the brine and servicing the restrooms twice on Saturday and again at pickup on Sunday generally keeps the units functioning well.

Some people who attend the event create another challenge — depositing clothing, cans, bottles and other items in the holding tanks. Smith and his crew pump out what they can and use picking tools to pull out bulky items. They've even pulled out fish — but not eelpout. "The eelpout are sacred for that event," Smith says.

IT'S A BUSINESS

Though he services an event where prizewinners' names are drawn from a toilet bowl, Smith takes his work very seriously. People in the portable sanitation business work hard, he says, and they need to respect themselves for that work and charge accordingly. "People need to run it as a business not as a job," Smith says.

"They need to know their costs and charge appropriately for the good of the business and their employees."

WORDS TO LIVE BY

Smith keeps to a simple business mission statement that stresses professionalism in the field, even if it's working the comical Eelpout Festival: "Raising the standard, one customer at a time." ■

An inflatable SpongeBob Square Pants marks one fisherman's spot on the large lake.



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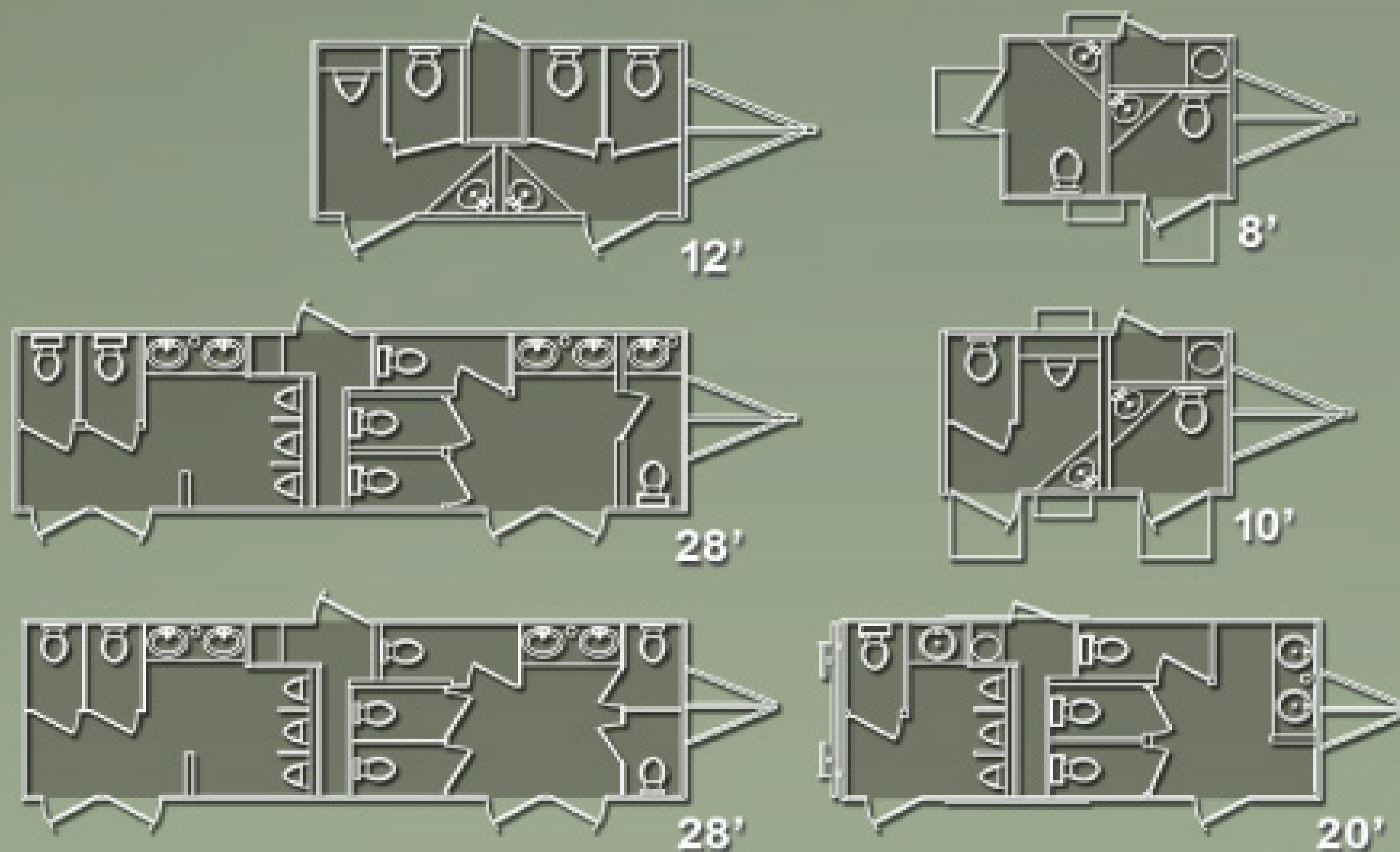
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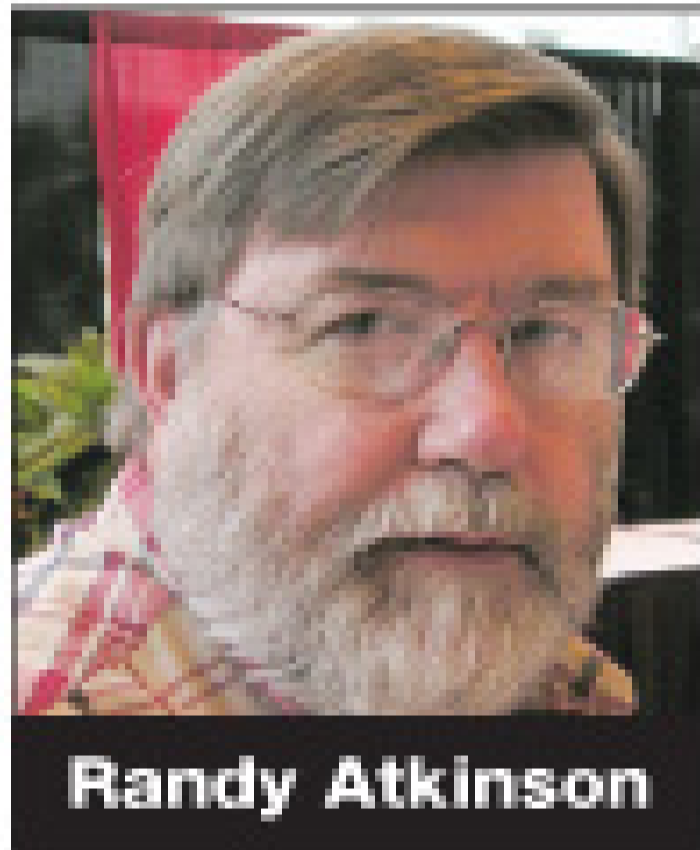
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PROs share thoughts on when to move to inventory tracking software

