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February 2021

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Barging AHEAD

Servicing floating restrooms in Wisconsin requires an innovative approach to customer service

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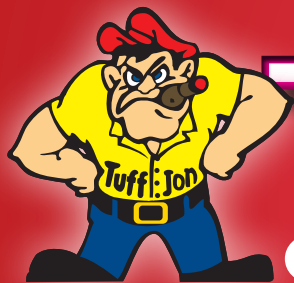


Sweet Success

The owners of Honey Huts Portables found a winning combination with measured expansion, exemplary service — and a bright yellow brand

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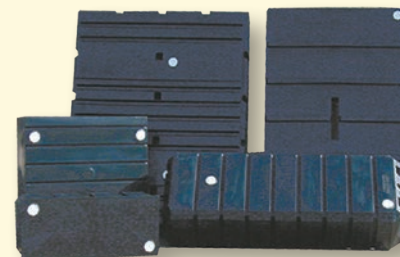
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By Jim Kneiszel

I'm Tired of Folks Saying Restrooms Are Unsightly



When will the general public realize how lucky they are to have portable sanitation?

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. When a PRO passes a portable restroom along the side of the road, you see a handsome moneymaker for your company. When others see this restroom, they recoil at the thought of what takes place inside the unit. Unfortunately, there are a small number of people who see the practical beauty of a restroom and a huge population of people who see a blight on the landscape.

We need to work on changing this perception.

Take the folks in Conway, New Hampshire, for instance. Their town sounds like a wonderful place adjacent to the White Mountain National Forest. They enjoy being near the trail encircling Echo Lake, visiting nearby waterfalls and the Conway Scenic Railroad's vintage trains and Victorian station. Picture postcard views all around.

But when they see a portable restroom in a park, the citizens of Conway hit the roof. That's all it takes to get them riled up.

"I think it's ugly to centralize them in the park," town manager Tom Holmes said during a meeting with Conway selectmen. As reported in the *Conway Daily Sun*, Holmes called 15 units at Schouler Park an "eyesore," and said, "We are trying to come up with ideas to disperse them throughout the village."

The board voted 5-0 to ban the use of portable restrooms at Schouler Park.

IT'S NIMBY TIME

It is interesting to note that town officials said the units were too well-used during the pandemic as they served many new visitors to the quaint community. One of their chief complaints, aside from that they didn't find the units pretty, is that the service providers couldn't keep them clean enough because of their popularity.

So Conway officials' answer was to either hide the units around town where nobody would see them and complain, or eliminate restroom service that seemed to be sorely needed.

What kind of solution is that? People are using the restrooms, so let's get rid of them because they are unsightly! How about taking a different tack, like ordering more restrooms, more frequent service, and continue placing them where the public uses them?



Above: Portable restrooms are practical, functional and look nice in a busy waterfront park in Duluth, Minnesota. (Photos by Jim Kneiszel)

What kind of solution is that? People are using the restrooms, so let's get rid of them because they are unsightly! How about taking a different tack, like ordering more restrooms, more frequent service, and continue placing them where the public uses them?

Frankly, I am weary of residents in towns and cities across the country complaining when they see a portable restroom show up for a construction site, a community event or to provide relief for folks during the busy summer season. It happens so regularly I suspect potential complaints are on the minds of PROs every time they drop a restroom at a new, fairly visible location.

Let's say you're placing a unit in front of a home remodeling job in some ritzy neighborhood. Oh oh, will you be called out later today to move it behind a fence or away from the view of an unhappy neighbor? A call like this creates frustration for you and your crew and the resulting relocation adds labor to the day and takes profits off the table. And the sad part is you can't accurately predict when one of these complaints is going to happen. You can make an educated guess, but it might happen when you least expect it.

When I was working in the newspaper business, we used to call these NIMBY complaints, as in Not In My Back Yard. What I found as a small-



Above: There is nothing to object to in this restroom placement at a construction site along a Lake Superior waterfront trail.

town newspaper editor and still find today is that a complaint from one disgruntled person can quickly be magnified in a public forum, such as a town board meeting.

As a wastewater publication editor, I find these situations not just with portable sanitation, but with the siting of private dewatering or treatment facilities, neighbors surrounding wastewater land-application sites, and grease trap service exhaust in urban settings.

What really irks me when folks raise a stink over wastewater services? That these people don't understand the valuable service that is being provided. No, they only recognize their temporary sacrifice of seeing a restroom in the park or getting a whiff of exhaust from your tank.

THE UNWELCOME MAT

Consider those folks in Conway, New Hampshire. Clean portable restrooms provide hospitality and make visitors to the town safer and more comfortable during their stay. Would they rather roll out the unwelcome mat and discourage families from coming and shopping at their retail establishments, eating at their restaurants and giving the economy a shot in the arm during a business-killing virus crisis?

Rather than complain, they should make sanitation services a priority and see these restrooms in a different light. They should work with their local portable sanitation contractors to devise plans to ensure enhanced service. And they should look at restrooms like you do, as an important public health tool.

