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BUILT FROM SCRATCH

His Motto for Restroom Success:
"Good, Happy Employees Equal Good Customers"

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Lights, Camera, Action!

Expanding into the film and television industry has forever changed the business model for Canada's Gotta Go Portable Toilet & Septic service

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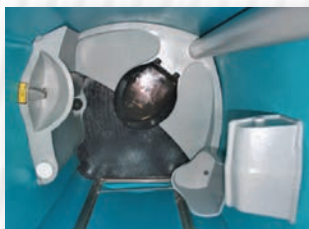
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By Jim Kneiszel

Thinking Outside the Box



You're a whiz at placing and servicing portable restrooms at events and construction sites, but where else can you look for new pumping opportunities?

The topic for this month's At Your Service column by Jeff and Terri Wigley was inspired by years of conversations I've had with PROs wondering about unusual or nontraditional pumping jobs. I have always had the sense that service providers can find revenue opportunities beyond pumping their own restrooms if they are willing and ready to step outside of that comfort zone.

Many of the queries I've had from PROs over the years relate somehow to campground work, cleaning out RV holding tanks and vault toilets at private camping resorts or public county, state or national parks. However, when I asked Jeff and Terri to share their experiences with out-of-the-ordinary service work as longtime owners of an Atlanta portable sanitation company, the variety of examples both surprised and delighted me.

As you peruse the stories in this issue, don't miss their column titled *Planes, Trains and Pontoon Boats*, in which the Wigleys detail how they answered usual pumping customer requests and share their advice on how to take on this new and exciting work while still ensuring profitability. Perhaps the best lesson to learn from their experiences is that a PRO has to carefully account for unanticipated time and materials expenses when negotiating fees for unfamiliar types of work.

I think it's fair to use the word "exciting" when talking about some of these unusual jobs. Among other things, the Wigleys' service technicians' routine was interrupted frequently when they pumped airplane waste tanks at a military base, and never more than when they were tasked with pumping the tank on Air Force One during a presidential visit. As you'll read, the workers spent the day at the military base airport waiting to pump the famous airplane, only to be told their services weren't required after all.

CAMPING ON THE UPSWING

You may not be called on to pump waste for the leader of the free world, but the odds are good that you may be offered work pumping an RV tank at some point in time. And this specialty could become more lucrative in the future. That's because two factors are pointing to an explosion of interest in RV and travel trailer camping these days.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered the way Americans are choosing to travel. The past year saw a plunge in airline travel, fears of staying in hotels and motels, and folks looking for socially distanced ways to enjoy vacations. Camper sales went through the roof, and campground bookings and state park usage skyrocketed. Suddenly there is a stepped-up demand for RV pumping.

But if and when COVID is controlled, the trend toward camping travel will continue on. Why? Because baby boomers are retiring at a record pace, and many of them want to enjoy the great outdoors. What better way is there to travel on a fixed retirement income than pulling your motel behind you? I believe you can count on the demand growing, and RV pumping could develop into a mainstay service for many restroom contractors.

Your success with campground pumping may vary depending on the local market potential. PROs located near a popular state or national park may find a lot more opportunities to provide these services. For example, if you're a short drive from Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon, you are surrounded by many public and private campgrounds that remain crowded for much of the year. Or if you are situated near a popular

Campgrounds can be crowded places with lots of twists and turns in the access roads to pinch traffic flow. Pay attention to where you pull over for service, look for a straight shot between your truck and the RV holding tank to maintain the best suction power.



PROs are always on the lookout for new ways to build revenue. What sort of nontraditional pumping work do you perform? Send me the details at editor@promonthly.com and I will share them with readers in a future issue.

snowbird destination in Arizona or Florida, for example, you might be able to keep a route driver busy all winter moving from campsite to campsite and rarely having to deploy a restroom from your inventory.

TOP TIPS

As the Wigleys explain, you have to consider what accessories are needed for each atypical service job. Your crew also needs to develop expertise in each area to perform the work safely and efficiently. In a May issue of our sister publication, *Pumper*, writer Mary Shafer talked to two California women who rent out RVs to tourists and have incorporated a pumping service into their business. Daniella and Angel Talamantes have learned by trial and error the best practices for pumping RVs. Check out *Pumper* to read all the details.

But I'd like to share a few of their helpful tips for campground pumping:

POSITION YOUR RIG WISELY

Campgrounds can be crowded places with lots of twists and turns in the access roads to pinch traffic flow. Pay attention to where you pull over for service, look for a straight shot between your truck and the RV holding tank to maintain the best suction power. Use your emergency flashers liberally and be prepared for an occasional impatient camper who wants to get around you.

WORK QUICKLY

The more you pump campers, the more efficient you will become at adjusting to different RV configurations and workarounds. Make it your goal to get in and out of each campsite quickly to both avoid issues with campground traffic flow and to ensure you can make a profit on each pumping. But also remember how important it is to work safely in a busy environment with lots of children running around.

DEVELOP A SERVICE SYSTEM

The Talamantes' hand out bright yellow-orange envelopes with instructions for campers. Those who want a pumpout that day leave cash in the envelope and tack it to the campsite number post. Then it's easy for the PRO to spot the sites that need service, and the camper doesn't have to wait for the service provider to show up on their rounds.

PROVIDE PROOF OF PUMPING

The Talamantes' say RV holding tank level sensors are notoriously inaccurate. When scum builds up in the tanks, the sensors will often indicate tanks remain full after pumping. So they use a clear hose connector so they can watch the contents evacuate into their vacuum tank and show when all the waste is removed from the holding tank.

