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POWERED BY THE SUN

Arizona's Ace Pumping & Portables
built a solar-powered dewatering
plant; and gets money back from the
power company **PAGE 14**

IN A GOOD PLACE

With a happy crew and a solid succession
plan, Port-A-Jon owner John Harper is ready
to pass the torch **PAGE 24**

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ADA/Handicap
Restrooms and Cleaning and Maintenance
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Tuff-Jon



Tuff-Jon III



100 Gallon Fresh Water Supply Tank



TJ Kids

TJ Shorty



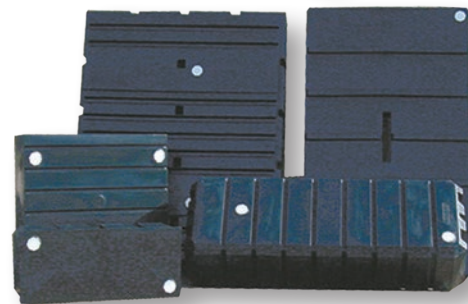
90 Gallon Free-Standing Sink with Optional Handicap Accessible Sink (45 gallons fresh water)



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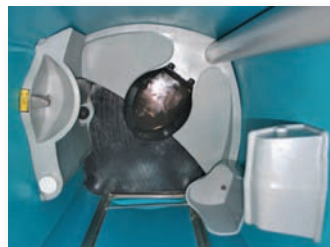
TJ Junior Single Free Standing Sink (16 gallons fresh water)



Sink Lifting Bracket



60 Gallon Rinse Tank



Interior View of Deluxe TJ-III

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Powered By the Sun
In the desert Southwest, Ace Pumping & Portables built a solar-powered dewatering facility that processes waste and generates revenue from the electric utility.

- Ted J. Rulseh

ON THE COVER: The owner of Ace Pumping & Portables in Tucson, Arizona, decided to keep his restroom-waste treatment at home and powers the system with solar energy. John Fehser is shown with an inventory of Five Peaks restrooms. (Photo by Mark Henle)

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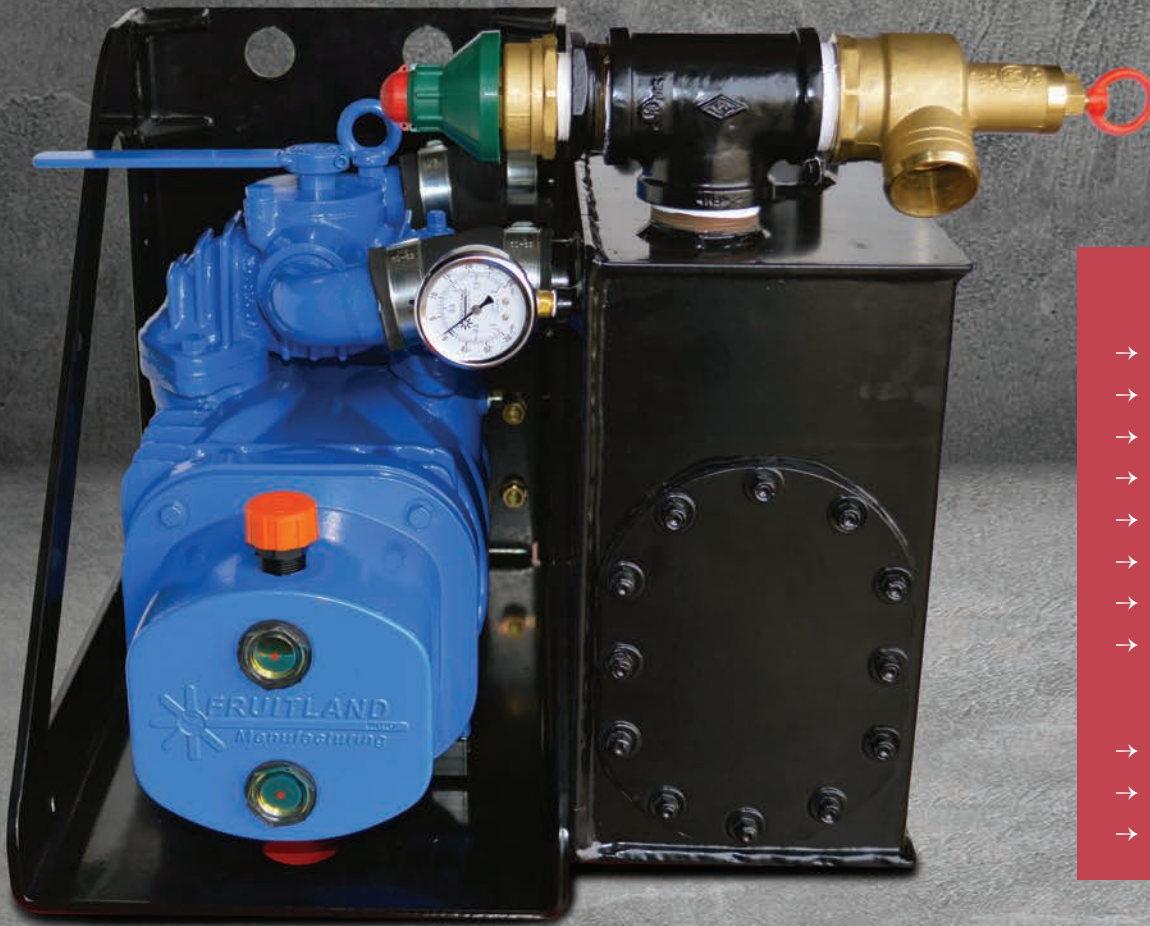
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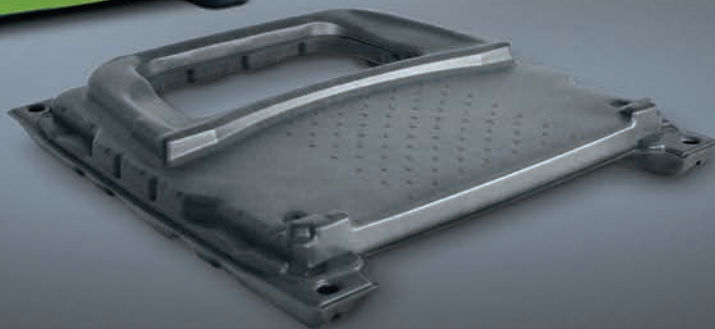
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A PRO's Best Friend

DOES A FOUR-LEGGED COMPANION GREET YOUR CUSTOMERS AT THE FRONT DOOR AND HELP YOU GET THROUGH A TOUGH DAY ON THE JOB?

