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September 2010
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Pit-Stop earns an encore at Country USA

Page 16

JACK of All TRADES

Kentucky PRO aims for constant diversification

Page 10

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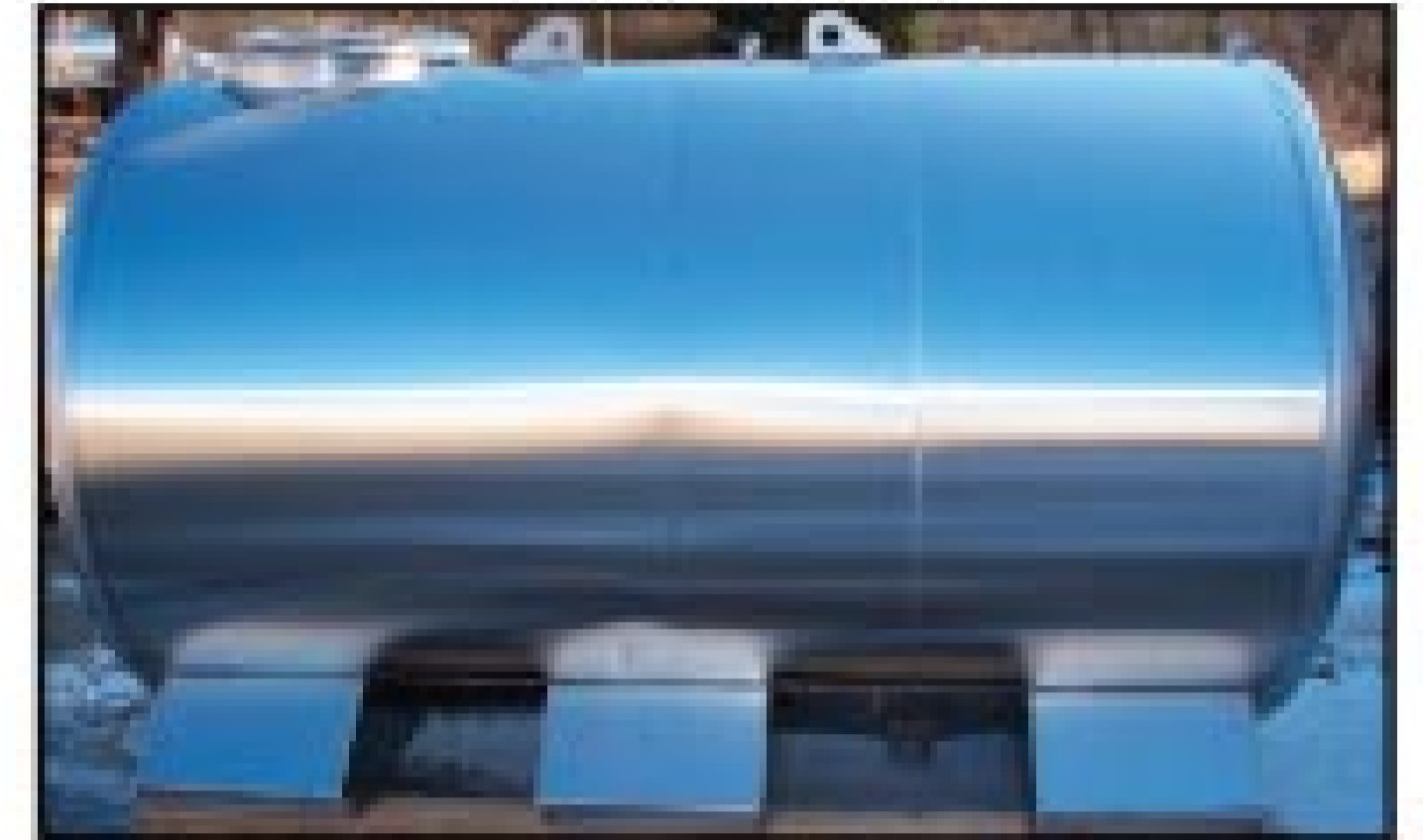
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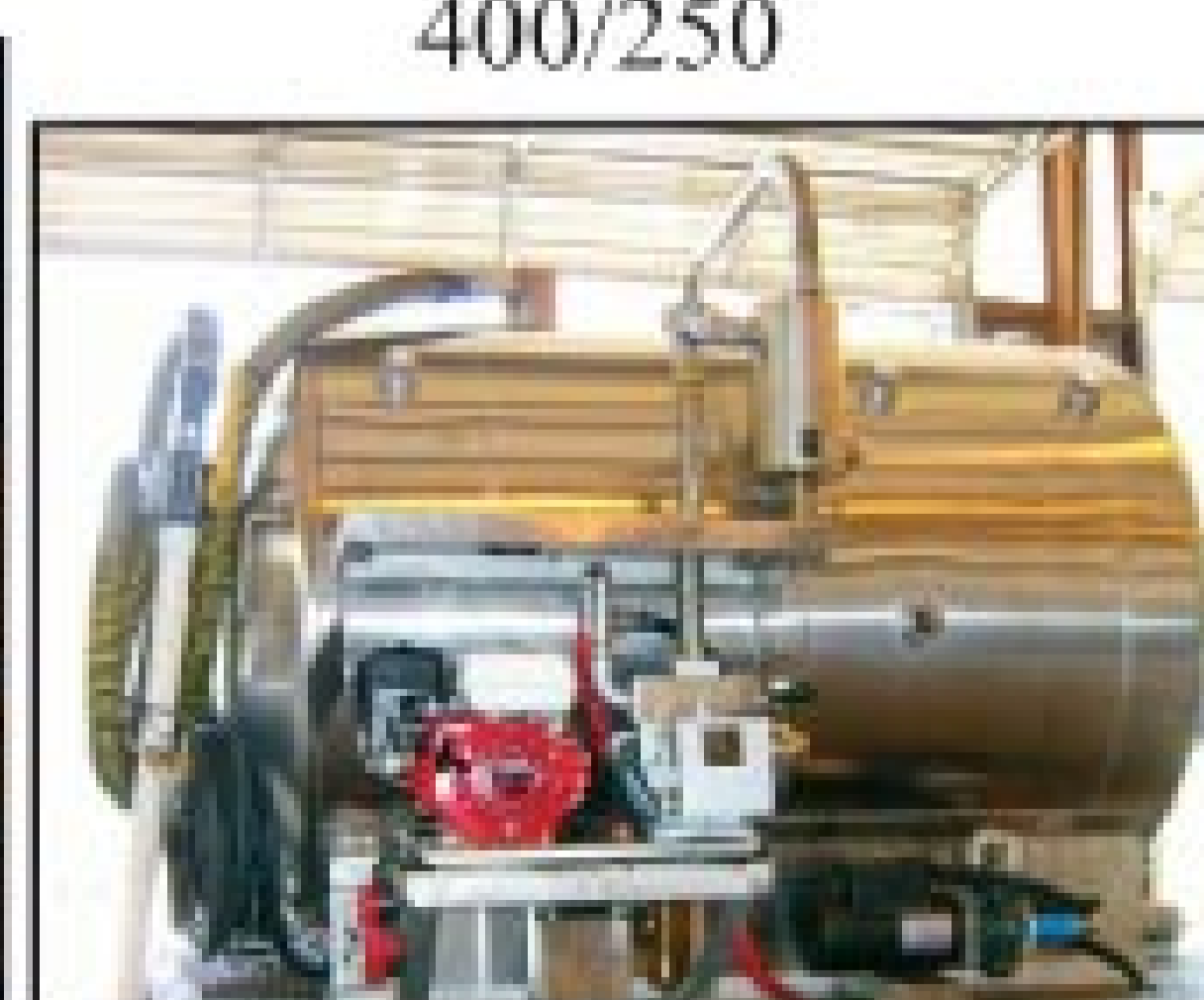
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- 6 From the Editor:**
Beware of Falling Prices
 Cut-rate contractors often leave a broken business, a busted bank account and angry competitors in their wake.
 - Jim Kneiszel
- 8 Back at the Office:**
Growing Up By Adding Services
 Maybe you've read a story in an issue of this magazine about a PRO who added a shower trailer or other specialized equipment. Adding services can be profitable, but it takes planning — just like starting a new business.
 - Judy Kneiszel
- 10 PROfile:**
Jack of All Trades
 Constant diversification helps Kentucky contractor Mike Thornton bring annual double-digit revenue growth to his Martin's Sanitation Service.
 - Ken Wysocky
- COVER STORY**
- 16 On Location: Keeping the Beat**
 A coordinated effort helps the crew of Pit-Stop Event Services cater to the needs of 150,000 country music fans in Wisconsin.
 - Betty Dageforde
- 20 Think Tank:**
Building New Revenue Streams
 If you diversified your business tomorrow, what new services or products would make the most sense?
 - Mary Shafer
- 22 PRO Discussion: Leaving Your Brand**
 How do you mark your inventory to identify stolen units?
- 24 Product News**
- 26 Industry News**
- 30 Truck Corner: Running on Empty?**
 No matter what type of gauge you choose, it's important to properly maintain the accessory that monitors waste level capacity.
 - Bob Carlson and Jerry Kirkpatrick



