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LUCK O' THE IRISH

A St. Pat's Day celebration of beer, food and fun tests this hardworking Michigan restroom service crew

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Go With the Flow

Texas PRO QP Energy Services travels rough terrain to provide comfort for energy pipeline workers

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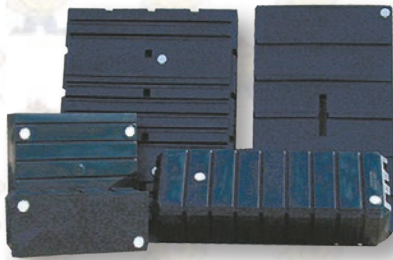
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Are Your Customers Ready to Scoop Sawdust?

PORTLAND-BASED NATURE COMMODES BETS THAT COMPOSTING RESTROOM WASTE IS THE NEXT TREND IN PORTABLE SANITATION

By Jim Kneiszel

Randall Scott White hits on a lot of popular environmental concepts when he talks about his new portable sanitation company, Nature Commode, in Portland, Oregon. The former tech company executive and TED Talks speaker uses words like sustainability, organic and natural, and catchphrases like “We’re turning waste into an asset,” when he promotes the fledgling company he started with business partner Nicole Cousino.

Yet the business really harks back to the early days of portable sanitation. White is hand-building modular restrooms out of wooden panels, collecting waste in interchangeable “cartridges,” and asking users to dump “locally sourced” sawdust over their “humanure.” Then he transports the collected waste to a rural compost site where it’s transformed into a soil amendment.

If you come from a long line of portable restroom operators, this probably sounds familiar. Remember when industry pioneers like Andy Gump built their own restrooms out of plywood and collected the waste using 55-gallon steel drums cut in half? And do you recall grandma and grandpa talking about life on the farm so many years ago, when they used sawdust to knock down odors in the outhouse?

While White says he is a portable sanitation pioneer promoting a service aimed at environmentally concerned event planners, he admits his new business plan is, in a way, rooted in days gone by.

“What’s old is new again. History repeats itself,” White says. “Guys, we’re not doing anything new here.”

FILLING A NICHE

But he says his service is hitting a niche of customers who want their events to carry a “green” theme. We’re talking about outdoor weddings or small music festivals where users appreciate the message he’s sending.

“We’re blown away by the response we’ve received in the market, so we know we’re onto something big,” White says. “So far we’re the only ones crazy enough to do it.”

In 2011, White was giving a TED Talk (Technology, Entertainment and Design) in San Francisco and discussing what the U.S. could do in the event of a financial collapse. Part of the plan he laid out was converting human waste into an energy asset, fertilizer. A few years later, he met Cousino, who had the same vision and had started a portable sanitation company. The pair partnered on the project and now have more than 100 handmade restrooms,



Above: A Nature Commode unit is set up and ready to go at a small festival. (Photos courtesy of Randall Scott White)



Left: Patrons at a music festival use Nature Commode restrooms.

a composting site in Washington state and plans to keep growing.

You can see photos and details about their restrooms at the website www.naturecommode.com. They also explain their “fork-to-food” recycling effort.

“We’re wasting this stuff, folks,” White says. He aims to move portable restroom waste from a disposal cost to a “profit center” on the ledger for PROs. Of course, some in the industry have been land-spreading waste as a farm field soil amendment for generations, but White would rather remove as much of the flow as possible from municipal treatment plants and put it directly into the ground after composting.

HOTBED OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

“Our motivation is absolutely an environmental one,” he says. Treatment plants, according to White, “fail to filter out 50 percent of the pharmaceuticals, street drugs, medications, the bad stuff that can get

(continued)

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into the mix in the porta-potty," he says. "It's getting out there in our oceans, food, soil web and watershed."

Randall Scott White hams it up for the camera at one of his restroom placements.

Maybe his location in Portland, a hotbed of environmentalism, or the type of customers he's approaching with the concept of Nature Commode, explain the tremendous feedback White says he's received. But he thinks event customers, particularly, have been craving new alternatives to the standard portable restroom. He says event managers want to spread a green and sustainable message to their patrons.

"People hiring porta-potties will start demanding this. We've created a market alternative. Capitalism loves choice and the natural porta-potty industry is born," he says. "The fact of the matter is wastewater management is headed toward a beautiful renaissance."

White said last fall's election outcome is an indication that people want to reduce regulations (including those on handling wastewater), encourage entrepreneurship and use technology to find new ways to generate energy.

QUESTIONS REMAIN

You may share White's enthusiasm for more sustainable ways to handle waste. But this effort is clearly in its infancy and there are more questions to be answered about building his model to a larger scale. A quick and safe way of handling the materials, from drop tank to finished fertilizer, would need to be developed for this idea to take off.

Meanwhile, the portable sanitation industry is undergoing continual refinement and evolution, with better restrooms, more efficient trucks, better spill-prevention protocols and oversight. There's a growing industry training infrastructure and more regulations requiring portable sanitation to be offered in far-flung construction, agricultural and event settings. Compared to those old wooden units and buckets of waste, new restrooms and service trucks are obviously more efficient tools and provide more sanitary solutions for the job at hand.

White realizes this isn't an all-or-nothing proposition for PROs. Contractors may find it valuable to offer an option perceived as more environmentally friendly along with their present service. He says approaches like Nature Commodes are onto "the next recycling business, in my mind. Current providers of portable sanitation can capture that and market that 'liquid gold.'"

What do you think? Is there a potential market for White's message and methods in your area? Or do you think the more popular alternative to the standard restroom is the upscale restroom trailer for events and weddings? Or is super diversification the best answer; offering a little bit of everything to land more customers?

Share your thoughts with me at editor@promonthly.com. ■



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5 Customer Types to Dump

FOR A BUSINESS TO OPERATE AS SMOOTHLY AS POSSIBLE, IT SOMETIMES BECOMES NECESSARY TO PRUNE THE CLIENT LIST. HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO LET A CUSTOMER GO?

By Judy Kneiszel

I recently read an online conversation in which a PRO expressed frustration over the extra time, effort and cleaning supplies needed to maintain restrooms rented by one particular client because the units were constantly being defaced with graffiti. While there were helpful suggestions on graffiti removal, graffiti prevention tips, and recommendations of damage waivers and ways to bill the client for the extra cleanup time, one comment stood out. Maybe, the commenter wrote, it's time to dump this customer.

