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Bike Week is a wild ride for busy Godawa Septic

Page 22



Page 12



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

6 | From the Editor: And the Survey Says ...

In the first Big 10 PRO Survey, contractors say finding new customers and rising business costs are top concerns.

Jim Kneiszel

10 Back at the Office: Banks a Lot

What has your bank done for you lately? Is it business friendly? If not, it may be time to take your money elsewhere.

Judy Kneiszel

12 PROfile: Upwardly Mobile

Royal Restrooms of California hits the road with a fleet of trailers to serve upscale wedding and party hosts.

Seiche Sanders

18 SPECIAL REPORT: Is it Time to Quit Talking on the Go?

Efforts to limit use of cell phones while driving are picking up steam. Here's how some contractors balance mobile communication with the need to drive safely.

- Greg Northcutt

22 On Location: Rumble in Daytona



For Bike Week, Godawa Septic rolls into action to provide portable restrooms at one of America's largest motorcycle events.

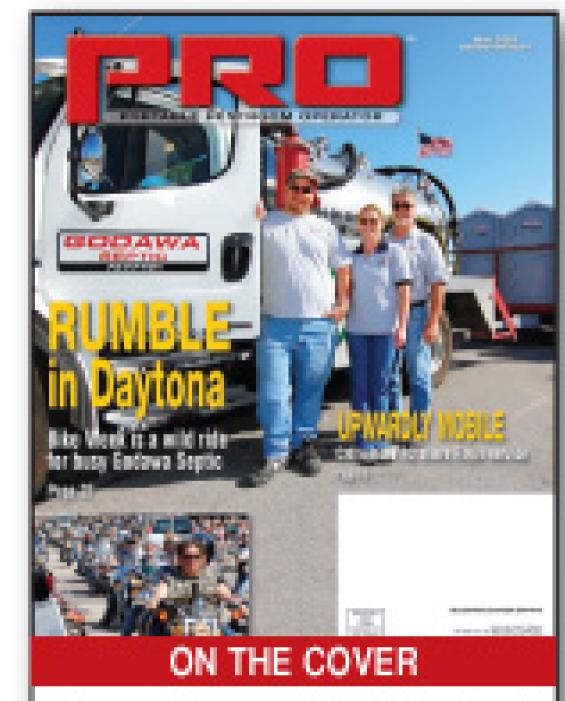
Ken Wysocky

26 Think Tank:

They're Seeking Functional Trailers

In a challenging economy, some contractors are looking for smaller, no-frills restrooms to add to their fleets.

Mary Shafer



Aaron, Lowry and Paul Creech of Godawa Septic of Daytona Beach, Fla., get rolling when Bike Week riders rumble into town. (Photo by Mark Robertson)

28 PRO Discussion: Slide-in Tank Questions

When it comes to smaller vacuum units for pickup trucks, PROs wonder about creating adequate pump pressure and choosing the right tank material.

30 PSAI News: Support Scholars

Association fund helps students in the portable sanitation industry pursue higher education.

Ned Carpenter

32 Product News

38 Truck Corner: Pumping at Higher Elevations

PRO who moved to the Rocky Mountains says his air-cooled vacuum pump doesn't act the way he expected it to.

Bob Carlson and Jerry Kirkpatrick

COMING NEXT MONTH - JUNE 2009

Special Issue: Buyer's Guide

Truck Corner: Hose fitting geometry explained



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Alpha Mobile Solutions	25
Ameri-Can Engineering	j17
Anchor Graphics Inc	38
ARMSTRONG EQUIPMENT INC.	
Armstrong Equipment I	lnc27
Asino	30
В	
Best Enterprises Inc	9
Black Tie Manufacturin	g30
С	
Century Paper & Chem	nical16
Classifieds	37
Comforts of Home	
Comforts of Home Servi	ices5

COMPANY	PAGE
DropBox Inc	29
E EZTrakR	35
G Green Way by PolyPortables	40
Hampel Corp HaulerAgent Buying Group	2
I Imperial Industries Inc	35
J & J Chemical Company J. C. Gury Company Inc JAG Mobile Solutions Inc	25
KeeVac Industries Inc Keith Huber Inc	

PAGE
16
37
35
17
29
20-21

P PortaJane Inc	COMPANY	PAGE
Ronco Plastics	PortaJane Inc	4
Toico Industries	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •	30
TSF Company Inc39		Roeda28
TSF Company Inc39	Т	
TSF Company Inc	INDUSTRIES	
w	Toico Industries	8
w		
W Walex15	TSF Company Inc	39
Walex15	w	
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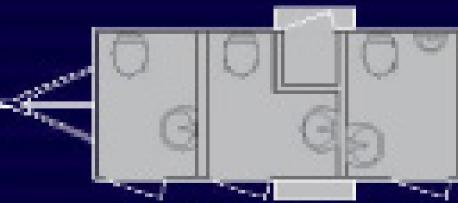
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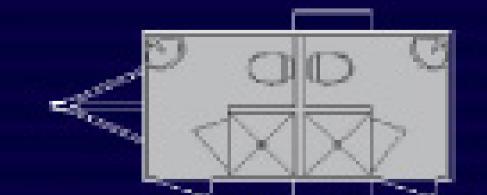
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And the Survey Says

he results of our first *Big 10 PRO Survey* of portable restroom operators echo many of the concerns you tell me about throughout the year. When I visit with PROs at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo, for instance, the talk often turns to the rising cost of running a small business, competitive forces that chip away at profits and the desire to improve marketing to gain more customers.

While the survey published here doesn't offer any jaw-dropping surprises, it confirms that some issues seem to affect PROs everywhere.

And maybe zeroing in on a few of those major concerns will help the industry forge ahead and make positive changes. In addition to sharing the data with you here, we'll return to the numbers and additional comments from respondents in researching other stories throughout the year.

First off, I'd like to thank the 70 contractors who took the time to answer the *Big 10* survey we posted late last year at www.promonthly. com. While the number of responses wasn't overwhelming, we think it was a good first effort for a survey that we hope to make an annual tradition. Look for a new survey late this year. Then please go online and add your voice to the chorus of PROs willing to share information to advance the industry.

FAR AND WIDE

The survey drew responses from throughout the United States and Canada. Texas and Michigan led the way, with five contractors from each state weighing in with answers. Iowa and Illinois were next with four contractors each. Kansas,

Wisconsin and Pennsylvania added three each.

I have a few brief observations about the survey

results:

Most restrooms are serviced weekly

Once-a-week service is the rule for 77 percent of restroom contractors. Only a handful of contractors said that on average they serviced restrooms twice a month, and another On average, how many times per month does your company service units that are out on long-term rental?

1%

13%

9%

77%

0%

1

2

3

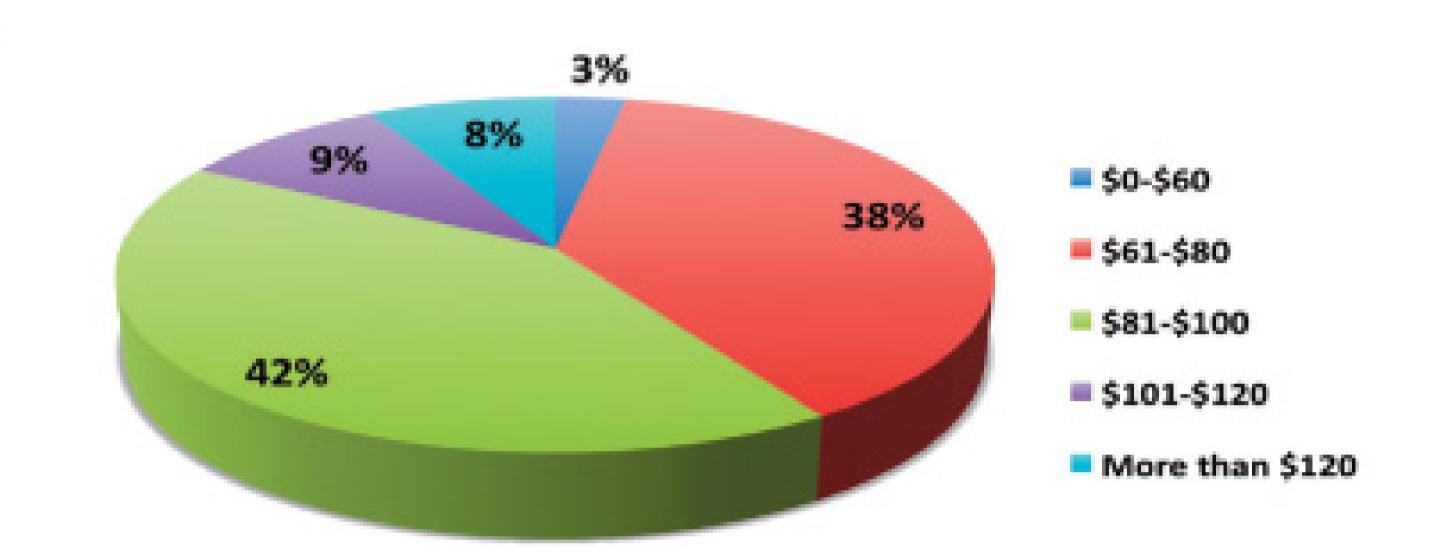
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5 or more

small percentage said they serviced most restrooms more often than once a week. The obvious question this raises is whether or not a down economy is slowing service intervals? Or is weekly service almost always going to be the norm?