And by the way, portable restrooms are not unsightly. They are the embodiment of practicality, a purpose-built product that does a necessary job effectively, efficiently and at a fair price. And no matter what anyone says in a public forum, know that you are appreciated here for doing a vital job. ■

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SWOT, PART 3

Examine Your Opportunities and Threats

In this column, Amanda Clark leads portable restroom operators through the examination of their opportunities and threats as part of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) grid analysis. Find out more in this online exclusive article.

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By Jeff and Terri Wigley

The Answer is Blowin' In the Wind

Take our advice and try these techniques to secure restrooms before you learn the hard way in a devastating windstorm

QUESTION: We operate in northern Louisiana and we are susceptible to high winds, occasional tornados and, especially in 2020, hurricanes. What are some strategies for securing units in such conditions?

ANSWER: Wind, regardless of the intensity, is an enemy to PROs and their portable restrooms. We will address your question in terms of the three weather conditions that you reference.

HIGH WINDS

Windy conditions exist in most parts of the country and can occur most anytime during the year. The best advice is to be proactive. So here are some tips for unit placement:

FLAT, STABLE LAND IS AN EXCELLENT FOUNDATION. A proper foundation allows for the unit to function as designed. The user can be comfortable inside the unit. The deodorizer and water solution are level and can maximize coverage of waste. The vent stack can allow odors to escape with maximum efficiency. Level paved or concrete areas are also excellent choices for placement.

PLACING UNITS NEAR WALLS OR SIMILAR LOCATIONS CAN MINIMIZE THE EFFECT OF WIND. Placement near a large tree or a group of large trees is also an effective proactive measure.

UNITS PLACED NEXT TO EACH OTHER IN A LINE CAN BE A STABILIZING FACTOR. As we will discuss next, knowing the predominant wind direction allows for the line of units to be placed perpendicular to these winds. Strong gusts would therefore hit the side of the first unit which would be backed up by the remainder of the units at that location.

IF YOUR GEOGRAPHICAL AREA EXPERIENCES MOST PREVAILING WINDS FROM A SPECIFIC DIRECTION, TAKE THAT INTO CONSIDERATION. Some PROs operate in areas near the coast where prevailing winds come from over the water, while other PROs are in areas near hills and mountain ranges that generally produce winds from a specific direction. Some PROs operate in relatively flat areas where the weather and the winds normally come from a certain

Pump as many units as possible empty and place them “doors down” on the ground if no inside storage facility is available. If the doors on units can be held closed, this will make the unit less likely to be blown greater distances.

area. If prevailing winds are common in your area, know the “downwind direction” when placing units.

TIPS FOR SECURING UNITS

If your area is prone to strong and sustained winds, other options are available to further protect your units.

PLACE THE UNIT INSIDE A WAREHOUSE OR OTHER ENCLOSED STRUCTURE. Please keep in mind that the unit must also be easily accessible for weekly servicing.

SKIDS CAN BE STAKED INTO THE GROUND. Depending on the type of unit, some PROs use stakes that go straight into the ground with a curved end that rests on top of the skid. Other PROs opt for a U-shaped stake that goes over both sides of the skid. In either case, all four of the exposed areas of the skid are staked.

SECURE THE UNIT TO A MORE STABLE OBJECT. A tree, light post or other approved structure on the job site can allow for a unit to be tied, strapped or even chained in place by taking advantage of either the bottom of the unit below the door or the top of the unit above the door. Again, depending on the design of the unit, holes near the end of the skids can be used for the ends of the securing line. For example, a rope tied to one end of the back skid, wrapped around tree or pole, and then secured at the other end of the unit’s rear skid provides a great deal of stability in windy conditions.

PLACE HEAVY BLOCKS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE UNIT AND CONNECTED WITH A ROPE. This may be a solution in an open area with no other way to secure the unit. Place the block on the ground in the middle of the side of the unit, connect the rope to the block and place it over the top of the unit and connect the rope to the block on the ground in the middle of the other side of the unit.

With winds ranging from breezes to strong gusts and deadly winds, none of these strategies and techniques can ever be 100% effective but they represent some of the best techniques developed in our industry over the years. Some of you might recall the derecho, a widespread and destructive straight-line wind storm, that hit the U.S. Midwest last summer. This type of storm could damage portable restrooms no matter how they are secured. Consider these events more common to many PROs:

TORNADOES

Often, these deadly winds occur with little or no warning. Some areas of the country are more prone to tornadoes during certain times of the year, However, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), about 1,200 tornadoes are recorded annually and they can occur in all 50 states.

According to NOAA, the peak tornado season is early spring on the Gulf Coast, from May into June for the Texas-Oklahoma-Kansas area, and in June and July in the Northern Plains and the Upper Midwest.

PROs in these areas should consider some of the securing methods that were discussed above during their tornado season and rely less on more passive strategies.

HURRICANES

With advanced warnings, PROs have the objective of not only protecting their equipment in the field but also protecting and preparing their equipment in the yard for use in the aftermath of the hurricane.

FOR UNITS IN THE FIELD

- With the customer's permission, move and/or removing units in the field that may be highly susceptible to damage. This would include units in elevated areas such as on the top of hills or buildings. These units could cause damage when blown about. In addition, units in low lying areas or in other locations that would easily succumb to flood waters should be targeted for removal.

- Attempt to pump as many units as possible empty and place them "doors down" on the ground if no inside storage facility is available. If the doors on units can be held closed, this will make the unit less likely to be blown greater distances.