If you are a relatively new business owner, you may be shocked by that advice. After all, you're trying to build up a customer base and earn money by any means possible. Firing a customer — any customer — seems counterproductive. If you've been around the block a few times, however, you realize there are clients who are simply more trouble than they are worth. Truly successful companies can choose who they work for — and who they don't work for. Being comfortable telling an obnoxious customer where to go may be a sign that you've made it in the business world.

Dumping a toxic customer can reduce owner stress, improve employee morale, and in the long run, make a business stronger.

Five types of customers to consider firing:

1. The customer who wreaks havoc on your investment. If your restrooms, hand-wash stations or trucks are constantly being damaged when in use for one particular client and you haven't found a way to completely recapture the cost of necessary cleaning or repairs, it may be beneficial for you to lose the client.

2. The customer who is slow to pay, late to pay, refuses to pay, or threatens nonpayment. If you like the customer, it's never happened before, and significant revenue is involved, try to resolve the issue by working with them — maybe allowing them better terms and more time to pay. If it's an ongoing problem and they are unwilling to address it, don't continue to work for them. And if a customer uses their business as leverage and threatens to withhold payment or leave for the competition to squeeze extras out of your company or otherwise get their way, stop playing the game and see if they actually carry out their threats.

3. The customer who makes your company look bad. Whether they think they know it all or they are just too cheap to do what's right, customers who refuse your recommendations when it comes to number of restroom units and frequency of cleaning compromise health and safety, and you may want to cut them off. Having your business name on restrooms that aren't maintained is the worst kind of advertising you can get. Everyone who uses them — or chooses not to because of the filthy conditions — associates

Truly successful companies can choose who they work for — and who they don't work for. Being comfortable telling an obnoxious customer where to go may be a sign that you've made it in the business world.

them with your company even though the client's ignorance or cheapness has caused the problem. When it comes to health and safety, insist that it has to be your way or the highway for the client.

4. The customer who wastes so much of your time that your profit margin evaporates. This customer mistakenly thinks he or she is your only customer, or at least your most important one. They have expectations beyond those of a reasonable customer. Phone calls for a "quick question" last 45 minutes. In-person meetings are frequent and long, plus you are expected to respond to all texts, calls or emails immediately, any time of the day or night, even after-hours or on weekends. They believe they are entitled to special attention and the rules don't apply to them, but their demands put undue strain on employees and resources.

5. The customer who is verbally abusive or threatening. If a customer makes you or your employees uncomfortable by frequently using inappropriate or insulting language, morale will suffer and you risk losing good employees. Think of it this way, in the long run, who would you rather spend time with, a great employee or a bad customer?

BENEFITS OF FIRING A BAD CUSTOMER

Of course, you have to be smart and selective. You can't fire all your customers just because you're having a terrible day. But if firing your absolute worst customer results in less stress, a happier staff and free time that can then be spent improving service to other customers, it may be worth it.

Commit some of the time you'd spend handholding that difficult client to search for a customer who is easier to work with. Sure, the old business adage says it's cheaper to keep an existing customer than land a new one, but you may find a truly bad client is the exception to that rule.

Look at the firing of a bad customer as an opportunity to prevent a repeat of the situation in the future. This may be a good time to implement a damage waiver, raise rates, rewrite your standard contract or beef up billing practices.

Know what to look out for when it comes to new customers. If a potential



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customer comes in bad-mouthing a competitor you know to be reputable, realize that they might be difficult to deal with and could be bad-mouthing your company next. If they loudly complain about your pricing structure, or try to negotiate prices with you, they might be the type who is always looking for excuses to avoid paying their bills in full.

BREAKING UP IS HARD TO DO

An easy way to dump a difficult customer (or feel better about keeping them) is to wait for their contract to come up and then present them with a drastic price increase. Lay out for them how their treatment of your restroom units or their constant unreasonable demands are costing you money, and then double the rate for them. Chances are, they will dump you. Of course there's a chance the bad customer will agree to the higher price, so make sure your new price is so outrageous that it makes keeping even the worst customer worthwhile.

Try to end things on a positive note. Tell the customer in person while you are unable to continue providing them service, you hope there are no hard feelings. You could even recommend someone else for the job, provided there's someone you think could meet his or her needs adequately.

Remain professional. In a world where people switch jobs frequently, you may someday encounter this troublesome person under completely different circumstances. You want them to remember you as a class act, not a jerk. Who knows, maybe they were a bad customer because of immense pressure from a boss or terrible job conditions and down they road they'll be a pleasure to do business with. ■

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2. An odor exhaust fan to remove odors.
3. The water and waste tanks hold about 43 gallons of water and 68 gallons of waste.
Note: Frequency of pumping will depend on volume, etc.
4. We use non-potable water so as not to waste drinking water.
5. An RV bowl that requires only 16 ounces per flush or half full, to carry the solids through the neck of the bowl.
6. Chemical deodorizers are not needed to control odors.
7. A pressure plate switch below the polyethylene floor mat, allowing the lights and fan to turn on and off upon entry and exit.
8. An electric 12-volt water pump creates a washdown feature so anyone having a fecal accident can clean the unit without the help of others.
You can clean the interior first, then refill the water tank. There's no need to move the pump truck or drag a hose around or between the units.
9. The water fill, battery box and waste tank openings are all in the rear of the unit, so attendees can still use it while it's being cleaned. Without having to get equipment in and out of doors, you can clean it faster than a chemical portable restroom.
10. The Sure Seal™ odorless waste tank design is like a P-trap in your home. No chemical deodorizers are needed, so profits are saved.
The unit vent pipe above to the rear will exhaust the fecal odor gases.
11. The invention of plastic produced three great products in the early 1970s, the models of Poly-Portables, PolyJohn and Tufway. Other portable restroom products have since come to market,

but we've been told these have been the most sold over time.

- 11a. Because of that, we have adopted these three models for our retrofit kit. Vendors who own one of these great portable restroom shells will not need to purchase another model. The existing model will fit on our retrofit tank, solar panel roof top, and fan adapter.
The idea is to use your existing models and reduce the cost of another purchase of walls, doors, and roof tops, while still owning a restroom with a solar panel feature. Use older models for construction. Save your profits.
12. These units are not air conditioned. They're designed as an inbetween of the high-end air conditioned units and chemical portable restrooms.
13. The industry standard of the chemical portable restroom is over 45 years old.
- 13a. The cost to purchase a chemical portable restroom is about \$450-\$1,200.
Cost to purchase a single air conditioned unit is about \$3,900 to \$5,000. Nice units.
14. Construction of our retrofit kit.
We have designed the water, waste tanks and skid to be about 200 pounds of polyethylene material, 70 pounds for the water and waste tanks, and 60 pounds for the skid that holds the two tanks together. After adding the shell and bowl and fan adapter and solar panel system the unit will be heavy. A chemical restroom weighs about 100 to 175 pounds.
- 14a. We created on the tank's side a set of forklift ports for easier placement and removal/loading onto the truck with a forklift. You can load it full of 43 gallons of water for delivery to an event. The size of the VIP Best 1 unit is about 48" x 72" long. Four can fit atop the typical truck bed.
15. We made an adapter to recess into the roof and hold the exhaust fan to remove odors. The side vents must be sealed to work properly.