PRO

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COMPANY	PAGE	COMPANY	PAGE	COMPANY	PAGE	COMPANY	PAGE
A		E		M		S	
Allied Forward Motion LLC	26	EZTrakR Systems Inc.	30	Marketplace	29	Safe-T-Fresh	15
		G		Anchor Graphics Inc.		Sanitation Insurance Services	27
Allied Graphics Inc.	14	Green Way Products by PolyPortables	32	Deal Associates Inc.		Satellite Industries Inc.	21
		H		DropBox Inc.			
Armstrong Equipment Inc.	25	Handago LLC	7	McKee Technologies/ Explorer Trailers		Screen Tech/Div. of Roeda	23
B		J		Water Cannon Inc.		Slide-In Warehouse	23
B ² Business Brokers	24			N		T	
		J & J Chemical Company	7	NuConcepts	27		
Best Enterprises Inc.	3	J. C. Gury Company Inc.	26	P		Toico Industries	25
C		K				TP Re-Roller Co	27
Century Paper & Chemical	22	KeeVac Industries Inc.	5	PolyJohn Enterprises	31	Tri-State Tank	14
Classifieds	28						
		Kewanna Screen Printing	7	PolyPortables Inc.	19	TSF Company Inc.	2
Comforts of Home Services	23	L		R		W	
		Liberty Financial Group Inc.	14	R. A. Ross N.E.	22		
		Lock America International	27	Ronco Plastics	24	Walex Products Co. Inc.	9

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Beware of Falling Prices

CUT-RATE CONTRACTORS OFTEN LEAVE A BROKEN BUSINESS, A BUSTED BANK ACCOUNT AND ANGRY COMPETITORS IN THEIR WAKE

By Jim Kneiszel

I'm addressing this column to cut-rate contractors who try to quickly build market share for their portable sanitation businesses by submitting a constant barrage of low bids to construction companies and special event planners. You know who you are ... And unfortunately, we don't always know who you are. But more on that later.

As you call on prospective clients and offer to place and service restrooms for 20, 30, even 50 percent less than your established competitors, I'd like you to ponder this question: What do you hope to accomplish in the long term with this strategy?

So you land a bunch of new customers and service a few hundred restrooms at razor-thin profit margins — if indeed you are making a profit on them. The salesman in you jumps for joy, while the accountant in you cringes. On the positive side of the ledger, you're keeping busy running service routes every day. The bad news is all it takes is a few late-payers, out-and-out deadbeats or a mechanical breakdown to bankrupt your fledgling operation.

ARE YOU BETTER OFF?

Let's say you sidestep any of the disasters that could befall your operation. You work hard for a year, and make a modest living in the industry. Was your low-price gambit worth the meager rewards it generated? Your first reaction might be, "Yeah, I enjoy steering my own ship, shaping my own destiny as an entrepreneur." Well that's fine.

But examine the situation a little closer. Maybe you're working 60-80 hours a week. You've been building the business, but are you putting any money in your pockets or saving for a future retirement? Is the business a legitimate, sustainable enterprise that would have value to a buyer when you want to get out of it someday?

Compare your lot in life with how you'd be doing if you punched a timecard on a 40-hour-per-week job working for someone else. Would an employer be paying for your health insurance, contributing to a 401(k) savings plan, giving you a few paid holiday, vacation and sick days?

Was your low-price gambit worth the meager rewards it generated? Your first reaction might be, "Yeah, I enjoy steering my own ship, shaping my own destiny as an entrepreneur." Well that's fine. But examine the situation a little closer.

If you've been charging far less than your competitors all these months, my guess is that you've not found the prosperity you envisioned when you started the company. So what can you do to get your business in the black, to start earning a decent living for you and your employees?

This is where we come back to long-term strategy. Your options are limited, and unlikely to work:

1. Raise your prices

By now you may understand that the established portable sanitation companies in your area had a rationale for their pricing structure. Over the years, they learned to base prices for restroom rental and service on establishing a fair profit and knowing what the market will bear. What will happen to your customer list if you raise prices to meet that same standard? Will customers stick with you or bolt to a competitor?

2. Expand your market

After a year, you've probably cherry-picked all the customers in your area who count low prices as the top priority in their buying decisions. Now you need to sell customers on the quality of your products and services. But operating on a shoestring budget, do your products or services compare favorably to competitors who charge more? Probably not.

3. Cut your costs

In order to offer lower prices in the first place, you had to keep an eagle eye on costs, looking for every efficiency possible to squeeze a profit out of a job. Maybe you ran your own service routes 10 hours a day. Maybe you bill every 28 days instead of monthly. Perhaps you serviced units every eight or 10 days instead of every week. So you have no room for cutting more.

DEGRADING THE INDUSTRY

After a year of seeking aggressive growth through a low-price strategy, you may come to the conclusion that quality usually trumps quantity in a service business, that customers won through good service are more valuable than those lured by a temporary discount. You may now know that sustainability is achievable only if you make a fair profit and invest some of that money in employees and the tools they need.

If your company is teetering on the brink of insolvency, you might look at yourself as the only loser in the failed business plan. But your price slashing is degrading an entire industry. Competitors attempting

to meet your prices forfeit profits they won't get back for a long time. Companies that hold firm on pricing lose revenue when customers leave.

The cycle of cut-rate contractors sets the industry back in many ways. Quality companies lose good workers to industries where the pay is better. Low prices depress wages, fringe benefits packages, and the ability of companies to upgrade equipment and technology. This has a negative impact on company owners, workers, even end users — construction workers and the general public — who want the best possible restroom experience.

WHO ARE THE PRICE-SLASHERS?

Back to what I said at the top of the column, that we at PRO don't always know who these low-ball contractors are. Once in a great while, I hear from a restroom contractor who is disappointed that we featured one of his low-ball competitors in some way, shape or form. He explains that the company in question uses unrealistic pricing to disrupt the marketplace.

I'm disappointed when I hear a story like this, too. It's difficult to know sometimes when a contractor is following unsustainable competitive practices that we wouldn't endorse. Of course, these contractors like to tell us they're growing, but they may omit details about how they're doing it. I suspect they often know deep down what they're doing is wrong for the industry.

Even though the cut-rate contractor can leave a lot of troubles in his wake, there is a silver lining to these stories. I firmly believe that a quality product and service at a fair price eventually does win out over the singular low-price strategy. ■

On the night of July 27th our Athens Georgia Facility caught on fire and burned completely down. The plant that was destroyed in the fire housed our corporate offices and liquid manufacturing division. The cause of the fire could not be determined by fire investigators. Thanks to our Tech Support group we had functioning offices the next day. At this time we have new corporate offices and a new 21,000 sqft. manufacturing facility. Our Utah plant and European operations continue to operate unaffected. In this tragic incident no one was lost or injured. We are thankful for the support that we have received from Customers and Industry Associates who offered to help in this difficult time.