In the first *Big 10 PRO Survey*, contractors say that finding new customers and rising business costs are top concerns

By Jim Kneiszel



On average, how much does your company charge per unit for a monthly rental fee?

Most contractors charge between \$80 to \$100 per unit per month

The largest (42 percent) number of contractors said their units brought in an average of \$81 and \$100 per month, while 38 percent reported charging \$61 to \$80 per month. The 17 percent that charge more than \$101 per month probably reflects regional cost differences and companies that believe providing great customer service requires charging a little more. When you see a very small number of companies charging less than \$60 for a monthly rental, you have to wonder how many contractors find themselves locked in a "price war" situation.

The majority of companies that provide portable sanitation also pump septic tanks

According to the survey, portable restroom service and septic tank pumping remain closely tied specialties for most contractors. While there's clearly been an increase in contractors exclusively providing portable sanitation, 55 percent reported pumping septic tanks and 46 percent said they service commercial septic and grease trap accounts. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, 30 percent of respondents said they

provide construction site services and 29 percent reported doing party or special event planning.

Some contractors made a point to add services they provide that weren't listed on the survey, including trash pickup, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning service, and contaminated water cleanup.

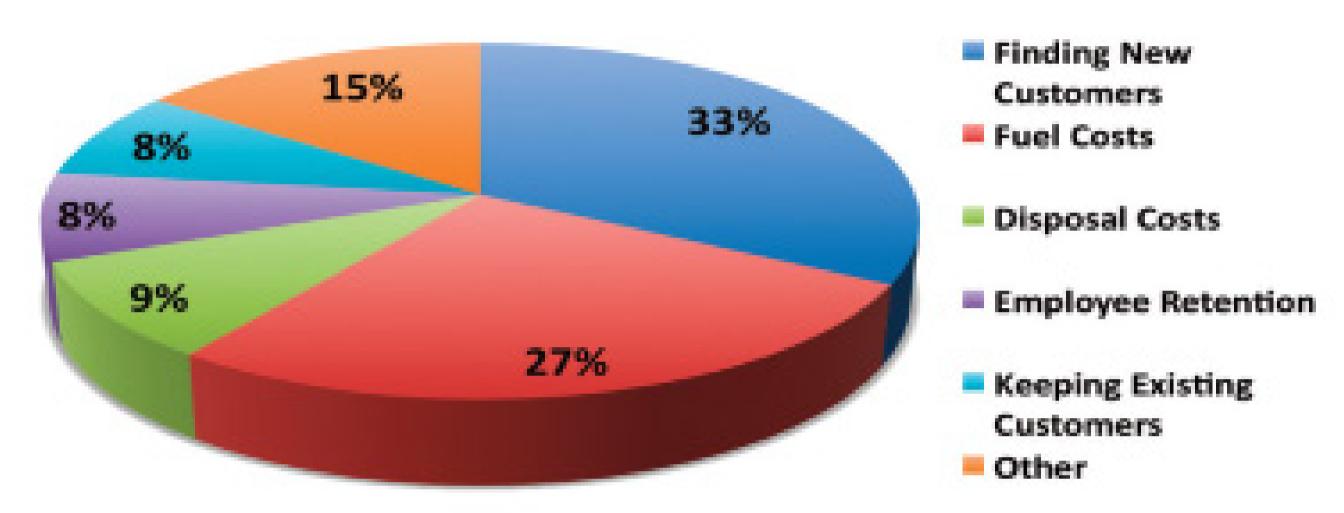
Providing employee benefits is important

Four fringe benefits are of particular importance to PROs. Contractors reported offering paid vacation (67 percent), health insurance (54 percent), uniforms (50 percent) and holiday bonuses (49 per-

Finding new customers was listed as the top priority for PROs (33 percent), not surprising in a tough economy that has beaten down construction accounts and focused competition on special events work.

cent). Slightly more than a quarter of the respondents also offer company parties, paid sick days and a retirement fund. A smaller number are offering benefits like flexible scheduling and health club memberships.

A few PROs elaborated on their benefits packages, saying they also offer employees personal use of company equipment, incentives for employees who land new accounts and lunch.



What is the single most important issue facing your company in the upcoming year?

Building customer base is job one

Finding new customers was listed as the top priority for PROs (33 percent), not surprising in a tough economy that has beaten down construction accounts and focused competition on special events work. Fuel costs (27 percent) was the second highest response, followed by disposal costs (9 percent) and employee and customer retention (8 percent). Anecdotally, PROs remarked that government intrusion, rising insurance costs, the economic downturn, taxes and winter freezing were critical issues.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Take a look at the survey results and let me know if you have any feedback. Do the answers raise any questions you feel we should answer in future stories? Are there other questions you would like us to ask the next time around? Drop me a line at editor@promonthly.com and I promise to respond.



Results



1. How many portable restrooms are in your company's inventory?

0-15028%	151-500	33%	501-1,00016%
1 001-2 500 17%	2.501+	6%	

2. On average, how much does your company charge per unit for a monthly rental fee?

\$0-\$603%	\$61-\$8038%	\$81-\$10042%
\$101-\$1209%	\$121+8%	

3. On average, how many times per month does your company service units that are out on long-term rental?

11%	29%	30%
477%	5+13%	

4. How many restroom service trucks does your company have in its fleet?

124%	2-328%	4-728%
8-109%	10+11%	

5. On average, what is your company's septage disposal cost per 1,000 gallons?

\$07%	\$1-\$4047%	\$41-\$8025%
\$81-\$12017%	\$121-\$1603%	\$161+1%

6. How many employees does your company have, including yourself?

1-329%	4-6	. 25%	7-9	11%
10-1211%	13+	.24%		

7. What employee benefits does your company offer?

Paid Vacation67%	Holiday Bonus49%
Uniforms50%	Health Insurance54%
Flexible Scheduling23%	Paid Sick Days27%
Company Parties31%	Retirement Fund29%
Flexible Spending11%	Health Club Membership4%
Other9%	None24%

8. How does your company compensate employees?

Hourly53%	Salary23%
Bonus16%	Commission6%
Other2%	

9. Other than portable sanitation, what services does your company provide?

Residential Septic Pumping	55%
Commercial Septic or Grease Trap Pumping	46%
Construction Site Services	30%
Party or Special Event Planning	29%
Powerwashing/Miscellaneous Cleaning	
Other	

10. What is the single most important issue facing your company in the upcoming year?

Finding New Customers33%	Disposal Costs 9%
Fuel Costs27%	Keeping Existing Customers8%
Employee Retention8%	Other15%





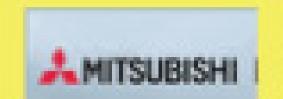




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Writer Judy Kneiszel has operated her own small business for a decade and is familiar with the many rewards and challenges of business ownership. Write to her with questions, comments or topic suggestions at thewordhouse@ameritech.net.



Banks a Lot

What has your bank done for you lately? Is it business friendly? If not, it may be time to take your money elsewhere.

By Judy Kneiszel

Banks have been in the news a lot lately and while day-to-day operations of a portable restroom business may not be directly affected by the buyouts, bailouts and big banking issues, these issues might be inspiring you to contemplate banking a little more than usual. Where business banks can affect daily operations, it may be time to rethink your bank.

BANK OFFERINGS

Most people, when they start a business, go to the bank they use for their personal finances and open a business account without giving much thought to the differences between personal banking and business banking, or how a bank can contribute to the business' success.

There are rules and regulations all financial institutions must fol-

Find out which banks are involved in the local Chamber of Commerce, service organizations, etc. It's a good bet that bankers who care the most about their community work the hardest to help small businesses succeed in that community.

low, but that doesn't mean all banks are the same. Banks can vary in the criteria they set for lending, interest rates they pay and charge, minimum balances for accounts, service charges and the types of products and services they offer. Some banks specialize in commercial lending, while others focus on home and car loans. Some may offer a wide variety of deposit accounts, while others may keep it limited to a few basic offerings.

WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM A BANK?

Start by making a list of what you require from a bank. Is a convenient location important because you'll be making frequent deposits, or is the ability to do most of your banking online a priority and physical location of little consequence? Do you anticipate needing financing for an expansion or large equipment purchase in the near future? Or is a place to stash your cash where you'll get a high interest rate a priority?