- For multiple units, pump empty and place together on the ground. If the units cannot be pumped, group them together with doors facing each other.

- If a unit can be locked on the job site by the customer, consider this option to make the unit more resistant to being blown wildly about.

- On construction sites with various pieces of large equipment that will not be moved in storm preparation, get permission to place your units between this equipment.

- For units already secured with stakes, ropes or other methods described above, attempt to have the doors locked either by your route service technician or by the customer.

FOR UNITS IN THE COMPANY YARD

- Arrange the units together in large blocks or cubes with all doors facing inward.

- If any trucks are to be parked outside, place the vehicles in front of the blocks of units. If possible, surround the units with vehicles. Restroom trailers, transport trailers and even trash containers can add some resistance to these tremendous storms.

- The more units that can be protected in the yard, the more units are available for use in the community after the hurricane has passed.

FINAL THOUGHTS

While Mother Nature is stronger than our equipment, we can attempt to mitigate potential damage to the equipment as well as damage to the surrounding area caused by the equipment. Try to be as proactive as possible. That is the best a PRO can do. ■

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Below: One of the barges on the Fox River in downtown Green Bay carries a Jim's Johns Satellite Industries restroom.

Barging AHEAD

Servicing floating restrooms in Wisconsin requires an innovative approach to customer service

By Ken Wysocky

THE TEAM

Based in New Franken, Wisconsin — located just northeast of Green Bay — Jim's John's is owned by Jim Jansen. He also owns a septic tank pumping company called Dyckesville Sanitation, which is based in nearby Dyckesville and managed by his son, Chris, his only employee.

COMPANY HISTORY

In 1997, Jansen was working as a salesman and supervisor/estimator for a local fabrication shop when he heard about a portable restroom company that was for sale. An entrepreneur at heart, he thought it might be a good way to earn a little extra money on weekends. "But it took off from there because I went farther out for customers than the original owner did," Jansen explains. "I tripled the company's service area almost right away."

Today, the company serves about a 75-mile radius around New Franken, which includes Brown and Kewaunee counties as well as part of Door County, a popular Wisconsin tourist destination. About 75% of its revenue comes from monthly rentals with special events supplying the balance, he says.

EQUIPMENT ROUND-UP

The company owns more than 400 restrooms. Most of them are from Satellite Industries, with the rest from Samson Industries and PolyJohn Enterprises. The company also owns nearly two dozen hand-wash stations built by The T.S.F. Company and Satellite. He uses Walex chemical products.

Below: This barge is processing materials in the bay of Green Bay as part of an 11-year dredging operation.



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Right: A typical riverside construction site setup in Green Bay features restrooms from Satellite Industries and a T.S.F. Company hand-wash station.

Below: Jansen moves Satellite Industries restrooms in the company yard using a Yanmar YL110 loader.

To service restrooms, the company relies on a locally fabricated 2004 Chevrolet 4500 with an 800-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater steel tank and Masport pump; and a 2004 Ford F-550 with a 400-gallon waste/200-gallon freshwater aluminum tank built out by Imperial Industries with a Masport pump. For pumping septic tanks, the company owns a 2015 Western Star truck equipped with a locally built 5,800-gallon steel tank and a National Vacuum Equipment vacuum pump.

THE MAIN EVENT

In 2009, contractors started a \$1 billion project to dredge a 13-mile stretch of the lower Fox River, from Green Bay to a dam located upstream, then recap portions of the river bottom with sand and gravel. The goal? Remove PCBs, a man-made chemical used for years in the papermaking industry before it was banned. During the recently completed 11-year project, contractors removed an estimated 5.4 million cubic yards of PCB-polluted sediment, which was dewatered, then taken to a special landfill.

Tetra Tech EC, the project's primary contractor, and J.F. Brennan, a subcontractor that did the actual dredging, hired Jim's Johns in 2009 to supply 12 restrooms for about a dozen barges doing dredging and related work. Jansen supplied the companies with new Tufway restrooms from Satellite Industries. A local fabricator outfitted the restrooms with special frames so a crane could lift them on and off the barges, Jansen says.

Jansen also supplied an additional 15 or so restrooms at other locations related to the project, including a temporary fabricating shop, on-site trailer offices and the dewatering facility. Servicing the roughly 27 restrooms and two hand-wash stations, located within about a 5-mile radius of each other, took about two hours once a week, he says.

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

The job posed one logistical problem: Jansen never knew exactly when the barges would come ashore so he could clean the restrooms. So rather than waiting for them to arrive, he proposed putting 12 clean restrooms at a designated spot along the river on a designated day every week.

That allowed the barges to come ashore during the designated day, offload a dirty restroom, load a clean restroom on-board and be on its way, all without Jansen having to waste time waiting.



"It's a very peaceful, rural area, which is what they wanted for their workers because they work 12-hour shifts and need a quiet spot to sleep. I found there was no ordinance against building a campground on my property, so I got on it right away."

JIM JANSEN

"Time is money," he says. "I didn't want to have to sit around and wait. Every Tuesday afternoon or Wednesday morning, I'd go to the drop-off site, clean the restrooms they dropped off and zip-tie the locks to indicate they were cleaned. Then I'd go and clean the other restrooms."