CRUSHED RV TANKS MAY BE A MYTH

You hear stories about RV blackwater or graywater tanks collapsing when suction is applied from the PRO vacuum tank. Daniella and Angel Talamantes have never seen this or heard of it happening to another pumper. If it has happened, it was likely a result of applying high vacuum to a holding tank with a clogged vent stack, they say.

GETTING STARTED

We're in the height of summer travel and camping season nationwide. If you haven't already, it might be a good time to make connections with your local campground owners or park managers. They may need your help right about now. And while you're checking in, let them know you also have portable restrooms and hand-wash stations available and ready to go. ■



We Want to Tell Your Special Event Story

With COVID-19 vaccinations well underway and crowd restrictions being lifted this summer, we want to celebrate the reopening of 2021 special event work in a big way. If you are serving a large or noteworthy event this summer or fall, drop us a line at editor@promonthly.com and tell us about it. After more than a year of not being able to cover PROs serving special events, we are looking to highlight a number of companies returning to normal service with fairs, festivals and other outdoor events. We'll send out a photographer to capture your crew hard at work and then promote your great local events through our On Location feature.

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USE CAUTION

Boat Landings Pose Fishy Problems for PROs

It's not uncommon to find portable restrooms at public boat landings; it's also not uncommon for those units to be misused as trash cans. Read this exclusive online article for tips and tricks to avoid a fish-guts-related headache.

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By Jeff and Terri Wigley

Planes, Trains and Pontoon Boats

You service portable restrooms every day, but don't forget the nontraditional pumping jobs that can boost revenue and lead to more restroom placements

QUESTION: In addition to recreational vehicles, what other types of specialized equipment can PROs pump and service?

ANSWER: In our career, we serviced RVs, military airplanes, railroad repair crew sleeping quarters and a small river touring boat!

Despite a variety of specialized customer equipment, we maintained a common strategy in determining if we could accommodate these customer inquiries.

OUR POLICY WAS:

Can we easily, safely and profitably provide service in these unique situations?

OUR STRATEGY WAS:

To investigate, anticipate and communicate with the potential customer.

GOAL

We will refer to the examples listed above to illustrate how we used our policy and our strategy in order to provide top-notch service to unique customer needs. It is our hope that you can use this information to explore new areas in which you can expand your range of services.

MILITARY AIRPLANES

As with most of these "unique situations," the potential customer usually initiates the communication. In our case, a competitor had provided this service to the local military air base for several years but had recently ceased operations. We had never considered the service need, but we were immediately interested.

The air base stated quite clearly upfront that this was a contracted service that renewed every three years. We asked for an informational onsite meeting. At this meeting we learned how to service these military C-130 cargo planes and the military protocol that accompanied the service:

1. We needed to purchase a unique piece of equipment to open the waste discharge valve on the plane. This device was Y-shaped and had a

The actual service of the specialized equipment was quite easy. The procedures and the details, however, made the situation more complex. After careful study and communication with the customer, the resulting contract was beneficial to our company

plunger on one branch of the Y that opened the valve on the side of the plane, while the other branch channeled the waste into a 55-gallon sturdy plastic garbage can that we would pump out as we would normally pump out a unit or a holding tank. The specialized Y-shaped component cost roughly \$600, and we also had to provide the 55-gallon commercial-grade plastic garbage can.

2. Our service truck was inspected at the front gate of the base to check for leaks of any kind (oil, water, waste, etc.). The driver was required to be in an "identifying" company uniform or shirt. Paperwork such as the Material Safety Data Sheets and the location of where the waste would be disposed was required, whether asked to be presented or not.
3. Military police (MP) would escort our service truck throughout the time it was on the base property.
4. Prior to entering the gate to the runway, as well as once on the runway itself, the route service tech and the MP would inspect the area for foreign object debris and remove these items if found. Items such as small pebbles lodged in the tires of the service truck that could be dislodged in the runway area were of prime concern. Once again, a check for any leaks or unsecured equipment was performed.
5. The MP was required to stand by and watch the service take place.
6. Once completed, the service vehicle was escorted to the front gate.

As a PRO, the actual service of the airplane was quite easy. Using the Y-shaped plunger and drain, no more than 20 gallons of waste drained into the 55-gallon trash can where it was pumped out. We then handed

our bucket with 3 gallons of water and a double charge of blue deodorizer to a soldier (when available) inside the plane who poured the mixture into the toilet.

The “investigate” portion of our visit was thorough and complete. The “anticipate” and “communicate” pieces of our conversation with the customer revealed several other considerations:

1. We were expected to provide service within 24 hours of notification by the base operations staff.
2. Our questioning of the customer revealed that, at times, it was possible that our route service driver would be in a “holding pattern” at the entrance to the runway due to the takeoff or landing of aircraft. We were steadfast in our desire to include language in the contract to account for longer than reasonable delays in the service process of the plane(s). “Time is money,” and we were able to gain agreement through the final contract that delays more than 15 minutes would incur an additional charge.
3. “Emergency charges” was another subject we inquired about during our investigation of this customer’s needs. Again, we agreed upon a significant charge for such emergencies and, in our many years of serving the air base, we experienced very few emergency calls.

We were awarded the contract with the pricing that we felt covered our costs and the special equipment that we had to purchase. We were able to view the previous contract and discovered that our prices were somewhat higher and included extra charges for delays and emergency situations. Since the contract was for three years, we anticipated increased costs of doing business during this time.