HOW TO FIND THE BEST BANK

Selecting a bank is a lot like hiring an employee. It involves asking thoughtful questions and checking into the candidate's history and performance. Personal chemistry also comes into play, since you want your banker to be someone you are comfortable talking with. Here are some ways to find a bank that's a good fit:

- Ask your lawyer, accountant and other business associates where they bank and what they like/dislike about their bank.
- Find out which banks are involved in the local Chamber of Commerce, service organizations, etc. It's a good bet that bankers who

care the most about their community work the hardest to help small businesses succeed in that community.

- Visit several banks to evaluate their customer service. Introduce yourself to the branch manager.
- Ask if the bank has a small business specialist on staff and meet that person too. A bank committed to small business enough to have a specialist on staff is more likely to provide support and assistance in areas such as cash management, tax issues, etc.
- Meet with a loan officer at the bank, discuss your credit report and try to get a feel for how likely they would be to loan your business money.
- Find out if the bank provides special loan programs for small businesses, including Small Business Association or other government guaranteed loans.
- Tell the people you meet with at the bank about your business to determine their level of understanding for what you do. Do they have customers in similar industries?
- Compare interest rates paid on deposit accounts and rates charged on consumer loans. While business loan rates are typically negotiated and usually not posted, a bank's consumer rates may give some indication of how they fall in line rate-wise compared to competing banks.
- Ask about fees. Many banks offer free checking and no account fees — don't choose one that is going to nickel and dime your business to death.

TWO BANKS?

Once you've selected a primary bank for your business, pick a runner-up. It's a good idea to build a relationship with two banks. That way, if there's a problem with the first one, you've got a back-up bank.

Banking professionals often move from one branch to another or up the corporate ladder. If the small-business specialist you have a great rapport with is replaced by someone who doesn't "get" what you do, you might start doing more business with bank number two.

If bank number one says no to a loan, you've got a better shot at a second bank if you've already built a relationship with them. In addition, since the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. covers only the first \$100,000 in deposits (though that was temporarily increased to \$250,000 per depositor through Dec. 31, 2009, as part of the banking bailout legislation) putting anything over that amount in a second FDIC-insured bank expands your protection.

Another reason to use two banks: These days, it's possible the bank you choose today will be out of business or owned by a different bank tomorrow. Having a back-up plan for your business banking needs can be a comfort to you as a business owner.

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Royal Restrooms of California hits the road with a fleet of trailers to serve upscale wedding and party hosts

By Seiche Sanders

oyal Restrooms of California is not a traditional portable restroom business. In fact, its owners, Rich and Kristin Reynolds, don't even own what you might consider your stock-in-trade portable restroom. Rather than carry individual restroom units, they have only rolling stock.

The couple has filled a business niche providing luxury shower and restroom trailers for special events and weddings throughout California. And they've been able to do it, in part, by establishing mutually beneficial relationships with other portable restroom operators and pumpers throughout their expansive service area.

The couple got into the portable sanitation industry three years ago, licensing a territory and marketing expertise from Savannah, Ga.-based Royal Restrooms, a national company that has 50 franchise offices in 13 states. Founded in 2003, the Royal Restrooms business model focuses strictly on providing rest-

room and specialty trailers for special events and other customers. The Reynolds' territory covers the entire state, except for

Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The national company hosts

the Reynolds' Web site and provides **Royal Restrooms** information on cusof California tomer leads, and also Livermore, Calif. Internet oversees marketing. Owners: Rich and Kristin Reynolds Kristin Reynolds says the arrange-Years in business: 3 ment shortened CALIFORNIA' Employees: 7 full-time; 1 part-time the couple's Service area: California, with the learning curve exception of Riverside and San in a business Bernardino counties in which they Services: Restroom and specialty trailers prior Web site: www.royalrestrooms.com



had the ability to get questions answered and conveniently learn best business practices. She said another advantage to this type of startup was that the corporation already had established relationships with suppliers.

WORKING WITH PUMPERS

Royal Restrooms of California sets up, but doesn't service the trailers. Instead, it relies on partnerships with liquid waste haulers and more traditional portable sanitation providers throughout the state.

"We're not a waste handler, and we're not a sanitation company," Reynolds explains. "Currently, we subcontract with other sanitation companies, some large and some small mom-and-pops. We bring in their (portable restrooms) when we need them for special events."

Since many events require a mix of luxury trailers and individual portable restrooms, the partnerships have proven fruitful for all.

"We bring in and collaborate with other (pumping) companies to provide what they don't," she adds. "We don't compete with one another. The relationships have been really beneficial in seeing us as a experience — they complementary item."



At left: Members of the Royal Restrooms of California team (from left) are driver Mike Wise, office manager Becky Raney and co-owners Kristin and Rich Reynolds with baby Parker. Below: A Ford LCF with modified bed is able to carry and tow two trailers. (Royal Restrooms photos)

Could they branch out to offer these other services? Sure. But the couple prefers to stick to what they do best and rely on other service providers to fill in the gaps.

"We're a rental company, like a tent, linen or other rental company, Reynolds explains. "In the beginning we did the research and heard about the pros and cons of owning your own vacuum trucks and having sanitation workers. We decided at the time we wanted to stay strictly in the rental business."

It makes sense for them, she continues, because of the company's far-ranging service area. Covering most of the state would require a big fleet of service vehicles and staff to run them.

Reynolds says their business strategy — sticking to trailer rentals in lieu of full-service pumping — has nothing to do with wanting to leave the dirty work to someone else. In fact, initially, before they established relationships with pumpers, they did their own pumping.

"I'm not afraid, and neither is Rich," Reynolds says. "We serviced such a large area, we'd rather purchase more trailers than invest the money into pumping and equipment and people and trucks. If we serviced only one county, that wouldn't be a problem."

DROP OFF AND PICK UP

Having backgrounds in real estate contributed to their view of the



trailers as "mobile real estate." "They're our 37 properties that we rent out.

"Our primary focus is the backyard wedding or the vineyard or corporate event where they need restroom trailers; we provide the upscale and that's what we want to be known for," Reynolds says.

For a typical event, Royal Restrooms' drivers will drop a trailer off, clean and ready to go, then conduct a walk-through with the customer.

After the event is over, Royal picks up the trailer and has it serviced at one of its lots — Royal has three locations: San Diego, Los Angeles and the East Bay/San Francisco area.

For long-term rentals, Royal Restrooms works with a septic pumping company to service trailers on location. The pumpers then send an e-mail or text alerting Reynolds that the trailers have been serviced.

For the technicians (who are spread among the three locations), there is a lot of driving involved. Vicinity and traffic are factored in to who delivers what, when and where.

Royal Restrooms currently works with about 10 pumping or portable sanitation contractors, sending them referrals and leaning on them to help out with events, occasionally at odd hours. The process of developing these relationships was painstaking. It began with Rich Reynolds making cold calls, trying to explain the restroom service procedures to septic pumping outfits unaccustomed to the work.

There are still challenges, in that each company Royal Restrooms works with operates differently. Some liquid waste haulers offer 24/7 availability — great when service is needed in the middle of the night and on weekends — but most do not. Pricing invariably differs across the board, requiring Royal Restrooms to get a quote for each job. But the working partnerships are easier to manage the longer they are with the pumping companies.

ON THE GROW

When the couple first saw the trailers, they were immediately intrigued. They took notice of the industry after Kristin Reynolds' mother told her about seeing an upscale trailer at a friend's house in Florida.

"My mom always knew I wanted to own my own business. She saw



Rich Reynolds sets silk flowers and butter mints on the counter of the men's stall.



"Our philosophy is providing an excellent restroom with excellent service. We want the restroom experience to be painless and carefree. Our repeat business and referrals are phenomenal, and that tells us we're doing something right."

Kristin Reynolds

restroom and an eight-stall Jag Mobile Solutions Functional shower trailer; Wells Cargo Comfort Elite II, Comfort Elite III and Comfort Elite ADA+2, Comfort Elite II and Comfort Elite III shower trailers, and Comfort Elite II and III Platinum Series trailers; Alpha Mobile Solutions Denali 10-stall semi-private restroom trailer; and Comforts of Home two-stall shower trailers. The couple did not want to specify how many of each trailer model they maintain in their inventory.

To haul the trailers, Royal Restrooms has Ford F-250s and F-350s from 1999 to 2007 model years. All are four-wheel-drive with diesel, and modified with back-up cameras. They also have a Ford LCF (low cab forward) diesel, with the bed modified to carry and tow two trailers.

QUALITY SERVICE A MUST

To achieve their goals, the couple is banking on an upscale product and the promise of round-the-clock service. Reynolds says good service builds a good reputation and spurs word-of-mouth business.

Reynolds' growth strategy includes opening new offices throughout California, more yards to house trailers and more drivers in remote areas, so the company is better prepared to deliver units on short notice.

