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PORTABLE RESTROOM OPERATOR

May 2022
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DEODORIZER Directory

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Promise and DELIVER

Customer service follow-through is one key to success for a fast-growing young portable sanitation company in Phoenix

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TUFF-JON

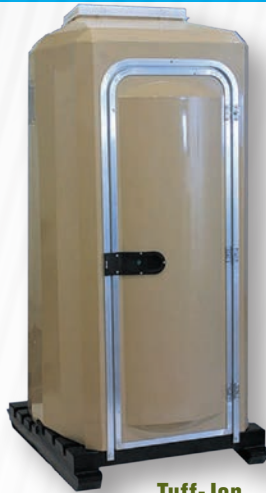
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By Jim Kneiszel

You're Going On Location. We Want to Hear About It



PROs and event planners are guardedly optimistic about the return of event work in 2022. We want to report on your favorite summer festivals.

As we head into what is traditionally a very busy summer season for PROs, two factors make me optimistic that special events are going to continue to gather steam coming off the pandemic that crippled that part of the portable sanitation industry for the past two years. And neither one involves the eradication of the virus that has taken the lives of almost a million Americans.

First of all, people are fed up with COVID-19 and there is a relentless movement to return to the large social gatherings we love so much like fairs, festivals and camping/concerts. And secondly, it appears COVID-19 is going to be around for a long time in one form or another, so we're just going to go about our business and deal with it as variants come and go.

These conclusions came to mind earlier this year as I watched 80,000 fans of the Green Bay Packers assembling for a playoff game at storied Lambeau Field, located a few miles from my home in Wisconsin. A far cry from the height of pandemic concerns — when the NFL was keeping fans out of stadiums across the country — in 2022 the fans would not be deterred, as they were packed in shoulder to shoulder, whooping and hollering for their team.

I believe PROs are thinking the same way as they prepare inventories and look to buy and upgrade new equipment to support the return of events that were canceled in 2020 and faced spotty cancellations due to the emerging delta COVID variant in 2021, and more recently the omicron variant. The contractors I've spoken to recently expect their traditional events customers to place orders and follow through this summer, but they understand the outlook can change swiftly at the whim of the mutating virus.

HOW ABOUT EVENT PLANNERS?

Recent reported surveys show event organizers live in a parallel universe to restroom contractors. They feel good about the summer ahead, but they realize planning and executing their events is more complicated than it was in 2019 and before. Bizbash.com asked event planners how they were feeling about 2022. Some expected a big comeback; others were mindful that adjustments may be necessary to hold events safely and successfully.

"My biggest hope for the industry is that we come back not only bigger and better than ever, but also wiser," said Vivian Perez, sales and marketing manager for Metro Events in San Francisco. "We have learned a lot during the past two years, and I hope we don't forget those lessons. We got creative

Recent reported surveys show event organizers live in a parallel universe to restroom contractors. They feel good about the summer ahead, but they realize planning and executing their events is more complicated than it was in 2019 and before.

and scrappy. We pivoted. Most importantly, we showed a lot of support for each other."

Eric Holmen, of California's Splash, said there may be a continued trend toward smaller, targeted events to generate revenue. "I think we are all hoping for and expecting a bigger comeback of in-person events in 2022. A survey we recently conducted at Splash indicates that a comeback is coming: 50% of respondents said they plan to host more in-person events."

Kristin Martinez, of Fast Forward Events in San Diego, said partners and suppliers for events will have to address pricing, labor structures and terms and clauses in contracts to ensure success in a world of uncertainty. "Having a partner on the other side of the contract means that risk and negative impacts can be mitigated. This requires trust, openness and willingness to change, and copious amounts of grace as we all navigate recovery. I really think that some creative problem solving and breaking out of the 'that's how it's always been' will change the landscape of what is possible and how we do it."

"The silver lining of the pandemic is that attendees are viewing live events with a new sense of appreciation and thus enabling planners to drive better engagement rates," said Colleen Brzozowski, of Sodexo Live in Chicago. "People want to feel the excitement of an in-person networking event."

SAFETY IS JOB ONE

A new report from TheVendry.com noted drastic changes to the event industry since the beginning of the pandemic, concluding that public health and safety have emerged as a top priority for event organizers. Among other safeguards, the report said events will stress the need for sanitizing stations and may require attendees and others involved in events to



provide proof of vaccination and follow masking protocols as necessary.

“While we continue to aspire and work toward a pandemic-free existence, hand sanitizing is likely an event must-have for the indefinite future, even though sooner rather than later masks will, fingers crossed, become obsolete,” the report stated.

Chicago-based business consulting firm Hub International released a report about insurance risks for special events in 2022, indicating that proof-of-vaccination requirements for event attendees and workers will be part of the new normal. It noted the success of the 2021 Lollapalooza music festival in Chicago, which required vaccination and negative COVID tests. It said 90% of almost 400,000 festival goers were vaccinated and only 203 COVID cases were tracked to the event.