By Jim Kneiszel

We're always talking about how your crew brings value to your portable restroom company. Where would you be without hardworking drivers who run long routes every day? And what about your office staff, the first contact customers have with your company? They offer courtesy and exhibit a great attitude for anyone who walks in the front door.

But do you have another most valuable player on your team? A four-legged friend that works for two square meals a day and a soft bed on the floor next to your desk? Does your faithful dog ride shotgun in the service truck to keep you company on long routes through the country? Is your canine — or feline — companion a calming influence in a chaotic workspace?

Occasionally we see a group photo for a story in *Portable Restroom Operator* in which a dog is lined up along with the humans in the yard. I love that, and I think including your pet in the team photos is the right and appropriate thing to do. Just like at home, your pet is a member of your company family, too.

Like any member of your crew, your dogs — and cats (who may be prove indifferent sometimes) — support you through thick and thin. They won't complain about the cleanliness of your restrooms or the punctuality of your service technicians. They won't vandalize or tip over your restrooms. They won't come in late, punch out early or ask for a raise.

Rather, they are a calming influence in the office. Like the vacuum relief valve on your trucks, your dog or cat can release the tension when someone is having a stressful day on the job. You've heard all the stories about emotional support animals helping their owners cope with a fear of flying. I would argue that your office dog or cat is really doing the same thing, even if you don't notice it ... pulling you through the challenging work of running a small business.

You've heard all the stories about emotional support animals helping their owners cope with a fear of flying. I would argue that your office dog or cat is really doing the same thing, even if you don't notice it ... pulling you through the challenging work of running a small business.

MY SIDEKICK

Like many PROs, I also have a furry assistant in the office. His name is Bugsly. He is a rescued Boston terrier, and we call him our "foster failure."



That's because we were his foster family a few years ago and we just couldn't send him on to another home. So we failed and kept him. We sensed that he needed us and certainly we needed him. Like every day, he's laying on his cushy bed under the window snoring by my side right now. Occasionally he'll jump on my lap and I'll have to reach around him to keep typing on my keyboard or to pick up the phone.

This is Bugsly, a 7-year-old Boston terrier and the editor's faithful office dog.

Bugsly has been with us for a few years now after being saved by a kind veterinarian who refused to euthanize him when his owner brought him in to be put down. There was nothing wrong with Bugsly; his family just had no time for him anymore and for some reason asked that he be killed rather than taking him to a shelter for adoption. This story of neglect is all too common, we have learned.

Our family volunteers for the Wisconsin Boston Terrier Rescue, and Bugsly helps us care for unwanted dogs until we can send them on to a new family. They come in a variety of ways. The story is often like Bugsly's. Someone bought a cute puppy, and then life changes and they no longer want or are able to care for the dog. Sometimes they are found on the side of the road, lost or dumped off by their owners. Many times they are rescued from a breeding operation where they are no longer seen as useful.

Perhaps you adopted your office dog or cat from a humane society or shelter and it had a similar rough and rocky past. If so, thank you for shar-

ing your home and workplace with one of these worthy animals. The best day of your pet's life was when you showed up and made him or her a part of your family. And these animals are doubly lucky in joining a PRO family, as they never have to leave their owner's side. They make so many new friends in the office and enjoy many new adventures on the road if they get to ride in a service vehicle.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Perhaps you already do more through your company to help local shelters or animal welfare groups. Speaking as a rescue volunteer, I want to thank you for anything you've done for these wonderful organizations — run by caring, giving people and usually strapped for cash.

Here are a few ways PROs can use their specialized skills and the fruits of their labors to help save a pet:

Donate restrooms

There are many ways to benefit pets by doing what you do best. Is there a dog park in your area? Many dog parks are run by volunteer organizations and either they may be paying for a portable restroom on site or they could use one to serve the park users. Your humane society or area rescues might plan fun runs, picnics or other events to raise money to cover vet bills or other expenses. Providing a restroom or two could save these organizations hundreds of dollars. And a few hundred dollars to these groups makes a big difference.

Raise money for rescue causes

Consider dedicating a small portion of your revenue to a local animal group. This will not only help the nonprofit organization, but it will build goodwill from your customers. Look around and see how many people in your community have dogs or cats. They would appreciate your commitment to these causes. Put a sticker on your trucks and restrooms saying you support a rescue group. Link to the animal organization from your website and explain your involvement.

Challenge others to join you

Organize support among your team or your local chamber of commerce for pet-related charitable efforts. Offer to match employee donations to your favorite group. Ask other small-business owners to join you in donating to an important cause. Beyond rescue groups, there are many other types of animal-related projects you can support, including service-dog training, community K-9 police officers and nursing-home pet therapy programs. All could use the help of local businesses like yours.

Show off your company pet

If you have a shelter dog or cat, put them out front in your marketing efforts. Talk about your adoption story with customers and friends who stop by and meet the pet. Include your cherished pet in company advertising. Make your dog or cat a mascot for your business by adding their image to websites or invoices. So many people will value your concern for pets and may see your business in a more positive light.

SEND A PHOTO

How would you like to share the story of your office dog or cat? Send me a photo and a brief story about the faithful companion to you and your staff. I'd love to share these stories with the readers of *PRO*. Contact me at editor@promonthly.com. ■

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OVERHEARD ONLINE

“ Along the path to setting new goals, we realized revenue had become a vanity metric. It wasn't telling us anything about the health of our company. ”

- How to Shift Your Business Focus From Revenue to Profit

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FIND YOUR NICHE

Customer Service Ethic Earns PRO Top Honors

Recognized as PSAI's 2019 Service Tech of the Year, Alberto Guerrero of JW Craft turned portable sanitation work into more than a job. Read more to see how Guerrero's approach to customer relations built an award-winning career.

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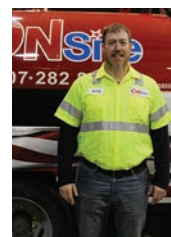


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THE OVERACHIEVER

Service Tech Jeremy Johnston Knows Safety

The On Site Cos. tech's commitment to safety has not gone unnoticed. Beyond earning the respect of his coworkers and employer, Johnston recently earned industry recognition for his work. Read on to find out how.