"Our philosophy is providing an excellent restroom with excellent service," she says. "We want the restroom experience to be painless and carefree. Our repeat business and referrals are phenomenal, and that tells us we're doing something right."

these and called me consistently for two days. She said I'm not getting off the phone until you go online."

Working in sales management and real estate, part of Reynolds' job was helping real estate agents automate business processes.

After assessing local competition and believing there was an untapped market for luxury restroom trailers, the couple decided to take the leap and become business owners, leaving behind the security of corporate jobs. They haven't looked back.

Kristin Reynolds admits running a business is hard work, but it's also rewarding. And she says the growth has come quickly. In their second year of business they worked 29 events — their third year they nearly doubled that number. The company now has nearly 40 trailers to meet increasing demand, including Jag Mobile Solutions' single-stall





At left: Royal Restrooms services an event at the California State Capitol. Above: A three-stall trailer serves a Napa winery.

And Baby Makes Three

When Rich and Kristin
Reynolds found out they were
expecting their first child, they
both knew they wanted to be
hands-on parents and bypass
traditional daycare if possible.
Both had been raised by family,
and wanted to do the same for
their child. So, they decided to
make every day "take your son
to work day."



Their son, Parker, who was

born in September 2007, has put in some serious hours in the office. Fortunately for him, however, it's more play than work.

"I'm in the office a few hours here and there," Kristin says. "I have his play yard set up so I can take him in, and my husband and I juggle things."

The ability to do a lot of work and communicate via phone, Internet and e-mail also allows Reynolds to work remotely quite easily. "Since everything is Internet-based, I can see what's going on every minute of the day, whether I'm in the office or not."

The prospect of their son becoming an office regular caused the couple to reconsider their previous facility, and they moved into a larger office about two miles from their home. The new location offers more space to store trailers, but, it did require some work to build an area for Parker in Kristin's office. There's also a full kitchen.

"It's the biggest expenditure we've made so far with him in mind," she jokes.

CAREFUL PLANNING PAYS OFF

As the due date drew near, Reynolds knew she wouldn't get much of a break from work — you simply can't as a small business owner. Always a careful planner and self-professed Type A personality, she even considered a planned C-section, but ultimately decided to let nature take its course.

Parker, who arrived a bit after his due date, weighed in at 9 pounds, 1 ounce, and Reynolds worked right up until the night before his birth. One of her top concerns was how busy they were at the time with events.

"Even from the hospital, Rich had his computer and (my break) was that my phone was forwarded to his for three days. The only time he didn't answer the phone was during labor and delivery, and we continued to run the business from the hospital."

Easing back into the working world with a baby was not without its hiccups, but Reynolds attributes much of the ease she's experienced so far to careful planning.

"If you can, plan ahead to try to implement things so they are as automatic as they can be," Reynolds recommends. "However, don't beat yourself up when it doesn't work out as perfectly as you'd planned."

Reynolds has learned to roll with the punches.

"Babies don't have a routine," she says. "You end up working at odd hours. I may catch up when he's up at 3 a.m., making sure (e-mails) get answered."

Her advice to other PRO families: "Make sure you have good partnerships with your partner in business or in life, and make sure that person is ready for the task at hand."

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SPECIALREPORT

Is it Time to Quit Talking on the Go?

Efforts to limit use of cell phones while driving are picking up steam. Here's how some contractors balance mobile communication with the need to drive safely.

By Greg Northcutt

January called for a nationwide ban on the use of cell phones — both handheld and hands-free — and text message devices while driving, it turned up the heat on an issue that has been simmering for some time: Are the convenience and time-savings of communicating on the road worth the risks they pose to life and limb?

Contractors' reactions to such a ban range from acceptance (if not support) to sputtering in exasperation at what they see as just one more attempt to stick the government's nose where it doesn't belong.

Currently, no state bans the use of all types of cell phones while driving. However, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety reports that six states — California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Utah and Washington — and the District of Columbia prohibit drivers from using hand-held cell phones. At the same time, all drivers are banned from text messaging in seven states — Alaska, California, Connecticut, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Jersey and Washington — and in the District of Columbia.

DON'T TAKE AWAY MY PHONE

Whatever your opinion about driving while talking on a cell phone, don't try to deny Danny Kleinpeter the use of his cell phone when he's behind the wheel.

The owner of Ranger Sewer, an onsite system services contractor and sewer cleaning firm based in East Northport, N.Y., depends on his phone to keep in touch with his customers and suppliers throughout the day. Complying with a New York state law that prohibits the use of a hand-held cell phone while driving, he takes calls on his hands-free unit while wheeling his truck from job to job.

"I don't want anyone telling me how to run my life and that I can't operate my truck or car safely with a phone in my ear," he says. "When I turn on my phone, I don't turn off my brain. I have the skill to drive and use my hands-free phone responsibly and safely. If the call is going to be a lengthy conversation, I pull off the road and stop to complete it. I shouldn't have to give up my cell phone while driving just because someone else hasn't mastered the art of driving and talking on a phone safely."

As executive director of the National Association of Wastewater Transporters Inc., Tom Ferrero recently asked members what they thought of a ban. "The polite ones said it would really be a step backward, because we all lean so heavily on cell phones these days. Others definitely would not like it."

BANS INEVITABLE

Peter Allard considers cell phones a necessary evil for his business. He's vice president of

> operations for Rooter-Man of Tampa Bay, Fla. The company employs 18 technicians who use cell phones and two-way radios. The safe and sane use of these devices is a frequent topic at the company's weekly safety meetings.

> Allard agrees with prohibiting text messaging while driving. "That's a ridiculous practice," he says. However, he doesn't want to lose mobile voice communications with his technicians. "Cell phones and two

"Because of the size of a truck and the added workload in the cab, a truck driver tends to be much more conscious of safety and the need to use cell phones responsibly than many motorists. Rather than imposing another mandatory requirement on our business, the government should let the industry address safe cell phone use."

Tom Ferrero

way radios have become a way of life for our business," he observes. "I sure hope that we don't lose them."

Donald MacDonald, president of A Corp./Rooter-Man, North Billerica, Mass., says he hasn't heard of any crashes related to cell phone use by drivers among his company's franchisees who provide plumbing, sewer and drain cleaning services. He's resigned to the idea that all states will eventually pass laws prohibiting the use of cell phones while driving.

"Even though cell phones can save a lot of time, the safety risks of using them while driving are valid concerns," he says. "But, laws to prevent it would be more government interference with commerce. You'd be operating your business with one hand tied behind your back. Still, I'm sure that it's just a matter of time before there is a national ban on drivers using cell phones."

RESPONSIBLE USE

The Safety Council cites numerous studies highlighting safety risks associated with cell phone use by drivers. However, say some contractors, the solution to the problem is not to ban the practice, but to promote more responsible use of mobile communications technology.

The ability to reach drivers on the road offers businesses real economic benefits, these



contractors say. They use cell phones to exchange dispatching information with technicians, and technicians use them to check with the office and to talk directly with customers.

Septic cleaning contractor David Hapchuk of Hapchuk Inc., Washington, Pa., likes drivers of his 10 service trucks to use their cell phones to talk directly with customers. It's more convenient than relaying information through the office and, he says, it can save each technician about 45 to 60 minutes a day.

At Allard's operation, technicians have been using two-way radios and cell phones for nine years, switching from pagers. "Instead of going to a supply house and waiting for parts as we used to, our technicians now call ahead and the parts are waiting for them when they arrive," he says. "There's also the security aspect of being able to call for assistance, if necessary. And, have you tried to find a pay phone these days?"

Even more importantly, loss of instant communication between office and driver risks losing business. "In our fast-paced society, people want service now," Allard says. "If there's a plumbing emergency and we can't respond right away, they'll call the next guy."

THE INDUSTRY'S ROLE

As Ferrero sees it, safety issues surrounding cell phone use are related more to the driver than to the phone. He thinks most truck drivers can handle cell phones more safely than a typical motorist. "Because of the size of a truck and the added workload in the cab, a truck driver tends to be much more conscious of safety and of the need to use cell phones responsibly than many motorists," he says. "Rather than imposing another mandatory requirement on our business, the government should let the industry address safe cell phone use."

Ike Casey, executive vice president of Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors — National Association, says the association doesn't have an official position on the National Safety Council stand. However, his group has surveyed members to learn what they think of a ban, and how it would affect their operations.

"We do know that cell phones and text messaging have been banned in California, and some of our members report that it has not had as much of an impact on them as they thought," Casey says. "They have just changed their procedures so that techs respond to voicemails and texts at their next stop.

"The safety of employees is always a priority for association members, he says. "Safe driving is a topic at many of their safety meetings, "We tell our people to keep their hands on the wheel when driving and to use the radios only when they are stopped and to leave the radios in the truck when they are working at a jobsite."