By Mary Shafer

Tracking inventory of portable restrooms is mission-critical for any PRO, and as the business grows, so do the challenges of making sure you have the inventory you need, when you need it, and where it needs to go. Smaller operations can get by with a simple, manual system, maybe even a white board. As soon as more than a few people are involved, however, unit tracking gets more complicated.

Midsize PROs often resort to some mix of manual system and generic or customized spreadsheets. Larger outfits, especially those with multiple locations, find the need to move to fully automated software that functions enterprise-wide. Here we survey PROs from across the spectrum to see how they're handling inventory management.

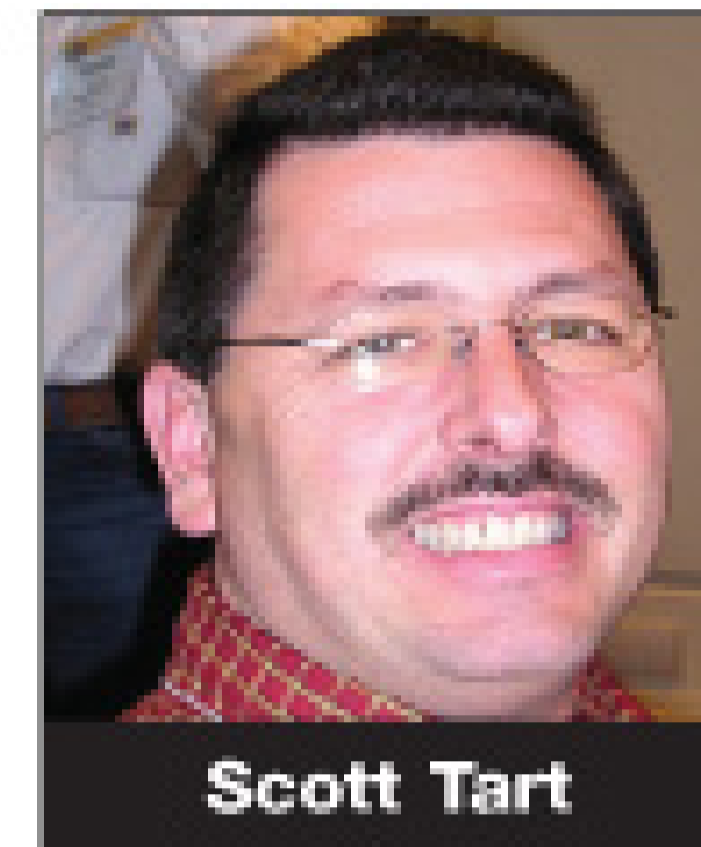


Name: Randy Atkinson, Owner
Company: Atkinson Roll-Off & Hauling Service
Location: Worthington, Pa.
Employees: 1
Years in Business: 2

"I'm just starting out," says Randy Atkinson of his almost-three-year-old business located in northeastern Pennsylvania. "So we use a paper invoice system" that keeps track of units. He started with about 30 units, and has considered buying out an existing portables firm nearby to build both inventory and customer base.