16. We offer an 80 watt solar panel; it produces almost 4.35 amps per hour in peak sun. Frequency of use to restoration will determine the size of battery wattage needed.
The solar panel bracket is also mounted on the back wall of the unit. It is reinforced by two aluminum 1/8" straps inside and outside. The existing walls are about 1/8" thick and not enough to support the panel and adjuster alone.
17. We have developed a patent pending towable dolly system attachable to the base of the unit; it is available as an option. Used only for hard top surfaces.
18. We were issued a utility patent pending by the U.S. Patent Office for copyright protection.

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We do charge a onetime service fee to prep, deliver, and clean the unit upon pickup. The farther we travel from our base yard, the more we charge per unit in order to pay for the operational cost.

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The QP Energy Services team includes, from left, James Aregood, J.R. Pickens, Cy Quackenbush, Farrah Cook and David Smith. (Photos by Ilana Panich-Linsman)



GO WITH THE FLOW

QP Energy Services LLC Smithville, Texas

Owner: J.R. Pickens and Cy Quackenbush (and two silent partners)

Founded: 2012

Employees: 26

Services: Pipeline portable sanitation service

Service area: Texas, parts of Georgia, Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma

Website: www.qpenergyservices.com



Texas long-haul restroom crews rack up the miles over rough terrain to provide comfort for energy pipeline workers **BY KEN WYSOCKY**

Travel trailers might seem like odd items for a portable restroom operator to own. But they're standard operating equipment at QP Energy Services, which is anything but a business-as-usual portable sanitation company.

Based in Smithville, Texas, and owned by Cy Quackenbush and J.R. Pickens (the Q and P in the company's name), the contractor provides restrooms for crews building pipelines in the oilfields of Texas, as well as parts of Georgia, Louisiana, New Mexico and Oklahoma. Because pipeline projects cover a lot of territory, providing restroom service requires a very systematic approach, not to mention long hours and miles and miles of driving every day.

"On a typical 100-mile-long pipeline, we send out two trucks and two employees," says Quackenbush, 33. "We set up one restroom per mile, and each guy works six 12-hour days a week and cleans 50 restrooms twice a week — even three times, if necessary. Some days they might drive 350 to 400 miles a day."

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CAREFUL PLANNING

Preparing for these long-term projects requires a lot of strategic planning. Employees pack a cargo trailer with supplies such as toilet paper, gloves, cleaning products and deodorizers. If the destination is far away and requires many restrooms, QP Energy drop-ships the units by truck to the job site. Furthermore, the company has to obtain disposal licenses in each state in which it works, Quackenbush says.

Left: Jose Luna unwinds a suction hose in preparation for a cleaning. Drivers service many far-flung restrooms every day.

Below: Luna pauses during a service route to complete paperwork.

How far will QP travel to do a job? “We’ll go just about anywhere if we can make enough money on the job,” says Pickens, 36. “It’s not like we pioneered how to do jobs like this, but we’re one of the few outfits that do it this way.”

Keeping up employee morale is one of the biggest challenges Quackenbush and Pickens face, due to the long hours and time away from families. The company tries to get employees home once a month, but it doesn’t always work out that way, the two owners say. “Sometimes we buy them a 12-pack of beer and cook steaks for them while they’re on the road,” Quackenbush says. “We try to make it a family atmosphere as much as possible.”

Because the “roads” employees travel on every day are little more than bumpy, rutted-dirt paths running along the pipe-

line right-of-way, QP Energy relies mostly on roughly a dozen Ford F-350, Ford F-550 and Dodge 5500 service trucks, most equipped with four-wheel drive. They all carry slide-in units, mostly built by Lely Tank & Waste Solutions with a few outfitted by KeeVac Industries. They all carry aluminum tanks that range in size from 300 gallons waste/150 gallons freshwater to 1,100 gallons waste/400 gallons freshwater. Most of the trucks feature Juprop/Chandler pumps; the rest are equipped with Conde pumps from Westmoor Ltd.

The slide-in units also make sense because the trucks wear out so quickly. “We can’t depreciate our trucks fast enough — this isn’t a normal restroom business,” Quackenbush notes. “Some of our trucks have 300,000 miles on them and haven’t been paid off yet. ... They’re driving on rocky

(continued)

The job sites are typically in remote locations, often hundreds of miles from home. As such, it’s common for employees to stay on the road for up to three to four months at a time. That’s where the company’s 10 30-foot travel trailers come into play.

Employees tow the trailers to RV parks located near a job site; finding conveniently located parks is never a problem. “They’re everywhere,” Quackenbush says.

Each travel trailer houses one employee. Sometimes the company will opt for motels or hotels; cost is the primary determining factor. “If it’s more economical to use an RV park, which might cost us \$400 to \$500 a month (per trailer), than a motel, then we go with the (travel trailers),” he explains.

“We’ll go just about anywhere if we can make enough money on the job. It’s not like we pioneered how to do jobs like this, but we’re one of the few outfits that do it this way.”

J.R. PICKENS



At one service stop, Jose Luna uses his Ford F-750 with a Lely Tank & Waste Solutions slide-in unit to clean a PolyPortables restroom.

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roads and are in four-wheel drive most of the time. That's why we like slide-in units; when the truck wears out, we just move them to another truck."

FROM THE CLASSROOM

Quackenbush and Pickens took unusual career paths to the portable restroom industry. Quackenbush grew up in a family with strong ties to the Texas oilfields and worked in the oilfields for five years after graduating from high school. He then earned a business management degree at Texas A&M University-Kingsville before taking a job as a high school teacher, where he met Pickens.

After earning a degree in criminal justice and playing baseball at the University of Mississippi, Pickens was drafted by the Oakland A's. He played minor-league baseball for five years and served as a college baseball pitching coach at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi before taking a baseball head-coaching job at the same high school where Quackenbush worked.