Jeff Wigley

and many take advantage of a "Distracted Driving — At What Cost?" safety program. The program emphasizes the many ways business owners and their drivers can avoid the pitfalls of distracted driving."

SAFE PHONING

Recognizing the risks of driving while distracted, some contractors are promoting practices to promote responsible cell phone use.

Anthony Heath, president of Tidy Coast Containers Inc., provides portable sanitation and trash container services and transports various types of equipment from his base in Hobe Sound, Fla. The company, which operates 15 trucks, has been using cell phones to communicate with drivers since it opened for business 10 years ago. "Our drivers have never had an accident while using a cell phone," he reports.

"Answering a cell phone is left to the driver's discretion," Heath continues. "Normally, if we're giving them instructions from the office, they're either at the jobsite or have pulled off the road. "If they get a call en route, they'll call back when they have a safe place to stop, unless they're on a back road with little traffic, in which case they may take the message."

Two years ago, the company added dashmounted GPS units to trucks to supplement cell phone communications. Now, customer information can be sent to the driver from a computer in the office, eliminating this use of the cell phone.

OTHER APPROACHES

Over the years, Rasmik Hovsepian, who owns a Rooter-Man business in Burbank, Calif., has communicated with eight technicians on the road in several ways — first with pagers and then two-way radios, and now with hands-free cell phones.

He agrees with state bans on hand-held cell phones and texting while driving, but says hands-free cell phones are easier and more convenient to use. In fact, because he doesn't like headsets or ear pieces, he's equipped his pickup with a system that allows him to talk using a microphone mounted near the sun visors and to listen over the truck's sound system.

Technicians use the voice feature of their cell phones to talk with the office and with customers. However, they receive their dispatch instructions via text messages from a computer in the office.

"More and more communication is going to text messaging," he says. "It works out much better for us. Often, when we called technicians on the radio, we'd be interrupting them. Now, when they get a text message, they can respond after they are stopped."

Portable sanitation contractor Jeff Wigley, co-owner of Pit Stop Sanitation Services of Marietta, Ga., has abandoned cell phones in favor of two-way radios to talk with his 10 technicians. This eliminated use of the cell phones for personal calls and fostered better customer relations by forcing technicians to talk face-to-face with customers rather than leaving messages.

"Laws to prevent (cell phone use) would be more government interference with commerce. You'd be operating your business with one hand tied behind your back. Still, I'm sure that it's just a matter of time before there is a national ban on drivers using cell phones."

Donald MacDonald

"We tell our people to keep their hands on the wheel when driving and to use the radios only when they are stopped and to leave the radios in the truck when they are working at a jobsite."

Wigley is a member of the Georgia Motor Trucking Association. "For a number of years, many members have prohibited their drivers from using communication devices while driving," he says. "I'm in favor of that. All those motorists engrossed in their cell phone conversations make the roads unsafe for our drivers."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Meanwhile, the NSC is urging businesses to enact policies that prohibit phoning and texting while driving, and is asking governors and legislators in all 50 states and the District of Columbia to pass laws banning those practices. As evidence that it is serious, the NSC cites its record of turning the "Click It or Ticket" seatbelt campaign from a one-state pilot project to a 50-state program.



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ON LOCATION

THE JOB: Bike Week in Daytona Beach

LOCATION: Daytona Beach and Volusia County, Fla.

THE PRO: Godawa Septic Tank

Service

Godawa Septic Tank Service sets out about 300 restrooms, mostly basic Hampel units and 12 PolyJohn handicapped-accessible units, for the annual Bike Week festival in Daytona Beach, Fla. (Photos by Mark Robertson)



For Bike Week, Godawa Septic rolls into action to provide portable restrooms at one of America's largest motorcycle events

By Ken Wysocky

THE TEAM

When motorcycle enthusiasts roared into Daytona Beach, Fla., in February for the 68th Bike Week festival, Paul Creech and his 11 employees at Godawa Septic Tank Service in South Daytona were as revved up as a Harley-Davidson Softail at full throttle. This Mecca for motorcycle madness, which kicks off the traditional riding-festival season for biker

In Daytona

buffs across the country, is one of the biggest events the company handles all year — and it's a total family affair.

Creech — a motorcycle rider himself relies heavily on his son, Aaron, who oversees Godawa's portable restroom division. Creech's wife and company vice president, Linda, keeps the bill-paying systems humming. Another son, Shelby, who's a parttime office systems troubleshooter, works as a route driver during the festival. And Creech's daughter-in-law, Lowry, helps coordinate operations and also runs a truck during the festival.

COMPANY HISTORY

Eddie Godawa, Creech's father-in-law, founded the company in 1947 and, in the process, created one of central Florida's first septic tank companies. Initially, Godawa focused on manufacturing his own concrete septic tanks, then installing the tanks and drainfields.

In 1982, Paul and Linda Creech, who now own the company, entered the portable restroom rental field, and also added septic tank cleaning to its services. In 1996, Aaron Creech became head of the portable restroom end of

the business. He got the company involved in processing septage — using a system he engineered and helped build — then land-applied the processed waste on family farmland.

Godawa's service area covers
about a 100-mile
radius of Daytona
Beach. The company owns about





1,100 restrooms, made primarily by PolyPortables Inc., PolyJohn Enterprises, Hampel Corp. and Synergy World Inc., as well as five restroom service trucks and three trailers. The company's current business mix is about 50-percent special events and 50-percent construction and miscellaneous rentals, although it used to do much more construction rental business before the economic downturn, Creech says.

THE MAIN EVENT

The first Bike Week was held in January 1937 in conjunction with the inaugural Daytona 200 motorcycle race, held on the beaches and roads south of Daytona Beach. It slowly grew into one of the largest motorcycle events in the country, with upwards of 500,000 bike enthusiasts converging on Volusia County for the sprawling, 10-day extravaganza, usually held in late February and the first week in March.

THE JOB

Godawa has provided portable restrooms for Bike Week since the early 1980s, so by now, employees

The sprawling Bike Week festival draws upwards of 500,000 motorcycle enthusiasts to Volusia County for the 10-day event.

know the drill well. This year, the company set out about 300 restrooms, mostly basic Hampel units and 12 PolyJohn handicapped-accessible units. The restrooms are scattered in clusters of roughly five to 10 units at various locations around the county, ranging from taverns and individual parties to concerts and other special events, such as the infamous coleslaw-wrestling contest. In addition, Godawa also services 10 restrooms and about 100 RVs at each of two local campgrounds.

"It's a hodge-podge of things," Creech says. "But all the restrooms stay put for all 10 days of the festival."

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Godawa got involved as a Bike Week vendor when the local Chamber of Commerce asked Creech to set up portable restrooms, figuring the company was prepared to set them up anyway for spring break, which typically follows Bike Week.

"But the Chamber didn't have any money in the budget to pay us," Creech recalls. "So we essentially did it for free, just to get our foot in the door. Then the Chamber folks started recommending us for other events, too."