When a unit is put in the field, a corresponding invoice is filled out in a bound book. The invoice is removed and put with job documents, and a stub is left in the book. When the unit is picked up, the job is billed and the invoice sent out. The stub is torn from the book and filed in the project folder.

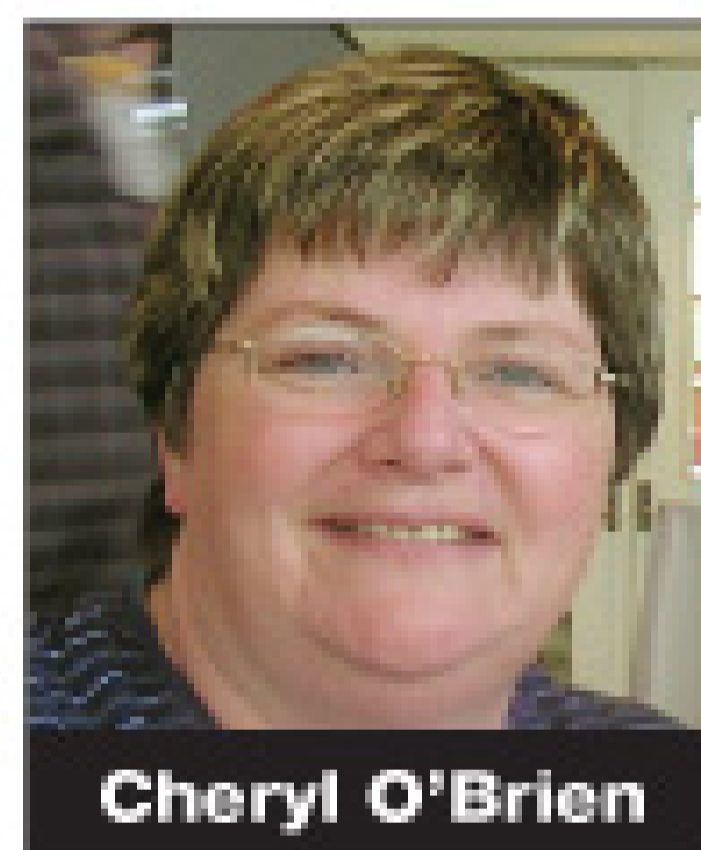
"We use yard positioning to keep track of which portables need repair," says Atkinson.



Name: Scott Tart, Owner
Company: Forever Clean Portable Toilets
Location: Fuquay Varina, N.C.
Employees: 4
Years in Business: 3

Scott Tart started out using Summit General Ledger software (Summit Software Inc., www.summit-soft.com) in his business, Forever Clean Portable Toilets, about 20 miles southwest of Raleigh. "I knew I wanted to get a handle on things right away," Tart says. "A colleague referred me to this software. I did get the barebones package, though, no extras."

The software allows Tart to keep track of his units and integrate route scheduling and billing, while enabling him to run reports as needed. He believes software will ease growing pains as the business expands, since data can be easily added to or changed as necessary.



Name: Cheryl O'Brien, Co-owner
Company: Grand Bend Sanitation
Location: Grand Bend, Ontario, Canada
Employees: 10
Years in Business: 20

About five years ago, Grand Bend Sanitation owners Cheryl and Andy O'Brien decided to add enterprise software to help manage their restroom inventory and the rest of their business. They opted for a package from Clear Computing (www.clearcomputing.com).

Cheryl O'Brien explains, "Before, we numbered our units and kept track of them on a white board. But now we have 250 units and I'm the only person in the office. I needed help." She uses the software to monitor "who has which unit where," and to keep a running total of how many units are in the field, in the yard awaiting delivery or requiring repair.

Like most PROs, O'Brien realized the software would be a significant investment, so "I did a lot of homework before buying," she reports. "I made the rounds on the floor of the (Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo) show, compared and made my decision. Then I made my purchase online." She also keeps up with developer updates.