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Social Media Networking Do's and Don'ts

IN THE GIVE-AND-TAKE ON FACEBOOK, BE FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL TO OTHERS IN THE INDUSTRY. BUT NEVER TALK ABOUT HOW YOU PRICE YOUR SERVICES.

By Jeff and Terri Wigley

Think back to Y2K. In the year 2000, there was no social media as we know it today. To share information with large numbers of people in your industry, one read magazines or attended conferences and meetings. Facebook did not begin until 2004. Twitter in 2006. Instagram in 2010. These social media platforms can be a great networking tool for the portable restroom industry, but we believe a few rules of the road would be prudent to use them wisely.

Question: I am relatively new to the portable restroom industry and I am unsure about using social media for business. What should I do or not do when networking with others in the portable restroom industry, for example?

Answer: While there is no formal protocol for communicating using industry-specific social media outlets, there are several best practices we should follow to convey professionalism and to improve the image of our industry.

The purpose of your communication on these business-to-business social media sites is to share or to seek information. Social media is an efficient way to get an answer to a question from a large group of PROs from various parts of the country in a relatively short time. Please keep in mind, however, that every member of that social media community can see these comments. For this reason, please consider the following suggestions in your online communication:

DO:

Be polite. Quite often you will not know the person responding to your question. The respondent is doing you a favor by sharing information, ideas or opinions. Treat that person as you would if they were standing before you in person and helping you with your inquiry.

Be professional. In a portable restroom social media forum, stick to industry-specific topics and ask relevant questions. Remember that other PROs in the social community will be able to observe this online conversation. Your image and consequently your company's image are always under scrutiny.

Be patient. In our fast-paced world, we need answers instantly. If your question is not immediately addressed by another community member, do not despair. Furthermore, do not accept the first answer that comes across and act on that response. A better answer may be coming in at a later time. If there are several different ideas or opinions given, patiently wait and read all responses. Perhaps you will recognize a consensus.

Be positive. While we all get frustrated on occasion, try to refrain from negativity in framing questions, asking opinions or making comments. People react more favorably to positive communication as opposed to rants and tirades.

Be prepared to help others. As a new operator may have many more questions than answers, an experienced PRO needs to help as much as they seek help. Experience is the best teacher, and sharing your experiences can often help others to avoid a mistake that you may have made in the past.

DON'T:

Don't discuss the issue of pricing on social media. While most of our list is open to opinion and some interpretation, price discussions among professionals are illegal. The Federal Trade Commission defines price fixing as "an agreement (written, verbal or inferred from conduct) among competitors that raises, lowers, or stabilizes prices or competitive terms." There is a tremendous risk exposure to all PROs involved in this type of behavior. While you may be interested in what other PROs charge for various services, refrain from taking part in these discussions on social media. We see this quite often, however, on various Facebook sites in particular. Unfortunately, should someone in a position of authority gain access to these discussions, serious legal consequences could occur.

Don't use derogatory language toward competitors. Keep competitors and their company names out of your communication at all times. As discussed under the "be professional" point above, your image and your company's image are always under scrutiny. Ask your question or respond with your opinion without contributing your competitor's name to the discussion.

Don't use social media to be derogatory toward an employee. Be generic in any inquires or comments that would refer to an employee or an employee situation. Remember, others in the industry are privy to your communication. There is no need to delve into specific employee matters, as this could be construed as violating employee privacy and confidentiality. The best advice is to avoid this topic entirely.

Don't use foul language. Pretend your mother will be reading your communications. Enough said.

Don't use language that degrades our industry. The product that we pump is human waste. It is classified as domestic septage and not hazardous waste. Our primary equipment are known as units, portable restrooms or portable toilets. Our drivers are known as route drivers or service technicians. Be proud of the industry we serve, and as our image constantly improves, so will our value to the community.

In conclusion, be responsible in your use of social media and everyone will benefit. Use this mass communication tool as a way to improve your business and your resources. Your company and our industry will be the beneficiaries of this remarkable communications medium. ■

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Jacob Junker is shown at the Ace Pumping & Portables treatment plant. The plant is powered by solar panels seen on the roof. (Photos by Mark Henle)

POWERED BY THE SUN

In the desert Southwest, Ace Pumping & Portables built a solar-powered dewatering facility that processes waste and generates revenue from the electric utility **BY TED J. RULSEH**

John Fehser saw tipping fees and travel costs rising for taking portable restroom waste to his county landfill.

So, in 2005, he decided to process the waste himself. Today his company, Ace Pumping & Portables in Tucson, Arizona, has four dewatering boxes that process about 30,000 gallons per week. Meanwhile, 65 solar panels mounted on a steel canopy over the boxes have all but erased what was once a \$600 monthly electric bill.

The solar energy installation does more than save money: It helps position Ace Pumping as an environmentally conscious player, going above and beyond to safeguard resources. That, combined with a reputation for reliable, timely service and meticulous cleaning, helps the business thrive.

(continued)

Ace Pumping & Portables Tucson, Arizona

Owner: John Fehser

Founded: 1988

Employees: 6

Services: Portable sanitation, septic service, wastewater processing

Service area: Metropolitan Tucson

Website: www.aceportables.com

ARIZONA



John Fehser, right, talks with Patrick Newell as the pair unloads Five Peaks restrooms at the company yard.

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Fehser and five team members cover the Tucson area, servicing construction sites and special occasions of all kinds, from backyard parties and weddings to huge events such as the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show and La Fiesta de los Vaqueros rodeo.

Founded in 1988 as a septic system pumping business, Fehser's company gradually built up its portable restroom service until, 10 years later, the restroom side took off. Today restrooms account for about 95% of the company's revenue.

PROFITABLE "MISTAKE"

Fehser started the business with partner Zeke Carlson. "I got into it by mistake," he recalls. "We had an auto body shop and a full crew of body specialists. We built our first truck for the septic service industry, and the guy we were selling it to backed out." (As fate would have it, that guy, Ron Baldwin, is now a key member of Fehser's team.)

Unable to sell the truck, Fehser and Carlson bought a Yellow Pages ad and went into the septic pumping business, keeping the body shop along with a salvage yard they owned. "We bought six portable restrooms in 1989 to see how it would go, and it has built from there," Fehser says.

The restroom business increased slowly until 1998, when it began to explode with growth in the Tucson area. "I pulled out the telephone book and

"I pulled out the telephone book and counted 135 body shops. And then I counted five portable toilet companies. So I thought maybe that was something we ought to pursue."