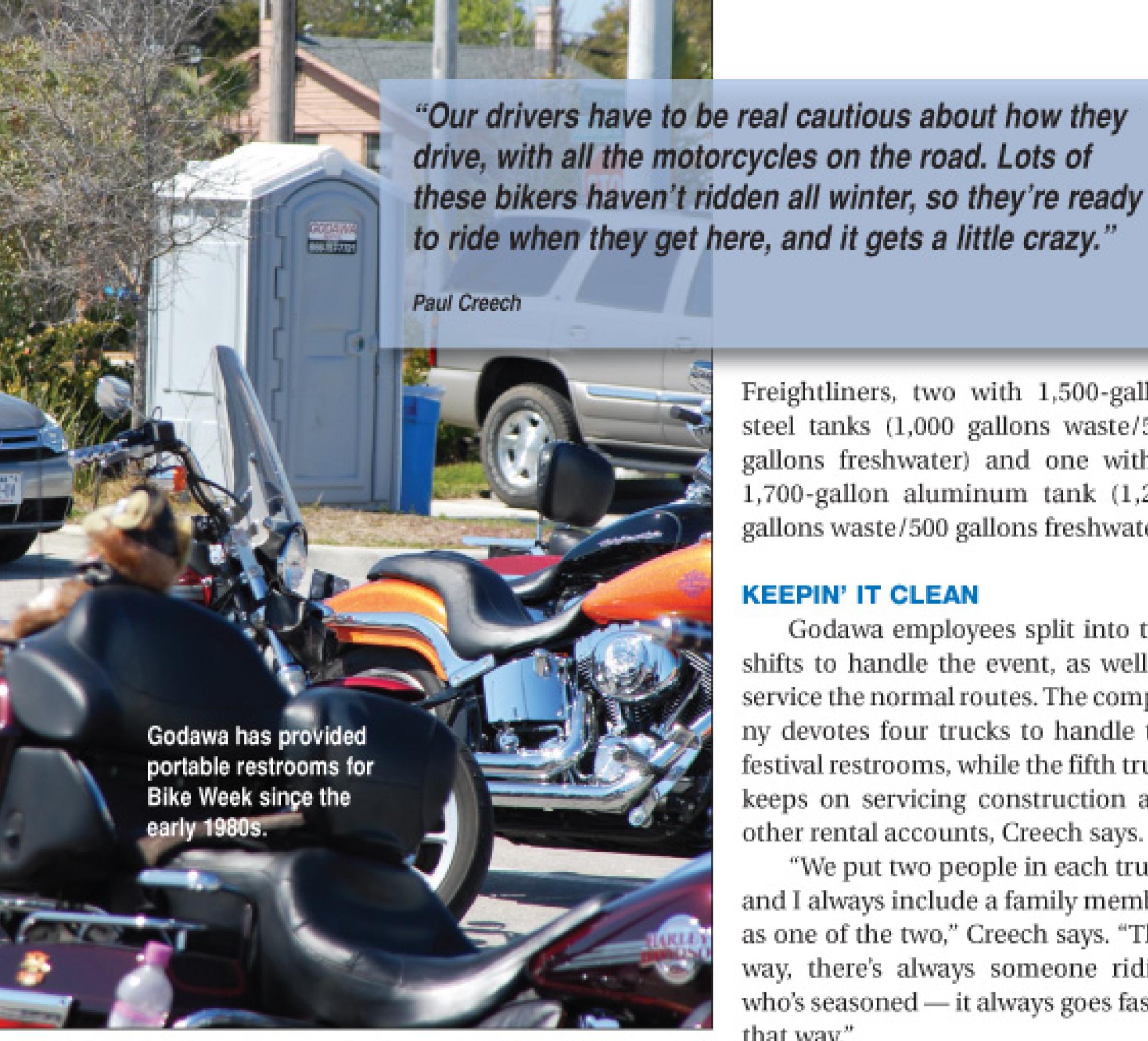
LET'S ROLL

Bike Week starts on a Friday, so setup usually starts on the prior Monday. "We leave it up to the customers as to when they want

> restrooms delivered," Creech says. "Some want their restrooms earlier than others because they need to get toilets in place before they can do other things, such as set up a tent."

> To deliver restrooms, Godawa uses all three of its trailers, each of which can hold 12 units. All the units are removed on the Monday after the event, which ends on





Freightliners, two with 1,500-gallon steel tanks (1,000 gallons waste/500 gallons freshwater) and one with a 1,700-gallon aluminum tank (1,200 gallons waste/500 gallons freshwater).

KEEPIN' IT CLEAN

Godawa employees split into two shifts to handle the event, as well as service the normal routes. The company devotes four trucks to handle the festival restrooms, while the fifth truck keeps on servicing construction and other rental accounts, Creech says.

"We put two people in each truck, and I always include a family member as one of the two," Creech says. "That way, there's always someone riding who's seasoned — it always goes faster that way."

The first shift starts around 3 a.m. Festival restrooms get serviced first, followed by the campgrounds and RVs by around 8:30 or 9 a.m. Godawa's facilities are centrally located in the middle of the restrooms it services for Bike Week, which makes waste disposal relatively easy.

"It was terrible before we handled our own

waste," Creech says. "We'd be at mercy of

Aaron Creech makes sure all is ready when the riders roll into town. Bike Week starts on a Friday. Setup usually starts on the prior Monday.

had to offload the waste onto big tanker trucks and wait until the treatment plants opened." A second-shift crew comes in during late morning to handle the company's usual construction and miscellaneous rental routes. When they're finished, they offload waste into

treatment plants, which aren't even open

when we start servicing event restrooms. We

the processing facility and restock the trucks with supplies so the vehicles are ready to roll when the first-shift employees arrive early the next morning.

LOGISTICAL CHALLENGE

The logistics of Bike Week are intense, Creech says. "When the bars shut down, people inevitably leave a vehicle — could be a motorcycle, a truck or a car — parked right in front of the restrooms. I think the chances are directly proportional to how much alcohol they've consumed. We get as close as we can, then maybe throw a hose over a fence and go to work."

To more easily handle special events, Creech outfits his trucks with two suction hoses, one on each side. "That way we don't have to turn the truck around in tight quarters to service toilets," he says. "We also have exterior lights mounted on the trucks, two on each side and two on the back, because we do so much night work at special events."

With thousands of motorcycle riders on the road every day, traffic also poses a challenge. "Our drivers have to be real cautious about how they drive, with all the motorcycles on the road," Creech says. "Lots of these bikers haven't ridden all winter, so they're ready to ride when they get here, and it gets a little crazy."

ENJOY THE RIDE

About half of Godawa's employees are bike enthusiasts, so despite all the hard work and long hours, the event is a lot of fun, too. "We ride, too, so we're always excited about Bike Week," Creech says. "About three-quarters of the way through it, we're pretty tired. But we really enjoy it."

a Sunday. One Ford F-250 and two Ford F-150 pickup trucks pull the trailers.

To service restrooms, Godawa relies on a 2000 Ford F-550 with a 1,000-gallon steel tank (500 gallons waste/500 gallons freshwater); a 2000 International with a 2,200-gallon aluminum tank (1,700 gallons waste/500 gallons freshwater); and 2005, 2006 and 2007



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May 2009





They're Seeking Functional Trailers

In a challenging economy, some contractors are looking for smaller, no-frills restrooms to add to their fleets

By Mary Shafer

"The trailer we're using now is 32 feet long. That's not easy to haul or position, and the removable tanks aren't easy to service. The ones we're seeing now are a lot smaller but have larger capacity in their permanent tanks."

Jack Kelly

he trend in the past several years has been an upswing in requests for VIP-style restroom trailers. During the height of the building boom, even some construction contractors were asking for trailers previously reserved for special events. It appears the current recessionary market has cooled those desires somewhat.

PROs who offer restroom trailers say they're fielding more calls for smaller, no-frills models, even as the overall market for trailers continues to grow. Typically, customers are still asking for trailers at special events with high attendance or for those requiring an upgrade from standard restrooms. But they're not requesting as many of the executive-level amenities as in the building boom years.

Likely, there are two market pressures coming to bear on this trend. The obvious one is that belts have tightened and budgets are lower. Anyone sitting on the fence between traditional individual restrooms and executive trailers is liable to fall on the side of economy for the time being.

Advance Portable Toilet Services has 265 portable restrooms and one six-stall restroom trailer from Ameri-Can Engineering. It provides two women's stalls and four men's stations, two stalls and two urinals.



Name: Charles Lahood, owner Company: Advanced Portable Toilet Services Location: Valdosta, Ga. Employees: 4 Years in Business: 4

"Our typical trailer customer is ordering for weddings, golf tournaments and corporate parties," says Charles Lahood.

"Weddings and parties tend to have between 200 and 400

attendees," he says. "The golf tournament is our largest event, part of the Nationwide PGA Tour. We get about 10,000 people for that." The event, part of the PGA's developmental tour for emerging pros, also rents individual portable units and hand-wash stations from Advanced.

The size of the golf event's crowd makes Lahood believe he could justify a second trailer, and he's shopped for one at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International. He isn't sure which features he wants yet, but is eager to see what new amenities are available.

Regardless of which model he chooses, Lahood believes that for the time being, customers won't be looking for all the bells and whistles. "At least not for more localized events," he says. Typically, larger events sponsored by national brands with a more regional scope are the ones asking for trailers. "But if it's more affordable, we may get more local (trailer) business," Lahood says.

"We have an older trailer with removable holding tanks that need to be installed for each job," says Jack Kelly of A-1 Portable Toilet Rental. Custom made by a firm that specializes in office trailers, it has three women's stalls, two men's stalls and two urinals. A regular trailer customer is the University of Kansas women's softball program. Kelly pro-



Name: Jack Kelly, owner Company: A-1 Portable Toilet Rental Location: Lawrence, Kan. Employees: 2 Years in Business: 9

vides a trailer for its weekend tournaments and generally services it once a day over the two-day event.

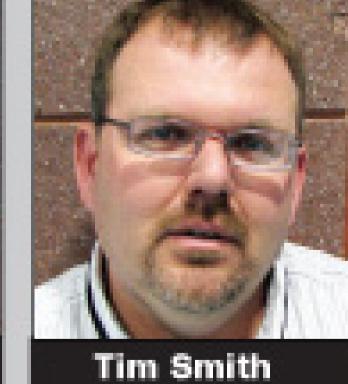
Currently shopping for a newer model, Kelly's not looking for a high-end

addition. He says his market won't support an executive level trailer. "I'd be looking for something that's more durable and easy to clean."

He'd like to double his trailer inventory, but likes the idea of a smaller and service-friendly model. "We want one that's about the same configuration capacity-wise, but the trailer we're using now is 32 feet long.