"It was a very unusual arrangement, but in the long run, it was a much more feasible and efficient way to do it," he continues. "They said it made a lot of sense and it worked out great, they loved it."

Jansen only charged the companies for 12 restrooms, not 24, because the arrangement potentially saved him hours and hours of waiting. "I can clean a lot of restrooms in that time that I'd otherwise spend waiting if something went wrong and it took the barges longer than expected to come ashore," he explains. "And giving them 12 free restrooms helped build a bond of trust."



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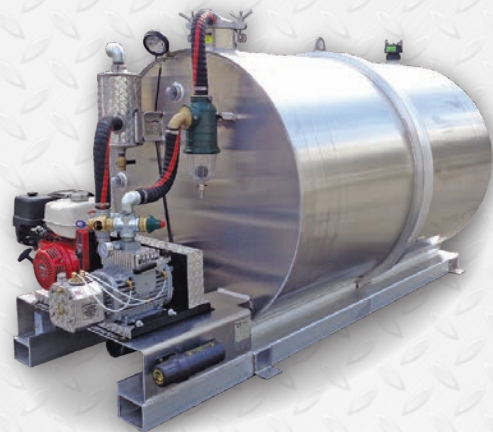
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Right: Jim Jansen spent \$20,000 to build a 12-site RV campground at his company headquarters for use by construction crews.

Below: Jansen dons gloves while preparing to pump the holding tank of a camper. The service truck is a Ford F-550 with a 400-gallon waste/200-gallon freshwater aluminum tank built out by Imperial Industries with a Masport pump.



“I can clean a lot of restrooms in that time that I’d otherwise spend waiting if something went wrong and it took the barges longer than expected to come ashore. And giving them 12 free restrooms helped build a bond of trust.”

JIM JANSEN



NEW REVENUE STREAM

The project also led Jansen into another role: campground operator. Shortly after the dredging project began, a local campground flooded and left dredging workers staying in campers stranded. That prompted officials from the companies to ask Jansen if he’d consider building a campground on the 10-acre site where his business is located.

“It’s a very peaceful, rural area, which is what they wanted for their workers because they work 12-hour shifts and need a quiet spot to sleep,” Jansen says. “I found there was no ordinance against building a campground on my property, so I got on it right away.”

In just two weeks, Jansen rounded up contractors that did the required site-prep work, drilled a well and ran water and electric power to 12 camping sites. “It went unbelievable quick,” he says. “And the customers were very grateful.” The total cost? About \$20,000, he says, noting it paid for itself in 1-1/2 years.

Now that the project has concluded, Jansen plans to rent campsites to construction workers and others that might need temporary lodging. “I’m not worried at all about it being empty,” he says. “Lots of people come here from out-of-state.”

KEYS TO SUCCESS

What made the project work? A strong commitment to customer service, Jansen says. “If they’d call for something, I responded right away,” he observes. “Sometimes they’d need another restroom in another location for a month or two, so I’d do it. We developed a good working relationship.” Developing a practical solution to the barge-arrival issue also helped, he adds, noting, “Sometimes it helps to think outside the box.” ■

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About the Author

Kate Zabriskie is president of Business Training Works Inc., a Maryland-based talent development firm. Reach her at www.businesstrainingworks.com.



Are Problems Brewing in the Family Business?

Long-running small family-run companies are to be applauded. But sometimes generational challenges threaten this wonderful institution.

By Kate Zabriskie

Anyone in a family business knows that according to many statistics, the chance of the business surviving declines with each handoff to the next generation. What causes the drop off? Among the myriad of reasons, times change, dedication levels vary, and talent isn't always genetic.

If you're in family business, do any of the following sound familiar?

- Granddaddy toiled day and night. He adored his work and never stopped with the new ideas. Most of his creations met with tremendous success. He just had a knack for knowing what the public wanted. My uncle, on the other hand, has practically run the place into the ground. He's got an idea a minute. Unfortunately, almost everything he dreams up is a dud.
- This place certainly has an us-versus-them feel. If you're family, you get away with murder. If you're not, the rules are the rules. I'm sick of it. The culture shifted when Jenny married Greg, and he started working here. I've dedicated years to this company, and it breaks my heart to see how an entitled spouse has practically ruined it. You think Jenny would know better.



Do you care more about the business or about your children having the opportunity to pursue their professional passions and goals? Yes, it's sad when after a lot of years the legacy stops, but it's sadder still when forced participation ruins something beyond the business.

- Since we were in the cradle, Mother has had us on a path to take over the reins. My brother and I know the business inside, outside and everywhere in between. Perhaps familiarity breeds contempt. Because as the years go by, I see my options slipping away. I'm only 23. Maybe I'll get the courage before the end of the season to tell my parents I'm leaving to go to law school.

Family dysfunction junction is no picnic. It's even worse when people's livelihoods are at stake. The longer any issues have gone unchecked, often the more severe they become. But there is good news, it's almost never too late to confront a problem.

DYSFUNCTION SYMPTOM NO. 1: The people currently in charge are running the business as usual but not innovating. Status quo will lead to hanging a going-out-of-business sign on the door.