We use this as an example where the actual service of the specialized equipment was quite easy. The procedures and the details, however, made the situation more complex. After careful study and communication with the customer, the resulting contract was beneficial to our company and resulted in an ongoing relationship with this base for many years. In fact, both the U.S. Navy Blue Angels and the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds held airshows at this base whereby our company was also awarded the business for these large special events.

TRAIN CARS FOR REPAIR CREW PERSONNEL

Like the military planes, the actual service of this specialized equipment is relatively easy, but logistics dictate the cost to the customer. The train line sends out crews to work for periods of time on repairing various aspects of the track. We basically serviced a 200-gallon holding tank under the train car that housed the repair crew. The customer required that the service be completed during the day while the crew was “working on the railroad.” A contract would be involved.

We requested easy access to the railcar to be serviced. Supplies, vehicle and other impediments needed to be clear in the service area.

Our investigation revealed that a double hose made it easier to reach the tank due to its position under the car. We needed no other additional equipment to complete this service.

Communication with the customer resulted in a minimum three-day advance notification of impending service. As with the planes, we also negotiated emergency charges. These were never used in our time with this

customer. Again, as with the planes, we received additional unit revenue as portable restrooms were often requested at certain points along the local rail line for repair crew use during the day.

Here is another example of specialized equipment that is easy to service with the only addition being that of a double hose. While we serviced actual train cars, we also obtained unit revenue as an additional benefit.

SMALL RIVER TOURING BOAT

We received this request from the customer directly. This was not a contract situation as previously described with the planes and the trains. In fact, the customer was just beginning this endeavor and had converted a large pontoon boat into a touring craft by adding additional seating with a small restroom below the main deck. There was a 150-gallon holding tank attached to the toilet. From a PRO’s perspective, there was a portable restroom unit draining into a small holding tank.

On our mandatory site visit prior to any agreement on potential service, we investigated and inquired as to the requirements needed to service this holding tank. We determined, with agreement from the customer:

Service could not take place at the dock where the boat would be positioned for boarding by the 20 or so passengers on any tour during summer operation. With the length of the long gangway and then the platform adjacent to the boat, at least three of our 20-foot vacuum hoses would be needed and the pressure would be extremely weak.

Given this fact, the customer related that he owned a private area a short distance away where the boat was moored during the week when not in use for these weekend excursions. Investigation at this site revealed that it was easily accessible via a double hose and that the service truck could safely park on a level concrete pad adjacent to the boat. Easy access to the boat and the tank were possible from this point.

The boat’s small holding tank needed service any time during the week from Monday to Thursday. To control odor, we assigned this service to a Monday route.

One final consideration that we presented the customer was access to the boat. A locked gate surrounded this area. We recommended that a combination lock replace the key lock and the customer agreed. With the lock code, we could then provide the service that was needed at our convenience without delay. The customer agreed to our putting one of our company decals inside the restroom on the boat, and we were confident that we received some additional business from the boat’s customers. We enjoyed a two-year relationship with this customer before he closed the operation.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Consider providing service to customers who present unique requirements. Often the actual service of the equipment is relatively easy and quite sanitary. As more customers approach your company about these special needs, you will become proficient in meeting these requirements. As your experience grows, consider proactively approaching other potential customers such as RV parks, small boat marinas and military facilities.

If it is easy, safe and profitable after you have investigated and communicated with the potential customer, accept the opportunity. Many times, the exposure you receive and the business relationships you establish will add even more to your bottom line. ■

TAKE 5... with Hawk Disposal

Right: Fernando Garza, owner, is surrounded by Armal restrooms in the Hawk Disposal yard. (Photos by Francisco Leal)

Fernando Garza recalls clearly when he decided to open his own portable restroom business: It was in May of 2014. He was working as the operations manager for a portable restroom operator, and he had just asked for a raise. He got a raise, but it was only \$5 a week. He realized that his future with this employer was not what he had hoped for, so he quit and started a new company, Hawk Disposal in McAllen, Texas.

He started on a shoestring budget, maxing out a credit card to buy 16 blue Armal Wave restrooms and a 400-gallon vacuum tank. He also bought two trailers on credit, one to haul the vacuum tank and one to haul four restrooms. He used savings for operating capital and started making calls at local construction sites.

After assembling the restroom units himself, he would haul the restroom trailer with his 1999 Ford F-150 pickup. When he needed to service units, he would unhitch the restroom trailer and hitch up the vacuum tank trailer.

Now the business has grown to 1,130 portable restrooms (all of them blue Armal Wave units), about 50 Armal hand-wash sinks, four trucks, three trailers and 10 employees. The trucks are all Ford F-450s — a 2016, a 2017, a 2018 and a 2019 — each bought new. Garza and his crew outfitted the trucks with 600-gallon (400 waste/200 freshwater) aluminum tanks with Condé pumps purchased from Progress Tank.

Garza still has the original Big Tex Trailer Mfg. trailers he bought to start with, but he also has a 10-unit Big Tex trailer. The Hawk Disposal office has always been in McAllen, but his original storage yard was in Roma about 50 miles away. He recently purchased a storage yard in Mission, which is just outside of McAllen. The company serves the U.S. side of the Rio Grande Valley from Roma to Brownsville, about 50 miles down the valley from McAllen.

Garza, 36, was born in Mexico but went to high school in Roma and attended the University of Texas-Pan American in Edinburg, now known as University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Before he started working in the portable restroom business, he worked on his parents' ranch in Mexico and did other agricultural work. He visits his parents on their ranch a couple of weekends a month.

Hawk Disposal still focuses its business on serving construction. "It's booming here in the Rio Grande Valley," Garza says. "There is enough work for everybody."