As the event industry tries to meet pent-up demand in 2022, Hub International said labor is a significant issue. After the live concert industry imploded in 2020, many of its skilled workers went away. Now festival planners are caught up in the global labor shortage and will have difficulty hiring to adequately staff events. Also, after a pattern of canceled events the past two years, prices for liability and event cancellation insurance have risen 20%, threatening profitability.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

These are some of the same concerns PROs — and the entire wastewater industry — have moving into the busy season. Labor competition seems at an all-time high as the pool of available workers have many options and will chase money, benefits and favorable working conditions. The cost of doing business, all around, is rising with supply chain issues, fuel price hikes and, well, the same insurances sought by event companies.

One point made by the event planners rings especially true. Your customers need cooperative and communicative business partners to be able to pull off successful events in these uncertain times. More than ever, they should lean on the expertise of portable sanitation professionals to recommend appropriate restroom placements and service protocols at every major event. And when they order more equipment for a margin of safety, PROs must be ready to deliver.

How is your event preparation going for 2022? Are your biggest and best fairs and festivals gearing up for a return to pre-pandemic attendance? I have heard a mix of hope and concern in my discussions with PROs in the past few months, but I believe events are on a major upswing.

That said, I want to hear from you. We're in need of events to cover for our On Location feature. We'd like to cover your company and the resurgence of some of your favorite special events this year. Drop me a line at editor@promonthly and we'll look forward to including your crew and your special event partners in a feature story. And good luck this summer! ■



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A HEAD START

Don't Let New Service Technicians Fall Behind

Spring is *the* busy hiring season for many portable restroom operators. Onboarding new technicians can be laborious and repetitive, but effectively doing so sets the groundwork for a successful special events season. Read this exclusive online story to find out how to better onboard new employees.

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OVERHEARD ONLINE

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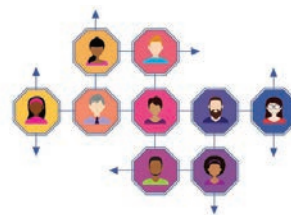
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THE DISENGAGEMENT CRISIS Employee Distraction Is On the Rise

In this exclusive online article, columnist Amanda Clark explains how employee disengagement is on the rise and how it affects your portable restroom operation. Read the article for Clark's tips and tricks to root out low employee engagement.

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DOWN THE LINE

Succession Plan Now to Avoid Conflict Later

Every portable restroom operator stops working at some point — be it because of personal choices, disease or death. However, many PROs kick succession planning down the road, which only breeds problems later. Read this exclusive online article to learn how to avoid these conflicts with a succession plan.

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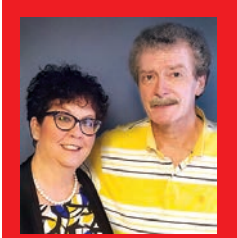
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By Jeff and Terri Wigley

Help Wanted! Beware of Hidden Hiring Costs

“Invisible” recruiting and onboarding expenses can have an impact on small businesses. Employee retention may be your best strategy.

QUESTION: Recently you addressed the issue of searching for new employees and the various methods of recruitment. Currently, we are a company with 10 employees running three routes per day and a small special event presence. We are planning to add another route driver and another administrative employee. What are some of the factors that we should consider in determining the cost of new personnel?

ANSWER: One lesson we learned as we began our business is that most actual cost includes underlying hidden costs that need to be identified. Whether taken into consideration or not, these underlying costs will impact your financial performance. We have heard business costs characterized as “visible” and “invisible” and this is how we will present them here.

As your company is expanding, we will address the actual costs of hiring new employees from both a route service and an administrative perspective. In addition, as you expand and grow, current employees may also resign from your company. There are cost considerations in replacing employees as well. Employee retention plays an important role in your company’s financial position.

COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH NEW HIRES

WORKFORCE NEEDS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

After taking the time to determine your workforce needs, consider the specific responsibilities of the new position. These are “invisible” costs as they involve management’s time and discussion with other employees. Creating a written job performance plan as a result of these discussions is a labor cost to some employee, either administrative or management.

ADVERTISING THE OPEN POSITION

As we covered in last month’s column, a variety of options are available to promote the new job opening from traditional newspaper ads to new online job websites such as Indeed.com and ZipRecruiter.com. These expenses are “visible” as you will receive invoices from the various advertising groups.

We had several employees who would state that they made X dollars per hour. ... We would also emphasize that health insurance, a 401(k) plan, vacation, paid sick leave, a business cellphone and a uniform service were important benefits added to their hourly pay.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

“Time is money” and either management or human resource personnel must conduct these interviews. Keep in mind that you must consider all of the time expended for all of the interviews and not just the time with the eventual new hire. This “invisible” cost can be quite time-consuming depending on the number of interviews conducted.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

For many PROs this is a prerequisite for hiring. Various agencies provide this service with the goal being to verify basic information such as education and work experience. It can also check for any criminal history or past identities. A “visible” expense.

PRE-EMPLOYMENT PHYSICAL AND/OR DRUG SCREEN

Prospective route service drivers are required to obtain a DOT Medical Card. Minimum physical requirements including good overall health and a clean drug screen are objectives that must be achieved. This “visible” expense is yet another in the hiring of a new employee.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Many employees and managers concentrate on the compensation rate as the only “visible” expense for each position in the company. Benefits are not only “visible” but extremely relevant in determining the true compensation of an employee. From our experience, we had several employees who would state that they made X dollars per hour. While true, we would also emphasize that health insurance, a 401(k) plan,

vacation, paid sick leave, a business cellphone and a uniform service were important benefits added to their hourly pay.