CORRECTION STRATEGY: Not everyone is a driver, nor does just anybody have the creative spark to carry the torch when a dynamic owner steps down. Fortunately, inside this dark cloud of bad news hides a silver lining. Nothing mandates a company to home grow its top talent. If you're not suited to the top spot, hire it out. You won't look weak, you won't have to give up control of your legacy, and you'll look smart and humble as you position your organization for future success. Nervous about an outsider? There are many ways to get a fit right. Be specific about what you're looking for, focus on culture, and find someone who is good at the parts of the business where you don't excel.

DYSFUNCTION SYMPTOM NO. 2: The rules don't apply to workers the same way. Blood relatives and/or their spouses may take advantage of family membership, and it negatively impacts culture, morale and attitudes.

CORRECTION STRATEGY: Addressing this dysfunction requires some tough love and may hurt feelings. When you decide to address the problem, have your data ready, and come prepared with plenty of examples. Obviously, the confrontation conversation is easier if you have power. When you don't, your approach may need some adjustment.

No matter your version of the entitlement dysfunction, one factor is almost certain; this dysfunction is not going to self-correct. At some point you're going to have to address bad behavior.

DYSFUNCTION SYMPTOM NO. 3: Some of the family work on vacation and others vacation at work.

CORRECTION STRATEGY: Start by making rules and goals visible and measurable. State the obvious to ensure everyone knows what's expected. Then, review goals and any rule violations regularly. Sometimes additional structure and sunlight can go a long way toward correcting an imbalance. Of course, if that doesn't work, it may be time to talk about a pay-for-performance structure, a split of some sort, or even a buyout. When tackling this challenge, you need to consider your interactions outside the business. Do you still want to have Thanksgiving with these people? Regardless of your answer, the greater relationship ecosystem should inform your decisions.

DYSFUNCTION SYMPTOM NO. 4: The kids want to join the business but see it more as a meal ticket than a career move.

CORRECTION STRATEGY: Many families that have successfully passed the stewardship of their enterprise from one generation to the next know the value of putting people to work outside the business before they earn a spot on the inside. While nothing is wrong with a short summer stint or after-school job, if junior hasn't started as a full-time employee, consider creating an outside work requirement. If you adopt this strategy, not only will you get someone who has had to earn a paycheck without the cache of the family name, you will have someone who has seen something different that your way of doing business.

DYSFUNCTION SYMPTOM NO. 5: The next generation has little to no interest in the business.

CORRECTION STRATEGY: Sometimes it's best to hear "no" the first time. After all, do you care more about the business or about your children having the opportunity to pursue their professional passions and goals? Yes, it's sad when after a lot of years, the legacy stops, but it's sadder still when forced participation ruins something beyond the business. The bottom line: when your offspring want to jump ship, hear the message and let them pursue their own future.

If you've encountered a problem in the family business, you know firsthand that knots rarely untie themselves. In fact, many get tighter and bigger as time goes by. So, if you're dealing with one of the dysfunctions described above or something else, now's the time to start planning a correction strategy and setting a timetable to execute it. ■

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Sweet SUCCESS

The owners of Honey Huts Portables found a winning combination with measured expansion, exemplary service — and a bright yellow brand

By Peter Kenter



Honey Huts Portables Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

Owners: Shawn Hiscott; Glen MacDonald;
Paul MacMillan

Founded: 2000

Employees: 5

Services: Portable sanitation

Service Area: Greater Halifax area

Website: www.honeyhuts.ca

It's been 10 years since Shawn Hiscott and two business partners took ownership of Honey Huts Portables, a restroom company in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. By his own reckoning, they started off doing more things wrong than right. But after a rocky start, a focus on better hiring decisions, quality service and measured growth has helped the company to prosper.

The original plan to enter the portable sanitation industry was made — like many of the company's subsequent business decisions — during a friendly discussion following a game of gentleman's ice hockey.

"A portable restroom business in the area came up for sale in 2010," says Hiscott. "We liked the potential margins and thought we could build it up quickly."

They offered a bid, but the business was ultimately sold to a larger company. However, the friends saw another opportunity when Honey Huts came up for sale four months later.

"It was part of a construction equipment rental company," says Hiscott. "It was located a half hour outside of Halifax and servicing a rather rural area, but had no business in greater Halifax where we saw significant potential for growth."

The business assets included 67 restrooms, and a single vacuum truck. Honey Huts' existing client list included home and road builders with a few customers in the agriculture sector. Hiscott had cut his teeth in the construction industry and leveraged his construction connections to quickly build up the business.

MAKING GOOD CONNECTIONS

"A lot of PROs are owner-operators," he says. "They make connections on job sites. In the construction business, that means marketing themselves to site superintendents. In addition to supers, we also went straight to the presidents and regional vice presidents of contracting companies. Many of those people had



Far Left: Technician Doug Todd prepares to service restrooms from Satellite Industries and PolyJohn, while John Caines, senior service technician, looks on.

Left: The Honey Huts team includes, from left, John Caines, Paul MacMillan, Shawn Hiscott and Doug Todd.

Below: Technician Todd returns a suction hose to his service truck, which was built out by Vacutrax and utilizes a Wallenstein pump.

never been called by a PRO and they were quick to put us on their lists of preferred vendors.”