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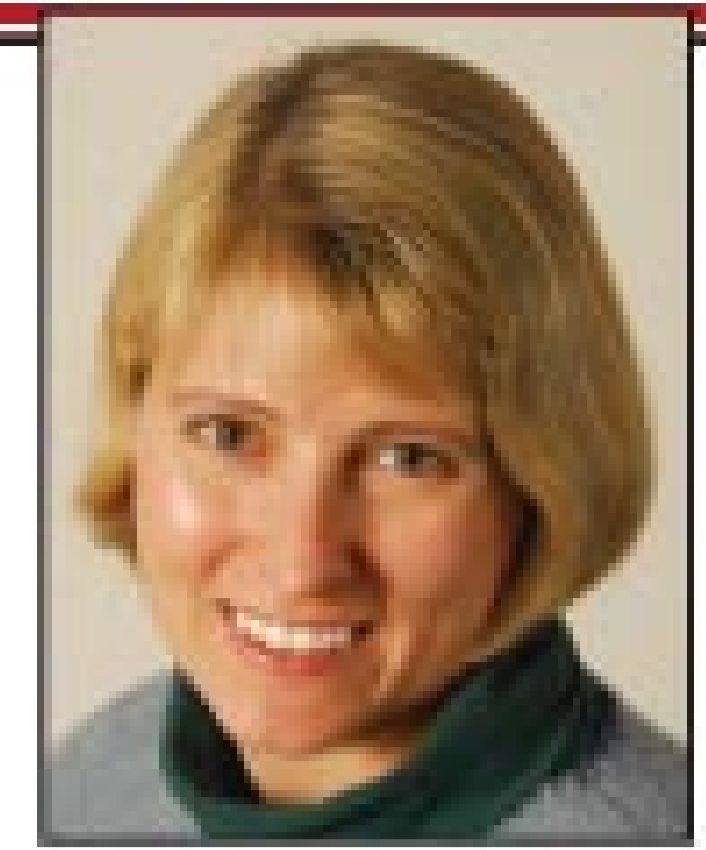
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Growing Up By Adding Services

MAYBE YOU'VE READ A STORY IN AN ISSUE OF THIS MAGAZINE ABOUT A PRO WHO ADDED A SHOWER TRAILER OR OTHER SPECIALIZED EQUIPMENT. ADDING SERVICES CAN BE PROFITABLE, BUT IT TAKES PLANNING — JUST LIKE STARTING A NEW BUSINESS.

By Judy Kneiszel

There are essentially two ways to grow a business: find more customers or find additional products or services to sell to existing customers.

Finding more customers may mean expanding into new markets, which can be difficult considering the additional time and expense of traveling to new territory or establishing a satellite location. There's also the existing competition in that market to consider. In the end, you may decide "out" is not the way to grow. So, how about "up?"

OH, GROW UP

By growing up, I mean offering additional services to the market you already serve. Which services would be smart additions? First, listen to hints from customers. If they frequently ask about a particular service you do not offer, consider adding it.

If the answer is not that obvious, take some time to study customers' buying habits and take a close look at your existing service line to determine if it is meeting all of their needs. But don't leave it to detective work. Ask your customers what other services might be convenient for them to purchase from you. Maybe they've never considered it before. If you can introduce a way to make purchasing simpler for customers, they'll get on board.

For example, if you notice when servicing restrooms at a special event that a client has rented portable fencing, ask if it would be more convenient to rent both restrooms and fencing from the same company — yours! If it's not going to cost them more, the answer will probably be yes.

And when considering expanding services, it's good to study the competition too. What added services do they offer? Would it benefit you to offer similar added services or differentiate yourself with unique offerings?

SELLING NEW SERVICES TO OLD CUSTOMERS

New service offerings open the door to new marketing opportunities. Sales staff will have a new reason to call on customers. No one is going to take advantage of the new offering if they don't know about it, so spread the word! Take the opportunity to call, send a brochure, e-mail or otherwise advertise your new services. And communicate with enthusiasm. If you are excited about a new offering be sure to share this with everyone you know ... customers and non-customers alike.

Be aware that when an added product or service creates an entirely new market, a business has to spend considerably more time and money promoting it. If, for some reason, you decide to sell swimming pools from the same office you rent restrooms from, you may be fighting an uphill battle because potential customers do not frequently overlap.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Jumping into a new service line blindly is not a good idea. To make a new venture as successful as possible, consider the following before taking the plunge:

A new offering is like a new business.

Re-work your business plan to include the new service. If you've never had a business plan, create one without the new service and one with and compare the numbers to determine if the additional time and expense of the new service will be worth it. Determine how long it will take for the new offering to pay for itself and start being profitable. When both capital expense and labor costs to support the new offering are added in, is it cost-effective?

The business plan should set some goals and revenue projections for the new offering. It would also be helpful to create a marketing plan and decide how you will reach your targets. If you go ahead and add the new service, measure the results and compare with those projections to gauge if it's on track.

Employees must be on board.

An additional service means change for employees. Consider if the service being added is a good fit for the skills of your employees. Will it require hiring additional help or significant retraining of workers? Will work schedules change? How will it affect the organization of the company? For a smooth transition, keep employees informed.

Customers must be told.

If customers expressed a need for the new service offering, let them know when it will be available before they contract with someone else. That way you can hit the ground running with a contract for your new service. And tell all customers how they can benefit from this new service.

And be sure to give adequate notice to existing customers if this addition is going to impact them in any way. Maybe you will be less available for a while as you implement the new service. Let customers know who will be taking care of them in the meantime. Customers are generally adaptable to change when they know what's going on and why.

Sometimes it's better not to add services.

If you are a very small business — going at it solo or as a couple — there may not be the hours in a day to execute a new service well, and then the whole business suffers. Consider the added time requirements of an additional service. Will it provide additional income or just sap your freedom? Can you justify hiring someone to meet the demands of the new service? Be sure that adding the service is likely to provide you with definable benefits, otherwise you might stretch yourself too thin.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If you are considering adding a new line of service to your portable restroom business, ask yourself: Why this service and why now? Is it the right time to implement this new plan? If you've done the homework and determined it is the right time to grow up and add a service, good luck! You've got a great start. Let us know how it goes, and how you've met the challenge of adding a service. ■



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Martin's Sanitation technician Melvin Myneer replaces the vacuum hose after cleaning a restroom at a construction site in Lexington, Ky. (Photos by Allie Garza)



JACK OF ALL TRADES

CONSTANT DIVERSIFICATION HELPS KENTUCKY CONTRACTOR MIKE THORNTON BRING ANNUAL DOUBLE-DIGIT REVENUE GROWTH TO HIS MARTIN'S SANITATION SERVICE

By Ken Wysocky

Building a diverse base of services requires a keen eye for spotting new opportunities, a knack for great customer service and a drive to succeed — not to mention a good relationship with a local banker, says Mike Thornton, the owner and president of Martin's Sanitation Service Inc.

in Paris, Ky., near Lexington.

Thornton knows about diversification firsthand: Since 1995, when he bought a septic service business from friend and mentor Gayle Martin, the company has expanded into portable restroom rentals, sewer line cleaning and inspections, transporting

sludge for rural wastewater treatment plants, residential plumbing and even producing vinyl graphics for contractor vehicles.

Today, portable sanitation is the dominant service sector, providing 50 percent of the company's business volume. But other areas have come on strong, with 25 percent of the revenues in cleaning wastewater treatment plants and grease traps, 15 percent municipal sanitary sewer line inspections and cleaning and 10 percent plumbing.

Martin's recently acquired another portable sanitation company that more than doubled its restroom inventory. And despite all his business dealings, Thornton also manages to find time to serve as mayor of Paris.

During the last 15 years, the company



The Martin's Sanitation crew (from left) includes Chris Wiley, Dean McFarland, Michael Bolanos, Erin Hiten, Mike Thornton, Melvin Myneer, Casey Jones and Kevin Hensley.

Martin's Sanitation Service Inc.

Paris, Ky.

Owner: Mike Thornton

Years in Business: 15

Employees: 21

Service area: 100-mile radius of Paris

Services: Portable restroom rentals, residential and commercial septic tank and grease-trap cleaning, sewer inspections and cleaning, plumbing

Web site: www.martins-services.com

Kentucky

"One or two reputable plumbers we refer business to got too busy, so I felt it was time to branch into hiring a master plumber and doing the work ourselves. We started with one or two calls a week and now run two trucks and two crews seven days a week."

Mike Thornton

Employee Melvin Mynear finishes pumping a restroom at a construction site.

Thornton says wryly. "How was I going to buy a business as a farmer who could barely make ends meet? But the more I thought about it, the more sense it made — and Gayle is a very good salesman. He's also been a great mentor and is still active in the company."

Thornton says he gradually became aware of the business's potential when he started hauling sludge from package plants — small, rural wastewater aeration treatment plants — to larger plants that could process it. "That's what really grew the business," Thornton notes. "We went from running trucks two to three hours a day to four or five hours a day. So I started concentrating full time on the company, doing door-to-door sales."

Shortly after buying Martin's, Thornton quit his job at the wastewater treatment plant, and by 2000, he sold off his farm to concentrate solely on growing the business. About



averaged 25 percent sales growth annually, grew to 21 employees and built up a sizable fleet of equipment and vehicles. "Believe it or not, even through this recession, we still posted a 22-percent growth in gross sales last year," Thornton says.

STARTED AS FARMER

Thornton started out as a tobacco, grain and cattle farmer, and figured that pumping septic tanks would be a good supplemental side business. "I thought running a truck three or four hours a day to get a little extra revenue would give me an opportunity to be more active on the farm," he says. "Looking back, that was a mistake. I wish I would've concentrated more on the business."