"My family owns a rental company and were starting to get into portable restrooms," Quackenbush explains. "So I decided to break away with J.R. and do our own thing. It seemed like a business that would offer a good return on investment and it wasn't capital intensive."

"After teaching, I got into oilfield work on the production side," Pickens adds. "But I wanted to spend more time at home and start a family, so I got into sales at Cy's uncle's rental business. I had a bunch of contacts in the oilfield industry, so Cy and I started QP and we haven't looked back."



The duo started out with two service trucks and 56 portable restrooms. Now the company owns roughly 1,200 restrooms and about 30 hand-wash stations, all manufactured by PolyPortables.

"Our goal after year one was to have 100 restrooms out in the field," Pickens says. "But by the time year one came around, we had surpassed that with 300 or so restrooms. We were pretty pumped about that." By the end of year two, that number grew to 700 restrooms.

Today, the company owns 29 service trucks, mostly built by Lely Tank & Waste Solutions. That includes 20 trucks with slide-in units, as well as two larger vacuum trucks outfitted by Lely on two Ford F-750s with 1,100-gallon waste/400-gallon freshwater steel tanks with Masport pumps. The company also owns two larger vacuum trucks built out by FlowMark on Hino and International chassis with 1,500-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater steel tanks and Masport pumps.

Above: Jose Luna uses an iPad to document each service stop along his route.

Right: Luna restocks paper products and other supplies in his truck.



Safety is a top priority

There's a good reason why many of the service trucks owned by QP Energy Services are outfitted with a rear video camera as well as two dashboard-mounted cameras: on-the-job safety.

One dashcam points forward to record things such as hard braking, major accelerations or accidents. The other films the driver, which discourages technicians from talking on cellphones while driving, says Cy Quackenbush, a co-owner of the company, which primarily services restrooms placed along pipeline construction projects in remote areas.

"Early on, we had a couple of wrecks and in another instance, a guy backed into a fiber-optics box," he recalls. "Restroom sales in the oilfields are so different from residential and commercial markets. There are so many more strict safety rules we have to deal with."

Oil refineries and large pipeline construction companies simply won't hire contractors with poor safety records. And the more safety-related technologies that QP Energy adopts, such as the truck video cameras, the better the company's standing with customers. "We get points for investing in all this technology," Quackenbush says. "It shows we take safety seriously."

QP Energy employees learn quickly that safety is a top priority. In all, they receive roughly 24 hours of in-house classroom training, including an eight-hour course taught by James Aregood, the company's full-time safety and operations manager. Aregood is a certified Health Safety and Environment instructor.

That training covers topics such as CPR, first-aid protocols and blood-borne pathogens. "We're supposed to inform employees about risks associated with dealing with human waste," Quackenbush says.

Technicians also learn about the hazards of working in the oilfield by taking courses developed by PEC Safety. The courses are accredited by SafeLandUSA, a volunteer organization made up of major and independent companies, contractors, associations and educators. The group encourages companies to use a standardized safety orientation to improve industry safety.

Employees also learn about snakebites, spider bites and different wild animals they might encounter along the pipeline right-of-ways where restrooms are located, Quackenbush adds.

In addition, QP Energy relies on 10 Cavalier-model RVs made by Gulf Stream; six cargo trailers, nearly two dozen trash trailers and about 15 utility trailers, all made by Texas Trailer Supply; five New Holland skid-steers; 10 home-fabricated combination trash/restroom trailers; and roughly 60 homemade restroom trailers that each carry two standard units.

DRIVE TO SUCCEED

What factors drove such quick growth despite a relative lack of industry knowledge? First of all, the partners were motivated to do better by previous low-paying jobs. Second, they took a never-say-no approach to their business. And third, they were willing to learn from their mistakes.

"We were hungry and go-getters," Pickens says. "We wanted to be successful ... so we chased everything we could, everywhere we could. We sort of figured it out as we went along." Adds Quackenbush: "Someone would call and ask if we could get to a job site within days, and we'd automatically say yes and figure out the details later."

(continued)

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The duo also credits employees for the company's success, including James Aregood, safety and operations manager; Farrah Cook, office manager; David Smith, asset manager; and Cristobal Lopez, regional manager and trainer.

Cy Quackenbush, left, and J.R. Pickens of QP Energy Services

Great customer service also drove growth. Quackenbush and Pickens believe that simple, commonsense practices — such as delivering and cleaning restrooms on time and personally answering phone calls 24/7 — are critical to generating repeat business and word-of-mouth referrals. Customers also appreciate the fact that when they call, they can speak directly with the owners.

They also emphasize customer service by embracing technology. All orders and pickup slips are texted and emailed to technicians via iPads for speed and efficiency. Time stamps on emails and texts let them know technicians receive messages, too, plus they don't have to stop and waste time writing down messages the way they'd have to with verbal messages, Pickens says.

"There's virtually no paperwork," Quackenbush says. "That's a big help because sometimes guys are 500 miles from our office, and we don't want to have to rely on them to keep all those papers together until they get back home.

"With things like manifests, pickup slips and delivery tickets, we just hit 'send' and they all automatically go to our server," he adds. "This also allows us to send out invoices faster and more efficiently, which increases cash flow."

After QP Energy had established a core group of customers, Quackenbush and Pickens didn't have to chase so hard for business because they'd earned the reward of repeat business. Moreover, other customers would see their restrooms on job sites, get the phone number off a restroom and call. "It all happened organically," Pickens says.

LOOKING GOOD

The two men also decided to emphasize professionalism, and build a unique and easily recognizable brand. Route drivers wear uniforms (fire-retardant coveralls) and keep their shirts tucked in, wear nametags and wash their trucks every day. They meticulously clean restrooms. Trucks are nicely lettered and logoed, with no corny, human-waste-oriented slogans.

"We want our employees to take pride in their company and respect what we have ... and customers notice that," Pickens says. "They're also very polite — everything is, 'Yes, sir,' and, 'No, sir.'" Quackenbush adds. "It's some-

thing we preach all the time. We're trying to build a roster of high-energy, independent and proactive employees."

All of QP Energy's trucks are equipped with dashboard-mounted GPS units, made by Garmin. And because the company commonly has as many as 600 to 700 restrooms out in the field, technicians also use Garmin's geo-stamping technology, which digitally tracks location coordinates for each unit.