Within a short time, Honey Huts was generating significant business in greater Halifax. The company began buying new restroom units with bright yellow branding, but Hiscott admits the growth occurred faster than the company’s capability to deliver the service it hoped to provide.

“We made a lot of hiring mistakes in the early years,” he says. “You need great drivers and equipment operators, and people who have an ability to deliver quality service, and you need to pay enough to hire that talent.”

Early on, drivers often failed to arrive on time or do the scheduled work. They also damaged equipment with regularity. “By the end of 2011 we went through more transmissions and pumps than you could imagine,” Hiscott says. “We set a record I’m sure.”

With vacuum trucks offline, Honey Huts was often forced to rent trucks and strapped tanks and pumps to trailers, eating into profit margins. The company also pursued some nonconstruction contracts too aggressively, including events, resulting in further reductions in profitability.

RIGHTING THE SHIP

By 2014 one of the original partners sold his interests to Hiscott and Glen MacDonald, the remaining partner. The consolidation underscored the fact that their other business interests were straining the ability of either partner to devote enough time to Honey Huts to provide consistent oversight. That resulted in a search for a full-time general manager — who just happened to be the manager of the minor league hockey team Hiscott was coaching.

“Paul MacMillan was in industrial sales and had the personality and drive we were looking for,” says Hiscott. “He learned quickly and stepped up to his new position so well that within six months we offered him a partnership.”

Hiscott notes that the company had previously hired quickly and fired slowly. That HR policy was flipped on its head after MacMillan took charge, with the general manager filling in as a route driver between hires when necessary.

“We also became more rigorous about vehicle maintenance,” says Hiscott. “We created schedules, checklists, standard operating procedures and training protocols, and followed them rigorously.”

“We’re seeing more units ordered per site — both restrooms and hand-wash stations — and requests for increased levels of service. They’re focused on assuring their employees that they stand for their health and safety. Price has also become less of an issue.”

SHAWN HISCOTT





Left: A Dodge Ram 5500 from Vacutrix and carrying a Wallenstein pump is ready to deliver a pair of PolyJohn restrooms to a customer.

Below: John Caines pulls a water service hose to service a bank of restrooms. His service truck is from Vacutrix and carries a Wallenstein pump.

Honey Huts currently employs five people, including Mac-Millan, office manager Sue Porter and three drivers, with plans in place to hire a fourth.

AMASSING EQUIPMENT

The company offers 310 standard portable restroom units from Satellite Industries and PolyJohn Canada, 25 Poly-Lift units from PolyJohn, six elevator units from Satellite, and three transport trailers and three restroom trailers from McKee Technologies.

“We’re switching the portable restroom inventory to products from PolyJohn Canada, in part inspired by the declining value of the Canadian dollar,” says Hiscott. “They’re a good product, and they have a ready supply of the bright yellow units we’re using as part of Honey Huts branding.”

Honey Huts also provides 37 hand-wash stations from PolyJohn.

The vacuum truck fleet consists of four vehicles, all with Wallenstein pumps and steel tanks. Two Ram 5500s, a 2018 and a 2020, each provide 780 gallons waste/300 gallons freshwater and were built out by Vacutrix. A 2012 Ford F-550, also providing 780 gallons waste/300 gallons freshwater, was built by Satellite Industries. A 2014 Fuso with 360 gallons waste/180 gallons freshwater was assembled by Honey Huts.

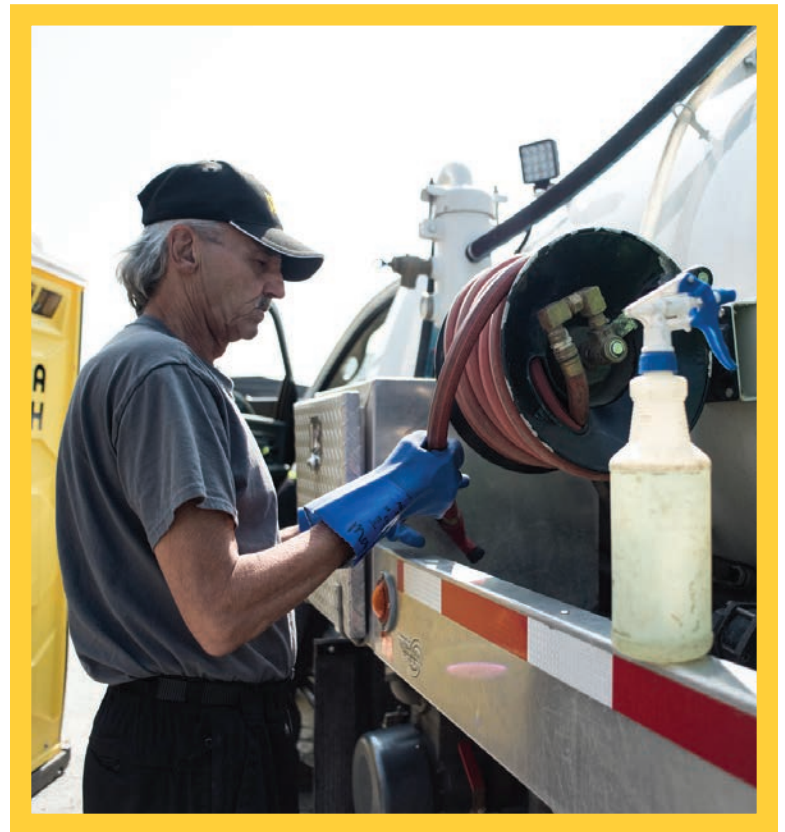
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Over the years, the company has doubled down on serving construction clients, which now comprise 95% of revenue.