JOHN FEHSER

counted 135 body shops," Fehser says. "And then I counted five portable toilet companies. So I thought maybe that was something we ought to pursue." He sold the body shop in 2006; Carlson has since retired, leaving Fehser as sole owner.

Meanwhile, in 1990, Baldwin moved back to Tucson after six years living in northern Arizona and went to work for Ace Portables. "He is my No. 1 guy now," Fehser says. "Without him, I don't know if I could do it. He's the head man for the routes and the servicing. He's been with me for 30 years."

DIVERSE CLIENTELE

The business mix breaks down to about 40% construction and 60% events. The restroom inventory includes about 300 PolyJohn Enterprises units and 100 Five Peaks units, about 30 of which are ADA restrooms and 10 are flushable. The 50 hand-wash stations in inventory were supplied by PolyJohn Enterprises.

In 1998 the company bought its first restroom trailer from Ameri-Can Engineering. It was well received in the market, so Fehser had the body shop
(continued)



Above: Technician Patrick Newell pulls a PolyJohn Enterprises hand-wash station out of a Five Peaks restroom after the equipment is returned to the Ace Pumping & Portables yard.



Ron Baldwin returns a hose to one of the company's vacuum trucks, built out by FlowMark Vacuum Trucks with a Masport pump.

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Right: Ron Baldwin unloads waste at the company's processing plant.

Below: Jacob Junker, the plant manager, attaches an EnviroZone liner to a Dragon Products dewatering box at the company's in-house processing plant.



team start building more luxury units. There are now seven trailers in inventory, from 15 to 35 feet, each with oak cabinetry and stalls, granite or marble countertops, music, air conditioning and other amenities.

The trailers are a mainstay for weddings and parties, but they have also come into play for higher-profile occasions, including events surrounding visits to Tucson by presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

The focal points of the year for the Ace Portables team are the gem show and the rodeo. The Tucson Gem and Mineral Show, the biggest event of its

Junker mixes polymer used in the company's processing plant. Ace Pumping & Portables handles up to 30,000 gallons of waste a week — its own and some from other pumping contractors.

kind in the world, draws thousands of visitors from 30 countries. The show and related events run for 16 days in February, encompassing three weekends, at numerous sites around the city.

"The various hotels rent out room where the exhibitors display their materials," Fehser says. "There are also tents on baseball fields and soccer fields." Most of the restrooms are for the outdoor venues, but some hotels rent units to handle the overflow crowds. Ace typically rents about 150 portables and all of its trailers for the event. La Fiesta de los Vaqueros, also in February, includes nine days of rodeo. The Ace team provides daily service for about 85 units at the rodeo grounds.

PROCESSING WASTE

In time, handling a growing volume of waste became a costly problem. The waste had to be driven 50 miles to the county landfill, where tipping fees kept rising. "We were spending so much on driving to the landfill to dump that we weren't making a profit to speak of," Fehser says. "I was tempted to sell the business and just be done with it."

Instead, he started processing the waste in a used dewatering box. When that showed promise, he expanded the operation. Today Ace has two 25-cubic-yard dewatering boxes from Dragon Products and two used dewatering boxes, all parked on a concrete slab beneath a steel canopy.

"When you drive in, you hook up to a strainer that my partner Zeke devised," Fehser says. "Everything goes into the strainer and then into a Franklin Miller Model TM851206 in-line grinder." The material is delivered to holding tanks totaling 70,000 gallons and then batch-processed. A mixer blends the waste with polymer, and the liquid is then pumped into the dewatering boxes.

"The dewatering boxes were out there, so we thought, Why don't we build a cover over the top to provide a solar holder and protect the boxes and protect us from the sun?"

JOHN FEHSER

(continued)

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The boxes are lined with single-use, disposable mesh screens (Enviro-Zone). “The water goes through the holes in the liners, and the solids separate out,” Fehser says. “We take the solids to the landfill, and we have a permit to discharge the liquid into the sewer. It’s just a huge improvement.” Ace accepts waste from other restroom operators and from septic pumpers. Of the 30,000-gallon weekly volume, about two-thirds comes from other contractors.

The solar installation dates to 2011. At that time, Fehser says, the cost of solar panels was subsidized by the government to the tune of 85%. “The dewatering boxes were out there, so we thought, Why don’t we build a cover over the top to provide a solar holder and protect the boxes and protect us from the sun?”

The 65 228-watt solar panels (Serengeti) power the entire operation. “I used to have a \$600-a-month electric bill, and now I have a \$35-a-month electric bill that’s just a service charge for being hooked up to the utility,” Fehser says. “I don’t use any electricity. I’m selling electricity every month to Tucson Electric Power.”

GETTING IT DONE

Fehser credits his company’s success to “an unbelievable crew.” Besides Baldwin, key people are Melissa Lynch, a 10-year team member who handles routing for deliveries and service and all office functions, and Jacob Junker (15 years), who manages the waste processing plant. The team also includes route drivers Patrick Newell (nine years) and Bob Foisey (one year).

The restroom service fleet includes:

Two 2016 Dodge trucks with 1,100-gallon waste and 400-gallon freshwater aluminum FlowMark Vacuum Trucks tanks and Masport pumps.

Two 2018 Dodge trucks with 800-gallon waste and 300-gallon freshwater FlowMark aluminum tanks and Masport pumps.

Three older Isuzu trucks with WorkMate aluminum tanks in sizes from 500 to 800 gallons waste and 150 to 300 gallons freshwater and Masport pumps from FMI Truck Sales & Service.



Above: John Fehser consults with Melissa Lynch, the office manager, in the Ace Pumping & Portables shop.

Below: The crew at Ace Pumping & Portables has built several restroom trailers from the ground up. Ron Baldwin is shown installing flooring in one of the units.



Clean is the deal

Tucson, Arizona, is a competitive market for portable restrooms. Ace Pumping & Portables doesn’t offer the lowest prices, but it promises excellent service.

“I’ve learned to pay attention not just to price, but service,” says John Fehser, owner. “We try to deliver the best service and the cleanest units, and we’re there when we say we’re going to be there. If somebody else wants to charge less, that’s OK.

“My employees are real conscientious. We go in and blast-out the unit with water and bleach. We wipe the whole thing down, spray the fragrance and put fresh chemical in. We wipe down the outsides and take care of any graffiti. It takes more than eight minutes for us to clean a unit; it takes closer to 12 minutes. You can tell we were there after we clean them out. Our customers notice, and they are the judge and jury.”