At first, Thornton didn't take Martin seriously when the pumper said he was retiring and wanted Thornton to buy the business. At the time, Thornton worked for the city's wastewater treatment plant, and knew Martin well because he took his waste there.

"I figured he was smarter than that,"

Workers dump waste from a 2010 Peterbilt truck built by Pik-Rite Inc. at the receiving station at the Paris, Ky., treatment plant. The truck was on display at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo in Louisville, Ky., earlier this year.



that time, Thornton seized another opportunity. He learned that under new regulations, the city would only accept new sanitary sewer lines for subdivisions if they passed an inspection. So the company took a gamble and entered the market for televised camera inspections and cleaning. That required a sizable investment: 1999 Vac-Con combination vacuum truck with a 12-yard debris tank.

"We spent a ton of money in 30 days without knowing how much work was going to be there. But in 2001, the new regulations went into effect and that side of the business took off as well. New construction has tailed off since then, but we make up for it by doing maintenance work for municipalities that are required to inspect a certain number of feet of sewer lines per year."

MAKE FRIENDS WITH THE BANKER

The new venture underscored how important it is for expansion-minded busi-



Workers Melvin Mynear (left) and Dean McFarland wash restrooms in the Martin's Sanitation yard.



Technician Casey Jones pours a chlorine product into a tank at the Paris, Tenn., treatment plant to keep odors down.

nessmen to develop a strong relationship with a local bank, Thornton says. He notes that a local banker has stood behind him on every new venture, as long as he produced a solid business plan and could show how Martin's would make things work.

"A lot of it comes down to being absolutely upfront and honest with your bank," he points out. "We haven't been a 100-percent success story. But instead of waiting until money was tight, I went to my banker whenever I was behind the eight ball and told them about cash-flow issues.

"You have to make them buy into it, just like your employees buy into your company, because at the end of the day, it's their money," he adds. "In a sense, we wash their

trucks every week for them. We've been very fortunate to have a banker that's always stood behind us."

When Thornton eyes a new market, he says he dissects it into what he calls blocks. One is recognizing a need, which he says often comes from employees who pass on information they hear, say, at a local disposal plant. The second block is determining what equipment and how many employees are needed. "The next block is what kind of price can we charge to be competitive and profitable," he says. "It's like the movie *Field of Dreams*; if you build it they can come. It's a simple principle we've used. But anyone can buy equipment; the key is providing great service."

In 2002, recognizing another community

need, Thornton bought 28 single-unit portable restrooms at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International. The business now is split roughly in half between construction sites and special events.

"I had no idea how quickly it would grow," Thornton says. "We've suffered some because of the construction downturn. But we were still up 2 percent in sales revenue on portables last year (2009) over the prior year, and we're up 8 percent (so far in 2010)."

Thornton says he can't emphasize enough how important it is to excel at customer service. "You need to keep a keen focus on your particular area's needs, but then you must out-service your competitors. Again, anyone can buy equipment, but service is where you stand out."

EQUIPPED FOR SUCCESS

Today, Martin's owns 1,000 single restroom units: about 50 percent of them are made by PolyPortables Inc.; 45 percent made by Satellite Industries Inc.; and 5 percent are Tuff Jons from T.S.F. Company Inc. The company also owns 25 handicapped-accessible units, made by PolyPortables and Satellite Industries; three 18-foot trailer units manufactured by Advanced Containment Systems Inc.; two 26-foot Presidential units from ACSI; one trailer each from Comforts of Home

President and CEO Mike Thornton stands in front of his fleet of vacuum trucks.



Thornton brings a business mentality to local government

Tired of just complaining about local government spending, Mike Thornton decided to put his money where his mouth was and do something about it: Run for public office.

"I saw a need to spend tax dollars more wisely — take a business-like approach to government," he says of his motivation to run for a city council seat in Paris, Ky., a city of roughly 9,200 residents that's the base for his business, Martin's Sanitation Service Inc. His message of fiscal austerity resonated with voters and he was elected for a two-year term.

Thornton was re-elected and became mayor pro tem. Then the mayor at the time died of a heart attack, so Thornton became the appointed mayor to fill out the balance of the term. He's running for his first elected term as mayor in November.

So far, Thornton's approach to government has worked. "We took a 'company' that was knee deep in debt and turned it around in three years," he says. "You've got income, expenses and employees; if that isn't a business, I don't know what is.

"We've had auditors scratching their heads because we're one of the few cities that actually put money back into the till without laying people off or increasing taxes or utility rates. We did it by running government like a business ... you can't spend \$100 if only have \$80 coming in."

To avoid conflicts of interest, Thornton doesn't vote on anything related to his business, such as portable restrooms units the city rents for its parks. "I've been very upfront," he says. "One of the first things I did was check with the Kentucky League of Cities for any potential pitfalls, and talked to the City of Paris legal counsel to be sure I avoided any problems."

How does Thornton run a large business and a city? "I focus on my daily routine and do what I can do," he explains. "A lot of it goes back to having a good staff at work that's effective and communicates well. The business sails pretty smoothly. Sure, there are days I wonder why I ran for office. But there are days it's very gratifying, too."

Services Inc. and Olympia Fiberglass Industries.

In addition, the restroom end of the business also relies on the following trucks (all with steel tanks): a 2010 Peterbilt 388 with a 5,000-gallon waste/250-gallon freshwater tank, built by Pik Rite Inc.; a 2002 Peterbilt 330 with a 4,250-gallon waste/250-gallon freshwater tank from House of Imports Inc.; a 2000 Peterbilt 379 with a 3,600-gallon tank built by Andert Inc.; 2006 and 2007 Ford F-350s with 600-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater tanks built by Satellite Industries; a 2002 Dodge 3500 with a 300-gallon waste/150-gallon freshwater tank built by Imperial Industries Inc.; 2005 and 2006 GMC 5500s with 1,000-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater tanks built by Crest

"We've suffered some because of the construction downturn. But we were still up 2 percent in sales revenue on portables last year (2009) over the prior year, and we're up 8 percent (so far in 2010)."

Mike Thornton

Manufacturing; and a 2005 Chevrolet 5500 with a 1,000-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater tank, also built by Crest.

Martin's also owns a 2008 combination vacuum truck built by Aquatech (a division of Hi-Vac Corp.), aimed at handling increasing sewer-related work in the city of Lexington; and a camera inspection truck outfitted by CUES Inc.

PLUMBING? WHY NOT?

In 2009, Martin's started a plumbing division. Why? Because Thornton noticed that often enough, technicians arrived at homes to find the problem was a kitchen or bathroom drain, not the septic tank. Then the company would call plumbers for help.

"Then the one or two reputable plumbers we refer business to got too busy, so I felt it was time to branch into hiring a master plumber and doing the work ourselves," Thornton

explains. "We started with one or two calls a week and now run two trucks and two crews seven days a week."



Mike Thornton prepares vinyl graphics for a customer's truck. Martin's Sanitation is diversifying into vehicle signage.

Thornton also is expanding into another market: vinyl lettering and signage for contractor vehicles. He bought equipment to design and produce vinyl letters when he found it expensive to get his own equipment lettered. He plans to focus harder on the signage service later this year after Martin's moves into a new 50,000-square-foot facility on a three-acre industrial site.

Thornton is quick to point out that he's had failures along the way to developing a large, well-rounded company. But along with a strong drive to succeed and a passion for what he does, Thornton says taking calculated risks is essential to growth.