"It handles routing, too," says O'Brien, "which is great in our area, because we have to keep track of every gallon we pump." Ontario's provincial Ministry of Environment requires annual pumping volume reports. ■

BONUS Think Tank Thought

Management of inventory and supplies has become big business among manufacturers, whose buying and storage strategies directly affect bottom lines. They refer to this practice as "MRO" or Maintenance, Repair and Operations. Though their business structure differs from yours, PROs could take a tip or two from manufacturer MRO tactics.

Check out a white paper on MRO Optimization at <http://go.infor.com/mrooptimization/>. INFOR is a software solutions company, with some illuminating insights on how companies physically manage inventory and how it affects cost-and-time-efficiency in operations and purchasing. The paper offers tools and processes to analyze and evaluate inventory and storage practices in order to identify, track, and organize parts and supplies. The result: a more functional, reliable storeroom, better inventory processes and inventory reductions.

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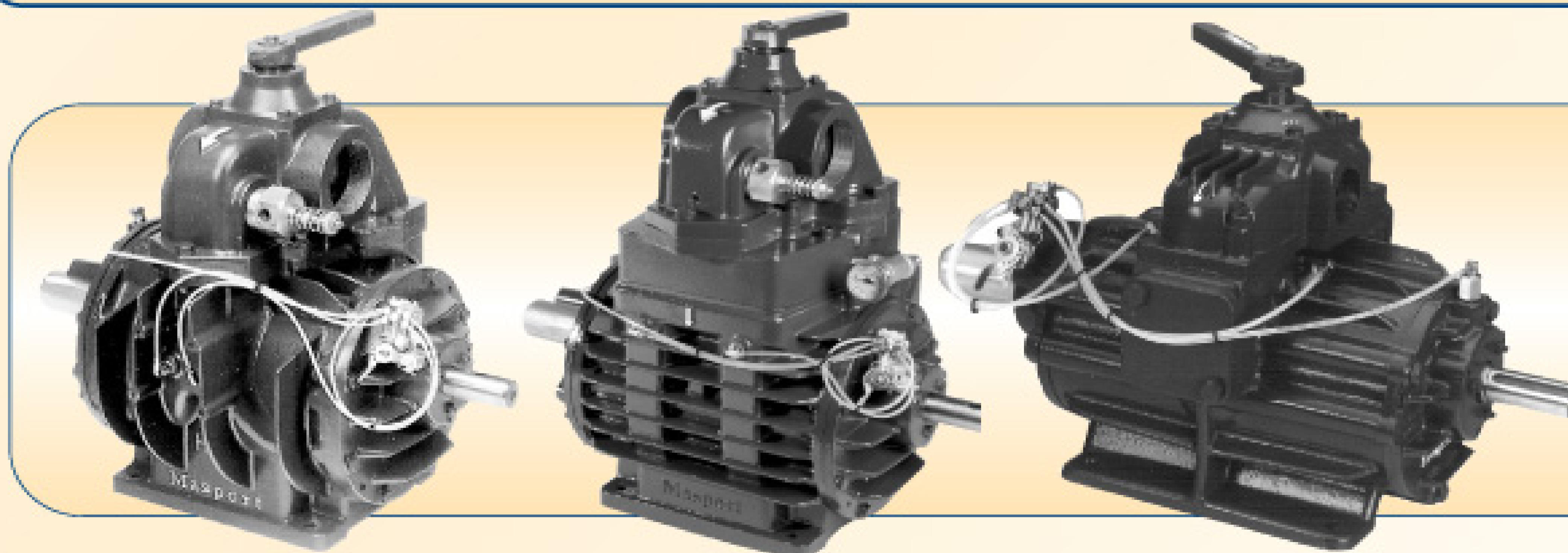


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Bob Carlson (left) and Jerry Kirkpatrick answer your questions in Truck Corner.



Smoking Pump Has Him Steamed

Look for several common root causes when your vacuum pump begins to smolder

QUESTION:
I recently had one of my employees “smoke” a vacuum pump. He said he was just doing his job like he normally does — nothing different — and the pump simply started smoking. I told him a properly maintained pump won’t smoke under ordinary working conditions. He claims he did nothing wrong. Maybe he did or maybe he didn’t, but my question is fairly basic: What will cause a vacuum pump to get so hot that it smokes?

Henry Windham
Buffalo, N.Y.