For chemicals, Ace Portables relies on Walex Products. “I’ve been working with them for 25 years,” Fehser says. “If there’s something they’re trying to develop, they send me samples and I promise I will try them. That’s where driver Ron Baldwin comes in. He likes to find good products that smell nice, won’t stain and are easy to use. We used to use chemical in the drum, but now we use dropins. There’s a lot less waste.”

Fehser counsels construction and event customers on how many units they need and where on the site to place them. “When we give a bid, we’re going to bid on the number of units the customer needs. I don’t want them calling around later and saying we didn’t give good service. We put a little extra into everything.”

The company has a variety of transport trailers fabricated in-house.

In hiring people, Fehser says, “I wish I had some magic secret for it. If people come in, look me square in the eye and say they’ll give it a try, I’ll give them a try.” He does perform background checks before offering employment.

One prospect he took a chance on, Marco Gonzales, was overweight. “He walked in and just lit up the whole room,” Fehser says. “Because of his size, I was a little bit hesitant, but he was just the nicest guy in the world. He didn’t know anything about the business, but he picked it up, he worked hard and he cared about everybody here. He was very happy that he was given a chance.”

He worked for the company for six years before passing away in late 2018: “He was a good guy, and losing him was like a losing a member of the family.”

A family atmosphere is what Fehser tries to provide. “Pretty much



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around the clock, we've got somebody here," Fehser says. "People start at different times so we can avoid traffic delays and get everything done. If someone has a family function going on, they can adjust their hours and it's not a problem.

"We're not the kind of place where we just put in eight hours and go home. If something needs to be done, everybody's willing to put in the work. If somebody needs something outside of work, we all try to help."

To keep good people, he provides competitive wages, profit sharing, and monthly or quarterly bonuses. Profit sharing kicks in after one year; after five additional years, team members are fully vested. "I make a pool for the bonus money," Fehser says. "If you've been here for six months or longer, you get one share of the pool. If you're here two years, you get two shares. If you're here three years or longer, you get three shares. That way everybody gets something. A new person who's working hard is not overlooked."

"I used to have a \$600-a-month electric bill, and now I have a \$35-a-month electric bill that's just a service charge for being hooked up to the utility."

JOHN FEHSER

KEEP ON GROWING

Ace Portables grows mainly based on quality service and reputation. The company has a website but doesn't use social media or paid advertising. "My trucks and my units out in the field are all advertisements," Fehser says.

To learn more about Ace Pumping & Portables, watch a video profile of the company at www.promonthly.com.

"We stand out because we say with our actions that we're respecting the environment. The solar energy is a good indication of that. I would like to get into recycling the sludge we have by mixing it with yard waste. That's an upcoming project."

And to think the whole thing started with a mistake. ■

MORE INFO

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• **Ron Inman of Northwest Cascade received the M.Z. “Andy” Gump Award.** Inman is vice president of Northwest Cascade and general manager of the Honey Bucket Division. Inman received nominations from several individuals who cited his integrity and his leadership and mentorship skills. Inman is a past president of the PSAI board of directors, and his career in portable sanitation included the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. The Andy Gump Award was started in 1993 by the late Barry Gump to honor his father, a longtime industry innovator.



Ron Inman



Jake Groen

• **Jake Groen, PolyJohn Canada general manager, was named the Flay and Glenda Anthony Volunteer of the Year.** A 30-year veteran of the portable sanitation industry, Groen has served on the PSAI board for many years and has taken on various leadership roles. He continues to serve on several PSAI committees and subcommittees including the PSAI Executive Committee and International Advisory Council. Now a PSAI trainer, Groen helped inaugurate the HOLLway sessions at the 2019 conference. Nomina-tors pointed to his work ethic and positive attitude as reasons why he should win the award. The Flay and Glenda Anthony Volunteer of the Year award was first given in 2015.

• **Alberto Guerrero was named the Service Technician of the Year.** He is lead service technician for JW Craft Portable Restrooms in Naples, Florida. Guerrero has spent four years in the portable sanitation industry and is PSAI certified. A bilingual asset to his team, Guerrero is responsible for training new recruits for special event services and route positions, as well as field-testing new products for the company. He was singled out for the award based on his commitment to the job, the care with which he treats both people and equipment, and his attention to detail. Guerrero has passed on several promotions, preferring to remain working with customers in the field.



Alberto Guerrero



Jeremy Johnston

• **Jeremy Johnston was named runner-up for Service Technician of the Year.** Johnston works for On Site Cos. in St. Paul, Minnesota. He joined the company eight years ago and has become a standout technician for his dedication to safety. Johnston has won the company’s safety award for the past four years. He is also known for his excellent attendance record and even had perfect attendance in 2017. Johnston’s duties include pickup and delivery of luxury restroom trailers, training and mentoring new recruits, and acting as a sales representative on job sites.

PSAI established the Service Technician of the Year and Runner-Up awards in 2001. ■



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If it's anything like last year's event, we know you'll make new connections, gain valuable insights, develop your skills, and come away refreshed and ready to help lead your business to new levels.

Invest in yourself today and make plans to join other industry leaders and colleagues in Scottsdale, Arizona on October 7-8 for an enriching experience and a greater understanding of balancing life, work and leadership!



Take 5 ...

with John Harper and Port-A-Jon

In a Good Place

An eye on expenses, happy employees and a rock-solid succession plan offer comfort to John Harper as he starts to pass the torch to a new generation at Port-A-Jon

By Betty Dageforde

John Harper spent many years working in the septic service industry in Jefferson, Texas, but one day in the mid-1990s he noticed a guy hauling portable restrooms and it occurred to him he could do that as well. Someone gave him a copy of *Pumper* magazine, and he called PolyJohn Enterprises, bought six units and started Port-A-Jon. By 2001 he got out of septic and today has approximately 2,500 units (mostly from PolyJohn Enterprises and Satellite | PolyPortables), 300 hand-wash stations (Satellite | PolyPortables) and six restroom trailers (Alpha Mobile Solutions, Ameri-Can Engineering, Wells Cargo and Rich Specialty Trailers).

Harper added satellite offices over the years, one in each of the four diagonal directions from Jefferson, all about 50 miles away. The largest is in Shreveport, Louisiana, managed by his son David. Three are in Texas — Texarkana (managed by son-in-law Alan Bradley), Longview and Mount Pleasant. Industrial work is about 50% of their business, construction is 25%, and the rest are parks, ball-fields and miscellaneous locations (including one at Harper's home so kids don't traipse through the house from the swimming pool).