It's hard to say what's next under Thornton's aggressive stance on diversity. But you can bet there's something new and profitable on the horizon. ■

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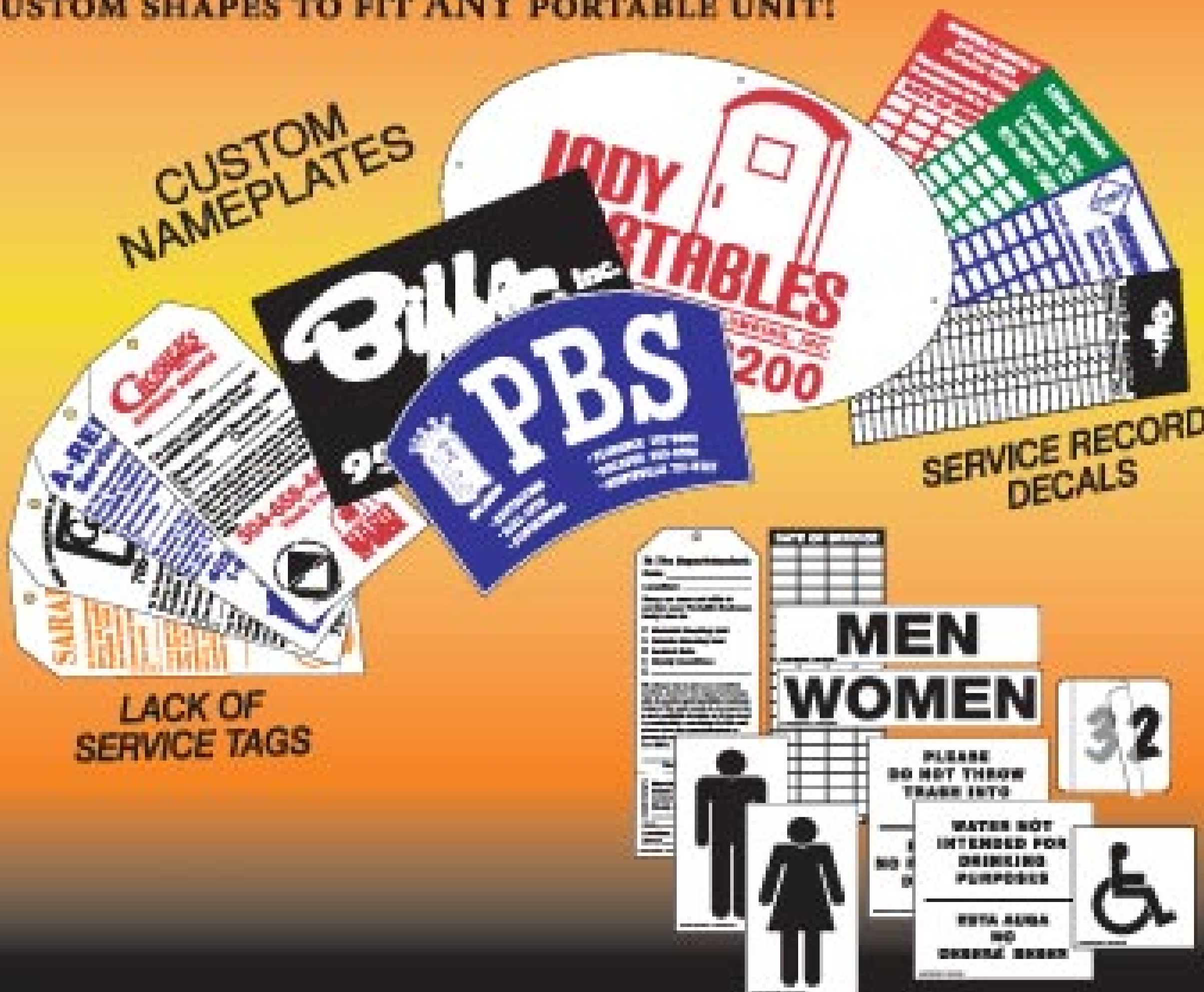
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Tony Dean of Pit-Stop Event Services prepares to service restrooms at Country USA in Oshkosh, Wis. (Photos by Don Stolley)

ON LOCATION

THE JOB: Country USA

LOCATION: Oshkosh, Wis.

THE PRO: Pit-Stop Event Services

Keeping the BEAT

A coordinated effort helps the crew of Pit-Stop Event Services cater to the needs of 150,000 country music fans in Wisconsin

By Betty Dageforde

THE TEAM

Pit-Stop Event Services in Fond du Lac, Wis., is one of three business units operating under the name Dean Enterprises, the other two being Pit-Stop Portables (their route business), and Dean's Septic. Owners Peggy and Richard Dean are fortunate to have four sons who participate in the business — route manager Tony, equipment manager Tom, diesel technician Brad and 15-year-old Mike. Tony's wife, Kim, handles accounts receivable and human resources. Tom's girlfriend, Bethany Warner, works on routing, dispatch, and shower

operations. Richard Dean concentrates on the septic side of the business. And as for Peggy, "I don't do routes," she says, "but anything else." Of course, as in any family business everyone fills in anywhere needed — the office staff might work in the field while Peggy's mother, Gail Wiese, staffs the office and her partner, Frank Hope, lends a hand.

The family workers are supplemented by four route drivers, as well as a number of temporary standby employees who assist as needed for specific events. Nearly 30 people worked on the Country USA project.

COMPANY HISTORY

Richard Dean got into the septic business in 1994 when he bought out the contractor he had

been working for. Shortly after that, when a local golf course owner said, "If you had portable toilets I'd rent them from you," Dean took the bait and bought six units. "Next thing you know there was a park in the area that heard about us and also wanted them, so we bought six more," Peggy Dean says. They got into the business full time in 1998 when they purchased M & N Portables, which added 600 units to their inventory. The following year Peggy Dean began working for the company full time, and the year after that they bought an additional 250 units with the purchase of Pit-Stop Portables. In 2004 they acquired their first shower trailer, having rented them for a couple years. Today, they have 1,600 portable restrooms, 50 wheelchair-accessible units, eight restroom trailers and 10 shower trailers.

An aerial shot of the Country USA stage hosting thousands of country music fans. (Photo courtesy of Country USA)





Pit-Stop worker Bethany Warner (left) and Peggy Dean kept an eye on the specialty trailers, which were heavily used during Country USA.

“We tried to get in after every person but a lot of people didn’t care if it was clean or not, they just wanted to get in the shower, so it wasn’t always possible.”

Peggy Dean

Men’s Room Urinal. A 32-foot trailer was placed near the Club Tent, and a 16-foot trailer was provided for the office staff.

Two shower operations were set up in the campground. At one end were five Ameri-Can Engineering trailers with 50 stalls, including an ADA stall. At the other end were two company-built trailers, one with 22 stalls, the other nine.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The purchase of M & N Portables also led to the Deans getting their foot in the door for the Country USA festival, as the owner of that business had done work for the event promoter, Starshow Presents Inc. A meeting was set up among the three parties, and the festival owner decided to give the Deans a try for the ’99 festival. “It was a year at a time for the first four years,” Peggy Dean says. “But now we have a long-term contract.”

THE MAIN EVENT

For five days, on five stages, over 150,000 country music fans were treated to non-stop enter-

tainment at the 15th annual Country USA festival. The event took place at the 300-acre Ford Festival Park in Oshkosh, Wis., June 22-26. This year’s lineup included the Zac Brown Band, Jason Aldean, Darius Rucker, Blake Shelton and Toby Keith. Participants also enjoyed the international marketplace, dozens of food vendors and carnival rides. A 3,000-site campground is part of the festival grounds.

BY THE NUMBERS

The company provided portable restrooms, restroom trailers, hand-wash stations, and shower trailers for the festival.

They brought in 625 blue-and-white PJN3s and 16 Comfort Inn wheelchair-accessible units from PolyJohn Enterprises Corp. as well as 40 PolyPortables Inc. hand-wash stations. Both the north and south ends of the facility had 150 units. Another 25 were placed at the pedestrian boulevard entryway; 25 at the marketplace. Single units were placed at each gate for gate and security staff, and the remainder dispersed in banks of 20 throughout the campground.

Restroom trailers are from Ameri-Can Engineering. Three were positioned in the VIP area — a 40-foot, 36-foot, and an ADA unit — along with a PolyJohn

LET’S ROLL

Beginning one week before the festival, two drivers worked continuously for three days to deliver all the equipment. They each drove a 2006 Ford F-350 with a 20-unit trailer. A dozen units were placed into immediate service for stage and catering crews.

KEEPIN’ IT CLEAN

The original 12 units were serviced every day beginning the week before the festival. The rest of the inventory was serviced



Brad Dean (driving) and Mike Dean use a Kawasaki utility vehicle to move a trailer load of restrooms at the Country USA grounds.

daily starting on the 23rd. At 4 a.m. the units were pumped out using the company's septic trucks — a 1995 5,000-gallon International, a 2000 4,000-gallon Mack, and a 1988 4,200-gallon Mack from T-Line Equipment Inc. All use Masport Inc. pumps. They were followed by a water truck and an assembly line of workers who sprayed, scrubbed, restocked, and repaired the units, finishing by 9 a.m.

Campground units were pumped and cleaned two or three times a day using a 2006 Ford F-450 and a 2006 F-550 built out by Best Enterprises Inc. with 900-gallon stainless steel tanks (650 gallons waste/250 gallons freshwater) and Jurop pumps, and a 2004 Ford F-750 with a 2,300-gallon steel tank (1,850 gallons waste/450 gallons freshwater) built out by T-Line Equipment. Pit-Stop drivers transported 12,000 gallons of waste per day to the Oshkosh wastewater treatment facility.