BUILT FROM SCRATCH

His Motto for Restroom Success:
"Good, Happy Employees Equal Good Customers"

By Steve Lund

EXPLORE FIVE ISSUES THAT AFFECT HAWK DISPOSAL'S PORTABLE SANITATION BUSINESS:

1 BEATING THE HEAT

McAllen is known for its sweltering hot summers, and that creates some problems for portable restroom operators. "The water evaporates too quickly," Garza says. In the summer, his crew typically puts 7-10 gallons of water in a unit when setting it up instead of the usual 5. Deodorants still work fine, despite the heat, he says. He uses Walex Products deodorants. The other way his employees deal with the heat, he says, is to start work early. His crews start at 4 a.m. during the summer and knock off around 4 p.m.

(continued)



Happy



4th
OF JULY



LET THE EVENT SEASON BEGIN!



Above: The crew at Hawk Disposal includes, from left, Sergio Rodriguez, Francisco Garcia Jr., Jesse Dorsett, Francisco Garcia Sr., Aldo de Leon, Fernando Garza and Nora Hernandez.



Jesse Dorsett, technician, secures restrooms to a Big Tex trailer for delivery.

2 KEEPING UP WITH THE BOOM

There has been a residential construction boom in the Rio Grande Valley, so portable restrooms are in demand at construction sites. That has always been Hawk Disposal's niche. "I more or less monitor how much inventory we have, and we've been able to keep up with it," he says. "Hopefully, the bubble doesn't burst any time soon."

Hawk Disposal has been steadily adding to its inventory, including buying 130 more units in January of this year. Most of his customers want once-a-week service on the units, but he has a few that require twice a week and even three times a week. His crew services the twice-a-week customers on Tuesdays and Thursdays and the three-time customers on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

3 STICKING TO CONSTRUCTION WORK

Hawk Disposal doesn't actively seek special-event work. "If they call us, we will come, but I don't look for special events," Garza says. "I like to rest the guys on the weekend." If Hawk Disposal expands into other areas, it is most likely to be septic pumping and grease trap service, he says, although he is also considering adding roll-off containers to his rental inventory. He has been looking for a larger property for his work yard to possibly accommodate the roll-off equipment. If he expands his territory, Garza says he would consider going toward Corpus Christi.



“It’s booming here in the Rio Grande Valley. There is enough work for everybody.”

FERNANDO GARZA

Below: Francisco Garcia Sr., technician, wipes down a restroom door during a service call.



4 **MARKETING WITH A PERSONAL TOUCH**

Garza’s marketing has been mainly based on his personal touch since the very beginning when he approached construction sites without restrooms. “I just went to construction sites that didn’t have any restrooms onsite, ones that were starting the first phase of construction,” Garza says. “I had the restrooms with me; they would give me payment with a credit card, and I would drop it off at the site. I started making sales the first week. I would service units rented on Monday and Tuesday, then use Wednesday, Thursday and Friday to visit potential customers. I kept doing that until the week was full and I needed help servicing units. Then I started to focus more on the rentals and building relationships with my clients.”

Knocking on doors at new construction sites is still part of his marketing plan, but he also has a website that he designed himself, and he spends a little bit of money on Google ads. “We don’t have to do too much advertising,” Garza says. “Our marketing is basically just me calling on customers. I’m knocking on doors every day.”

MORE INFO

Armal, Inc.
866-873-7796
www.armal.biz
See ad, page 21

Big Tex Trailers
903-575-0300
www.bigtextrailers.com

Conde/Westmoor
800-367-0972
www.westmoortd.com

Garsite/Progress, LLC
800-467-5600
www.progresstank.com

Walex Products Company
800-388-3155
www.walex.com
See ad, page 11

Below: Technicians Jesse Dorsett, from left, Francisco Garcia Sr., and Francisco Garcia Jr. unload Armal restrooms at a work site. The trailer is from Big Tex Trailer Mfg.



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5 WORKING HARD IS THE KEY

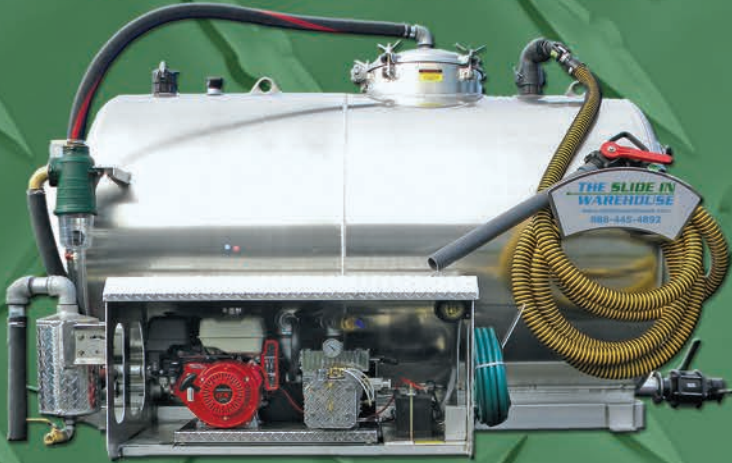
To Garza, there's no great secret to giving good service and being successful in the portable restroom business. He thinks it's all about working hard and putting the customers and employees first. One of his mottoes is, "Good, happy employees equal good customers."

His advice to anyone who wants to follow in his path is, "Work Hard and don't give up. Just keep working, everything will work out in the end." ■



Above: Francisco Garcia Sr., technician, rinses dust off Armal restrooms parked in the Hawk Disposal yard.

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So You Want to Land the Big Fish Event or Construction Client?