ANSWER:
Nothing like “smoking” a pump to make smoke come out of the boss’s ears. There are three primary reasons why a pump will start smoking:

1. This is the answer everyone thinks is the only answer: There’s no oil in the pump. Every vacuum pump requires a steady flow of lubrication. Should the pump run out of oil, the rotor and the vanes, which are turning at around 1,100 rpm, will definitely create heat inside the pump. It won’t take long for the heat to turn the residue oil into smoke, and only a bit longer than that to permanently damage the pump. *So, rule No. 1, fill up the oil reservoir on your vacuum pump every workday.*
2. Your vacuum relief valve is set too high. This will depend on your elevation to some extent. If your vacuum relief is set too high, the pump will run for a longer period of time before the relief of the valve comes into play. The longer work cycle will again create heat in the pump and if allowed to continue — you get smoke. *Consequently, rule No. 2, adjust your vacuum relief valve to the proper setting for your elevation.*
3. This is a combination answer. That is to say, any one of these things could create problems and heat for your vacuum pump. One is very basic: The wrong oil was put into the pump. Every vacuum pump manufacturer recommends certain oils be used in their pumps. Other oils will not perform like the recommended oil, consequently heat is generated and here comes that smoke cloud. *So use the right oil, consistently and constantly, in the pump.* Don’t get in a hurry and substitute the stuff you have on the shelf because it happens to be there. Simply put, the oil you put into your car or truck isn’t the oil (in most cases) that you should be dumping into your vacuum pump.

Another possibility is that the pump is running too fast. Vacuum pumps are designed to run at certain rpms. The speed is different for each vacuum pump, depending on the manufacturer. The pump installer will usually set it to run within the specifications required by the manufacturer. Many pumps are designed to run around 1,100 rpm with a high range around 1,300-1,400 rpm. Some installers will use a smaller pump and set it at the higher range to get it to work as quickly as a larger pump. If the pump is set to run at a higher-than-recommended rpm, the smoke will begin to show.

If you are using a small pump on a large tank, the extra time needed to evacuate the tank could cause the pump to overheat. Not only that, but a small pump on a large tank is going to have a short, sweet and possibly smoky life.

As a side note, make sure your installer or the provider of the pump understands the size of the tank you are using. Remember, the size of pump on your truck should be based on the size of tank you are hauling. If you are using a small pump on a large tank, the extra time needed to evacuate the tank could cause the pump to overheat. Not only that, but a small pump on a large tank is going to have a short, sweet and possibly smoky life.

ADD IT UP

When your employee says that nothing had changed from previous workdays, but the pump started smoking anyway, something is up. If everything was the same as the previous time, there would have been no smoke, the pumping would have been done and another successful day of work would have been accomplished. Somewhere between the last working day and the smoking day, something changed and it is most likely one of these reasons.

So before it happens again, find out what the employee did to create the change in the operation of the vacuum pump. Pumps are expensive. Make sure all your employees understand what is happening when a pump starts smoking. When it comes to the portable sanitation industry, there is nothing romantic about the phrase “Smoke gets in your eyes.”

Bob Carlson and Jerry Kirkpatrick of Arizona-based Glendale Welding have over 50 years combined experience dealing with portable sanitation truck issues. Fax questions to them, addressed to Truck Corner, at 623/937-3688, or send Bob and Jerry an e-mail at truckcorner@promonthly.com. ■

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TOICO Acquires GMF Co., Expands Sales Staff

TOICO Industries has acquired GMF Co. of Johnstown, Pa., and added tenured sales representative Tom Edwards to its staff. Edwards has 30 years of experience in the portable sanitation industry. He will be responsible for sales and customer service in the Northeast United States. The company also has tripled its warehouse capacity, moving to a facility at 1439 Londonderry Drive, Woodstock, Ga.

Ameri-Can Appoints Andrews Sales Administrator

Mandi Andrews has been appointed sales administrator for Ameri-Can Engineering. She will be responsible for the coordination of sales quotes, processing and assistance in the selection of features, options, colors and designs of custom-built sanitation trailers. She brings 10 years of restroom design and sales to her position. ■

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Baby, It's Cold Outside!

About this time of year, PROs fed up with cold weather issues aren't afraid to share their frustration

If you're missing the *PRO™ Discussion Forum*, you're missing out on valuable advice and informal banter among folks in the portable restroom business. Where else can you go to shoot the breeze with others in your specific industry from across the country?

Question:
I'm wondering how you continue to pump restrooms when the temperature is minus-20 degrees? I have a slide-in vacuum unit that sits on a 1-ton Chevy pickup. I run magnesium chloride in the restrooms, but it seems that nothing works at these cold temperatures. I leave my vacuum pump running because I am unable to pull start it at 0 degrees. If it shuts down, I have to head back to the shop to warm it back up. Are there any 12-volt heaters available that might help? I would appreciate any ideas.

Answers:
I have looked into the same problems. Check with recreational vehicle dealerships. They carry a lot of heater options for water tanks. You may be able to find something that will work for you. In past issues of *Pumper®*, I have seen vacuum

units placed in box vans to help keep things warm. That sounds like an idea you would benefit from.



