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ON THE COVER
Dain Mann of A-1 Septic Crescent Moon pumps an RV holding tank at the Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Club 2010 Grand National Rally in Forest City, Iowa, last July.
(Photo by Patrick Durkin)

COMING NEXT MONTH — April 2011

- **Think Tank:** What's your strongest market niche for the coming season?
- **PROfile:** Carolina PRO diversifies for success



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Come to the Blog Spot

WELCOME BACK FROM THE EXPO. NOW YOU'RE INVITED TO ADD YOUR TWO CENTS ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS AT THE EDITOR'S BLOG AT THE PRO WEBSITE

By Jim Kneiszel

As you're reading this column, you may have just returned from the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International in Louisville. That's where you saw the latest equipment for the portable sanitation industry from restroom manufacturers, truck builders and companies that sell many types of accessories designed to make your workday go smoother.

If you're still jazzed about a product you saw at the Expo, or if you got a lot of value out of the Education Day seminars, or even if you're still on a high after seeing country star Dierks Bentley perform at the Saturday Evening Jam, I'd love to hear from you. Your feedback helps me plan our coverage of the Expo for the following year. Let me know what you thought of the greatest show on earth for PROs.

If you couldn't make it to the Expo this year, I'd like to invite you to attend the 2012 event, to be held in a new town, Indianapolis, and at a new and exciting venue, the Indiana Convention Center. I think you're really going to like the new location, with convenient access via several nearby premium hotels — connected to the convention space by indoor

you head into the 2011 busy season as well. Earlier in the year, I wrote about the most requested service upgrades by customers heading into the summer season. At the time, we published a story asking restroom contractors for their thoughts. They said hand-wash stations and hand sanitizers topped the list of upgrades sought by their customers.

Portable sanitation in the news

In August, a blog post explained how former President Bill Clinton's daughter, Chelsea, ordered \$15,000 in portable sanitation equipment for her VIP wedding. The story pointed toward the need for more customer education about the availability of lavish restroom trailers for special events.

In May, I reported on the antics of unruly attendees at the Kentucky Derby, who have established a tradition of racing across the tops of portable restrooms placed in the Churchill Downs racecourse infield. The Internet is rife with videos of drunken revelers "running the gauntlet" across the rows of restrooms, while other spectators throw cans of beer at them. This causes a business liability nightmare for restroom providers.

In October, I wrote about several reports of portable restroom burnings in San Francisco. Going back to 2008, portable sanitation companies had reported

dozens of restroom fires throughout the Bay Area. A 27-year-old homeless man was arrested in the most recent case.

THROUGH THE BLOG, I CAN MORE IMMEDIATELY RESPOND TO INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENTS AND PROVIDE A WAY TO SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT ANY TOPIC. IT'S JUST ONE OF MANY WAYS WE'RE CHANGING THE PRO WEBSITE TO MAKE IT MORE MEANINGFUL FOR YOU.

skywalks — and a huge variety of restaurants and attractions in Downtown Indy. Watch future issues of *PRO* or go to www.pumpershow.com for more details as the Indy show nears.

Speaking of new initiatives, I would like to invite you to go to www.promonthly.com and take a look at the editor's blog posts. The blog is something that started early in 2010. Its purpose is to bring you snippets of timely portable sanitation news, personal observations and commentary meant to educate and entertain. Through the blog, I can more immediately respond to industry developments and provide a way to share your thoughts about any topic. It's just one of many ways we're changing the *PRO* website to make it more meaningful for you.

INFORMATION FOR YOU

The following are some of the topics I've touched on in recent months at the editor's blog. At the *PRO* website, you can read all the blogs I've posted and respond by e-mail with your comments.

Seasonal trends

Late last year, I used the blog to share several tips about preparing service vehicles for efficient winter operation. Some of those same tips, like checking battery life and coolant strength, are important as

Restroom trivia

Which Michigan PRO was sued by longtime *Tonight Show* host Johnny Carson in 1977 for using the trademarked phrase "Here's Johnny" for his products? True or false: A company 30 years ago unsuccessfully marketed collapsible cardboard portable restrooms? Can you name the toilet paper brand that started selling the first rolls with no cardboard core in 2010? The answers to all of these trivia questions can be found in my blog.

Marketing opportunities

Georgia PRO Nix Tank Inc. believes having its own blog can help build brand awareness for its services. You can read more about the company's new website tool in a blog from last summer.

Have you thought of approaching your local city officials about placing restrooms in downtown tavern areas to help stamp out public urination among late-night partiers? They've done it in College Station, Pa., home of Penn State University. Read about the initiative in a blog from last June.

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

I've touched on dozens of topics in the editor's blog over the past year, but I'm always looking for new ways to use this 21st century communication tool. Is there a question you'd like to throw out to the portable sanitation community about marketing, customer service or another topic? Have you discovered a timesaving procedure or technique you'd like to share with others in the industry? Do you have news of note to announce, like a new location, expanded staff or updated website?