"It's linked to a barcode on each restroom," Quackenbush explains. "That way we always know where all the restrooms are. It's critical on a pipeline job with, say, 200 restrooms. Whenever we move a restroom, we delete the old geo-stamp and create a new one." Further, if one technician gets sick

or quits, geo-stamping makes it easy for the substitute driver to find the restrooms.

The satellite-based technology also enables QP Energy to either affirm or refute customer complaints about uncleaned restrooms. It's easy enough to match a service truck's GPS retroactive map with a geo-stamp to see if a technician actually came or not, Quackenbush says.

"They're ... very polite — everything is, 'Yes, sir,' and, 'No, sir.' It's something we preach all the time. We're trying to build a roster of high-energy, independent and proactive employees."

CY QUACKENBUSH

BRIGHT FUTURE

Quackenbush and Pickens admit that they sometimes get concerned about their dependence on one market sector and have had "serious talks" about diversifying their customer base by getting into residential and commercial markets. But in some respects, they're victims of their

own success. "Every time we think about it, we get a call for another big pipeline project," Quackenbush says.

Because most of their clients work on the downstream end of the oil industry instead of upstream on the fracking end, QP Energy hasn't been as hard hit by the dramatic decreases in oil prices. As such, they see growth ahead.

"Our plan is to grow when the market's right," Quackenbush says. "We never say no and we're not going to start now. If we don't have enough trucks and restrooms, we'll go out and buy them. ... When (oil) production starts to go up, we'll grow with it.

"We'd love to have 10,000 restrooms. ... We're both in our mid-30s and we're still eager," he continues. "But we want calculated and smart growth. We're not done just yet." ■

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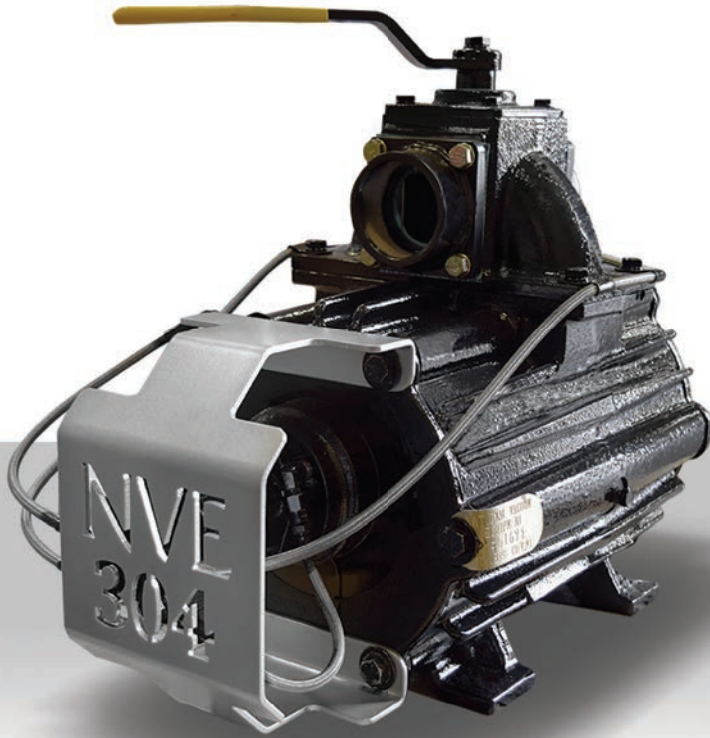
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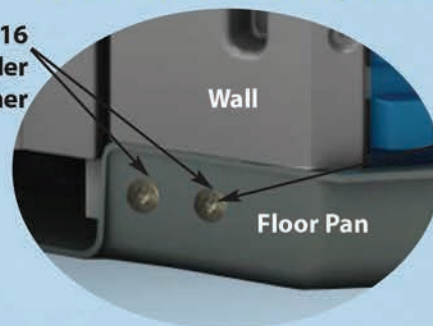
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From left, William Hollis, Cody Allan and Nicholas Plummer clean a bank of restrooms at what is described as Michigan's biggest St. Patrick's Day street party. (Photos by Anya Plummer)

Luck O' the Irish

A smashing St. Patrick's Day celebration of beer, food and fun tests the hardworking crew at Michigan's Plummer's Disposal Service

BY BETTY DAGEFORDE

THE JOB: Irish On Ionia

LOCATION: Grand Rapids, Michigan

THE PRO: Plummer's Disposal Service

THE TEAM

Plummer's Disposal Service provides portable sanitation and solid waste management services in a 50-mile radius of Wyoming, Michigan, a suburb of Grand Rapids. Owner Nicholas Plummer oversees a staff of 17 technicians (a few more in the summer) and three office personnel who handle dispatch and other administrative functions. They operate out of a 20,000-square-foot building on a 3.5-acre lot.

Plummer tends to manage the larger events that come their way and did so for the Irish On Ionia festival. About half the staff was involved in the job.

COMPANY HISTORY

The company is celebrating its 10th year as a stand-alone business, but its roots go back to 1957, when the Plummers' father, 18-year-old Warren, founded a septic company. Over the years he added other services, started a family and got his sons involved in the business, who eventually took it over — Richard the septic, Todd the environmental, and in 2006 Nicholas took their in-house roll-off truck and started

(continued)



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a business. Within a year he added portable restrooms, a service his father once had, but sold 20 years previously.

“It just complemented what we were doing,” Nicholas Plummer says. “It made it more of a one-stop shop for customers.” In 2011, he added restroom trailers after a year of renting them from another company. Today he’s got about 1,100 Five Peaks portable restrooms, and five JAG Mobile Solutions and Satellite Industries restroom trailers. Events account for about 30 percent of their portable sanitation business.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The company has been working the Irish festival since 2013. The or-

The crew unloads some of the 115 Five Peaks restrooms at Irish On Ionia. Plummer's Disposal Services used two Dodge trucks from Imperial Industries and trailers from Liquid Waste Industries to deliver the units.



A panoramic photo of a bank of restrooms set up for the Irish On Ionia festival.



ganizers, a private bar and restaurant group, wanted to switch vendors and when he met with them to pitch his company, they liked what he had to offer. “We segregate our construction units from our specialty event units so we’re able to offer like-new restrooms that are in fantastic condition,” he says. “And we always do more than we say we’re going to do.”

Nicholas Plummer instructs Louis DeCheney on where to place a row of Five Peaks restrooms for the St. Patrick's Day event.