Follow these strategies in the chase for a mega-sized customer that will alter the course of your portable sanitation company forever

By Jill Johnson

A big fish is anyone who is of a higher stature than you normally play with, and if you land them, it will move you into a whole new level of clientele. They may be spending bigger money and as a result, they will expect that you have the professionalism to satisfy their needs. Yet big fish – in your case, perhaps those hosting a large special event in need of portable sanitation — have so many people who want to work with them that they are often even more demanding than most people anticipate.

So how do you manage a big fish sale? Keep in mind that this is often going to be a much more complex sale than your typical restroom customer. Big fish sales are rarely rapid, unless there is an exceptionally dire situation and they know you are the one they need to help them solve it.

In big fish selling, there are typically many decision influencers working behind the scenes trying to bring in their own vendors. Always remember your prospect is also dealing with an internal power structure. Be on the lookout for those people on the inside of your prospect’s organization who may help you better understand what it will take to close the deal. They may be able to give you the fundamental insight that will help you reel the big fish in to close the deal.

Most importantly, in any complex sales situation with a big fish prospect, your primary goal is to keep moving the ball forward toward an agreement on a deal that works for you both. The ultimate goal is to close the deal. If both goals are met, you need to celebrate your win.

WHAT THEY WANT

Remember, at its core a big fish sale is just like any other sale. This is always about the client. Keep your focus on that. It is all about their needs, their desires and their problems. Focus on how working with you will solve their critical issues within a budget amount that works for you both.

Pay attention to media reports involving the big fish. Today you can access print and television media interviews easily. But don’t forget to access other information such as interviews with industry publications or podcasts where they have been a guest. All of this insight is essential to your understanding the nuances of how to best position your products or services to meet their unique needs.

Often big fish want to test you first with a something that is a smaller part of your overall proposal. Frankly, getting the smaller first sale is often the tipping point that gets you the bigger deal and longer-term money. If you

This is always about the client. Keep your focus on that. It is all about their needs, their desires and their problems. Focus on how working with you will solve their critical issues within a budget.

can, break your proposal down into several component parts or additional optional services. Give them choices in how to work with you.

PREPARE AND PRESENT

When you are selling as part of a team, it is vital for both of you be in the same game. Use your time wisely to prepare while you are in the car driving to the meeting or preparing to go on Zoom. Determine who needs to reinforce what message and when it will be key to tag team to reinforce your potential value to the client. Think about how you will respond to objections and who will handle it.

It is often extremely intimidating to try selling to a big fish. Look for ways to give yourself a mental boost to stay grounded in the moment when you are up close and personal. This is especially helpful if they get terse with their tone, questions or response to your pitch.

Big fish are extremely pressed for time and they do not have the time to care about your feelings. Take care of yourself. Reach out to a trusted friend and ask for a pep talk before you pitch. Write a note to yourself that only you can see with three or four phrases. These should be positive in nature and serve as reminders to you. A few examples of good reminder notes are:

1. THEY ALREADY LIKE YOU (OR YOU WOULD NOT BE IN THE ROOM).
2. THEY WANT TO WORK WITH YOU SOMEDAY EVEN IF TODAY IS NOT YOUR DAY.
3. BREATHE!

ENJOY THE WIN

When the day comes and the big fish finally says “yes,” be sure to do your scream and happy dance — just don’t do it in front of them! You do not want them to know that you cannot believe you finally got this major job. You want them to only think of you as belonging in the room — not that it might be the first time you ever were there! ■



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Below: The service crew at Gotta Go includes, from left, Rob McKay, Marc Lamarche, Jay Nosaty, Ken Novotny, Taylor Christian, Braden Leost and Donald Malko. (Photos by Joel Boily)



LIGHTS, CAMERA,



Gotta Go Portable Toilet & Septic Tank Pumping Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Owner: Ken Novotny

Founded: 2003

Employees: 7

Services: Portable sanitation for construction; entertainment industry, weddings and events

Service Area: 50-mile radius of Winnipeg

Website: www.gottagoportabletoiletrentals

When Ken Novotny founded his portable restroom business in 2003, he was wary of becoming too big to maintain a reputation for good service. In 2021, Gotta Go Portable Toilet & Septic Tank Pumping of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, has more than doubled in size and expanded beyond construction customers to serve the province’s film industry. His strategy for maintaining service? Knowing how to share the workload with family members, including his wife, Lois, and their daughter Lindsey Greig, who is playing an increasingly important role in the company.

PRO last visited Gotta Go in 2010, seven years after Novotny had leveraged a summer stint with a friend’s portable sanitation company and a government loan program to launch the business that freed him from the cyclic unemployment of working at a bus manufacturing plant. Starting with

about 100 restrooms, he quickly found clients in the local construction industry and servicing area special events, ramping up to 330 units.

However, a friend of Novotny’s, Brent Yorke, who works in transportation services for the film and television industry, insisted he investigate that sector.

“In 2012, I spoke to John Mysyk, a film industry transportation coordinator, who came by the shop, looked at the units we had for rent and started using us immediately,” Novotny says. “It changed the company forever.”

Today, Novotny is 56 years old and Gotta Go employs seven people, including Novotny’s wife and daughter. The company fields more than 800 restrooms, adding 150 units in 2020 alone.

The restrooms are all supplied by PolyJohn Canada and Satellite Industries of which about 30 are fully accessible. The company owns 14 re-



ACTION!

Expanding into the film and television industry has forever changed the business model for Canada's Gotta Go Portable Toilet & Septic service

By Peter Kenter

"We're all here to do a job. If we don't have a lot to say to each other, it's because we're providing the service we promise."