That's not easy to haul or position, and the removable tanks aren't easy to service. The ones we're seeing now are a lot smaller but have larger capacity in their permanent tanks." Again, practicality rules the day for this PRO.





Name: Mark Manning and Tim Smith, co-owners Company: A King's Throne Location: Des Moines, Iowa Employees: 3 Years in Business: 2

"We tend to service the VIP section of special events like outdoor festivals and band concerts," says Mark Manning of A King's Throne. "The other major category is outdoor weddings and receptions." A King's Throne currently offers what Manning and co-owner Tim Smith consider a mid-level trailer that accommodates eight users at a time. It's a custom fabrication by a private company.

Smith says they would be far more likely to be able to rent a smaller, two-stall model in the current market. "In the future, that's what we'll be looking for, but now's not the time for us to be making that kind of large purchase."









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Slide-in Tank Questions

When it comes to smaller vacuum units for pickup trucks, PROs wonder about creating adequate pump pressure and choosing the right tank material

QUESTION:

I've got a Boyd slide-in unit (100 gallons fresh/300 gallons waste) with a vacuum-only pump. I'd like to route the exhaust from the pump back into the tank to pressurize the tank, as some of the waste stays in the tank even when the front of the truck is up on ramps. Anyone else done this?

ANSWER:

If you have a vacuum pump, putting the exhaust into the tank will not pressurize the tank. You'll be circulating the air and that's all. You need a four-way valve installed on your pump.

QUESTION:

I'm looking at stainless and aluminum slide-in vacuum tank units, both with 400-gallon waste/200-gallon freshwater configurations. They have the same pump and engine combinations, so what would you prefer and why?

ANSWER:

I have a stainless steel tank on my C5500, and you can't beat stainless. It will last a lifetime. But if I were going to buy a slide-in unit I would buy aluminum. The main reason is the weight; aluminum is so much lighter. You could run a lighter truck under it.

But one word of caution: a tank that size should cover 20 to 30 restrooms a day, if you're lucky. When I bought my tank, I figured seven gallons of freshwater per restroom and 10 to 15 gallons of wastewater. The 200-gallon freshwater tank you mention then will service 28 units, and the 400-gallon waste tank will allow you to service 20 to 30 units. If your business grows, this tank might not be big enough to serve your needs.

I don't have a slide-in unit, but I would like to have one. I have an older service truck for a spare, and a pickup truck. If I had a slide-in unit, I could get down to one pickup as a spare and reduce my insurance premiums. However, I own my two backup trucks outright, and the payment on a slide-in unit isn't justified.

Come Join Us Online

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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Support Scholars

Association fund helps students in the portable sanitation industry pursue higher education

By Ned Carpenter

Portable Sanitation Association International members have proudly shown their belief in the value of education by contributing \$319,350 to the PSAI Scholarship Fund during the initial five-year pledge campaign. The members' generosity allowed 46 full- and part-time international and national students to be awarded scholarships worth \$99,000.

The economic situation the world is experiencing has caused us to delay the second five-year pledge campaign. The scholarship fund balance of \$220,350 will allow eight outstanding students to receive individual \$2,500 scholarships in May 2009 for a total of \$20,000.

The decision to delay the start of the second five-year pledge campaign has not stopped us from asking for contributions to the PSAI Scholarship Fund. Contributions can be made in honor or memory of a special person. End-of-life giving is also an excellent way to provide funds by including the PSAI Scholarship Fund in a Last Will and Testament; money along with corporate stock or other types of property may be included in the will.

The PSAI Scholarship Fund is administered by Scholarship America, a private sector scholarship and educational support organization. Scholarship America receives the scholarship applications and follows its selection process to choose students for the PSAI Scholarships. Scholarship America also receives and invests the scholarship contributions and makes payment of the scholarship awards.

A tax-deductible contribution check may be written payable to Scholarship America for the PSAI Scholarship Fund. The mailing address is Pat Halter, Scholarship America, 1505 Riverview Road, P.O. Box 297, St. Peter MN 56082.

PSAI membership includes international and national portable restroom operating companies and associate member companies who supply the portable restroom industry. All employees and their family members of a company belonging to PSAI are eligible for PSAI Scholarship Awards. The application deadline for the 2009 scholarships was March 15.

An application and additional information for the 2010 PSAI Scholarship are available at www.psai.org and are due to Scholarship America by March 15, 2010.

Download the scholarship information and place it on the company bulletin board or include it with the employee's paycheck. Employees appreciate the chance to educate their children, which brings goodwill to the company. It's just another good reason to be a PSAI member.

The PSAI Scholarship Committee includes Chairman Ned Carpenter of Porta-Jon, Gastonia, N.C; Kathy Crafton of PolyPortables Inc.; Gregg deLong of PolyJohn Enterprises Corp.; Barry Gump of Andy Gump Inc., Santa Clarita, Calif.; Todd Hilde of Satellite Industries Inc.; Rich Vegter of Black Tie Sanitation, Frankfort, Ill.

For more information on PSAI and its programs, call 800/822-3020 or go to www.psai.org. ■



PRODUCT NEWS

PolyPortables Introduces DriPax Deodorizer

The DriPax throw-and-go deodorizer from PolyPortables comes in a 12-gram, watersoluble (including saltwater) pouch. The



environmentally-friendly product is designed for one-week service. The blue deodorizer is available in three strength levels — first gear, second gear and third gear — and comes in cherry, mulberry and fresh-room cleaner fragrances. 800/241-7951;

www.polyportables.com.



Wells Cargo Introduces Comfort Elite X Power Flush

The 20-foot Comfort Elite X Power Flush rest-

room trailer from Wells Cargo COG is designed to meet high traffic needs yet can be towed by a standard pickup. Featuring hydraulic technology, the unit lowers and rests on the ground, eliminating the need for steps or platforms. The macerating vacuum pump uses a fraction of the water required by other toilets and has the ability to pump waste up to 300 yards. A total of 10 unisex, private stalls can accommodate crowds of up to 2,000. The hand-wash station at the rear of the trailer features four stainless steel sinks. The trailer can connect directly to sewer, an external tank or include a waste tank for total self-containment. 888/574-4222; www.wellscargocog.com. ■





We're Here for the PROs!

Have you ever wondered how we generate story ideas for the pages of *PRO™*? Portable sanitation contractors are our most important sources for the news and feature stories you see here every month.

If you have an issue-oriented story idea or know of a fellow contractor whose success story should be told, please call or write and tell us about it.

Editor Jim Kneiszel may be reached by phone at 866/484-6131 or 920/983-6636, 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*:

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

What's the strangest thing that happened to you and your business this year? You know, that funny or unbelievable portable sanitation story you find yourself repeating over and over to friends and family? Whether it's a tale of misfortune or good fortune, we want to hear about it and share it with readers in *All In a Day's Work*.

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*.

PRO SNAPSHOT

Many of today's leading portable restroom companies started out with humble beginnings, the company owner building wooden units in the back yard and going on service routes with an old pickup truck in the 1950s and '60s. Scan your favorite old photos and send them, along with a brief history of your company, and we'll share your business story in *PRO Snapshot*.

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*.

PRO FORUM CHATTER

An interesting portable sanitation roundtable discussion awaits you anytime at the *PRO E-mail Discussion* at www.promonthly.com. If you haven't already subscribed to this free e-mail idea exchange, check it out on our Web site (click on the *PRO E-Mail Discussion* icon to sign up) and start talking about industry issues with counterparts across the country. We print some of those discussions in the magazine under the headline *PRO Forum Chatter.*



New And Used Trucks And Equipment





QUESTIONS? Get Answers...

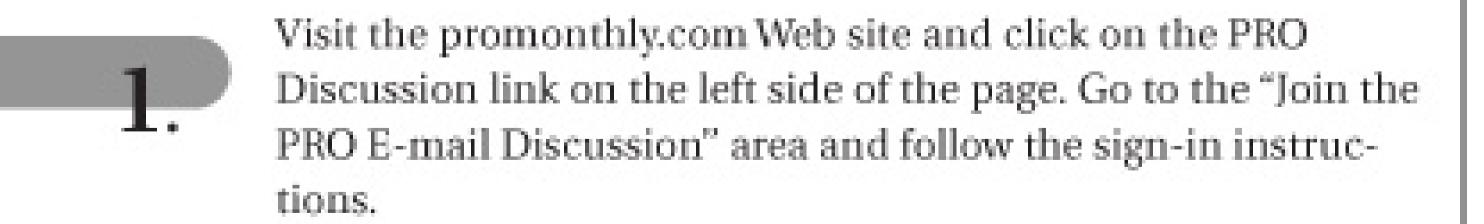
New PRO Discussion forum brings portable sanitation professionals together over the back fence, 21st Century style

By Jim Kneiszel

inally ... A place you can go to talk shop with portable restroom operators from across the country ... and around the world. Welcome to the PRO e-mail discussion forum, your cyber home for communicating with other portable sanitation professionals about issues affecting the individual contractor or the entire industry.