An interesting fact from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics is that in 2020, benefits made up 32% of a small business employee's total compensation. This number is an average and depends on location of the business, number of employees and type of benefits offered. This figure does, however, illustrate the point that total employee compensation is significantly more than the salary amount only.

EMPLOYER EXPENSES

Employers are responsible for paying their portion of each employee's payroll taxes, including social security. This cost should be factored into the calculations for the cost of a new employee.

Each new hire will require the company to pay additional workers compensation insurance. The rate for route service drivers is higher than that of administrative and sales personnel but this insurance must be obtained nonetheless.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED FOR NEW EMPLOYEES

It is entirely possible that new equipment may have to be purchased to accommodate growth. The addition of a route may require the purchase of a route service truck. A new route driver may need a new electronic device to go in the cab. Some companies issue tablets or similar devices for route and service programs. Uniforms may be required for route personnel as well as personal protective equipment such as hard hats, reflective vests and protective face shields, among other items.

A new office employee may require the purchase of an additional computer and office furniture. Company-issued cellphones may also necessitate the purchase of one of these devices for the new employee.

If new employees are replacing former employees, these expenses may not be incurred.

TRAINING AND PRODUCTIVITY

This is unquestionably the largest "invisible cost" most PROs overlook. Depending on the job requirements and the experience level of the new employee, the training process can be costly. The key point is that for a period of time the new employee will not be producing very much value for your company. At the same time, the person in charge of training is being taken away from the key elements of their job.

The amount of time a new employee takes to be as productive as their counterparts in similar roles can vary widely. It may be a matter of days to several weeks until a new hire is completely productive.

We found an interesting 2021 article online from Investopedia entitled "The Cost of Hiring a New Employee." Given the fact that new employee experience levels, the specifics of the job, and company policies and procedures can vary widely, this publication produced some average productivity rates for new hires. According to their data:

1. The first month after training is completed, new employees are functioning at 25% productivity.
2. Weeks 5 through 8: Productivity goes up to 50%.
3. Weeks 9 through 12: Productivity is 75%.
4. Following the 12 weeks (roughly 90 days): "Companies can expect a new hire to reach full productivity."

EMPLOYEE RETENTION

Once all of the "visible" and "invisible" hiring costs are analyzed, you'll realize employee retention is a key element in the success of your business. Experienced and satisfied employees increase and maintain satisfied customers.

Several suggestions from PROs when discussing this topic over the years include:

1. Create thorough and comprehensive written job descriptions for each job within the company.
2. Incorporate these job descriptions into written performance plans shared with the employee far in advance of any performance review.
3. Establish an environment where employees are valued and encouraged to make suggestions and to share their thoughts and feelings. This open communication benefits both the employee and the company.
4. Incentives motivate performance. Safe driving programs, positive customer feedback, suggestion programs and referral programs for new employees are just a few of the examples that PROs develop.
5. Additional benefits based on service time with the company. Some companies offer health insurance after a certain time period as well as vacation time and eligibility for 401(k) programs and other benefits.
6. Establish career paths to encourage long-term employment with the company. Employees are motivated to maximize their performance over a period of time to advance within the company. Avoid the sentiment among employees that "I have a dead-end job." Strive to work with your employees to retain their services where possible and all parties will benefit.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Employees are the most important asset of any company. Hiring new employees is an investment of time and money with many "invisible" costs. Once hired and trained, employee retention should be the goal of any PRO who is looking to maintain an experienced staff and satisfied customers. ■

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TAKE 5 ... with Porta Potty Togo

Karen Lau admits it was a humbling experience when she decided to help her son, Paul Lau, start a portable restroom business in 2015. Working as an executive assistant at a high-end car dealership, she wore business suits and heels for her day job, then changed into clothing more appropriate for driving a vacuum truck and cleaning restrooms after hours.

With savings and his mother's support, Paul started out with a 2007 Isuzu truck and 50 restrooms that he purchased unassembled. "For two years it was just the two of us," says Karen about Porta Potty Togo in West Palm Beach, Florida. The days were long, getting up early to send and answer emails and scheduling, then going to a regular job and ending the day transporting and servicing restrooms. But based on a friend's experience, they knew the portable restroom industry had great potential.

Karen knew about starting over. She was born in San Francisco and lived there until she was 6 when her parents moved to Guatemala, where her mother was born. In 2013, when Karen's sons were old enough to be on their own, she moved to Florida. Paul moved there shortly after. Their focus on the goal to be independent and build their own successful business motivated them. Their work paid off and in 2018, Karen's other son, Steve, joined them.

Porta Potty Togo has 11 employees and serves a wide variety of customers, from construction to high-end clientele in Broward, Palm Beach, Martin and Miami-Dade counties. In addition to 800 standard Satellite Industries restrooms, the business has 50 flushing PolyJohn units with sinks, seven restroom trailers, six from Rich Specialty Trailers and one from Lang Specialty Trailers; 60 Satellite hand-wash stations, 25 towable generic farm trailers; 25 Satellite crane units and 40 Satellite holding tanks. They also recently added fencing rental and trash container services and septic pumping.