On your pump, change the oil to synthetic Mobil 1 or a similar product. That should do it. But if you have to run the engine all day, make sure the vacuum relief valve is kept at a very light setting. Changing the oil will be the biggest help.

Looking for grease relief

Question:
I am looking for a way to get cold, hard grease out of drums and into my vac truck. I don't want to use anything that is going to introduce too much water. Does anyone have any ideas?

Answers:
Use a propane torch.



Heat the outside of the barrel until the grease softens.

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The *PRO™ Online Discussion Forum* is found at www.promonthly.com. The forum is conveniently split into several topic areas: General Discussion, Business, Chemicals & Deodorizers, Parts & Accessories, Portable Restrooms, Portable Restroom Trailers, Portable Restroom Service and Trucks. Simply register with a user name and password and join the discussion! Information and advice in *PRO Forum Chatter* is offered in good faith by industry professionals. Readers should consult in depth with appropriate industry sources before applying the advice they read here to a specific business situation. ■

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Water Cannon Offers Undercarriage Attachment

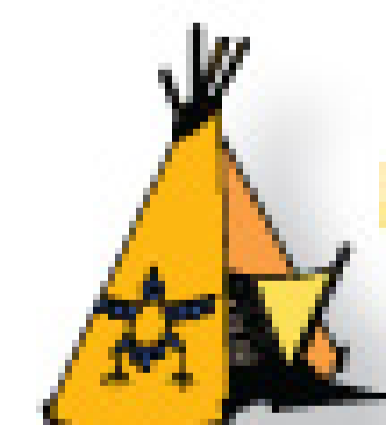
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Mud Cannon undercarriage cleaner from Water Cannon

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Frequent customer feedback — positive or negative — will help you improve service and build a stronger clientele

By Steve Washburn

Mark Twain once said, "It ain't what you don't know that gets you in trouble, it's the things you know that ain't so." We all "know" that we provide the best service in our own areas at a fair price. But what if, "It ain't so?" How would you find out? How do you really discover what your customers are thinking about you and what they want?

The best way to find out is to ask. And, don't just ask in one way every few years, but in many different ways every few months by developing a customer feedback system. A customer feedback system should be designed to get responses at many customer contact points — billing, service, management and sales. The benefits of the information you receive will help you get a leg up on the competition.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

A customer survey is not just a bunch of questions strung together. The way the questions are posed, how they are answered, and how the survey is given are important factors to be considered before finalizing your survey. For example, asking "How satisfied are you with our service?" will give you mostly positive answers. However, asking "What are you dissatisfied with about our service?" may give you a much more negative response, but will get closer to the truth.

The shorter and easier the survey looks, the more response you'll get. Your best bet is to whittle the survey down to between 10 and 20 questions. Keep questions short and provide multiple-choice answers, allowing responses on a scale from 1 to 10.

Billing statements are a good way to send out the surveys if you are sending them to small operators who pay their own bills. However, if the survey is going to a larger company where an accountant or office staff pays the bills, then you'll need to mail the survey directly to your customer with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

A customer satisfaction survey provides several benefits. First, if there is a problem with your service, you may hear about it in time to correct it and keep the customer. Second, the compiled results can be valuable to your sales program using statements such as: "93 percent of our customers report that they are extremely satisfied with our service and that they will use us again." Third, you are showing customers how much you care about your service and value their opinions.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

A more effective way to get your customers' opinions is to conduct a telephone interview. Although a script should be written out beforehand, your staff can ad lib when responding to the customer's feedback. By engaging customers in a conversation, your staff may discover information that would have been lost in a typical survey. However, to be successful, staff must be friendly, better listeners than talkers and talented notetakers (or calls should be recorded). Phone calls should be limited to five or ten minutes to avoid being a time burden to your customers.

FOCUS GROUPS

One of our fastest growing customers in the Northeast got into the portable sanitation business five years ago by holding focus groups. He invited several contractors to a restaurant for lunch. After

speaking with them, he was able to determine everything he needed to know about what they wanted in a portable restroom service. He also discovered that they were all unhappy with their current service. That meeting was the single most important factor in making his decision to start his company.

While taking competitors' customers to lunch may be seen as "predatory," there is no reason not to take your own customers to lunch occasionally. If you do, make sure the entire hour isn't spent in small talk. Bring notes on the questions you'll ask and make sure you have some tough questions.

The best customers to invite are those who have been with you for a while and know your service, but haven't been around for many years, continuing more out of habit than conviction. Questions can range from "How did you first hear about us?" to "Where do you prefer to get information about vendors?" You can get competitive information by asking questions such as "How often do you hear from my competitors, and in what fashion?" and "What do they say about themselves and about us?" Or, "What do you like about our service, which you didn't get from your previous provider?"