KEN NOVOTNY

stroom trailers, including self-built units and others purchased from Rich Specialty Trailers, NuConcepts and Comforts of Home Services. The company offers 125 hand-wash stations from PolyJohn Canada.

Gotta Go operates 10 vacuum trucks, most featuring Wallenstein and Jupop (Chandler Equipment) pumps.

Eight are Fords, ranging from 1999 to 2014 and carrying 720-gallon waste/360-gallons freshwater tanks. Tanks are made of steel, stainless steel and aluminum. Seven are F-550s, and two feature flat decks, allowing one to transport 10 restrooms plus another six. An F-450 features a slide-in Satellite Vacuum Trucks tank. Gotta Go built out all but two of the Fords, installing some used tanks and some new tanks supplied by Vacutrux. A 1999 F-550

was built out by Keith Huber (Hol-Mac), while the 2006 F-550 was built out by Lane's Vacuum Tank with a Moro pump.

A 2006 Chevrolet 2500 features a 360-gallon waste/180-gallon freshwater slide-in tank from Best Enterprises and a Condé pump. A 2003 International 4400 is outfitted with a 2,400-gallon steel tank. Another half-dozen Chevrolet and GMC half-tons with extended cabs are used to haul VIP restroom trailers and light towers.

About 35% of the business is now devoted to the entertainment industry, although construction remains the company's primary focus. However, as a result of COVID-19, construction clients have been asking for more units and more frequent service, providing additional revenue.

Gotta Go's wedding and event schedule has been heavily cut back during the pandemic, but the company has previously served area events including the River Cities Dragon Boat Festival in Winnipeg, and carnivals for Wonder Shows, Select Shows and Canucks, amusement companies which travel Manitoba to the Ontario border from spring to fall. Most of these events call for between 30 and 50 restrooms. Prior to the pandemic, the company serviced between 100 and 150 weddings per year. A small sideline business involves pumping out recreational vehicles.



Left: Ken Novotny, owner, prepares to service a restroom trailer unit on location.

Below: Ken Novotny, left, and Donald Malko, are shown in the company yard. Gotta Go has 14 restroom trailers, including self-built units and those from Rich Specialty Trailers, NuConcepts and Comforts of Home Services. The service truck fleet is a combination of units with vacuum units from Satellite Vacuum Trucks, Vacutrux, Keith Huber (Hol-Mac), Best Enterprises and Lane's Vacuum Tanks and pumps from Wallenstein, Jurop and Condé.



Novotny ascribes company growth to providing top notch service to clients. “That kind of growth creeps up on you,” he says, “but you can’t take your business relationships and the type of service they expect for granted. It needs to be the same or better.”

For example, any client who calls before noon will still receive a portable restroom delivery that same day.

Balancing short-term event contracts with middle-term film and long-term construction contracts requires discipline. It’s a matter of knowing how to delegate responsibilities.

Novotny now manages the film work, while Greig handles incoming calls and construction contracts. They work together on events, dividing up the contracts between them. Lois Novotny handles other administrative tasks, including paperwork and delivering restrooms for film industry clients.

Winnipeg has a population of about 750,000. Gotta Go’s service area ranges to roughly a 50-mile radius around the city for construction contracts, though the company will go 250 miles to deliver a trailer for a film location.

“For locations outside a 90-minute drive, the film company has a choice whether to pay our increased travel costs or choose a local pumper,” Novotny

“I grew up on a farm, and my father used to build his own equipment. I guess this is the farmer in me. We like to build them exactly as we want them.”

KEN NOVOTNY

says. “If they choose another company, they will ask me to provide them with a pumping schedule and any special instructions.”

Movie production companies provide their own trailers for the cast. Pumping bathrooms in these trailers is part of the overall service contract. When the transportation coordinator says it’s time for a production to move to a new location, Gotta Go is on the call list, arranging to move trailers to the next set.

Gotta Go has provided restroom trailer rentals and service for productions as diverse as Amazon Prime’s *Tales from the Loop* series, to feature film *A Dog’s Purpose* and a long list of Hallmark TV movies, including *Snowkissed*, *Let’s Meet Again on Christmas Eve*, *12 Days to Love*, *Sweet Autumn* and *The Secret Ingredient*. The company also provided service for *The Nobody*, a new action film starring *Better Call Saul*’s Bob Odenkirk, and *The Ice Road* featuring Liam Neeson.

Novotny has exchanged a few words with stars such as Neeson, Odenkirk and Keanu Reeves, but it’s all in a day’s work. “We’re all here to do a job,” he says. “If we don’t have a lot to say to each other, it’s because we’re providing the service we promise.”

Gotta Go buys social media ads and advertises a little in local construction publications, but the film work is strictly word of mouth.

The company’s four-acre property is located close to home and features a 2,700-square-foot shop and a 3,200-square-foot equipment building, complete with restroom wash pad. Novotny performs much of the vehicle maintenance during slower winter months, alongside his friend, Marc Lamarche,

(continued)



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Above: Taylor Christian, left, and Jay Nosaty load restrooms supplied by PolyJohn Canada for delivery to a job site.



Right: Ken Novotny, owner, prepares to inspect a Rich Restrooms trailer at Gotta Go Portable Toilet & Septic Service.

who is called in as needed. The pair also builds out many of the company's newer vacuum trucks using Wallenstein pumps and Vacutrux tanks.

"I grew up on a farm and my father used to build his own equipment," Novotny says. "I guess this is the farmer in me. We like to build them exactly as we want them."