“It’s often harder to regain the trust from clients you’ve lost than to win new ones,” says Hiscott. “But we’ve regained many of the construction clients we’d lost — in some cases they came back after six or seven years.”

“We made a lot of hiring mistakes in the early years. You need great drivers and equipment operators, and people who have an ability to deliver quality service, and you need to pay enough to hire that talent.”

SHAWN HISCOTT



Honey Huts occasionally bids on small one-off events, such as weddings, using its restroom trailers, but only when the event doesn’t conflict with serving core construction clients.

SELLING CLEANLINESS

“Initially, when we were pursuing more events, we were finding that we had to borrow units from construction sites that weren’t using them on the weekend and then rush them back on Sunday night or Monday morning, just before they were needed,” he says. “You can imagine the pressure on that schedule.”

Nova Scotia construction businesses have remained open as essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Service and cleanliness remain clients’ top concerns.

“We’re seeing more units ordered per site — both restrooms and hand-wash stations — and requests for increased levels of service,” says Hiscott.



Right: John Caines, left, and Paul MacMillan, general manager and partner, use an iPad to confirm bookings for restroom service.

“They’re focused on assuring their employees that they stand for their health and safety. Price has also become less of an issue. They’re not worried about the cost of an extra rental or an extra service charge on a \$20 million project if it helps ensure that the Department of Health is happy and that they remain open.”

The future of Honey Huts will rely on a continued focus on expanding its construction clientele. The company’s new venture, Privy Ad, aims to sell advertising placed inside restroom units targeting construction workers. “We’ve trialed it in our own restrooms and we’re now expanding the offering to PROs across Canada on a revenue-sharing basis,” Hiscott says.

KEEP IT GOING

The company is planning to move from a rented office and a leased yard to a fully owned yard and office in the same business park in 2021. The new garage will feature wash bays, allowing drivers to wash their trucks.

The partners are also on the lookout for a strategic acquisition somewhere in Atlantic Canada, provided the right opportunity presents itself.

For now, Honey Huts continues to work to achieve its unofficial motto: “We never want to hear from the customer.”

“When we started out we heard from them a lot,” says Hiscott. “Now we rarely hear from them at all. It’s a sign that we’re doing our jobs well.” ■

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FORGET WINTER COLD; HALIFAX WINDS ARE THE REAL PROBLEM

Shawn Hiscott hates the cold weather months in Halifax, Nova Scotia. But it’s strong ocean winds that really make life difficult for the co-owner of Honey Huts Portables.

“We get more wind than a lot of cities and it’s tough on our business,” he says. “Here on the ocean we also get the remnants of hurricanes and tropical storms. The wind up the Atlantic coast is strong enough that it can blow our units over, with the worst winds coming in from August through October.”

Construction clients are the backbone of the business, and Honey Huts takes a construction industry approach to the problem. Technicians drive iron rebar through unit bases to stake them to the ground where possible. Otherwise, they’re chained to adjacent structures.

“If we know heavy winds are coming over a weekend, we have a strong enough relationship with our clients that we can ask them to move heavy equipment around the units so they don’t blow over,” he says.

As the weather gets particularly cold, an injection of 20% methanol keeps freshwater tanks from freezing. Hiscott prefers premixed methanol because it doesn’t promote rust and allows drivers to concentrate on other tasks more important than calculating the strength of salt mixtures.

“Even though I don’t love the cold, I do like the winter for one reason,” he says. “Once ice and snow form around the restroom units they get frozen into place.”

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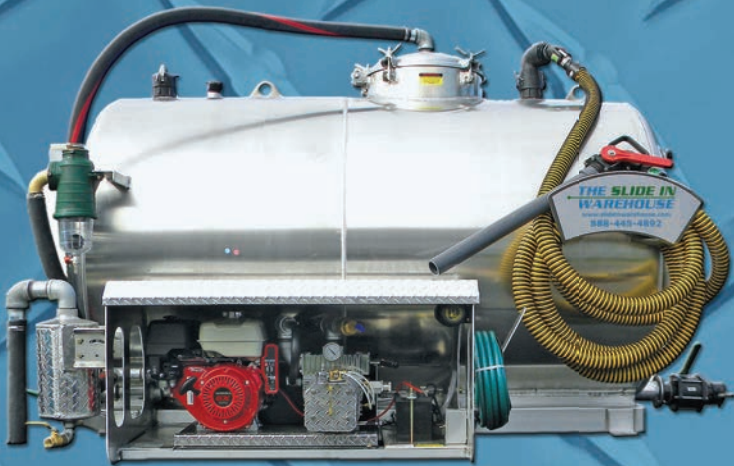
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Karleen Kos is executive director of the Portable Sanitation Association International. She may be reached at karleenk@psai.org or 952-854-8300.