Harper has a staff of 29, including his wife, Gloria Harper, who handles the office. All employees are encouraged to be salespeople because "if the phone doesn't ring, we don't eat," he says. "You've got to sell, sell, sell on everything you do." Harper knows phone book advertising doesn't work very well anymore but says he was dragged kicking and screaming into the digital age. Fortunately he has a computer tech on staff — his daughter Suzanne Bradley who also handles billing and insurance.



The family management team at Port-A-Jon includes John Harper, president (seated); Gloria Harper, treasurer; and David Harper, Shreveport, Louisiana, sales manager. (Photos by Olivia Ogren-Hrejsa)

EXPLORE FIVE ISSUES THAT IMPACT HARPER AND PORT-A-JON:

1 SATISFYING THE ENERGY SECTOR

Oil field work is a boom-or-bust industry, so Harper is cautious when taking on that work, not letting it become a majority of Port-A-Jon business. Instead, the company concentrates more on mines, electric power plants, gas plants and refineries. He attributes his growth in that niche to his willingness to offer multiple services a week. "If people want daily service, we'll give them daily service," he says. "If they want twice a day, we'll give them twice a day." At one time they had 120 units at a utility plant and serviced them three times per day for 60 days. Harper conducts a safety meeting first thing every Monday. In addition, all technicians are certified by the Mine Safety and Health Administration to work in the mines. "And we do the refresher classes every year," Harper says. "It's eight or nine hours — then the barbecue place comes out and brings barbecue and beans."

(continued)



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Bill Bolick empties a PolyJohn Enterprises restroom on a service route.

2 KEEPING EXPENSES UNDER CONTROL

The cost of buying and maintaining the fleet is an ongoing concern, Harper says, and can get out of hand if you don't watch it. The company has 24 vacuum trucks. Most are Dodge 4500s and 5500s and Chevy 5500s with 1,100-gallon waste and 400-gallon freshwater tanks and Masport or Conde (Westmoor) pumps. A few were built out by FlowMark Vacuum Trucks, Abernethy Welding & Repair and Best Enterprises, but most are company built. "That way, we can configure them the way we want and customize the tank to the truck," he says.

Harper is careful to control the debt load on vehicles. "When we finance a truck, it's for five years, and hopefully we can run it eight to 10 years to make it pay for itself. But the new trucks are getting more expensive. My first truck cost me \$17,000 to rig out. Now, 25 years later, the same truck costs me \$80,000. Everything is going up and it's killing us as operators. The cost of equipment is going to be a big thing going forward."

Harper knows he'll always lose a few customers when he has to raise prices, but the company works hard at creating customer loyalty by providing good service. Harper still has his first customer from 25 years ago. "I don't want to be the cheapest, I don't want to be the highest, I want to be competitive — but I want to be profitable."



Bolick pulls hose to service restrooms at an industrial work site. The truck was built out by FlowMark Vacuum Trucks and carries a Masport pump.

3 FINDING DISPOSAL SITES

Disposing of waste is getting to be a real problem, Harper says, as treatment plant options are dwindling. "Our toilet waste is a high-strength wastewater and most sewer plants don't like it, and if they can find an opportunity to knock it out, they do."

As a result, the company has to haul the waste farther and farther. "We have to take it to a bigger town," he says. "We have one or two that will take it so you haul it around. You have no choice." Of course, that results in increased expenses on fuel, employee time, and wear and tear on the trucks.

"Looking down the road, what are we going to do in 10 years if the environmental rules get more stringent? That's going to be an issue everybody's got to look at. It's one of the main problems."



A vacuum truck from FlowMark Vacuum Trucks is parked in front of the Port-A-Jon office in Jefferson, Texas.

4 COMPETING AGAINST THE OIL FIELD FOR LABOR

Harper can't match oil and gas companies on salaries but says he gets pretty close and also provides a few things they don't. Layoffs, for example — a way of life for the oil and gas companies — have never happened at Port-A-Jon. He gives everyone one to three weeks' vacation, a uniform, 80% of the cost of boots up to \$200 a year, a \$20 monthly allowance for safety equipment, and various insurances. "And we try to make it a pleasant place to work," he says. "I'm not chewing on their butts all the time."

And Harper is generous with his employees. "Every time I go to one of the offices around lunchtime, they all think I'm supposed to buy their lunch — and of course I do." He encourages employees to be involved in their sports teams, churches and kids' school programs. And, though they always cover emergencies, he likes to keep the standard workweek to five days. "We don't want anyone to dread going to work," he says. "A happy employee is a good employee." His approach seems to be working — a number of employees have been with him over 20 years.

Harper's current concern is the possibility of minimum wage going to \$15 an hour, which will have a ripple effect on all wages and prices. "If minimum wage goes to \$15, that loaf of bread is going to double, milk will double. So, how do I give my guys more than just a common laborer's wage?"

"And we try to make it a pleasant place to work. I'm not chewing on their butts all the time. ... A happy employee is a good employee."

JOHN HARPER



The Port-A-Jon team includes, from left, Dawson Harper, Pancho Bautista, Julia Jefferies, Gloria Harper, John Harper, Bill Bolick, David Harper Jr. and David Harper.

5 FAMILY SUCCESSION PLANS

Harper is 67 years old and has been turning more of the day-to-day responsibilities at Port-A-Jon over to his kids, David and Suzanne, who will eventually take over the business. The family

“We have our plans on how to exit to where the business will still be secure. And I want to make sure all these people have work.”

JOHN HARPER

“We like to take the motor home and go on trips three or four times a year. We’re just going to increase that. We’re not going to quit. We’ll always come back and help as long as we’re capable, but we’re just going to slow down.” ■

has been discussing the transition for a long time, he says. “We have our plans on how to exit to where the business will still be secure. And I want to make sure all these people have work. We’ve got the lawyer and CPA advising us how to go about it.”

The transition may occur as an inheritance rather than a business sale if it makes more sense from a taxing perspective. As David and Suzanne take on more of the management functions over the next few years, Harper and his wife will start spending more time away from the office.

“We like to take the motor home and go on

MORE INFO

Abernethy Welding & Repair, Inc.
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Where's the Restroom?

July 2019



Follow the clues to identify the winter wonderland shown in this mystery snapshot

This Construction Project Ends With a Big Bang!