Manitoba's cold winters can be a challenge, but Gotta Go is well stocked with methanol to prevent restroom tanks from freezing, without exposing vehicles to corrosive salt. Methanol is more expensive than salt, but PROs in Manitoba expense it directly as a winter surcharge.

All waste is pumped out at the City of Winnipeg's wastewater facilities.

Novotny attends the WWETT Show every year to catch up with the latest trends in technology and to meet old friends like Scott Edwards, owner of Scottie's Potties of Detroit, who he first met at the show, and Canadian PROs, including the father-and-son team of Dustin and Devon Cabelka of Go Services in Calgary, Alberta.

Novotny's succession plans have evolved since daughter Lindsey has taken an increased interest in one day taking over the business. She's driving additional company growth by exploring new contract opportunities. This year she bid on a contract for the City of Winnipeg that Novotny had previously had his eye on — and won it. Gotta Go is currently ordering 200 additional portable restrooms to fulfill the terms of the contract.

"I'm lucky in that I can now leave for a month or so to go to Arizona in the winter," Novotny says. "But I intend to stay in the business as long as I can, helping and guiding Lindsey as she takes on more responsibility." ■

Below: The Gotta Go family includes, from left, Lindsey Greig, Ken Novotny, Lyndon Greig, Lois Novotny, McKenna Greig and Cole Mitchell.



SEEING THE LIGHT

Having spent plenty of time on film and television locations serving entertainment industry customers, Ken Novotny has overheard more than one location manager calling out for light towers. That need inspired the owner of Gotta Go Portable Toilet & Septic Tank Pumping to add them to his equipment rental menu.

“They always seem to need a few more light towers than have been delivered,” he says. “When I was wintering in Arizona three years ago, I was bored and started looking on Craigslist and saw somebody selling three 60-foot towers that had been used at an Amazon warehouse. I disassembled them, strapped them to the trailer and drove them home. They’ve been rented out ever since.”

The company now offers 14 Wacker Neuson light towers and has become the go-to source for many production companies. “When they call me for a light tower, I’ll deliver it right away and bill it along with the restrooms,” Novotny says. “It’s one less company they need to call.”

“I intend to stay in the business as long as I can, helping and guiding Lindsey as she takes on more responsibility.”

KEN NOVOTNY



Above: Novotny, owner, returns a suction hose to a service truck. A Rich Restrooms trailer is in the background.

MORE INFO

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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Pro Series restroom trailers from Lang Specialty Trailers are designed for durability and versatility

By Tim Dobbins

Lang Specialty Trailers envisioned the Pro Series line of portable restroom trailers to be elegant enough for wedding use and rugged enough to handle demanding public events.

Among the line is the Pro Series 2 Station Restroom Trailer designed to be a compact unit for an easy fit into most event spaces. This trailer features a durable construction found throughout the Pro Series line, according to Steve Ghrist, president of Lang Specialty Trailers. "Its exterior, interior, subfloor and roof are built out of a composite material so it's super durable and long-lasting," Ghrist says.

The Pro Series 2 Station trailer features stainless steel sinks, Delta faucets and individually valved foot-flush toilets. Users will find a 300-gallon waste tank with a spray bar waste tank clean-out. A number of other features are included, and options like a 105-gallon freshwater tank package can also be added.

Total trailer length with tongue measures roughly 17 feet and 10 feet, 7 inches wide with stairs. It weighs approximately 5,000 pounds, depending on various features and one dedicated 120-volt, 20-amp circuit is generally required to power the trailer; however, that can also vary depending on features.

Ghrist said the team at Lang Restroom Trailers used its experience in the rental field to design the units. "We were able to make a fair amount of adjustments and changes based on what we saw needed to be done in the field," he says.

They took note of maintenance challenges of past units and designed the Pro Series 2 Station to address them. "Our mechanical rooms are built large with large doors, so it's easy to get in and out to do maintenance," Ghrist says. "And the composite material is super easy to clean. People can write all over the walls with a Sharpie, and you can wipe it right off."

Lang also put thought into ease of use and setup. For example, all necessary tools for setup come with the unit. According to Ghrist, the effort has gone a long way with users. "We've gotten a lot of really good feedback, and the biggest compliment is when we sell a trailer to a new buyer and they have come back and bought more," he says. **724-972-6590; www.langrestroomtrailers.com.**



Slate Pages app for portable restrooms

The Slate Pages aluminum tag can help make managing portable toilets easier by automating information. The 2- by 3-inch aluminum tag is laser-etched with a QR code. The Slate Pages app (available on iPhone and Android) is used to scan the QR code and record important information related to the portable restrooms, including GPS coordinates, service dates and service history, delivery/pickup dates, customer information and more. Data gathered can be customized to specific company needs. Information gathered is sent to the Slates online dashboard where data can be viewed and tracked. Different data and map views can be created to show unit location, units in stock, unit condition, toilet servicing dates and more. **515-758-5463; www.slatepages.com.**



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By Craig Mandli



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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.**



SATELLITE INDUSTRIES FREEDOM-4

The **Freedom 4** from **Satellite Industries** is a fully ADA compliant portable restroom. It has been re-engineered for added strength and space. New features include reinforced side panels, longer handrails, molded vents, plastic carrying handles and a strengthened roof, door frame, closure and latch. Its high-impact, plastic lift handles will not rust and have a wider grip to reduce hand pressure when lifting. Molded-in vent screens reduce maintenance costs, and longer handrails provide more stability for end users. The roof is 50% stronger having added supports and maintaining multiple tie-down options. A heavy-duty door closure provides added durability. **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.**