Below: Karen Lau and her sons, Paul and Steve Lau, operate Porta Potty Togo. They are shown in the company yard. Restrooms are from Satellite Industries and PolyJohn; trucks are from Imperial Industries, Flowmark and Crescent Tank, all carrying Masport pumps. (Photos by Steven Martine)

Great EXPECTATIONS

A south Florida family hustles up customers for its new restroom business and brings their American dream to life

By Dee Goerge

EXPLORE FIVE ISSUES THAT AFFECT PORTA POTTY TOGO:

1 FINDING WAYS TO GET NOTICED

As a new business, the Laus knew they needed to make themselves noticed to attract customers. "We did a lot of door-knocking," Karen says. "It was nonstop initiative from us." She got up at 3:30 a.m. to send emails, initially targeting construction companies and then event organizers. From the beginning they offered extras to impress customers who would spread the word to others. "We made our event restrooms really nice. We would add a mirror, air freshener and nice, thick paper towels to stay on people's minds," Karen says.

But their service goes beyond nice restrooms. "Our logo is a smiley face. We sell an emotion. Our philosophy is to have a friendly approach to clients and provide great service. We take pride in caring for their particular needs," Karen says. That includes everything from the right color restrooms to having an emergency number 24/7. Also, being Hispanic has its advantages. "There are lots of Hispanics in south Florida, and they like that we are bilingual. They are more comfortable placing an order," Paul says.

(continued)



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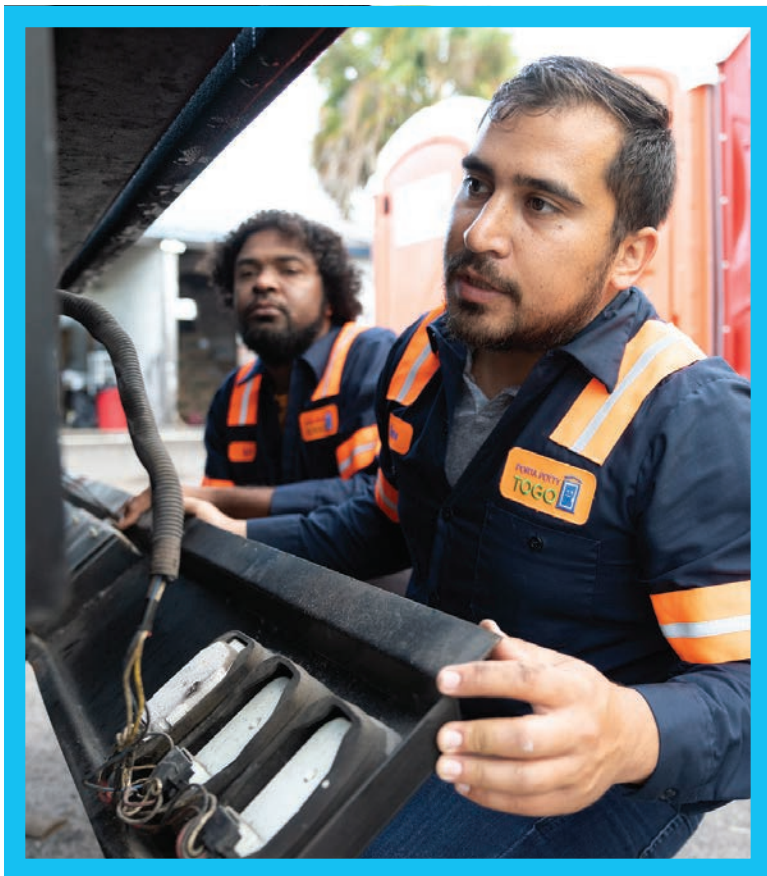


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Above: Technician Roberto Fuentes moves restrooms in the company yard. Restrooms are from Satellite Industries and PolyJohn.



2 MAKING THE RIGHT INVESTMENTS TO GROW THE BUSINESS

"In 2018, business was remarkable and we got many large events," Karen says, noting Palm Beach has many opportunities. She recognized her advantage of being a minority- and women-owned business and reached out to new clients. Workers paid attention to details to keep those clients, and the Laus invested in high-end restroom trailers.

"We always say yes; we will find a way," Paul says, recalling his first 30-unit event for a Seminole tribe casino. It barely made a profit, but it opened doors, and costs went down as the business grew and they invested in larger locally made trailers to haul the units. They also invested in vacuum trucks that are the appropriate size for the areas they serve. They range from three Isuzu trucks with Imperial Industries 650-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater stainless steel tanks and two Isuzu trucks with Crescent Tank flatbed 650-gallon waste/300-gallon freshwater steel tanks; a Ford F-550 with a Flowmark 1,100-gallon waste/400-gallon freshwater aluminum tank; and a Ford F-750 with a Flowmark 1,500-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater aluminum tank. All have Masport vacuum pumps and NVE washdown water pumps.