By Jim Kneiszel

It's Christmas in July! Well, not exactly. It's July and we're bringing you a photo from Christmas 2018 to cool your sweating brow in the midst of the hottest time of the year for servicing restrooms.

This Satellite | PolyPortables Global unit is set up with a tidy office trailer in an urban riverfront park noted for its holiday light displays. You can't see it, but behind the photographer are construction barricades surrounding a very big building that is part of a complex of sporting venues. Though the arena being blocked off is only 30 years old, it was being laced with explosives at the time this photo was taken. And boom! The roof was imploded shortly after the photo was taken, and the building is no more.

Here are a few more clues to help you identify the location of the restroom:

- This Great Lakes city is known for Gemütlichkeit, which should come in handy when it hosts a major political convention in 2020.
- A few popular 1970s sitcom TV shows were set in this city, and a bronze statue of one of the popular TV show characters was erected near this park.
- This is the birthplace of the editor of *Portable Restroom Operator* magazine.
- When the construction workers take a lunch break in their trailer, they might just play a few hands of Sheepshead.
- You'll find many Germans here, but the park shown is named for a French missionary.

To win the contest, be the first person to respond with the name of the city, the park being shown in the background and the intersection where the restroom is located. The winner will receive a *PRO* T-shirt and recognition as a geographical whiz. Send your responses to me at editor@promonthly.com. The winner will be announced at www.promonthly.com and through the *PRO* Facebook page. ■

SEND YOUR MYSTERY PHOTOS! Do you have an interesting spot where you've been dropping and servicing restrooms? Send some photos to be considered for our feature, *Where's the Restroom?* If we decide to run your photos in a future issue, we'll send you a *Portable Restroom Operator* T-shirt! Send your photos to editor@promonthly.com.

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ADA/Handicap Restrooms and Cleaning and Maintenance

By Craig Mandli

ADA/HANDICAP RESTROOMS

ARMAL CUBE HN

The **Armal Cube HN** is designed for the comfort and convenience of individuals requiring special portable restroom facilities or simply preferring a large restroom. It has a sloping, antislip floor, and it is spacious enough to admit a person in a wheelchair and an attendant. The seat height and side handrails allow easy movement from wheelchair to the restroom. The pneumatic door closer is balanced by a heavy-duty cable spring for easy access. **866-873-7796; www.armal.biz.**



SANSOM INDUSTRIES ZENITH ADA

The **Zenith ADA** unit from **Sansom Industries** includes a durable wraparound floor and the choice of 45- or 70-gallon sump tanks. It exceeds federal ADA and California ADA Title 24 signage requirements and includes ADA handrails on three walls. Its one-piece floor structure is built using all stainless steel threaded fasteners and is formed from a single sheet of 0.400-gauge plastic. It has side and rear forklift access openings molded into the floor, a baby changer mount and a sonically welded doorjamb. Hands-free door entry and exit reduce germ exposure to hands for improved hygiene. No angled or plate metal parts are required for assembly. **844-972-6766; www.sansomindustries.com.**



FIVE PEAKS SUMMIT



The **Summit** from **Five Peaks** is an alternative to larger ADA-compliant restrooms. It is smaller and easy to maneuver with one person while also being wheelchair accessible, or it can be used as an oversized restroom when extra space is needed. It is available in two tank configurations — 40 or 74 gallons. It features ground-level floor access; powder-coated wraparound grab bars; large, open interior floor space; grab handles; dual coat hooks and mirrors; vent screens; and an automatic door closer, all accessible through the heavy-duty rotational molded door and jamb. The sidewalls are constructed of high-density polyethylene with steel-reinforced corner extrusions for added strength and integrity. **866-293-1502; www.fivepeaks.net.**

POLYJOHN ENTERPRISES COMFORT XL

The **PolyJohn Enterprises Comfort XL** restroom offers customers a larger unit with more than 16 square feet of interior floor space. The wheelchair-accessible unit comes equipped with a self-closing door and interior grab rails that provide added safety and convenience. Available in a wide variety of colors, the spacious restroom is designed for extra comfort for users. **800-292-1305; www.polyjohn.com.**



SATELLITE | POLYPORTABLES ATLAS



The large-size **Atlas** from **Satellite | PolyPortables** includes a sump waste tank that makes cleaning and servicing easier and faster than ever. The floor plate is sloped at the point of entry, making it easier for special needs users to access the restroom. A reinforced roof means no more roof flex from heavy snow or tight straps during transport. It includes steel tie-down points, easy-to-grab handles for transport and durable hinges. **800-883-1123; www.satelliteindustries.com.**

T BLUSTAR SPACE160

The **Space160** from **T blustar** is a spacious portable restroom suitable for parks, beaches, recreation sites and handicapped-accessible requirements. It has a flat floor that allows a wheelchair or child's stroller to easily roll into and turn around inside. The interior metal handrails assist people and children with disabilities for easy maneuverability inside the restroom. It comes standard with a freshwater flush and hand-wash sink, both with hand pumps. It can be personalized in a large selection of bright colors and a company logo. A double wheel and lift jack allow a single operator to easily move it from site to site. **404-719-0715; www.tblustar.com.**



GRAFFITI REMOVAL

CENTURY CHEMICAL GRAFFITI WIPES

Graffiti Wipes from **Century Chemical** are designed for fast, easy cleanup of paint from nonporous surfaces. The abrasive, yet nonscratching fabric aids in cleaning and can be used on a variety of surfaces, including portable restrooms, showers, partitions and hand-wash stations. They are premoistened with an environmentally safe and biodegradable cleaning formula that removes paints (including enamel), ink and permanent marker. A few swipes with a single wipe dissolves unwanted paint and graffiti, according to the maker. Each case contains six canisters, with each canister holding 70 wipes that are 9 1/2 by 12 inches. **800-348-3505; www.centurychemical.com.**



SAFE-T-FRESH GOOD AS GONE GRAFFITI REMOVER

Good as Gone graffiti remover from **Safe-T-Fresh** is formulated to remove paints, inks, crayons, lipstick and other marks from portable restrooms, road signs, bridge abutments, sidewalks, reflective signs, buses, public buildings, mirrors, lockers and wherever graffiti is a problem. It can be used on most surfaces, including plastic, brick, glass, ceramic tile, porcelain, marble, ceramics, Formica, terrazzo, enamels, brass, aluminum, steel, chrome, vinyl and painted surfaces. **800-883-1123; www.safetfresh.com.**