ODOR CONTROL



CENTURY CHEMICAL TOI-DE-FRESH

The **Toi-De-Fresh** line of portable sanitation products from **Century Chemical** has been formulated and tested to neutralize odors in the most demanding applications. The liquid deodorants are available in super-concentrated and premixed formulas in both formaldehyde and non-formaldehyde varieties. Fragrances include apple cinnamon, bubblegum, cherry, fresh and clean, lavender, mulberry, and orange. The recently reformulated 2-ounce fresh and clean fragrance toss-in packet provides long-lasting odor control. They can be paired with Super Mask masking agent and line of all-purpose cleaners and citrus degreasers. **800-348-3505; www.centurychemical.com.**

J&J PORTABLE SANITATION PRODUCTS TRUOX SQUEEZE BOTTLE

The **Truox Squeeze Bottle** from **J&J Portable Sanitation Products** is a convenient, no-leak, easy-to-use 1-liter bottle filled with non-formaldehyde Truox Liquid Power portable restroom deodorizer. The squeeze bottle speeds productivity and reduces messy and costly spillage. It provides long-lasting deep blue color, advanced time-released odor eliminating technology, and it breaks down paper and waste, reducing mounding. **800-345-3303; www.jjchem.com.**



JOHNNY'S CHOICE RELENTLESS LIQUID

Johnny's Choice Relentless Liquid deodorizer is a concentrated non-formaldehyde formulation that controls foul odors in portable restrooms during all seasons, particularly in hot and humid summer months. It has a non-staining royal blue color to hide waste and has a fruity scent. It breaks down waste and tissue, making it easier to clean and service units. It is available in different concentrations (regular, super or ultra), allowing operators to customize and prepare ready-to-use formulations to specific conditions and cost requirements. **888-729-6478; www.johnnyschoice.com.**

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POLYJOHN DEODORIZING POWER PACKETS

Deodorizing Power Packets from PolyJohn are suitable alternatives to traditional liquid deodorizers. They offer an environmentally friendly option for odor control and are formulated to work in the most demanding conditions. They are designed to help customers control usage and service costs. **800-292-1305; www.polyjohn.com.**



when placed into liquid. Each bag comes with 50 sachets, with each pre-portioned to provide about one week of odor control depending on the usage and climate. It is biodegradable, non-staining, biocide-free, formaldehyde-free and California-compliant. The formula is able to break down paper, eliminating the need for special toilet papers, and is designed to contain everything necessary to deodorize a tank. The enzyme-based

formula digests built-up waste on tank walls and sensors that are a common source of odors in portable restrooms even after pumping or dumping the tank. **800-338-3155; www.walex.com.**

PRESSURE WASHERS AND SPRAYERS

SAFE-T-FRESH ECO BLUE

Eco Blue from Safe-T-Fresh addresses the most restrictive dumpsite regulations in the industry. As guidelines become more stringent, compliance with traditional holding tank treatments has become an issue. Most holding tank deodorizers disrupt the growth of odor-causing bacteria by the process of elimination. Formaldehyde and biocides kill bacteria. Eco Blue avoids these issues by utilizing non-disruptive technology to control malodor. It absorbs the malodor molecules produced by bacteria. Proven to have the capacity to absorb more than 100,000 times its weight, it performs like a premium portion control deodorizer, managing the odor in the water and even in proximity from mounding. In addition to active ingredients, the non-staining blue dye and lavender fragrance are recognized as non-hazardous, eco-friendly agents. It is biocide- and bacteria-free, making it fully biodegradable and treatment plant-friendly. **800-883-1123; www.satelliteindustries.com.**



CAM SPRAY MCB3040

The **MCB3040** skid-mount, hot-water pressure washer from Cam Spray is designed to move easily from truck to van to trailer. It offers 4 gpm at 3,000 psi from a Honda GX390 industrial gas engine and triplex plunger pump with ceramic plungers and stainless steel valves. It is equipped with low-pressure chemical injection and is protected by an unloader valve and secondary pressure pop off. The burner system includes a rust-free fuel tank, Schedule 80 coil with stainless steel wrap, is controlled by an adjustable thermostat and temperature limit switch for a maximum temperature of 195 degrees F. The frame is constructed using industrial coated 2-inch tubing and comes equipped with a wand/hose rack. A heavy-duty trigger gun with a dual wand and side handle valve allows switching from high pressure cleaning to detergent application and is equipped with quick change 0-, 15-, 25- and 40-degree nozzles. **800-648-5011; www.camspray.com.**



SURCO PORTABLE SANITATION PRODUCTS POTTY FRESH PLUS P.T. SPRAY DOWN

Potty Fresh Plus P.T. Spray Down water-soluble spray from Surco Portable Sanitation Products eliminates stubborn odors and dirt in portable restrooms and provides long-lasting freshness. Its odor protection is designed to clean and disinfect portable restroom units using Metazene, an odor-neutralizing additive that destroys particles that cause vaporous malodors at their molecular level. Spray it on directly or mix it with water. It's

available in five fragrances — xtreme clean, cherry, lavender, super spice or bubblegum — packaged in cases of four 1-gallon jugs, 5-gallon pails or 55-gallon drums. **800-556-0111; www.surco.com.**

WALEX BIO-PAK

Walex's Bio-Pak is a natural drop-in deodorizer designed to eliminate odors using natural enzymes. Operators can use it to keep the holding tanks inside restroom trailers and portable restrooms free of foul odors and also to reduce mounding. The packets are designed to be mess-free and dissolve quickly

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