(continued)

Left: Steve Lau services one of the company's trucks, while technician Igor Garcia looks on.



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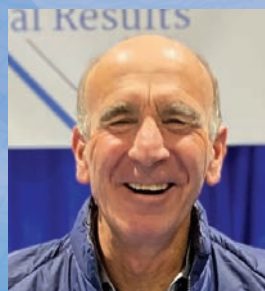
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3 TURNING OBSTACLES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

During COVID-19 and lockdowns, portable restrooms were considered an essential service, and Porta Potty Togo was ready to respond. With precautions in place, employees continued to work as usual and no one contracted the virus. “We were honored to serve (then President Donald Trump) at Mar-A-Lago,” Karen says, along with many other customers.

With their main yard in West Palm Beach, they were able to efficiently offer daily service to another important sector — hospitals. “We rented all of our trailers for medical staff and teams ready for emergencies at overflow sites,” says Karen. “We went back and forth to restock and bring water as many times as we needed to.”

Early on hand-wash stations were in high demand and manufacturers couldn’t keep up building them. “So we started building hand-wash stations,” Karen says. They placed two 55-gallon barrels together with the top barrel with freshwater and a faucet at the bottom that flowed into a sink and drained into the water barrel on the bottom. They built 75 units to meet demand. Not designed to be a long-term solution, the Laus replaced them with commercial wash stations as they became available.

(continued)



Below: Robert Fuentes, left, consults on the daily truck routes with Steve Lau.

“We did a lot of door knocking. It was nonstop initiative from us. ... We made our event restrooms really nice. We would add a mirror, air freshener and nice, thick paper towels to stay on people’s minds.”

KAREN LAU



Right: Paul and Karen Lau go over paperwork at the Porta Potty Togo office.

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Above: Steve Lau moves a Satellite Industries hand-wash station in the company yard.

4 LEARNING TO MANAGE LOGISTICS

When your business encompasses a 300-mile radius that includes large, traffic-congested cities, logistic planning is essential. Experience and technology help the Laus operate their business efficiently. In addition to their main yard in West Palm Beach, they have yards in Miami and Port St. Lucie. Steve coordinates with employees at each site and visits them regularly to check on supplies. With everything on the cloud and using HelloTracks routing software, Steve can see where his drivers are from his truck or the office.

While plans always look good on paper, he leaves some slack in the schedule when drivers are servicing the busiest areas. "Sometimes people don't answer their phone for portable restroom placing instructions. Or places are locked. It's most crowded in Miami, so I usually schedule 25-35 stops per route," Steve says, compared to 35-40 stops on other routes. He also accounts for travel time in more rural areas of their service area.

Paul incorporated technology and automation within a year after starting the business. He worked in several logistics jobs after college. "The thing that relates the most was I worked for a vending company in South Florida, managing routes for technicians," Paul says. The concept adapts well to Porta Potty Togo's service routes and the software is intuitive and easy for everyone to understand, he says.

He's also incorporated automation to address customer complaints correctly and timely with Ring Central software. And to ensure customers can access help, the business website offers a Chat Live icon, and phones are set up so someone will answer within 30 seconds.

"Our logo is a smiley face. We sell an emotion. Our philosophy is to have a friendly approach to clients and provide great service. We take pride in caring for their particular needs."

KAREN LAU

5 FILLING ALL THE NICHES WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

Paul is the financial numbers guy, paying attention to current work trends and looking ahead to know when to invest in equipment that will be needed. There is no down time in Florida, so it's an ongoing challenge. "I'm also a people person, and I try to sympathize and have good communication with employees, which is one of the greatest challenges for everyone," Paul says.

Steve's experience managing a logistics operation of fresh produce deliveries in Guatemala helps the day-to-day business of scheduling and handing sales and, he has natural mechanical aptitudes. "I'm the problem solver, the handyman, so it helps when breakdowns happen and time is of the essence," Steve says.

Karen constantly networks, joining contractor associations and corporate and city groups. She takes care of data processing and necessary certifications as part of her office work. "I'm the dynamo, a go-getter all the time and push toward the goal not to be afraid to challenge ourselves to go further," Karen says, adding, "We do planning together." ■



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Below: General Manager Brock Mathews is shown with restrooms from Satellite Industries. (Photos by Mark Henle)



Promise and DELIVER

Customer service follow-through is one key to success for a fast-growing, young portable sanitation company in Phoenix

By Ken Wysocky

Building a successful company doesn't have to be overly complicated. For proof, look no further than Arizona Portables, a fairly new Phoenix-based company that has enjoyed solid growth by emphasizing some basic customer service and pricing principles as well as offering customers a complementary product: roll-off containers.

Owner Marc Segel says a Phoenix-area construction boom also has fueled the company's growth. But overall, providing great service — which tends to minimize price objections and, in turn, allows the company to maximize profit margins — has been a real difference-maker, he says.

"We really sell on our service more than anything," he explains. "We're not the cheapest company in town by a long shot. But we can charge a bit of a premium because our customers appreciate that when we tell them we'll be there to

service restrooms at a certain time, we'll be there.

"We also stand behind our service," he continues. "Price is important to construction companies, but service is just as important, if not more so."