SUNRISE ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIFIC WIPE OFF

Wipe Off from **Sunrise Environmental Scientific** eliminates product runoff and drip down, as it sprays out as a gel that clings to hard surfaces. This gelling property makes the target surface and the product interact. It stays where it's sprayed, offering an effective solution for graffiti removal, according to the maker. Its ability to cling to graffiti-covered surfaces eliminates the need to reapply, saving time. **800-648-1153; www.sunrisenv.com.**



WALEX PRODUCTS BANISH GRAFFITI REMOVER

Banish Graffiti Remover from **Walex Products** is a user-friendly formulation that removes graffiti and leaves surfaces protected from future graffiti. It works to remove most types of graffiti and many stains from smooth, nonporous surfaces such as plastics, glass and metals. It can be used to remove marker, paint, pen, pencil, grease, tar, crayon, dirt and calcium buildup. In most cases, it will remove the graffiti in less than a minute on unpainted surfaces, according to the maker. It is sold in 1-, 5- and 55-gallon containers. It should be sprayed onto the surface being cleaned and allowed a minute or two to work; and then use a Banish Pad or soft scrub brush to agitate the product on the surface to help the removal process.

800-338-3155; www.walex.com.



ODOR CONTROL

CPACEX FRESH PUMP X

Fresh Pump X from **CPACEX** eliminates offensive odors at the source, helping improve the integrity of service. Just 2 ounces added to a gallon of pump oil can effectively counteract all unpleasant odors while pumping, according to the maker. Its use can help keep the workspace smelling fresh. It is available in a long-lasting wild-cherry fragrance. **419-450-6208; www.cpacex.com.**



J&J PORTABLE SANITATION PRODUCTS TRUEX POWER PACKETS

Truex Power Packets from **J&J Portable Sanitation Products** are a nonformaldehyde, water-soluble, portion-control deodorizer with advanced technology using multiple odor control components that engage when needed. The formula utilizes advanced fragrance and long-lasting, deep-blue, nonstaining color. They work to continuously break down paper and waste, reducing mounding for increased odor control in the holding tank to provide long-lasting protection in the most demanding environments. They are available in a variety of exclusive fragrances and sizes. **800-345-3303; www.jjchem.com.**

LUNARGLO SOLAR EXHAUST FAN

LunarGlo offers a solar-powered exhaust fan, which when mounted on the 4-inch vent stack can remove 23 to 40 cubic feet of air per minute on a sunny day with a gentle breeze by pulling the air from the holding tank up the stack. The fan motor is designed to function for up to 40,000 hours of continuous use. It can be coupled with a scented biscuit hung from the side vent to create a pleasant interior environment for users. **574-294-2624; www.lunarglo.com.**



CASE STUDY

PRO solves restaurant's kitchen odor issue

PROBLEM: A restaurant in Ironwood, Michigan, had dealt with bad odors in their kitchen area for weeks. Bill Leppala from Tula Toilet and Septic was hired to find and rectify the problem.

SOLUTION: During his investigation, Leppala discovered the foul odors didn't originate in the kitchen, but rather from outside of the building. "After chasing a few things, I noticed the makeup air intake for the kitchen was pulling outside air from right over the dumpsters for the air discharge from the oven hoods," Leppala says. "It wasn't the best design." Leppala decided to affix a **Fresh Strap** from **Surco Portable Sanitation Products** to the air intake.

RESULT: "As soon as I hung a Fresh Strap, there was no more odor problem," Leppala says. **800-556-0111; www.surco.com. ■**

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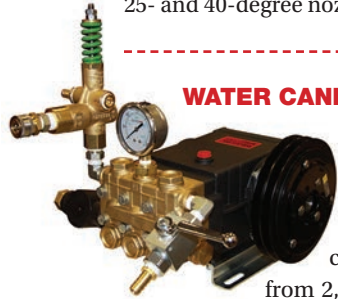
CAM SPRAY MCB SERIES

MCB Series skid-mounted pressure washers from Cam Spray can be used with a flatbed truck, pickup or van — with or without an on-board water tank. They are available in operating pressures from 2,000 to 7,000 psi and don't require plugging into an electrical source. The gasoline engine provides power to drive the pump system and provide 12-volt DC power to keep the battery charged and operate the burner system. They include an industrial gas-powered engine; triplex plunger pump; chemical injection; 50-foot hose; and a trigger gun with 0-, 15-, 25- and 40-degree nozzles. **800-648-5011; www.camspray.com.**



WATER CANNON ELECTRIC CLUTCH SERIES

The heavy-duty, 12-volt electric clutch series of pressure washers from Water Cannon Inc. - MWBE are designed to mount on the front of a diesel engine for high-pressure washing on location. It is available in three different pressures from 2,000 to 4,000 psi and flow rates from 4 to 8 gpm. Other features include a continuous-duty hydraulic coupling drive system, an in-line serviceable stainless steel mesh water filter, stainless steel unitized valves, forged brass manifold and a heavy-duty triplex plunger pump. The thermo-pump protector engages at 140 degrees F, and the adjustable pressure regulator is from 150 psi to the max pressure. **800-333-9274; www.watercannon.com.** ■



PRODUCT NEWS

Reelcraft Industries Series 3000 ultracompact reels

Reelcraft Industries Series 3000 reels are all-steel construction and ultracompact for a wide range of bench-mount or mobile applications with critical space requirements. These compact reels fit in a 1-by-1-foot space. The reels incorporate multiple slotted mounting holes to accommodate many configurations. An optional guide arm accessory is available for multiple adjustment positions of the hose or cord. The hose reel models are available with up to 25 feet of 1/4-inch or 20 feet of 3/8-inch air/water hose. The cord reel models are available with 30 feet of 12/3 cord with multiple cord ending options including a new quad box receptacle. **800-444-3134; www.reelcraft.com.**



Isuzu 12-foot road-ready Supreme Spartan service body

Isuzu Commercial Truck of America announced the availability of a new road-ready service body for select Isuzu N-Series gasoline trucks.

The expansion of the Isuzu Road-Ready Program with Supreme provides a wider selection of bodies. The 12-foot Supreme Spartan service body will be available for 109-inch-wheelbase NPR and NPR-HD models. Standard features include eight compartments with adjustable shelving for cargo-organizing versatility and a spacious stand-up height interior with a standard street-side pipe door. Stainless steel D-ring compartment handles offer easier gripping with work gloves, and it offers two interior LED dome lights. **866-441-9638; www.isuzucv.com.** ■



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