FOLLOWING UP WITH LOST CUSTOMERS

Don't show defensiveness when calling customers you lost to the competition. Let them know that you are sorry they left and that your main reason for calling is not to win them back, but to prevent further defections of current customers. Taking this stance — one business owner to another — most people will be willing to explain their reasons for leaving.

Here are a few more customer feedback ideas:

- Put a "comments" section on your bills, so customers have an opportunity to provide feedback on your service.
- Print customer feedback forms attached to self-addressed, postage-paid envelopes and give each service driver a stack so that he or she can leave one in customer offices.
- When sending out surveys, always include a cover letter that explains the survey's objectives, why the customer was selected to participate, and sets a one- or two-week deadline for its return. Thank them in advance for their participation.
- Make follow-up calls to customers who don't return surveys. Ask if they remember receiving it, and if they lost it, would they like another one.
- Provide a toll-free complaint number with a voice mailbox. Make sure call-in messages get immediate responses.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Silence is definitely not golden when it comes to customer feedback. Don't be fooled into thinking you have no unhappy customers. In fact, if you are not receiving complaints from customers, something is wrong, especially in a business where one fouled up restroom can ruin someone's day. The more contact points you can supply for give and take with customers, the better your feedback system will become, and your customers will repay you with greater loyalty. ■

Steve Washburn is quality assurance manager for PolyJohn Enterprises Corp. in Whiting, Ind.



Employee Motivation is Job One

Follow these four steps to raise the level of enthusiasm and feeling of job satisfaction among your workforce

George Hedley is owner of Hedley Construction and Hardhat Presentations, a speaker on business-building topics and the author of The Business Success Blueprint Series. To reach him, call 800/851-8553 or visit www.hardhatpresentations.com.



By George Hedley

I used to get tired of trying to get my people to do what I wanted them to do. They always had what appeared to be legitimate excuses why they didn't get the job done on time, or why they didn't follow my directions, or why it wasn't their fault when something went wrong out on the jobsite. I thought I was the only one who could do the job right. Perhaps, you feel the same some days.

PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT THAN YOU

There is a way to build your pumping business with the people you have. You can get them motivated, all on the same page, and working like a winning team with common goals, drive, and excitement. Successful business owners and managers know their people are different than them. They realize employees are not motivated for the same reasons they are. Just because you pay employees a good wage doesn't mean they're going to work their fanny off for you.

Younger workers today are very different as well. They like continuous learning and personal growth in their careers. Their loyalty is to themselves. It is your job to discover each employee's differences, what makes them tick, and help them achieve their goals in order for you to reach your business goals.

THE MOTIVATIONAL PROBLEM IS YOU

Years ago, I went through 14 secretaries over a 2-year period. I just couldn't find anyone who would work as hard as I wanted them to. One day I finally realized maybe the problem was me! I had to take responsibility for motivating my staff. Once I realized this fact, my personnel problems turned around, our people became great and our employee retention improved to more than 90 percent every year.

To motivate your workforce, you've got to give them a reason to be motivated. Don't expect others to understand your passion for customers, quality work or the need to make a profit. They must want to follow your vision, achieve your goals, and get the job done properly.

Exceptional employees require two things — money and happiness. Money includes fair pay and competitive benefits, plus working for a strong company with a good reputation in the community. Happiness is the same, being motivated. Your job is to motivate your people to want to do what you want them to do. You accomplish this with inspirational leadership, continuous, clear and continuous two-way communication, an exciting vision, step-by-step directions, holding people accountable and giving them full and unquestioned responsibility.

FOUR PROVEN STEPS TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE:

1. Outline clear expectations

People need to know exactly what you want them to do and the results you want them to achieve — the expected results. Weak managers assume people understand what's required. The norm is to tell people to work real hard and try your best. But, this doesn't let people know exactly what's expected. People must be told and

understand exactly what you want, the specific end results.

Be specific with clear targets and define the exact results you want. Make sure your people understand what their individual targets are, what's acceptable and what's not, when they hit or miss their target, consequences for not achieving the results you want, and rewards for a job well done.

2. Give regular recognition and praise

The second important step you want is to provide ongoing recognition and praise for people who do the work. Weak and ineffective managers don't take time to thank people for a job well done. Over time, this causes lackadaisical employees and poor results. In a survey of why people left their company, over 90 percent said they'd never been recognized or praised by their boss.