Full-time monitors were on hand from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. An attendant was stationed at the restroom trailer at the Club Tent, and two at the VIP trailer. The



Kim Dean assists Country USA attendees waiting to use shower facilities. Each shower area was staffed by an attendant, cashier and maintenance technician.

company kept a 32-foot trailer on site with 140 cases of small core toilet tissue, 50 cases of single-fold towels, 15 cases of spray soap and 25 cases of center pull towels, along with cleaning supplies. All family and several other employees stayed on site during the event.

SHOWER SERVICE

The company provided the shower trailers at no charge, and ran the operation as a concession. Each shower operation had attendants, cashiers and a main-



Worker Yojaira Alveraz maintains shower trailers at Country USA. Pit-Stop provided the showers for free, then ran the units as a concession service.

tenance technician between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. Because the well water they were using was rusty, it was imperative that showerheads and filters be cleaned continuously. "We tried to get in after every person but a lot of people didn't care if it was clean or not, they just wanted to get in the shower, so it wasn't always possible," Dean says. "Our showers are not timed, so they could take as long as they like." Showers were emptied up to three times daily, with the greywater taken to the Oshkosh treatment facility.

COME RAIN OR SHINE

Dean sums up this year's event: "It was a little more difficult than previous years. We had monsoons. It rained almost every day — usually at (4 a.m.)." Not only did this make working conditions difficult, but for two days the rain prevented them from getting their septic trucks onto the festival grounds. "But there's always a way," Dean says. "We had to service everything from the back side, dragging a 100-foot hose to the units."

On the last day, when the company would usually be emptying all units, the roads were washed out so everything had to be left an additional day. A week later the company was still removing equipment.

The company has a can-do attitude about serving the big event. "Whatever it takes, we make it happen," Dean says. ■



Rick Dean (left) and Tom Dean prepare hoses for pumping a bank of restrooms at Country USA.

MORE INFO:

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Building New Revenue Streams

IF YOU DIVERSIFIED YOUR BUSINESS TOMORROW, WHAT NEW SERVICES OR PRODUCTS WOULD MAKE THE MOST SENSE?

By Mary Shafer

The past couple years have reinforced that diversification can be a good thing in the portable sanitation industry. Some restroom contractors who were hit hard by the economic downturn in construction found that it was beneficial to be serving special events. And some PROs found that when restroom service in general lagged, another service they perform, such as septic cleaning and repairs, may have picked up the slack.

So we asked a few contractors what they'd be doing if diversification were on their immediate horizon. The wide range of answers may surprise you.



Name: Andy Zabrieszack
Company: A & A Porta-Potty's Inc.
Location: Ashland, Ky.
Employees: 8
Years in Business: 18

For Andy Zabrieszack, who offers portable restrooms, storage and offices made from shipping containers, the question of diversification isn't theoretical. "This year, we're going into the jetting business," he says. "We've been talking to the Rooter-Man franchise because we need to find ways to generate more revenue." He reports that business has been slow. Many of his 1,200 restrooms have been staying in the yard this year.

"We don't do the pumping as much as we do the portables, and we have the offices, mostly all

"With all the municipalities trying to keep (inflow and infiltration) out of the sewer lines, I think there may come a time when, before any house gets sold, the line has to be videoed for issues that need to be fixed before the property can change hands."

Doug Saunders

rentals. We'd like to even out the seasonality of the business as well as diversify a bit into a business that uses equipment we already have."

A & A has already proven the wisdom of such natural service extensions. The company had been in the storage container business when Zabrieszack realized he could put the containers to double duty by refitting some of them as small, portable offices. "We also knew we could place a restroom inside those offices, so it was one more way to make money off of products we already handled, using equipment we've already got, on jobsites we're already servicing."

"The first thing I'd do is add more restrooms to my inventory, and add accessories such as hand sanitizers, sinks and soap to the units I've got," says Doug Saunders, a relative rookie in the portable sanitation industry. Those 50 units are mostly PolyJohn Enterprises Corp. PJN3 restrooms and a Wells Cargo Elite VIP trailer.



Names: Doug Saunders
Company: Royal Flush Ltd.
Location: Virginia Beach, Va.
Employees: 3
Years in Business: 3

"I'd also look into adding CCTV work, inspecting lines for people," adds Saunders, a veteran of the municipal sewer side of wastewater management. "I'm already a certified camera operator from that other job," he explains, saying he believes such inspection work is likely to soon become a growth industry.

"With all the municipalities trying to keep (inflow and infiltration) out of the sewer lines, I think there may come a time when, before any house gets sold, the line has to be videoed for issues that need to be fixed before the property can change hands."

Calvin McFarland sees expanding his niche in portables and party rentals into something similar and logical. "Definitely trash," he says,

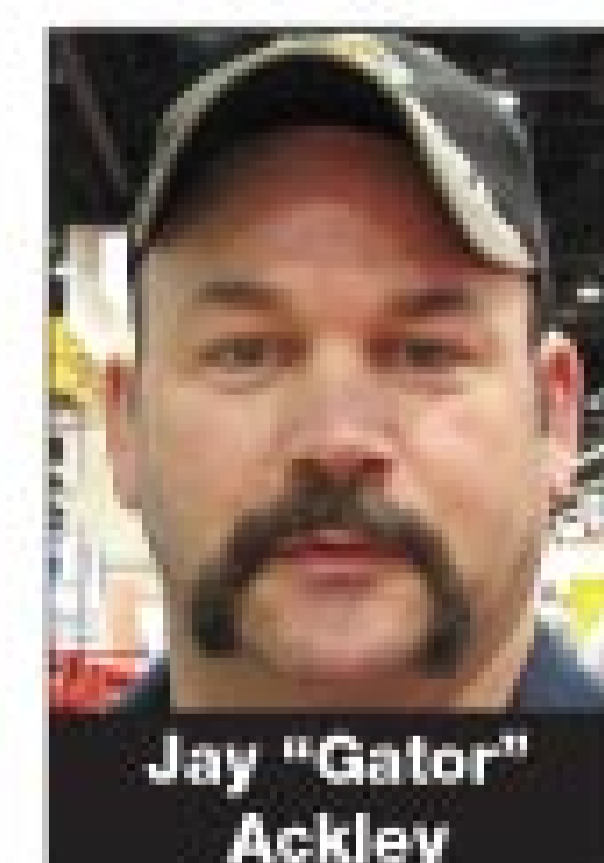


Name: Calvin McFarland
Company: Head Quarters
Location: East Hampton, N.Y.
Employees: 2
Years in Business: 5

"because restrooms and trash go hand-in-hand. On jobsites, it's mandatory to have (roll-off containers) and portables." He has about 200 units in inventory that he mainly uses to service construction sites and special events. He also offers VIP trailers and high-end portable units for parties, all of which require trash collection.

Jay Ackley says his business is already diversified with septic and grease trap pumping in addition to his portable restroom rentals, but he's always interested in new opportunities. He identifies one that's rather unique.

"I'd like to go into the revamping of older trucks. The price and the (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) regulations on today's truck motors are going to squeeze (profit margins) down so far that you're going to spend more time getting the truck to run than running the truck. With the incinerator exhaust systems on them, the money you're going to make you'll have to spend to keep the truck running."



Name: Jay "Gator" Ackley
Company: Gator's Jons LLC
Location: Chillicothe, Ohio
Employees: 3
Years in Business: 2

He believes the refurbishing idea is the direction in which the whole industry is trending in the next 4-5 years. "I think that's where the money is, and it's a way of greening things up, including (retrofitting trucks to run) biofuel." ■

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I am looking for ideas to mark restrooms for identification purposes in case they happen to go missing. It would seem wise to be able to somehow identify them with a permanent system that cannot be removed by anyone. A company logo or brand would be nice, plus a numbering system for our own records. It should also be in a somewhat discreet location. Just curious to see if anyone else identifies their units this way. We already have large company decals on the doors, but these can be peeled off.

ANSWERS:

I went to a local tire store and bought an electric branding iron. They had to order it. It has the initials of our company name and I add numbers to indicate the year the units were purchased. I usually brand the skids inside the door. If you assemble your own units, you could brand all panels in a hidden area.

All of our units have the production/inventory number stamped into either the door or the frame. If need be, we could identify the unit by those numbers. Unless you have a repetitive problem with theft or peeling decals, branding sounds like a lot of work. We've never had one go missing, I don't think.