The editor's blog, and all the content at www.promonthly.com, is an extension of *PRO* magazine. Both the magazine and the website are important tools COLE Publishing uses to spread valuable information and, it is our hope, contribute to the professional standards of a growing industry. You can help by sending your news, tips and questions to editor@promonthly.com. ■



Video Series Launches on PRO Website

A portable sanitation reality video series, *Riding Shotgun with Gretchen Menard*, debuts this month at the *PRO* website, www.promonthly.com. The series will follow the Detroit-area restroom contractor as she serves special events and a new high-profile assignment providing restroom trailers for the ABC-TV crime drama

Detroit 1-8-7, which films on location in the Motor City.

Menard, owner of Poopy's Potties in Holly, Mich., is using compact high definition (or HD) digital video cameras to provide an up-close, day-in-the-life glimpse of the challenges she faces each day and her service techniques on location. In new installments on the *PRO* website throughout the year, you'll hear her commentary on service, equipment and disposal issues.

Menard has positioned herself as a boutique supplier of upscale single restroom units and small restroom trailers. Since Michigan started offering tax incentives to television and film production companies in 2008, Menard has gone after related portable sanitation opportunities. She landed a job providing trailers for the *Transformers 3* movie set. Most recently she's had a five-day-a-week job shadowing the production company for the crime drama. ■

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Look to the Clouds

Being described as someone whose head is in the clouds used to be a negative characterization. These days, however, many small businesses have discovered there are advantages to having your head, or at least your data, in a cloud.

By Judy Kneiszel

Microsoft recently reported some confusing statistics. A survey commissioned by the technology giant claims 29 percent of small businesses use cloud computing services. In the same small business survey, only 20 percent of the respondents said they know what cloud computing is.

How can the number of people who use something be greater than the number of people who know what it is? Simple. Many people are using clouds; they just don't realize it.

So, how about if I turn you into that rare small-business person who knows what cloud computing is? After all, it's not a term that's going away any time soon, and once you understand what it is, you can decide if it's something your business should be utilizing more or less frequently.

What is cloud computing?

Cloud computing is a term describing services delivered in real time over the Internet. The services can be free or subscription-based and include software, file storage, synchronization, backup and other utilities.

Think you've never used a cloud? Think again. Have you ever uploaded photos to Flickr or Snapfish to share with family and friends? Your photos are on a cloud. Other common applications people may not recognize as cloud computing services include Gmail, Hotmail, and Skype.

CLOUD COMPUTING IS A TERM DESCRIBING SERVICES DELIVERED IN REAL TIME OVER THE INTERNET. THE SERVICES CAN BE FREE OR SUBSCRIPTION-BASED AND INCLUDE SOFTWARE, FILE STORAGE, SYNCHRONIZATION, BACKUP AND OTHER UTILITIES.

For businesses, Dropbox is a popular online backup, file sync and sharing service, and many businesses use the application Basecamp for project management. Microsoft Office 365, allows users of Office, Share-Point, Lync and Exchange — whether a company of one or one million — to link to these applications anywhere, anytime. Simply put: Users don't have to be in their office to access Office. Accessing accounting software like QuickBooks via cloud allows a business owner, an outside accountant, and the company bookkeeper who happens to be stuck at home due to a snowstorm, to see the company finances together in real time.

Clouds save money

Many companies were persuaded to expand their use of cloud computing services in the past couple of years because budgets were tight

and there was a willingness to try anything to save money and stay afloat during the lingering economic downturn.

By using a cloud, a company can cut down on the number of people needed to handle information technology (IT) in-house. No one is needed on the payroll to maintain and troubleshoot servers, which saves money. In fact, no server is needed, saving even more money. And software accessed through a cloud is considerably cheaper than packaged software, not to mention the elimination of all that packaging is good for the environment.

Clouds are simple

Generally, cloud-based services are easy to use. They require only a computer, a browser, and an Internet connection and, unlike a server, require no maintenance from the user.

Clouds protect data

If something were to happen to your office — fire, flood, or other natural disaster — your data could be lost if it were stored on a server at the same location. Using a cloud computing service for data storage means your data is safe even when your building is not.

Clouds make business truly mobile

Laptops and smart phones have made businesses mobile, but cloud computing takes mobility to a new level. Now you don't need your laptop to access your company's information ... you can use any computer ... and you can work on a project in real time with co-workers from anywhere you, or they, happen to be.

Big support for little businesses

Cloud computing levels the playing field somewhat between big companies and small companies by providing David access to the kind of infrastructure that only Goliath had in the past. It's like having a huge IT department that you never have to think about.

But clouds can be risky, too

An actual cloud is vapor. There's nothing you can hold on to. Cloud computing is the same; there's nothing for you to hold on to. While it's cheaper and easier not to have to buy, store and maintain servers, packaged software, etc., utilizing cloud computing services involves a certain amount of trust on your part.