THE MAIN EVENT

Irish On Ionia in Grand Rapids, billed as Michigan’s largest St. Patrick’s Day street party, is an adults-only, one-day beer-and-food festival. Some 20,000 ticketed attendees were admitted to the Saturday event, which stretched along three downtown blocks (one of which is Ionia). Many others were turned away when the venue reached capacity. Frigid March temperatures never dampened the enthusiasm of the crowd. Warmth was provided

by heated tents, lively music, Irish dancing — and of course lots of local beer. The action started with “kegs and eggs” at 7 a.m. and continued until 10 p.m.

BY THE NUMBERS

The company brought in 115 Five Peaks Glacier units, all with hand-sanitizer units. Most were the company’s signature orange, but 20 were pink urinal-free units with LED ceiling lighting.

“We love it,” Plummer says. “My dad had pink units 30, 40 years ago. He painted them hot pink. So when I got back into it we bought some pink ones and get new ones every year.” They also provided 12 PolyJohn Enterprises ADA-compliant units and six PolyJohn Bravo hand-wash stations.

Another product they brought in, which proved to be quite a hit the previous year, was four Kros four-sided men’s walk-up portable urinals from Kros International USA. Plummer bought them at the WWETT Show in 2015.

“I wasn’t really sure about them,” he says. “But I like the idea of them, I love the construction. I figured one way or another I’d find a customer. I like to go out on a limb and be the first to have something in our area.” The 2015 Irish festival was the inaugural event for the units after Plummer met with the organizers, showed them a picture and got their buy-in. It turned out to be a huge success and, in fact, was a talked-about feature of the event. “They were all over Facebook and Instagram,” Plummer says. “People were taking pictures.” By midday they were full and had to be shut down.

“My dad had pink units 30, 40 years ago. He painted them hot pink. So when I got back into it we bought some pink ones and get new ones every year.”

NICHOLAS PLUMMER

(continued)



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The company has since used them at other beer festivals and large construction sites.

LET'S ROLL

Setup took about four hours Friday afternoon using two vacuum trucks pulling Liquid Waste Industries trailers (one eight-unit and one 14-unit) and a 2006 Sterling flatbed truck. Units were set up in four lots in U-shaped banks (two each, men and women), with two Kros urinals at each of the men's banks. A few units were placed near the stage and at security headquarters.

Organizers began breaking down the event around midnight, so when the team arrived Sunday morning at 7 a.m., everything was out of their way.

After pumping the units and removing graffiti (J&J Chemical Graffiti Blaster) they loaded the units up, headed for the shop and handed them off to the cleanup crew, who gave them a thorough washing before putting them back into inventory.

Above: Crowds flow into a fenced area where many of Plummer's restrooms are set up for the one-day event.

Right: The Plummer's Disposal Service team serving Irish On Ionia includes, from left, Louis DeCheney, Jared Bond, Nicholas Plummer, Cody Allan, Derek Decker and William Hollis.

"We segregate our construction units from our specialty event units so we're able to offer like-new restrooms that are in fantastic condition."

NICHOLAS PLUMMER

The company used two Dodge Ram 5500s (2013, 2014) built out by Imperial Industries with 775-gallon waste/400-gallon freshwater aluminum tanks and National Vacuum Equipment 304 pumps. At 2 p.m., two drivers drove the trucks down an alley to the back side of the first bank of units, then

stretched out two 100-foot suction hoses from VARCo. Security personnel closed the bank, put up a fence and stood by while six team members went to work. They worked quickly, as partygoers were quite impatient, although mostly polite.

Everyone knew the game plan and their role, Plummer says. "One guy pumped waste, the guy behind him did trash, the guy behind him did paper, and then a couple guys did water and J & J tablets." It took them about two hours to clean the four banks.

Waste was transferred as needed to a 6,000-gallon tanker borrowed from Plummer's brother Todd, parked five blocks away and from there taken to a septic company owned by his brother Richard, before being hauled to the local wastewater treatment plant.

A CELEBRATION OF THEIR OWN

Plummer says the key to their success at the festival, particularly the mid-event servicing, was good coordination with the organizers, the help they got from security, advance preparation on their part and a lot of hard work by the staff. To thank the team for their efforts, on Sunday he took them all out for a steak dinner. "My crew just really stepped up to the plate," he says. ■



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Are You Getting the Most Out of Equipment Warranties?

PROPER MAINTENANCE, INCLUDING FLUID ANALYSIS, CAN REDUCE THE CHANCE OF UNEXPECTED — AND POTENTIALLY COSTLY REPAIRS

By Ed Wodalski

You do a good job of maintaining your equipment. But what happens when something breaks? Fortunately it's under warranty. But is it?

Let's look at the three basic warranties: factory, emissions and extended service.

Terms of a factory warranty are typically outlined in a document issued by the manufacturer referred to as the Warranty and Limitations of Liability. Generally considered a legal document, it outlines the responsibilities of the manufacturer, dealer and customer.

Federally mandated emissions control warranties are intended to ensure equipment meets federal emission standards for a given period of time. Federal emissions guidelines are two years or 1,500 hours of operation (whichever comes first) for engines less than 19 kW/25 hp or five years/3,000 hours of operation for engines greater than or equal to 19 kW/25 hp.

Extended service or third-party warranties typically don't cover the same components and materials as a factory warranty, and allow purchasers to choose what is and is not covered. An extended warranty might be a consideration if you don't rotate equipment every two years.

So, who's responsible when something goes wrong? The quick answer is: It depends.

COVERAGE QUESTIONS

Factory warranties cover defects in material and/or workmanship. Generally, these defects appear in the first year of use. Factory warranties do not cover failures caused by poor or improper maintenance.

With advances made in equipment manufacturing and customer expectations, companies such as Case Construction Equipment have increased their length of coverage with ProCare to three years/3,000 hours. This trend of extending the factory warranty means maintenance becomes a critical factor in determining whether the failure is warrantable or not.

"If you're sitting at 2 1/2 years and you have a component failure, such as a hydraulic pump or rear axle, I assure you there's going to be a look-see at the maintenance that was done," says Bruce Reader, regional product support manager for Case.



Proper operating practices and techniques impact warranty coverage as well as component wear. (Photo courtesy Case)

"If a fuel system goes down because of contamination, that's not a warrantable failure. That doesn't even qualify for an emissions warranty failure because a failure due to the contamination of fuel is not a defect in material or workmanship. It's a failure on the customer's end."

Bruce Reader

Key contributors in the changing dynamics of vehicle responsibility include fault codes, error codes and telematics.

"Any time you have an ECU (electronics control module), VCM (vehicle control module), TCM (transmission control module), CCM (chassis control module), there's almost always a built-in fault code history," Reader says.