I made a branding iron. It's about 3-by-3 inches. I heat it with a torch and brand the bottom of the units. If a unit goes missing, I have a way to prove a found unit is mine.

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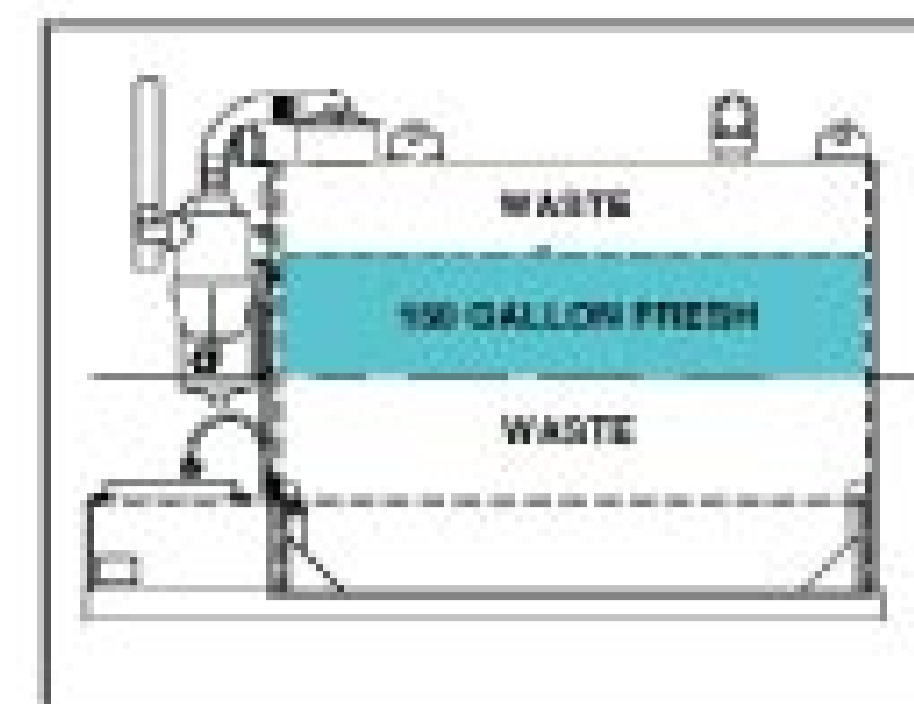


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PRODUCT NEWS

Rotonics Introduces Private Green Restroom

The multi-purpose **Private Green** restroom from **Rotonics Mfg.** can also be used as a medical testing station, shower, deer blind, storm shelter and ice fishing shack. Standing 88 inches tall, the unit features flat, removable side panels for transportation and storage. The panels can be easily replaced with hand tools. The unit is made from lightweight polyethylene with built-in steel reinforcements, eliminating the need to remove rivets. **310/538-4932; www.rotomics.com.**



Satellite Introduces Tufway Foot Flush Restroom

The low maintenance **Tufway recirculating foot-flush restroom** from **Satellite Industries** features a self-cleaning, one-press pedal encased in a fully sealed rubber sleeve for continuous operation. The pump and hoses are mounted under the restroom deck for easy transportation and storage. The flip-top tank lid with full-length hinge props open for cleaning and maintenance. The unit stands 88 inches tall, is 45 inches wide and 45 inches deep. It weighs 174 pounds and has a 44-gallon holding tank. **800/328-3332; www.satelliteindustries.com.** ■



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LISTINGS

North Carolina Septic Business. Grossing in excess of \$125,000 annually. Includes 2,000 gallon service truck, backhoe, jettors and more. **\$110,000.**

Northern Minnesota Septic & Drain Cleaning Business For Sale.

Established in 1965, owner is retiring. 3,500 customers including some contracted. Well-established name for 45+ years. Real estate available for additional fee that adjoins municipal dump site. Hunt, fish, snowmobile right out your back door. **Affordably priced at \$50,000.**

Texas Septic and Sewer Business. Grossing in excess of \$1,000,000 annually. Includes 2007 2500 gallon septic truck, 1995 2500 gallon septic truck, 2007 and 2008 Chevy service trucks, portable restrooms and more. 430 contracted customers. **\$799,000.**

Green Bay, Wisconsin Area Septic & Drain Business. Solid and steady revenue history and nearly 20 years established. Excellent opportunity to expand or start your own business. Includes very well-maintained 3,800 gallon septic service truck, fully outfitted 2002 Chevy drain service van, drain & sewer equipment, all office equipment and computers, 2,700+ customer list, and more - a true turn-key or easy expansion opportunity. Very meticulously maintained equipment all kept inside a heated shop. Current owner is retiring. Large shop and real estate is also available if desired at additional cost. **Asking \$249,000.**

Chicago-Area Biosolids, Land Application, Dredging and Industrial Services Business. Established in 1985, owner is retiring. Reputable business includes real estate servicing the entire Chicagoland area with sludge and biosolids disposal and treatment services. Real estate and shop included with sale valued at \$750,000, business grosses in excess of \$3 million annually, \$6.3 million in equipment and assets including several TerraGators, Vac Trailers, dump trailers, loaders and much more. **\$4,900,000.** Huge potential, good profit and priced right. Non-Disclosure Agreement required, all P&L statements, list of assets, and financials available to qualified buyers.

South Florida Commercial Real Estate, Plumbing & Sewer Business For Sale. Established in 1969, owner is moving on. Nearly 8,000 customers in database including some contracted. Established name with real estate on turnpike. Real estate appraised in excess of \$2 million, business grosses in excess of \$1 million, close to \$1 million in equipment including Vactor, Guzzler and Safe Jet trucks. Equipment has been featured in Cleaner magazine. Assumable SBA loan for bulk of selling price. **\$2,799,000 for the entire package.**

New Jersey VIP Restroom/Portable Toilet Business. Servicing Metro Philadelphia and Southwest New Jersey with VIP restroom trailers and portables. Many late model assets including 2 nice service trucks, 1 back-up service truck, pick-up truck, 4 VIP restroom trailers, nearly 300 restrooms, sinks, holding tanks, slide-in unit, 2 forklifts, and more. Assets worth over \$300,000 - priced to sell at **\$399,000.**

Allentown, Pennsylvania Area Sewer Business. Specializing in collection systems, video inspection, jetting, municipal work. Includes CUES TV & grout truck, Sewer Equipment Corporation jetter truck, Vactor 2100, RIDGID camera, confined space equipment and more! Good revenue history. Great opportunity to expand or start your own business. Current owner wants to retire. **\$330,000.**

Massachusetts Sewer & Drain Franchise For Sale. Confidential listing. Non Disclosure Agreement required. Turn-key business, good revenue. **Asking \$165,000.**

Dallas/Fort Worth Texas Area Sewer/Rehab Business For Sale.

Drain Cleaning, TV inspection, Pipeline & Manhole Rehab/Relining, Municipal Cleaning and Maintenance business for sale. Excellent opportunity to expand or start your own business. Good revenue history and priced to sell. Includes all equipment to get started. **Asking \$150,000.**

Wanted. Very serious and well qualified buyer looking for sewer, septic or industrial business in Dallas, Texas area. Must be grossing between \$500,000-\$1,000,000. All inquiries are kept confidential.

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Hino Trucks Adds Preferred Financial Partner

Hino Trucks has entered into an agreement with Hitachi Capital America Corp. that will expand Hino's commercial financial options. In addition to Hino's captive financial partner, Toyota Financial Services, Hino's dealers and customers will have access to Hitachi Capital America Corp. retail and wholesale financing offerings.

Tricouni Names Mansell President of Centerline Tank and Trailer

Tricouni Enterprises, St. Cloud, Minn., has named Ed Mansell president of Centerline Tank and Trailer Mfg., Sauk Centre, Minn. The new company is a blend of Engle Fabrication of Sauk Centre and R-Way Trailer Mfg. of Long Prairie. Engle is a regional and national designer and builder of custom stainless steel, aluminum and carbon steel tanks and trailers, including industrial vacuum tanks and municipal equipment. R-Way manufactures heavy-duty steel bottom-dump construction trailers. Mansell will be responsible for managing Centerline's engineering, manufacturing and service operations, as well as guiding product development.



Ed Mansell

Walex Introduces New Logo, Corporate Branding



A new Walex Products Co. logo features the company name in blue, illuminated by a radiating white starburst. The logo will tie together the company's product line of deodorizers and waste digesters under one brand identity. The branding reflects the company's growing corporate presence and international product distribution.