Be aware of the risks involved in putting your data in the clouds. One risk is that you can never be 100 percent certain who has access to your information once it has migrated beyond the hard drives and

backup storage devices in your office.

Another risk is that the information, and sometimes the applications you need to make use of it, may be available only when you are connected to the Internet and the service is up and running.

A third risk is losing ownership of your data. Before utilizing a cloud computing service try to find out if you still own your data once it goes into the cloud? Ask if you can share data between cloud services if you plan to use more than one. Determine what happens to data if you terminate a cloud relationship or the company providing the cloud service goes out of business. Can you get your data back and what format will it be in? How can you be sure all other copies are destroyed?

To protect your company data, read the fine print about security and privacy before signing on to use any cloud computing service. Usually, convenience outweighs risk if you are utilizing a trusted, well-known provider. Cloud computing experts have likened security breaches to plane crashes; they happen so rarely that when they do, they get a lot of attention. Still, using clouds, like choosing whether or not to fly in a plane, depends on an individual's comfort level. You may be perfectly comfortable storing e-mail on a cloud, but not prepared to put a year's worth of financial data out there.

SHARE YOUR CLOUD STORY

I'd like to know how much *PRO* readers are utilizing the cloud computing services. I'll bet it's more than you realized before you read this column. What has your experience been like? Are you on Cloud Nine over what this technology means for your business, or does your cloud experience feel more like a cyclone? E-mail your cloud story to editor@promonthly.com. ■

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MOTORHOME *Mania*

Iowa's A-1 Septic Crescent Moon delivers door-to-door pumping services for 1,500 RVs at the Winnebago Industries' annual rally

By Patrick Durkin

THE TEAM

Dain Mann, Corey Nichols and his uncle Chad Nichols are partners in A-1 Septic Crescent Moon of Mason City, Iowa. Their service area covers a 100-mile radius around their office in north-central Iowa, extending into southern Minnesota. The company employs up to eight workers during the busy summer season. The staff includes crew manager Colby Nichols (Corey's younger brother); office manager Jeana Amundson; and drivers Jeff Tiedt, Doug Bohner and Joshua Servantez.

COMPANY HISTORY

Mann and Corey Nichols have owned A-1 Septic Crescent Moon for five years, and Chad Nichols joined them as a company officer and business manager in 2009. The company has about 225 portable restrooms and hand-wash units, three vacuum trucks, a trailer-mounted vacuum unit and two Ford pickups for excavation work. For the 2010 Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Rally, Mann and Nichols rolled out their 2009 International 4300 truck with its 1,800-gallon waste, 400-gallon freshwater aluminum Progress Tank. The truck was assembled by KeeVac Industries, and is equipped with a Masport 950R pump. A-1 also used a 2000 Ford F-250 at the rally to pull a trailer-mounted 1,500-gallon Calumet steel vacuum tank from Imperial Industries Inc. The trailer has a 10-hp Honda engine to power the tank's Jurup pump from Chandler Equipment Inc. Mann and Nichols use this trailer/tank only for the annual WIT Rally.

The company also runs a 2003 International 4200 with a 1,000-gallon steel Imperial Industries tank for waste and a

continued

Corey Nichols (left) and Dain Mann are ready to roll at the Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Club rally in Forest City, Iowa. (Photos by Patrick Durkin)

ON LOCATION

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THE JOB: Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Club
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Dain Mann

525-gallon National Tank Outlet (NTO) plastic tank for freshwater. Mann and Nichols worked with Rick Johansen Welding to install the tanks and Jurop pump. They also have a 2002 Dodge 3500 equipped with a 350-gallon waste/150-gallon freshwater slide-in vacuum unit from Imperial Industries with a Jurop pump.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Soon after Mann and Corey Nichols acquired A-1 Septic Crescent Moon, they also acquired the contract to work with Winnebago Industries to service the Winnebago-Itasca Travelers Club’s annual Grand National Rally. This members-only rally is held at Winnebago’s headquarters in Forest City, Iowa, about 35 miles northwest of Mason City. About five months before the rally, WIT managers contact A-1 Septic Crescent Moon to discuss pricing, expectations and procedural changes from the previous year’s event. They update and modify their plans in the weeks preceding the rally.

THE MAIN EVENT

The rally, held every July, attracts 1,300 to 1,600 motorhomes and about 3,000 guests from the United States and Canada. Although the rally runs six days, attendees show up early and stay late for pre-rally and post-rally events, hosting visitors more than 10 days. The motorhomes pull into reserved and numbered “addresses” on the sprawling RV grounds. The sites are accompanied by street names and state designations. At a glance, you’ll often identify the travelers’ home states by college or pro football bumper stickers, flags and window decals.

THE JOB

Nichols and Mann say they have pumped between 850 and 1,300 RV waste tanks at past rallies. Most RV owners buy \$20 pump tickets from the rally office, and rally officials also hand out complimentary pump tickets to VIPs, officers or others to use at their discretion. RV owners attach the ticket to their windshield when they want A-1 to pump the waste and greywater (sink and shower) tanks. A-1’s crews collect the tickets when servicing the RVs, and invoice the WIT Rally after the event.