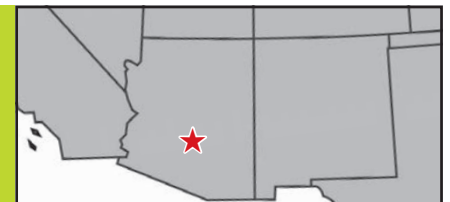
So far, the company's strategies are working. After just two full years of operation, Arizona Portables owns nearly 1,000 restrooms. It also runs seven service vehicles and three hoist-equipped trucks that transport roll-off containers.

"We've been able to scale up pretty quick," Segel says.

About 80% of its restroom business stems from construction-related rentals and the remainder from special events, he reports.

The acquisition of a roll-off container business in July 2021 also spurred growth.

"It's been great because it allows us to offer two complementary services," says Segel, who also



Arizona Portables Phoenix, Arizona

Owner: Marc Segel

Founded: 2019

Employees: 8

Services: Portable restroom and roll-off container rentals

Service Area: 60-mile radius around Phoenix

Website: www.arizonaportables.com

Right: Brock Mathews pauses during his workday to review records on a laptop in one of the Arizona Portables trucks.

has eight years of experience on the roll-off container industry and also owns LDR Site Services, a roll-off container business based in Atlanta. “We were thinking about getting into that market anyway, but then I heard this company was for sale, so it was just one of those lucky things.”

The takeaway here? The business landscape is always in flux so it’s a good idea for portable restroom operators to keep an eye out for opportunities to expand into complementary services, he says.

RESPECTFUL SERVICES

So what does good customer service look like at Arizona Portables? For starters, ensuring a live person answers customer phone calls is critical.

“Sometimes just answering the phone — and doing it with a positive attitude — is all it takes to beat the competition,” Segel says.

The company strives to have a real person answer every phone call. And if calls can’t be answered live, customers get return calls right away, Segel says.

“We prefer to use brand-new vehicles. We try to book a lot of stops on our routes, so vehicle up-time is very important. We’ve purchased used trucks in the past, but at the end of the day, even one day of truck downtime can kill us.”

BROCK MATHEWS



“If a customer has a unit that needs to be serviced because too many people have been using it or we missed a service call, being able to speak to someone who can resolve the issue is very important,” says Segel, who established the company in fall 2019. “I’d say our phone call answer rate is in the mid-to-high 90% level.”

“For whatever reason, if you simply answer the phone and do what say you’re going to do, you’re way ahead of the game,” he adds. “We’re very customer-driven and that’s been one of the keys to our success.”

Segel also says it’s crucial to build a company culture based on respect for customers, whether it’s answering phones or cleaning restrooms. “You have to treat customers the way you’d want to be treated and talk to them respectfully,” he says. “Being respectful pays dividends every time.”



Above: Derek Black, left, and Chris Letbetter move the inventory of Satellite Industries restrooms in the Arizona Portables yard.



Above: Technician Chris Letbetter cleans restrooms in the company yard.

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

The company's pricing policy also has been integral to the company's growth. Larger companies often have the financial resources to cut prices and make up losses on volume, but Arizona Portables is not one of them, says Brock Mathews, general manager.

"We could've grown a lot more and faster if we gave away our restrooms, but it's not in our plan to decrease our profit margins like that," he explains. "I always tell people we're not a Target or a Walmart. ... Instead, we're a little nicer and a little more expensive.

"But we never want to be the biggest company, either, because bigger operations usually mean bigger problems," he adds. "We just want to be great and treat everyone like they're important.

"We'd much rather have quality customers and quality employees instead of doing things cheap and trying to get by and running around like chickens with our heads cut off."

"If you simply answer the phone and do what you say you're going to do, you're way ahead of the game. We're very customer-driven and that's been one of the keys to our success."

MARC SEGEL

In addition, Arizona Portables strategically concentrates on smaller homebuilders as well as concrete companies and residential pool installers instead of larger construction contractors.

"It seems like everyone wants to get job sites with 20 to 25 restrooms, but we've done extremely well with renting just one or two restrooms per job site for four- to six-month projects," he says. "That way we get restrooms back quicker and earn better margins because bigger companies always want discounts, since they're renting more restrooms."

The ability to charge higher prices also provides another benefit: The company can pay employees higher wages, which in turn promotes employee retention. And providing good-paying jobs is part of the company's business model, Mathews says.

"The portable sanitation industry has a lot to offer that can change people's lives," he says. "I always tell employees that I want them to leave me for a better job or grow with us forever. ... I've seen their fortunes and lives change for the better."

CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

To serve customers, the company relies on seven service trucks; all are equipped with Masport vacuum pumps. Three of them are built on Hino 268 chassis with 1,500-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater aluminum tanks from Tank World and KeeVac Industries.

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Above: K.J. Sells secures a load of restrooms for delivery. Arizona Portables has seven service vehicles with vacuum systems from Tank World Corp., KeeVac Industries and Satellite Vacuum Trucks. All carry Masport pumps.



Above: Technician Sells services a portable restroom in Tempe, Arizona.