Sharing Advice on Stopping Offensive Language in the Workplace

By Karleen Kos

Last summer when protests were happening in American cities, a portable sanitation company leader overheard a conversation outside her office window. It went something like this:

Employee: “Yeah, I know this sounds horrible but someone ought to shoot a few of ‘em (protesters). That’ll clear ‘em out.”

Manager: “No kidding. A little ammo therapy is what’s needed.”

At the PSAI, we often get calls from company leaders asking for guidance on how to approach a situation like this and just about any other topic that might arise while running a portable sanitation operation. Sometimes, the question turns into a roundtable discussion or a newsletter article. We take the tough questions, do the research and get back to you with information you can use. In the case of this scenario, here’s what we told the company leader who called us:

1. Don’t ignore offensive language just because no one seems to be offended. Maybe you think they were joking. Maybe nobody is bothered at all by what was said. That’s not the point when it comes to workplace requirements. What if they were just joking about a particular ethnic group or people of a certain sexual orientation? Even if you don’t employ anybody from those groups, it’s a bad idea to ignore the stories. You don’t know who is listening, or who has an LGBT relative, or who might assume tolerance of the joke means you would be biased in hiring. Would you want anyone talking this way in front of customers? It’s better to have a company code of conduct that spells out what you expect and then stick to it with everyone.

2. There’s company culture, and then there are lines that should not be crossed. Everyone is entitled to their opinions. No one is entitled to threaten to commit criminal acts or otherwise take actions that are harmful to others. These remarks should be addressed immediately, clearly prohibited and documented. In the scenario above, this is especially important since one of the people involved is a manager. It’s been a long time since anyone thought a joke about bombs on airplanes were funny. In today’s world, jokes about shooting people are similarly off limits. Period.

3. Free speech is not free at work. Inevitably, someone is likely to complain that you are infringing on his or her right to free speech. The Constitution prohibits the government from shutting down free speech, but your company is not the government. There is no right to free speech at work. Company leaders get to decide how much talk about politics, current events, and other sensitive topics to allow on company time. Here’s another consideration: do you want customers whose views may differ? If so, you may find it best to address what is acceptable in your code of conduct and make it clear the code applies both on and off the yard.

4. You have a legal responsibility to protect employees from a “hostile and offensive” work environment. Even if almost everyone at your company agrees on politics, protesters, and whether or not such-and-such is real or a hoax, there’s always the possibility someone sees it differently. As long as dissenting employees are doing their jobs as you have legally defined the duties, they are entitled to a work environment free of harassment or intimidation. Be sure you are not accepting offensive jokes, insults, name-calling, ridicule or mockery in the workplace. Allowing this sort of “humor” can backfire by costing you money dealing with U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEO) complaints. They can also result in bad reviews on sites like Indeed or Glassdoor that turn off potential employees.

Take action. Whether someone is threatening to shoot people, not minding if others shoot people, or just shooting off their mouth, these situations do not take care of themselves. You need to lead. In the case of illegal or threatening behavior, the action you take could save lives. In the case of inappropriate comments, stepping up and actively supervising will help create a positive culture that attracts better employees, more customers, and discourages costly complaints or lawsuits.

Often, the best defense is a good offense. Have a code of conduct, model the attitudes you want to see, talk about expectations in team meetings, and reward the best behavior. It will pay off in the end. And so will a PSAI membership. ■

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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Surco provides new sanitizer products to fill demand caused by the pandemic

By Craig Mandli

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit last spring, hand sanitizers became essential to help prevent the spread of the virus when handwashing was not an option. However, as the pandemic continued, sanitizers from household brands sold out even before they hit the shelves. The demand vastly outweighed the supply, causing companies all over the country to spring into action to meet the supply shortage. Surco Portable Sanitation Products quickly offered a new Pure Care hand sanitizer line under their Air-Scent International brand.

“At the time of the pandemic outbreak, we immediately went through the government approval process to produce sanitizer for many industries,” says Tonya Ray, account manager for Surco Portable Sanitation Products. “Pure Care kills bacteria and viruses, and prevents spread of viruses by working immediately to kill microorganisms. It is available in bulk to refill just about any dispenser or pump.”

If you can’t wash your hands properly with soap and water, you need hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. FDA-compliant Pure Care hand sanitizer comes in spray, gel and foaming formulations, all of which exceed the 60% alcohol threshold. The strongest variety, Stat80, is an 80% alcohol spray solution, while IPA70 is a 70% alcohol gel solution. Stat62 is a 62% alcohol gel solution, while the foaming variety is a 62% alcohol solution.

All are available in a variety of fragrances, and contain a topical antiseptic that reduces germs, viruses and bacteria that can cause disease. They are available in 1-gallon jugs, 5-gallon buckets, 55-gallon drums and 275-gallon totes. According to Ray, the products are offered in bulk to make refilling dispensers easy and for repackaging to provide a revenue generation opportunity for PROs. The response from the field has also been positive, she says.

“We’ve gotten excellent feedback so far,” Ray says. “Many large portable restroom operators tried it in a smaller amount at first, and later ordered it in drums and totes. We’ve gotten lots of compliments on the fragrance.” **800-556-0111; www.airscent.com**

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