BY THE NUMBERS

Because motorhomes have their own sanitation and restroom facilities, A-1 Septic Crescent Moon needs to place only 18 standard restrooms, two handicap-accessible restrooms

and three hand-wash units on the grounds. Besides placing a portable restroom near busy intersections, they position multiple units near seminar tents and the entertainment stage.

LET’S ROLL

When servicing the rally, A-1 Septic’s two crews arrive by 7:30 a.m. and strive to finish rounds and return to Mason City by 1 p.m. They make the roundtrip service run seven times during the rally, which means they pump an average of 170 motorhomes per visit, but that jumps to 200 or 250 during peak days.

The challenge is having the right equipment to work the rally cleanly, quickly and efficiently. “You need big equipment to handle

continued



The Crescent Moon crew makes its rounds at the RV rally, where it pumps hundreds of vehicle holding tanks in addition to portable restroom service.



Chad Nichols pulls a dump ticket from the windshield of an RV during the camping event. Inset shows what a pump-out ticket looks like.



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Chad Nichols

so much work, but you're constantly squeezing into tight quarters without much room for error," Mann says. "Our guys have to pay attention every time we move. You're dealing with about 200 individual 'clients' every day, and their rigs can cost \$250,000, so the owners often watch every move you make. You don't want to give anyone a reason to be unhappy."

A-1's crews consist of a driver and two hose handlers on the 2009 International; and a driver and one hose handler on the F-250 pickup with vacuum trailer. Whenever possible, the driver positions the tank and hoses so they can pump a motorhome on each side of the street before pulling ahead. When the truck moves, the hose handlers serve as spotters for the driver, and keep the hoses from knocking over bicycles, potted plants, charcoal grills and other personal property.

When pumping motorhome holding tanks, A-1's crew must ensure the tanks are properly vented to prevent damage from excessive suction. The pumps are powerful enough to cause an RV's tanks to collapse inward if the vent is clogged or damaged. Crews must be careful the pump is set for vacuum rather than pressure to prevent a mess or damage to the RV.

HOSE & OUTLET CONNECTIONS

Crews attach the same hoses for pumping portable restrooms and RVs. The only modification is equipping each suction hose with a standard coupler that fits motorhome drain valves. After dragging the hose to the RV's ser-

vice panel, the technician snaps the coupler onto the drain, opens the motorhome's drain, and then cranks open the valve on the suction hose.

PROVING SERVICE

A-1 crews also know some motorhome owners will check their work, sometimes claiming a technician didn't pump their tanks thoroughly. Rather than turn the truck around and get the entire crew behind schedule, Mann or Nichols grabs a 5-gallon



bucket and follows the owner back to their rig. To prove the tank was properly pumped, they place the bucket under the RV's waste drain, pull the release valve, and catch a drop or dribble in the bucket.

"It's usually just a faulty sensor inside the RV waste tank, or toilet paper stuck on the sensor," Mann says. "Their digital gauge might say their tank is still half- or one-third full, but the bucket proves it's empty."

Crescent Moon restroom units can be seen in the upper right corner of this photo of the rally grounds.



Dain Mann (above) puts on gloves in preparation for pumping a row of RVs at the event sponsored by Winnebago and Itasca. Below, see how Crescent Moon workers attach a vacuum hose to an RV for pumping.

We don't argue with them. We just check it with the bucket. The last thing we want is someone saying we didn't provide a service they paid for."

KEY TO SUCCESS

Chad Nichols says personal service — at the rally or at any job — is critical. "The best possible marketing for any company is having a reputation for good, hard, honest work," he says. "We try to immerse ourselves in the communities we serve. Sometimes that means getting the job done first and worrying later about compensation." ■

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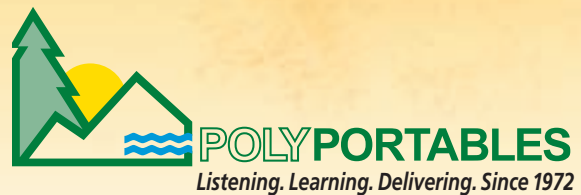
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Widget Wish List

WHAT ONE NEW PIECE OF OFFICE OR TRUCK TECHNOLOGY WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE RIGHT NOW?

By Mary Shafer

In an era when technology advances so quickly, many of us hold off on making tech purchases. We hope for a lull that will allow us at least enough time to learn all the neat things our new toy can do before causing us to hanker for the next big thing.

Portable restroom and accessory manufacturers, truck builders and equipment suppliers display beautiful new offerings every year at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International. It's a visually dazzling array of items designed to help you do the job better, faster and more profitably.

And how about those folks back at the office, making it possible to keep the guys in the trucks busy and on the road? Surely, they've got their eyes on some promising new technologies. Let's check in to see what these PROs have to say about their widget wish lists.