The company also owns an International CV515 with a 1,500-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater aluminum tank from Tank World; and two International 607 trucks that carry a 500-gallon waste/200-gallon freshwater aluminum tank from Tank World and a 450-gallon waste/200-gallon freshwater slide-in tank from Satellite Vacuum Trucks.

The company also relies on a Ford F-250 with a Satellite slide-in aluminum 200-gallon waste/100-gallon freshwater tank and Masport pump. “Sometimes our routes get heavy and we can’t complete all of them, so our slide-in unit helps alleviate some of that pressure,” Mathews says. “Also, the slide-in truck can maneuver in tight places.”

In addition, the company owns about 950 Axxis standard restrooms, 20 accessible restrooms, 70 TAG 4 hand-wash stations, 20 containment trays and 10 250-gallon holding tanks, all from Satellite Industries.

The company also owns about 100 roll-off containers. Most of them are 40-cubic-yard units, but some have 20- and 30-cubic-yard capacities, too. Most of the containers are from Roll Offs USA, with the rest from Hambick’s Truck & Container Sales. They’re transported by two Peterbilt trucks and one Mack truck; the trucks are outfitted with roll-off hoists made by G&H Truck Equipment.

“We prefer to use brand-new vehicles,” Mathews says. “We try to book a lot of stops on our routes, so vehicle uptime is very important. We’ve purchased used trucks in the past, but at the end of the day, even one day of truck downtime can kill us.”

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As for what the future holds, Segel envisions further growth for Arizona Portables.

“Brock and I are very growth-motivated,” he says. “We want to get much deeper into the Phoenix market and eventually expand down (southeast) to Tucson and in between.

“We plan to keep our foot on the gas.” ■

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Above: Brock Mathews loads a holding tank from Satellite Industries for delivery to one of Arizona Portables' customers.

CONTAINERS AND RESTROOMS ARE A GOOD MATCH

Product diversification is a proven growth strategy for portable restroom operators. And roll-off containers work hand-in-glove with restroom rentals, says Marc Segel, the owner of Arizona Portables in Phoenix.

Segel knows what he's talking about; he owns two other restroom-rental businesses as well as an Atlanta-based roll-off container rental businesses, LDS Site Services. And Arizona Portables acquired a Phoenix-based roll-off container company in July 2021.

“They're very complementary businesses, especially if you work a lot in construction,” says Segel, who graduated from the University of Georgia in 2008 with a degree in management information systems. “A lot of companies prefer to work with one vendor for both of those on-site services.

“There's also the cross-pollination aspects,” he continues. “For example, when a customer call and wants to rent a few restrooms, we always ask who provides their roll-offs.”

Of course, starting a roll-off division isn't as simple as buying a truck and some roll-off containers, hiring a driver and finding customers. It also requires some significant up-front investments, he says.

Depending on their size, for instance, roll-off containers sell for about \$5,000 to \$6,000 each. And a winch-equipped truck will cost another \$225,000 to \$250,000, he says.

“I wouldn't want to start with less than 30 containers,” Segel advises. “And I'd shoot for no more than 50 containers per truck. But if have one truck and 20 containers, you can still make a profit — it all depends on the market.”

Segel also points out that buying a less expensive used truck to start out can be a viable strategy for avoiding higher startup costs.

There are many other costs to consider, such as truck licensing, liability insurance, maintenance and repair, fuel, “tipping fees” for disposal of construction and demolition debris, hiring employees, marketing and so forth.

“The liability insurance is higher because you need drivers with a commercial driver's license,” he adds. “And I'd also recommend having a second truck as a back-up in case the other truck breaks down.”

Segel also points out that routing service calls is a little different for roll-off containers than it is for restrooms. While optimizing route density is critical to profitable restroom routes, for roll-offs it's more important to match up customers that rent the same size roll-off containers, he says.

“Route optimization for roll-offs depends on container sizes,” Segel explains, noting that eight stops a day is an optimal route in Phoenix. For example, it's optimal for a driver to pick up a container, take it to a disposal center, then deliver it to a different customer that also needs the same-sized container.

“After you leave our yard, you want drivers to come back here as little as possible, so the optimization puzzle is a little bit different,” he says. “Routing can make or break your profitability.”

With startup costs that could easily reach \$800,000 to \$850,000, it's critical to do some market research; that could include calling local roll-off companies to see what container sizes they rent and determine their rental rates. It also helps to look at online reviews of companies to see how satisfied customers are with their service, experts say.

Buying a roll-off company also is an option, but it requires a lot of what's called “due diligence” — doing a deep dive into the company's finances and other critical performance indicators, experts say.

“But no matter how you go about it, you need to know what you're getting into,” he says. “It's better to start out slow and walk before you run.”

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About the Authors

Carter Harkins and Taylor Hill are authors of *Blue Collar Proud: 10 Principles for Building a Kickass Business You Love* and owners of *Spark Marketer*. Visit www.sparkmarketer.com.