PRO Discussion is based on the successful Pumper Discussion that has been a fixture on the COLE Publishing *Pumper* magazine Web site (www.pumper.com) for nearly five years.

Sharing ideas is as simple as 1-2-3



Once you've registered and confirmed your forum membership, post an e-mail introduction for fellow PROs.

Sit back and wait for e-mail topics to roll in. You and other PROs will meet on the forum and exchange information whenever you like. When one PRO sends out a question or comment, everyone on the discussion list will receive the e-mail and may respond. The forum is open for a wide range of topics, but there are a few simple ground rules to keep in mind when starting or responding to an e-mail post.

Discussion rules

- No soliciting or commercial product endorsements.
- · No derogatory remarks about products, services or people.
- · No discussing prices or pricing of goods or services.
- No forwarding junk mail, chain mail, jokes, or any other e-mails not specific to this industry.

As easy as it is to join the discussion, it's just as simple to leave — or unsubscribe — and stop receiving e-mails. Instructions to remove your e-mail address from the forum are found on the promonthly.com Web site.

Remember, there's strength in numbers. When we all get together and share ideas at promonthly.com, we strengthen our service businesses and the portable sanitation industry.



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2005 Ford F550, diesel, auto., Satellite tank, 350 fresh, 600 waste, 2-unit carrier. \$25,000. 800-275-3616 NY. (PT5)

2000 Ford F-550 Pumper Truck, 700 waste, 300 fresh. Needs some work. \$10,000. Call 317-440-1206.

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1996 Chevrolet 3500. Engine and transmission have been replaced in the last year. Steel tank, 800 gal. 600 waste/200 fresh water. Jurop pump, powered by gas Honda engine. Sale price is \$10,000. Call 352-446-0475. (PT5)

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PHONE:

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

Pumping at Higher Elevations



PRO who moved to the Rocky Mountains says his air-cooled vacuum pump doesn't act the way he expected it to

QUESTION: A few months ago, I moved my pumping company from Houston to a small town near Denver. I figured since I was up in the Rocky Mountains, pumping would take less time ... They always talk about the thin air up in the mountains. But when I started working, my pump nearly burned up. It seemed to take forever. I checked the oil in my pump. I double-checked my vacuum gauge to make sure it was working. I check those things in my normal operation anyway. My air-cooled pump, which ran like a champ in Houston, just got hotter and hotter. Is there something I'm doing wrong? Can you explain what I need to do to fix this situation?

Roy Vaughn Denver

ANSWER: You did nothing wrong. Mother Nature just took over the operation of your system. Creating a vacuum and pumping at a higher elevation doesn't work the way you'd think it would. The assumption, like you thought, is that thinner air

In the Rocky Mountains ...
the air is thinner. So here's
the key to explaining your
situation: It's going to take
you longer to build up vacuum because vacuum is
based on the differential
between the lack of air in
the tank and the outside air.

should make everything work easier.

A strong vacuum pump should clear out the thin air in seconds, and the pumping should begin. After all, isn't thin air easier to move?

This is where an understanding of vacuum comes into play. First, I am not a scientist — and you don't have to be — to understand what happens at higher elevations.

When you were pumping in Houston, you arrived at the jobsite,

turned on the pump, and the tank was evacuated of air, which created ample vacuum. You opened the valve on your hose and sucked up anything and everything in your path. Hopefully, it was the contents of a portable restroom. Nothing overheated. Everything worked fine.

OK, so in the Rocky Mountains, things aren't the same. You're right. The air is thinner. So here's the key to explaining your situation: It's going to take you longer to build up vacuum because vacuum is based on the differential between the lack of air in the tank and the outside air.

SEA LEVEL PUMPING

What does this mean? In Houston, which is near sea level, the air contains more molecules. Turning on your vacuum pump evacuates the air from the tank and creates a differential between the air inside the tank and the air outside. It happens relatively quickly because there are lots of molecules and the differential is the key to the creation of vacuum.

At higher elevations, where the air is thinner, it takes longer to create vacuum because there are fewer molecules in the air to start with. Your air outside the tank is already thin. So creating a vacuum inside the tank requires having to run your pump longer to create a differential between the atmosphere outside the tank and vacuum inside the tank.

The longer you run the pump, the hotter it gets. Moving to a higher elevation is not a problem if you switch to a water-cooled pump. It can stand a longer pumping cycle without overheating.

One way I like to demonstrate vacuum is with an empty plastic bottle, let's say a 20-ounce soft drink bottle. Put the bottle up to your mouth and suck the air out of it, venting the air through your nose. In a few seconds, the bottle collapses as you remove the air and create the differential between the air inside and outside of the bottle. The instant you remove your mouth from the bottle, it jumps back to its original shape as the air rushes in to "normalize" the bottle. That is the essence and the key to understanding vacuum.

The vacuum pump creates the differential inside the vacuum tank, and when the valve is opened, the air or whatever you're pumping rushes in to balance the air pressure.

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. ■

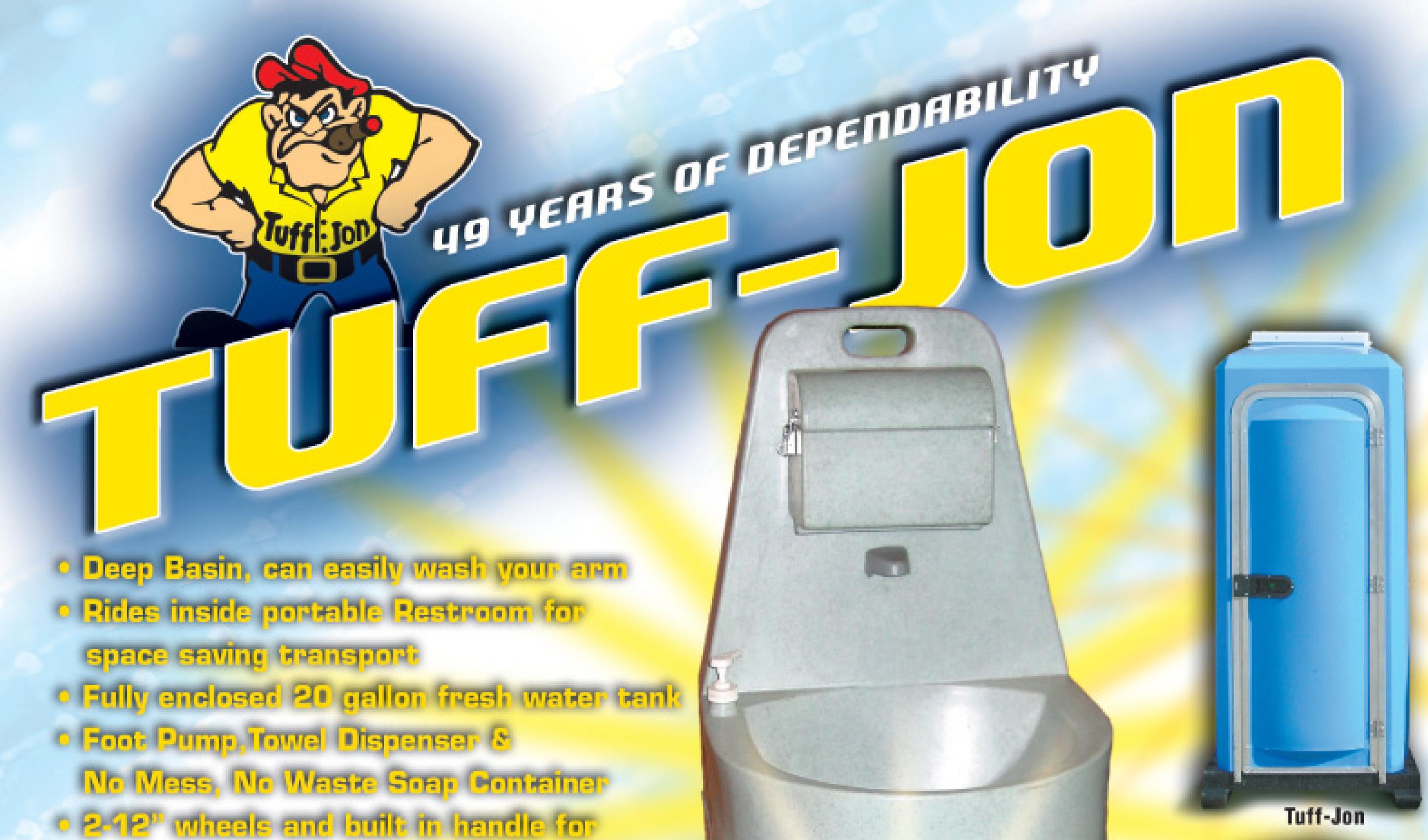




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