RANDY SCHUTHEIS
J & J Septic & Sewer Cleaning LLC



Location:
Waterloo,
Iowa

Employees:
8

Years in
Business:
10

Randy Schutheis drives truck for J & J Septic & Sewer Cleaning. He wishes for an on-

board computer in his truck to provide real-time road maps that would be the equivalent of a GPS system, only more accurate and up-to-date. He'd like to know about road closures or detours, any information that would help him not only locate the restroom pickup and drop-off points, but also help him plan a smarter, more efficient route.

"It's always good to have a more organized trip," he says.

ROBIN WERTZ
Ken Wertz Hauling & Septic Service Inc.



Location:
Hollidaysburg,
Pa.

Employees:
8

Years in
Business:
27

Robin Wertz is the office manager of the septic pumping, portable restroom and trash disposal business she owns with husband Ken Wertz. She says software that would make her dispatching duties easier sounds appealing.

"I think it would be very helpful to have the kind of routing (software) that would let you know where all your portable units are at any given time," she says. "Real-time tracking devices on the units would be a very big advantage."

She and her husband have

"I THINK IT WOULD BE VERY HELPFUL TO HAVE THE KIND OF ROUTING (SOFTWARE) THAT WOULD LET YOU KNOW WHERE ALL YOUR PORTABLE UNITS ARE AT ANY GIVEN TIME. REAL-TIME TRACKING DEVICES ON THE UNITS WOULD BE A VERY BIG ADVANTAGE."

Robin Wertz

given a lot of thought to adding tracking technology. "I think it's an interesting possibility for our future," she says, adding that the more units they get, the more attractive such a solution becomes. They currently run three trucks to service about 300 units, and Wertz says the company has grown each year. "For us last year, I expected the economy to put a dent in our growth, but we ended up buying a tractor-trailer load of 28 new units. For our particular area, which is mostly small towns, that was a pretty big thing, especially now."

She anticipates growth will continue, and that within a year, the tracking technology will become more of a necessity than a dream. For now, she's content to do her homework on available solutions, so when it's time to buy, she's ready to make an informed decision.

Tommy Breeding pumps septic tanks and rents portable restrooms. He, too, says a GPS unit might be just the ticket for his truck.

"It helps in finding loca-

TOMMY BREEDING
Tommy's Port-A-Toilet Services



Location:
Crossville,
Tenn.

Employees:
5

Years in
Business:
29

tions, directions, and I think it cuts down on time on your trip. They allow you to run your trip in demo mode, so you can get a good idea where you're going."

Breeding also believes a GPS unit would help back in the office with route planning. "The secretary in the office does that a lot of times, gives us a pre-run, letting us know (our destination) is going to be close to this or that little community, so we have an idea and can start looking for it." He says that, though the secretary does a great job, the GPS technology would make her work faster and possibly more accurate. ■

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Waterless Celebrates 20th Anniversary

Waterless Co. Inc., maker of no-water urinal systems and other restroom products, including the soy-resin urinal, celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. The Vista, Calif., company was founded by Klaus Reichardt in 1991.

ScreenTech Launches Product Website

ScreenTech Imaging, a division of Roeda Signs, has launched www.sanitationgraphicsonline.com. The product website features stock decals for the waste and recycling industries, including safety decals for roll-offs, compactors, front loaders, truck bodies, portable restrooms, reflective tape and more.

Consortium Seeks U.S. Businesses for Global Projects Database

The Consortium for Global Development, through its Global Contractors Library database, seeks to match U.S. companies with projects in the \$130 billion global development market. The consortium is especially seeking small, medium and SBA 8(a) businesses. For more information on available projects and the free database listing, go to www.cfglobaldevelopment.com or www.global-contractors.com.

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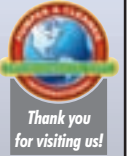
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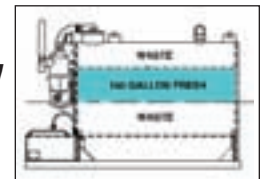
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A Side Job? NOT FOR LONG

David Lucero of Colorado's Alpine Portable Toilets and Septic places a restroom on a construction site. (Photos by Wendy Saunders)

By Sharon Verbeten

Colorado's David and Tawnie Lucero had their minds set on running a small evening and weekend portable sanitation company. But soon the little venture grew into a full-blown, full-time career.

What happens when you start a side business and it soon takes over your life? Just ask David and Tawnie Lucero. Their plan to launch a modest portable restroom company turned out to be a lesson in what happens when you set a goal of doing everything right.

After the Luceros had their first child in 2000, they launched Alpine Portable Toilets and Septic in Durango and Pagosa Springs, Colo., as a small business Tawnie could run from home and that they hoped could help pay the bills.

"(David) was going to do stuff on the side, stuff on the weekend," says Tawnie, 32. The couple knew some friends and family in construction work, so they felt they already had a network of potential clients.