Employees want and need feedback and positive reinforcement for their efforts. Effective leaders give out praises at least every week to everyone in their sphere of influence. Use words like, "I appreciate you" and "Thanks for a great job." Keep a simple chart in your day-timer to ensure you recognize all your staff on a regular basis. Strive to praise everyone at least weekly and check it off on your chart so you won't forget someone. Verbal praise works the best, but occasionally write handwritten notes to those who went beyond the call of duty.

3. Share a clear understanding of the big picture

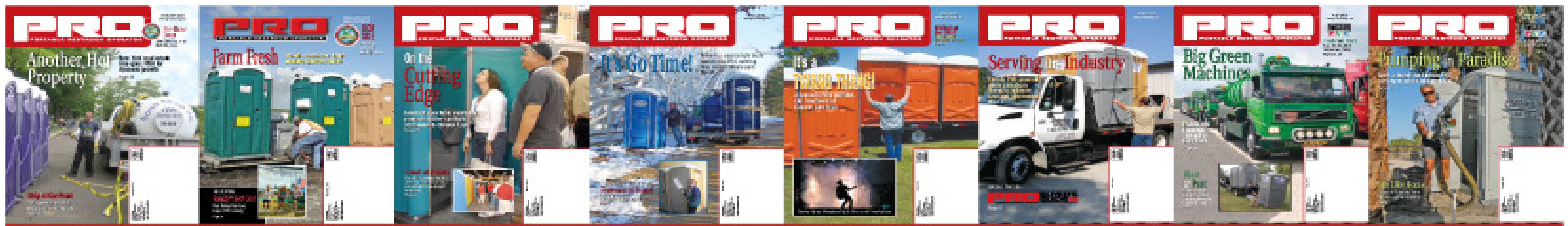
The third thing your people need is a clear understanding of the big picture (company, employees, customers, projects, etc.) and how they fit in. Successful business owners, managers, and supervisors are open and honest and tell employees where their company is going — its vision, what the future has in store, positive and negatives, and changes or adjustment required to be successful. People need to know what's happening; otherwise, they tend to think the worst.

Successful leaders constantly tell the real deal — business is good or bad, the future is positive or negative, sales are up or down, productivity is acceptable or not, our people are doing a good job or not. Hold semi-annual, all-company meetings plus monthly project and department meetings where the big picture is discussed and open to questions.

4. Promote a caring company attitude

Let your people know you care about them. Employees need to know you appreciate their contributors to the company success. They want to know you care about their personal goals, future, personal development and their family. People must know they're important. They want to know they will be listened to and have a say in the future of their company.

To ensure you continuously show you care about your employees, keep a "team member profile" sheet on each person in your day-timer. Include their name, family members, schools, hobbies, sports, interests, goals, challenges, contributions, etc. This way you can refer to it on a regular basis and keep track of each team member's life. ■



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T07

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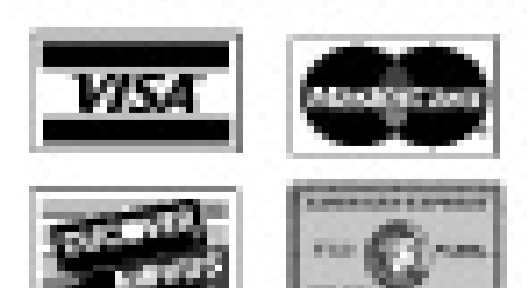
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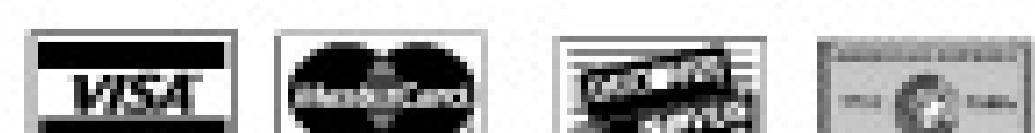
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tractor whose success story should be told, please call or write and tell us about it.

Editor Jim Kneiszel may be reached through COLE Publishing by phone at 800/257-7222, by mail at P.O. Box 220, Three Lakes, Wis. 54562, or by e-mail at editor@promonthly.com.

Here's a sampling of features that appear in the pages of *PRO*:

WORKING VACATION

Do you have trouble leaving your work behind when you visit faraway places? If your camera holds images of portable restrooms and associated rental products along with the usual vacation shots of tourist attractions or the family frolicking on the beach, we want to hear from you. We'll share your snapshots and portable restroom travel tales in *Working Vacation*.

TAKE 5

Some days you only have a few minutes over a cup of coffee to take a breather in your hectic workday. We want to help you make the most of those few moments by introducing you to a PRO or

industry leader who addresses the five issues that have the greatest impact on their job or business. If you know someone in the industry who could offer valuable insights to others, we'll feature them in *Take 5*.

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