Telematics simply makes it easier to see what happened to components over the lifetime of the equipment: How many times did an engine lose oil pressure because it was working on an incline? How many times did the transmission overheat? How many times did the engine restriction light come on because the air filter wasn't properly maintained?

FLUID ANALYSIS

Reader says to get the most out of equipment warranty, be sure to incorporate fluid analysis — engine oil, hydraulics, transmission and fuel — in your maintenance program.

"I'm going to go out on a limb, I don't have any data on this, but if you do find people who have a pretty good fluid analysis program, I bet fuel is not part of it," he says. "I think it's probably one of the most neglected. With all the additives, Tier 3 and Tier 4 and the cost of components on fuel systems now, fuel needs to be part of that fluid analysis program."

With the advent of Tier 4 and high-pressure, common-rail, direct fuel injection, failures brought on by contaminated fuel — fuel from a dirty can — are not cheap.

Take an injector. In the 1970s, a mechanical injector was about \$75. Today, an electronic injector can cost \$2,000 — with four or six in an engine.

"If a fuel system goes down because of contamination, that's not a warrantable failure," Reader says. "That doesn't even qualify for an emissions warranty failure because a failure due to the contamination of fuel is not a defect in material or workmanship. It's a failure on the customer's end. From

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the standpoint of protecting your warranty, I think customers today need to be ever vigilant about their fuel and their fuel practice.”

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GO BEYOND MANUAL

The operator’s manual is your guide for maintenance intervals and requirements, but it might not be enough.

“Sometimes you have to do more than what’s in the operator’s manual,” Reader says. “For example, if you are operating in an environment in which there are extremely high amounts of dust, that air filter probably won’t make the first interval in the manual that says, replace the air filter. One must have ‘situational awareness’ with respect to their job site conditions and adjust accordingly.”

Keep in mind that some modifications will void a factory warranty — especially when the modification requires any type of welding involving structural integrity. This could include modifying a bucket for increased capacity or utilizing attachments, such as thumbs, that are not suited for the size or type of machine. And be aware of your environment. When working around septic systems and drainfields, be cautious about acids from waste that can harm wiring harnesses and other components.

“You have to be cognizant of the application and adjust your maintenance accordingly,” Reader says.

Proper operating practices and techniques also impact warranty coverage as well as component wear. The advancement of telematics and electronic diagnostics can tell the difference between a smooth operator and a “bucking bronco.”

Operators need to be properly trained and well informed about maintenance requirements for most new Tier 4 machines and have an understanding of the different types of after-treatment systems associated with them.

LIMIT DOWNTIME

To get the most out of your warranty, you’ll also want to limit downtime. Excessive idling not only wastes fuel, it also adds wear and wastes warranty hours — 30 percent idling over a 3,000-hour warranty adds up to 900 operating hours lost.

“I have this little saying: The best warranty is the one you never have to use,” Reader says. “But, when you do have to use it, you want to make sure you have done all your due diligence and it doesn’t come back on you that the failure was the result of you not taking the appropriate maintenance measures.” ■

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Additional companies being added daily.
Please check the website for updates.

Trucks and Tanks

By Craig Mandli

VACUUM TANKS

AMTHOR INTERNATIONAL FLAT VAC

The **Flat Vac** multipurpose portable restroom vacuum tank from **Amthor International** allows the operator to carry up to 12 restrooms on top of the tank, as well as pull a restroom delivery trailer. The tank has a rounded bottom with a full-length formed sump design for drainage and full baffles for strength. The flat tank has separate wastewater and freshwater compartments, as well as an option for a chemical or brine compartment. It is available in steel, stainless steel or aluminum. It comes with a workstation and a vertical cabinet with an aluminum extruded door including numerous shelves. A liftgate is installed behind the tank to load and unload restrooms. All units are custom built to specifications. **800/328-6633; www.amthorinternational.com.**



ARTHUR CUSTOM TANK LLC, A DIVISION OF MID-STATE TANK INC., PORTABLE RESTROOM UNIT

Service units from **Arthur Custom Tank LLC, a division of Mid-State Tank Inc.**, are available in 1,500-gallon two-compartment portable restroom units, with 400 gallons for freshwater and 1,100 gallons for waste. They are constructed of 5454 H32 polished aluminum, with stainless steel and a No. 4 satin finish also available. They have dual service inlets, a 20-inch pressure manhole with 2-inch primary connection, pressure-relief valve installed, four work lights, two 5-inch sight eyes located at the rear, a discharge flange on the bottom of the tank, two restroom bumper assemblies on the rear, a 36-inch aluminum cabinet on each side, drop-down workstation on one side, hose hanger on each side, bucket and bottle holder, lights and wiring, full-length sills 34 inches wide, and full-length hose trays on both sides and across the rear. **800/722-8384; www.midstatetank.com.**



BEST ENTERPRISES COMPACT TANK



Best Enterprises offers a small vacuum tank that can fit in the back of a pickup truck. It comes with an electric Hypro water pump, which includes an on/off toggle switch and 30 feet of 3/4-inch hose with a fast water dump and spray nozzle for easy cleaning.

It is powered by an electric-start Honda 5 1/2 hp engine alongside a 70 cfm vacuum pump. The tank is constructed with 304 stainless steel, with the primary, secondary and motor platform made from the same material. The tank has a 2-inch inlet and 3-inch dump with dump sump for easy removal of debris and liquid waste. It comes with 30 feet of 2-inch Tiger Tail hose with suction wand and 10 feet of 3-inch dump hose. Tanks vary in size and can be custom built. **800/288-2378; www.bestenterprises.net.**

CRESCENT TANK VACUUM TANK

The **Crescent Tank Vacuum Tank** is flat inside and out. It has no baffles, allowing it to be emptied completely to avoid internal corrosion. With the included pump at specified cfm, unnecessary fatigue of the structure is eliminated and life of the tank is prolonged. It is made from 1/4-inch steel for structural strength. The liftgate rail width allows portable restrooms to fit, and there are choices of decks and rails. The unit carries up to 10 restrooms, and the weight capacity is the same as a flatbed truck. Freshwater is held inside the 1/2-inch thick external poly tank to avoid internal wastewater contamination. The tank can be installed on any chassis within the specifications required for each model based on axle ratings and maximum load capacity. **585/657-4104; www.crescenttank.com.**