"We were just thinking we could rent out to (friends and family), clean them on the weekends and (it would) give me

a chance to stay home," Tawnie says.

The couple started on a shoestring budget, applying for a \$10,000 credit card, then using it to purchase a 100-gallon vacuum tank to put in the back of a Ford F-150, along with 14 modestly priced restrooms. Soon they were renting the units consistently and kept fielding requests that exceeded their inventory.

"When we first started, we started so small," David says. "Most of our (jobs were) construction. That was the first we really marketed toward because we didn't have the inventory (for large events)."

Tawnie adds, "We just kept doing the small scale, and we would always end up getting calls where we'd have to order more restrooms."

About two years after they launched the business, "We got a call to do an event (a country music concert). They wanted 28 units," Tawnie recalls. The event required additional restrooms and buying a

continued

Alpine Portable Toilets and Septic Durango and Pagosa Springs, Colo.

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Quick-Tabs



Alpine's crew (above, from left) includes Steven Smith, John Buckley, David and Tawnie Lucero, David Kelley, Ed Williams and Jason Early. At left, the Luceros pose with their 2008 International 4300 with 1,500-gallon tank.



second pickup truck and a 350-gallon slide-in unit to get the job done. The Luceros considered this a turning point in their business.

"That just kind of pushed us to another level," Tawnie says.

Astounded with their early success, the Luceros remained pragmatic about their side job turning into their career. David was already a certified wastewater treatment plant operator, working full time at the Southern Ute Indian Tribe's facility. But as the business grew, David left his job to work full time with Alpine.

given our family the financial security we need, (and) people know we are a family oriented company ... and they love it."

FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE SECTOR

David's wastewater background, the couple believes, helped them secure and maintain clients. And he uses expert knowledge of sewage and sanitation issues to tout his company's attention to cleanliness.

"I'm really concerned and I really enforce health and safety," he says. "When I was work-

ing for the sanitation district, I would write and enforce the safety policies. A lot of the disinfection and sterilization experience really pays off; it just carries over.

"Gloves, washing hands, handling the sewage ... We're really careful. We make sure that that when we're handling dump hoses and wands that it's a requirement to wear gloves."

David stresses safety with his staff, and makes sure all units have hand sanitizers to help kill pathogens. "That's actually something we market," he says.

He pursues continuing education in wastewater treatment to retain his licenses and passes that training along to his employees through meetings and seminars. But even with that background, David says he won't likely take his business in that direction.

"I definitely have thought about going into the wastewater treatment end, but the permit process through the state is so expensive," he says. "Realistically, what it costs to build a treatment plant and the minimal dump fees we pay ... it's worth it to have someone else handle it."

David says his move from the public to the private sector was well worth it, even though there were some trade-offs, such as having to

"We're just on hand and preach service so highly. Basically, we try to provide the best service for a good price. I think a lot of it is in selling guaranteed service. You have to sell your sincerity. I'm giving you my word — these will be clean."

David Lucero

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“The biggest part to this whole picture is hard work; you have to live it. That’s the only way you’re going to make it in today’s world.”

David Lucero



A placement of PolyPortables Inc. restrooms (above) is lined neatly between trees in a heavily wooded area. At left, David Lucero services a restroom.

9,000 attendees daily. Alpine supplies 100 units, which they service three times a day. The company provides its restroom trailer, made by Rich

Specialty Restrooms.

The luxury trailer has four women’s stalls, one men’s stall and three urinals. The trailer features an electric fireplace and other amenities that clients appreciate, Tawnie says. In addition to the upscale festival, the trailer is used for several weddings each year.

This is the second time Alpine has serviced Blues and Brews — which David admits is a challenging event. Their crews must get in and out quickly because of huge crowds. “We’re very experienced and we’ve put a lot of thought into it,” he says.

Maintaining customer satisfaction goes hand-in-hand with maintaining units, the Luceros believe — even more so than price.

“We’re just on hand and preach service so highly. Basically, we try to provide the best service for a good price. I think a lot of it is in selling guaranteed service,” David says. “You have to sell your sincerity. I’m giving you my word — these will be clean.”

Diversity and hard work pay off in challenging economy

David Lucero isn’t happy sitting still. The co-owner of Alpine Portable Toilets and Septic, along with his wife, Tawnie, didn’t start his own business to remain stagnant.

To that end, he remains in constant expansion and acquisition mode — always looking for ways to improve.

That can be tough in a recessionary market, but David isn’t letting that stop him from using diversification to his benefit. While others focus on niche service, David is reaping benefits from diversity.

“Our market is dropping just like everybody else’s,” he admits. “But I continue to push different aspects of our company.

“The construction market was failing, so I got into (special) events. Just this year, I picked up two bigger events.”

While David says others in the industry may feel they have to downsize or specialize to compete in a troubled economy, he looks at it differently.

“It’s not rocket science. If you want to continue to make money and continue to grow, you have to be the best,” he says. “The biggest part to this whole picture is hard work; you have to live it. That’s the only way you’re going to make it in today’s world.”