Following Fire, J & J Chemical Opens New Plant in Georgia



New 21,000-square-foot J & J Chemical plant.

J & J Chemical Co. Inc. of Athens, Ga., provider of deodorizers, fragrance enhancers, cleaners and other products used in the portable sanitation industry, lost its corporate headquarters and liquid products manufacturing facility in a July 27 fire. The company has established a new corporate office and manufacturing plant.

Following the fire, the company issued a statement, saying: "The plant that was destroyed in the fire housed our corporate offices and liquid manufacturing division. The cause of the fire could not be determined by fire investigators. Thanks to our tech support group, we had functioning offices the next day. At this time we have new corporate offices and a new 21,000-square-foot manufacturing facility. Our Utah plant and European operations were not affected.

"No one was lost or injured in this tragic incident. We are thankful for support received from customers and industry associates who offered to help in this difficult time. A special thank you to Kathy Crafton of PolyPortables Inc. and Jason Caraway of Redichem who helped immediately in our time of need." ■

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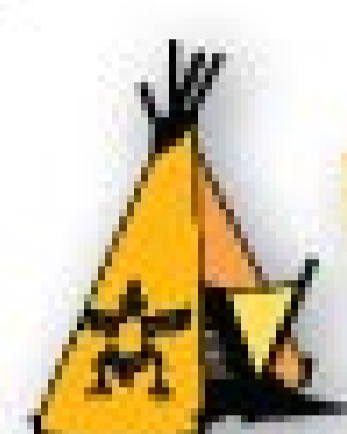
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BUSINESSES

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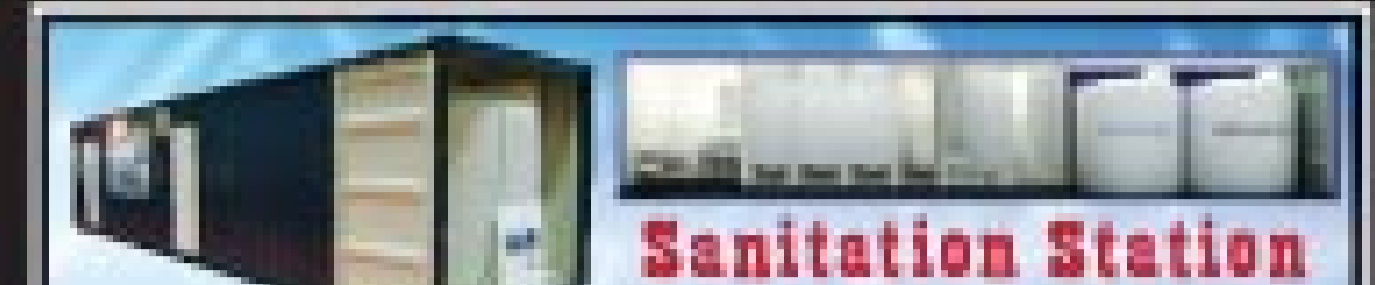
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Bob Carlson (left) and Jerry Kirkpatrick answer your questions in *Truck Corner*.



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QUESTION:

I recently purchased a used truck with a mechanical level gauge with an arrow indicating empty to full. I have never had a mechanical level gauge on a tank. Are those things good or should I replace it? In the past, I have always had sight bubbles on the rear head.

Ryan Bensinger
Rapid City, S.D.

ANSWER:

The purpose of any level gauge is to ensure the tank never fills so far that waste makes it through the primary, to the secondary, and lastly to the pump. At that point, pumping restrooms is an expensive game.

There are four types of level gauges used on vacuum tanks. As you mentioned, one of them is the sight glass. These are clear, bowl-shaped windows, installed in series of at least three from top to bottom on the rear head. The technician can glance at the bubbles and tell when the tank reaches capacity. This is a quick, easy way to determine if you have room for another load or if it's time to dump.

Sight glasses are made of either plastic or glass. Generally they are secured by large thumbscrews, allowing for easy removal for cleaning or replacement. Bubbles get cloudy over time, and if they are not maintained, the driver cannot clearly see the level of waste.

SIGHT TUBE MAINTENANCE

Some PROs prefer a clear sight tube, typically installed on the back of the rear head. The tube fills and registers the same amount of waste as is in the tank. The sight tube must be strong enough to handle vacuum in the tank. A plain plastic hose will collapse, so something sturdier must be used. Usually there is a valve at the top and

bottom of the sight tube, allowing for easy removal and replacement once the tube becomes cloudy.

A third tool for measuring tank contents is the electronic gauge. Electronic gauges are more expensive than fixed plastic or glass sight gauges, but offer additional features. An electronic gauge, installed inside the tank, uses a vertical rod with electronic sensors. Depending on the tank's diameter and length, the gauge is calibrated to give a precise gallon measurement of contents. A digital readout inside the truck allows for constant monitoring of capacity.

The mechanical gauge you mention is popular with some PROs. This gauge is usually installed on the rear head. Inside the tank, an arm holding a 6-inch diameter stainless steel ball float moves up as the tank fills. Through simple gearing, the gauge on the outside of the tank registers empty to full.

All these gauges are currently in use on vacuum trucks. Each has a downside. The sight bubbles and the sight gauge need regular cleaning or replacement. The electronic gauge is expensive, and if something goes wrong with the gauge, it's more difficult to repair and replace.

A buildup of waste can cause the float ball and arm on the mechanical gauge to stick, which may result in an inaccurate readout. PROs need to make sure the readout needle is able to move freely. If you doubt the accuracy of the mechanical gauge, look inside the tank and see if it needs cleaning.

PROTECT YOUR PUMP

Sight gauges protect your pump and help ensure that your truck isn't running overweight. No matter which gauge you choose, it's wise to make sure it's in good working order and maintained as needed.

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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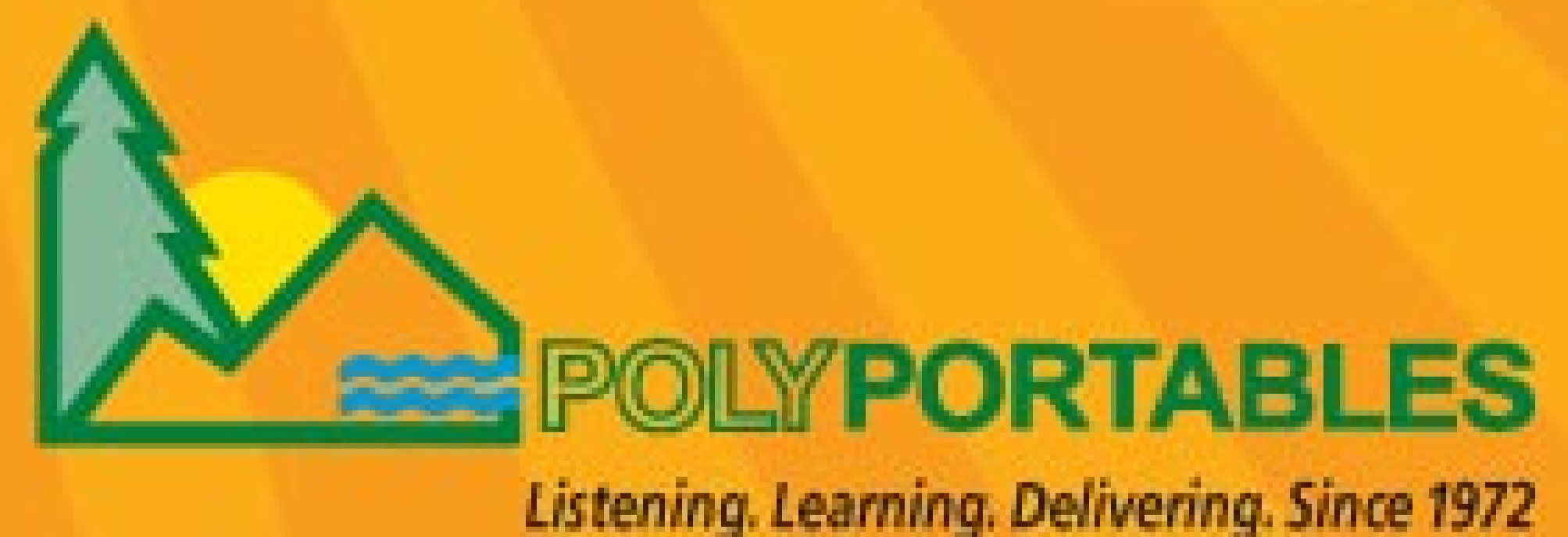
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