VACUUM TRUCKS

FLOWMARK ISUZU NPR

The **Isuzu NPR** 999-gallon aluminum portable restroom service truck from **FlowMark** has an aluminum vacuum tank with capacities of 700 gallons of waste and 299 gallons of freshwater. Power is provided by a Masport HXL4 156 cfm vacuum pump, and it includes a FloJet water pump, LED lighting, and two-unit fold-up toilet hauler. It is designed for efficient operation. **855/653-8100; www.flowmark.com.**



FMI TRUCK SALES & SERVICE WORKMATE



The **WorkMate** portable restroom service truck from **FMI Truck Sales & Service** has a sidewinder tank with equal weight distribution that extends brake life and improves handling. The two food-grade poly water tanks are plumbed to provide brine, freshwater, premix or any combination of fluids with no corrosion or rusty water. The ergonomically designed workstation with over 60 cubic feet of storage space saves both time and effort during the workday, minimizing restocking and driver movement. It can carry four restrooms. Its E-track load securement system eliminates the need for ropes. The modular design allows components to be easily replaced or transferred if damaged. The truck comes with hoses, wand, nozzle, bucket and straps and a hydraulic liftgate. **800/927-8750; www.fmitrucks.com.**

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VACUUM TRUCKS

IMPERIAL INDUSTRIES PTM980

The **PTM980** portable restroom service truck from **Imperial Industries** has strong steel construction and stainless barrel protection, a 680-gallon wastewater compartment and 300-gallon freshwater compartment, plus a modular option that allows for the vacuum pump and engine to be easily self-mounted. Available on Ford F-Series and Dodge Ram trucks, it comes in two- and four-wheel-drive models. Additional units are available in 1,175-, 1,300- and 2,150-gallon sizes. **800/558-2945; www.imperialind.com.**



KEEVAC KV950

The **KeeVac KV950** can be used for those who wish to stay under the DOT tanker endorsement requirement, yet still service a large route. With a capacity of 650 gallons of wastewater and 300 gallons of freshwater, it can service 60 to 65 portable restrooms. It is available in carbon steel or aluminum, with either two- or four-wheel-drive chassis. A selection of vacuum pumps is available. It includes a two-unit fold-down restroom carrier with trailer hitch. An arctic package is also available. **866/789-9440; www.keevac.com.**



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LELY TANK & WASTE SOLUTIONS PORTABLE RESTROOM TRUCK

The **Portable Restroom Truck** from **Lely Tank & Waste Solutions** has a 1,000-gallon steel tank with a 700-gallon waste compartment and a 300-gallon easy-fill freshwater compartment. The tank is mounted on a 2015 Ford F-550 with a 300 hp diesel engine and automatic transmission. The vacuum system has a Masport HXL4 pump package with 122 cfm free airflow. The tank has dual-service hose connections with a 2-inch Tiger Tail hose, shut-off valve and service wand. The bucket-fill stations are located in the rear on both sides, in front of the two-unit fold-down restroom carrier. Each workstation has a manifold with easy shut-off brass valves for water and chemicals, and a shut-off for the 50-foot water hose with spray nozzles. Each side has full-length hose trays with a wand scabbard and an 18- by 18- by 24-inch toolbox mounted for easy access. **800/367-5359; www.lelytank.com.**

PIK RITE PORTABLE RESTROOM SERVICE TRUCK

This portable restroom service truck from **Pik Rite** is fitted on a Dodge Ram 5500 Series chassis with a 1,250-gallon vacuum tank divided into 950-gallon waste and 300-gallon freshwater compartments. It has dual service 2-inch Kanaflex hoses with wands and valves. A 4-inch rear dump is located on the driver's side. The freshwater is supplied by a Burks DC10 electric pump and through dual hose reels and a 2-inch lower bucket fill. The mounted bucket holder sits in the painted aluminum hose trays. Spray-on bedliner protects the sides of the tank from scratches and wear. The Masport HXL4V vacuum pump is powered by hydraulics, which allows the truck to use four-wheel drive for off-road situations. The bumper has a hitch receiver for pulling restroom trailers and a fold-up two-unit portable toilet rack. The conveniently placed toolboxes have convenient fold-down doors. **800/337-5975; www.pikrite.com.**



VACUTRUX HOOKLIFT ROUTETRUX

Oversized and heavy portable restrooms can be handled with ease by the **Hooklift Routerux** from **Vacutrux**. It has a 4,000-pound traveling winch to pull and lift up to 9,000 pounds. It has an 800-gallon two-compartment galvanized steel vacuum tank with Wally 202 hydraulic drive, and is shown mounted on 33,000-pound GVW-rated Hino chassis. **800/305-4305; www.vacutrux.com. ■**

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INDUSTRY NEWS

Ledwell 70th anniversary

Ledwell & Son Enterprises celebrated 70 years of manufacturing trailer and truck bodies in 2016. A few operational features of Ledwell vacuum trucks and trailers are: ASME/DOT 412, multicompartment tanks; hydraulically operated front hoists and full-opening rear doors; liquid ring technology; and continuous-duty vacuum pumps with auxiliary off-loading capability. ■



PRODUCT NEWS

Annovi Reverberi pumps from Water Cannon

Water Cannon offers the complete line of Annovi Reverberi pumps. The RSV Series triplex plunger pump features a built-in unloader and downstream injector on the left side of the manifold. It has a 1-inch hollow shaft and is flanged for direct coupling to gasoline engines. It also has large, light-weight connecting rods, new long-life low- and high-pressure seals, roller bearings, and a forged brass manifold with a five-year warranty. **800/333-9274; www.watercannon.com.**



Surco Portable Sanitation Metazene odor neutralizer

Surco Portable Sanitation's odorless additive, Metazene, is an effective and environmentally safe odor neutralizer used in portable toilet deodorant products to control odors at the molecular level, according to the manufacturer. After neutralizing unpleasant odors, the new, heavier molecule sinks and evaporates over time. Metazene does not contain formaldehyde and is used in Surco's odor control deodorant liquids, toss packets, and other odor-control products. **800/556-0111; www.surco.com.**

Oxford Plastics EnduraMat ground covers

EnduraMat ground covers from Oxford Plastics protect the ground on job sites and help eliminate the cost of expensive repairs. The EnduraMat can withstand weight up to 160,000 lbs. and is made of durable recycled material. The mats are anti-slip, easy to clean and have a patterned surface for safety. Molded hand grips and lighter weight help with handling, and there are a variety of colors and the option for company branding. **800/567-9182; www.oxfordplasticsusa.com.** ■



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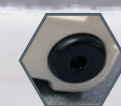
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