Sticking to that mantra has brought word-of-mouth referrals. Satisfied coordinators of the Blues and Brews Festival pitched Alpine for jazz and wine festivals held in Telluride. “Immediately after that one, we booked three more,” David says.

With Colorado’s cold and snowy winters, special events are primarily seasonal, but David remains dedicated to growing that portion of the business. “There’s always something big-

continued

buy his own health insurance.

“We did lose a good group plan ... We bought ourselves pretty good insurance just because we have four kids and we had to make sure that we were able to provide. I wouldn’t have been able to leave if I couldn’t get insurance,” he says.

And as much as David says he loved working more regular and predictable hours, he says, “It’s not worth the trade-off of being able to push your own business. I’m a very competitive person; I like personal challenges. I like the satisfaction of doing something and getting a reward from it ... In the public sector, that’s not there.”

SPECIAL EVENTS EXPAND BUSINESS

Special events make up about 40 percent of Alpine’s business. The company is located in southwest Colorado, home to several American Indian reservations — making tribal events a prime candidate for their services. One event Alpine landed the contract for is the Native American Sundance Festival. Alpine supplies 25 restrooms — which they clean twice a day — to the five-day event and neighboring campsites. The company also serves events for other tribal nations.

One of the company’s largest events is the three-day Blues and Brews Festival. The event, held in the upscale mountain village of Telluride (about 2 1/2 hours away), draws about

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David Lucero stays busy serving construction sites in southwest Colorado, placing his company's restrooms from PolyJohn Enterprises and PolyPortables Inc.

ger and better," he says. "There are still events I want to do. I constantly think about different marketing plans ... how can I figure out a way to get these people?"

But since business slows down in winter, David always keeps an eye on cash flow issues. About two years ago, he faced financial challenges after buying another portable sanitation company, acquiring about 140 units.

"That's when we had the inventory to go after bigger stuff," David says. "My biggest fear was how do I now get out of debt so I don't have payments in the winter?"

IN ACQUISITION, EXPANSION MODE

Alpine has 600 portable restrooms from PolyJohn Enterprises Corp. and PolyPortables Inc., as well as six PortaJane Inc. units, and five ADA units, nine upscale units and 10 hand-wash stations, all from PolyPortables.

The truck fleet now numbers five: a 1994 Ford L9000 with 3,000-gallon steel tank and Masport pump from Imperial Industries Inc.; a 2008 International 4300 with a 1,500-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater steel tank and Masport pump from Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc.; a 2008 Ford F-350 with a 500-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater stainless steel tank and Conde (Westmoor Ltd) pump from Best Enterprises Inc.; a 2005 Ford F-350 with a 300-gallon waste/150-gallon freshwater steel tank and Conde pump from Imperial; and a 1998 Dodge 3500 with 300-gallon waste/110-gallon freshwater stainless steel tank and Conde pump from Best Enterprises.

Alpine also provides septic and plumbing services. For those services, it uses a 2008 Chevrolet Kodiak box truck, a 2004 Ford service van and a 2008 Kubota mini backhoe and tractor.

To house the growing inventory, the Luceros bought a shop and yard to consolidate their equipment. Previously they were using several yards to store equipment. The new complex includes three shops, the biggest being 40 by 60 feet.

"We might start doing a little more truck repair," David says. "At this point, it's really more indoor parking. The winters are rough here."

In addition to buying a restroom company two years ago, the Luceros purchased a drain cleaning business and expanded their excavation services. Alpine also has added septic system pumping, repair and installation to their offerings, as well as plumbing and heating repair.

David says he's always in acquisition mode — an important trait, he believes.

"I think you need to do everything you think you can ... but you have to do it all well. If you do a thousand different things and you're not good at any of them, that's not how you grow. You have to market yourself as the best."

Even though Alpine is no longer just a business that Tawnie can do from home — the couple now has four children — the Luceros have come a long way in a decade. And David isn't ready to slow down.

He believes 2011 could



be another acquisition year. "I'm not sure. I know it will be a hard-pushed year ... more plumbing, and we'll continue to push excavation ... the good thing is we have enough good (clients) under our belt that we have referrals."

Continued success is all about building and keeping a reputation for hard work and integrity, he says.

"You have some sleepless nights," David says, but adds that it's important to "do what we say we'll do. Good names travel fast; bad names travel faster." ■

MORE INFO

Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc.
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Best Enterprises Inc.
800/288-2378
www.bestenterprises.net
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PolyJohn Enterprises Corp.
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www.polyjohn.com
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PolyPortables Inc.
800/241-7951
www.polyportables.com
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PortaJane Inc.
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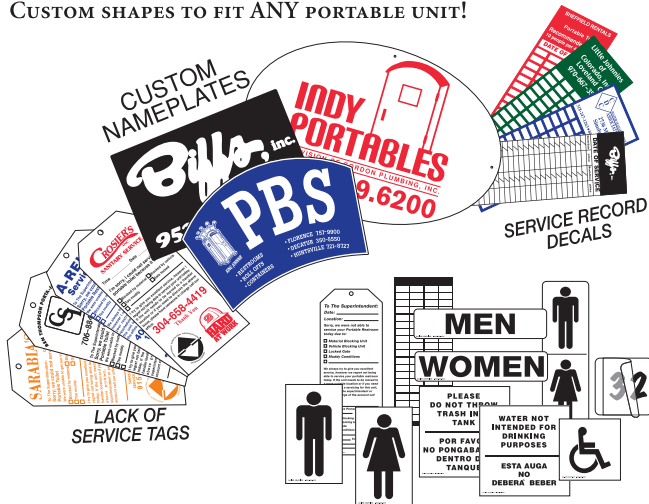
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LISTINGS

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New Jersey VIP Restroom/ Portable Toilet Business. Servicing Metro Philadelphia and South-west 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.**

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.

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Bob Carlson is owner of Glendale Welding in Glendale, Ariz. His company has been building and repairing portable sanitation trucks for 40 years. Send questions for Carlson to truckcorner@promonthly.com.

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By Bob Carlson

QUESTION:

Some truck manufacturers don't separate the water and wastewater tanks front to back, but instead install a long, round water tank down the center of the waste tank, running the full length of the tank. I assumed that was the water tank. Is there a reason to build the truck that way? Wouldn't the long tank create a slosh factor where the water rushes from one end to the other when the truck comes to a stop?

Rusty Ingebritson
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ANSWER:

That is the water tank. But rather than having a big "slosh" factor, the long, cylindrical tank is baffled front to back, reducing the sloshing to where it is hardly noticeable to the driver and not a threat to push the truck into traffic at a stop light. This design is chosen to ensure better weight distribution.

By running a cylinder-shaped tank through the center of the vacuum tank and having the proper baffles in both compartments, water and wastewater are distributed evenly throughout the tank. In many portable sanitation service trucks, the water compartment is located at the front of a dual-compartment water/wastewater tank. During a service route, the water level goes down as the wastewater tank fills. That shifts the overall weight toward the rear of the truck. A heavy rear end is going to put more stress on the transmission and wear down the tread on the tires.

Overall, the central cylindrical tank design is advantageous for a portable restroom truck, and in my opinion, it is an under-utilized tank design. A balanced truck, with hauling weight constantly distributed evenly inside the tank, will help the longevity of the truck. In your next truck, consider the option of a longitudinal water tank down the center of the waste tank.

QUESTION:

I've heard a lot of talk about stretching truck frames. My truck will handle a larger tank, but to accommodate it I need to move the axle back and extend the frame. I've been told I can't just splice a piece of channel and weld it up. I don't know enough about truck frames to know what needs to be done. Is this something I can do or do I need a professional?

Dennis Flaherty
Houston, Texas

ANSWER:

Truck frames are made of highly tempered steel, not the ordinary variety used to make angles, flats and channels. Here is the process to follow when stretching your frame:



Placing the tank perpendicular to the truck frame and building the freshwater tank into a cylinder at the center of the waste tank is one way to promote even weight distribution. (Photo courtesy of Bob Carlson)

1. Cut the frame channels at precisely the same spot on each side. The cutting should be done at a 45-degree angle. Then move the frame section with the axle back as far as required. Obviously, you will also need to cut the driveline. You will add the extension later.
2. Using truck frame tempered steel, make sure each end of the insert piece has the ends also cut at 45-degrees so the insert piece will be welded to the existing frame in the open V-shape made by the two 45-degree cuts. Many truck frames are at least 3/8-inch thick, so it will take several passes in the welding process to weld the insert piece in place.
3. Make similar 45-degree cuts into the back end of the insert and the axle section of the frame so that welding will be done in the open "V." Weld the insert to the axle truck frame in the same way as before, using several welding passes to accomplish the task.
4. Now it's time to fishplate the frame on each side. This means that a normal steel plate (A-36) is cut somewhat in the shape of a long diamond (perhaps 18-24 inches long) and welded to the inside of the truck frame, centered over the weld-splices. The thickness of the fishplate should be equal to or greater than the thickness of the truck frame.
5. When all the fishplates are in place, measure and get the driveline extension you will need to connect the driveline to the rear axle.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

This is a fairly large job and if you are not set up to handle the section pieces, such as the rear axle, then it's best to turn the project over to professionals with experience stretching frames. ■

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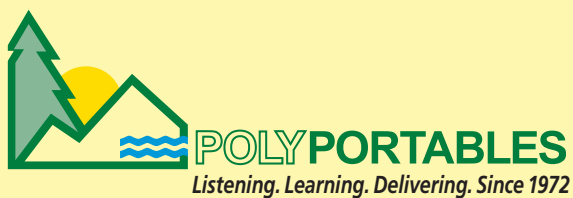
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