How May We Help You? Making a Case for Chatbots

You've seen those digital robots when searching out companies on the worldwide web. Here's how they can help your business keep existing customers happy and land new accounts

By Carter Harkins and Taylor Hill

With Facebook (now Meta), HomeAdvisor, Angie's List, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Thumbnail and the many other platforms out there that allow clients to find and communicate with your business, it can feel like you need to clone yourself a dozen times just to keep up with the messages and questions. And that doesn't include the phone calls and contact forms coming in through your Google Business Profile (formerly GMB) and website.

But it's not like you can just leave every platform, turn off your phones or ignore emails and messages until work calms down enough for you to get to them. Sure, a lot of service businesses do, but it's a big mistake. That is because the customers and leads you ignore will never become clients — now or in the future.

You may think, "I don't need their business right now, anyway," but you may not always be so busy. And if you don't treat them right now, you can kiss those leads goodbye for good. Is there anything that can make client communication at least a little more manageable?

Our suggestion is to give chatbots a try. What is a chatbot?

A chatbot is an AI program that simulates and processes human conversation. It allows humans to interact with digital devices as if they were communicating with a real person. The most important thing is that it's programmed to work independently from a human operator. That means chatbots allow you to answer questions and engage with clients and leads without actually stopping what you're doing.

Here are nine reasons to give chatbots a try for your business, plus how to get started:

THEY DON'T SLEEP

Even if you hired someone to monitor your business's website and Facebook messages, they wouldn't be able to do so 24/7. And clients and prospective customers don't only have questions and problems during business hours. When you use a chatbot on Facebook or on your website, you can be there to engage with those clients when they need you and answer their questions when they have them — even if it's after hours.

Through a series of questions, something that might once have required you to get on the phone with a potential customer can now be done by a chatbot. Easy for your customers. Easy for you.

THEY CAN GENERATE MORE CONVERSATIONS

Not every potential client or lead will reach out when they have questions. Some people will visit your Facebook page or website, take a look around and if they don't find what they're looking for, they'll just leave rather than ask for help. But if you have chatbots set up, these little helpful heroes can nurture leads and initiate conversations that might not otherwise happen. Ultimately, the more conversations you can have with potential clients, the more likely you are to convert those potential clients into paying clients.

THEY HANDLE MULTIPLE CONVERSATIONS AT ONCE

We all want answers and we want them yesterday. And if you think that's only true for the young people of today, think about how often you skip ads when you're on YouTube or how many times you've cursed while on hold. Chatbots allow you to meet the expectations and demands of the modern customer in ways you otherwise couldn't. Even the best multitaskers can only focus on helping one person at a time, but a chatbot can handle many simultaneously.

THEY'RE CONSISTENT

The last couple of years have tested the patience of even the most saintly among us. Even when everything's going great, we still all experience bad moods and bad days. The trouble is, when you're representing a business and interacting with clients and potential clients, those bad moods and bad days can easily impact clients and their perception of the business. Chatbots aren't human, which means they don't have bad days, bad moods, bad colds or bad manners. Your clients and potential clients get reliably friendly and helpful assistance every day, every time.

THEY CAN COLLECT AND ANALYZE DATA

Chatbots are programmed with information, which makes them helpful to customers. But they can also collect and analyze data so that you can learn from the conversations they're having with your clients. This data gives you insights into the questions your clients are asking, the problems they're having, and what they want and need from you. It can also empower you to address those questions, problems and needs in your content, in your sales conversations, and with your customer service representatives in training.

THEY CAN HELP YOU PERSONALIZE CONVERSATIONS WITH CUSTOMERS

Chatbots can also use the data from interactions with customers to improve personalization. For example, they might make note of the specific preferences and past purchases of a specific client so that when they interact with that client in the future, the client is saved the time and frustration of having to explain those things again. Not only that, but you can add that data to your systems and personalize your communication with those clients as well.

CHATBOTS ARE MULTILINGUAL

We live in a multicultural country, which means not every client you serve will speak impeccable English. But chatbots speak many languages, which means no matter what language your leads speak, they can get the help they need from your chatbot.

THEY CAN AUTOMATE MANY PROCESSES

Chatbots can be taught to guide leads through different processes and make things automated and simple. Through a series of questions, something that might once have required you to get on the phone with a potential customer can now be done by a chatbot. Easy for your customers. Easy for you.

THEY CAN BE DEPLOYED ACROSS MANY CHANNELS

Chatbots aren't only for your website. You can deploy a chatbot on Slack, Facebook Messenger, SMS and more. You can give your customers the personalized, fast answers and assistance they need wherever they're reaching out to you. It's the best way of making yourself omnipresent, short of cloning yourself.

WHERE TO START?

We recommend starting with a chatbot on Facebook Messenger. This will give you a great intro and let you see how a chatbot really works. There are several options for setting up a chatbot on Facebook Messenger, but one of the easiest and most trusted is ManyChat.

Good luck. Hopefully you'll find running a business with the aid of chatbots is just a little bit easier. ■

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ODOR CONTROL

By Craig Mandli

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Graffiti Wipes from **Century Chemical** are designed for fast, easy cleanup of ink from nonporous surfaces. The abrasive, yet nonscratching fabric can be used on a variety of surfaces, including portable restrooms, showers, partitions and hand-wash stations. They are premoistened with an environmentally safe and biodegradable cleaning formula that removes paints, enamel, ink and permanent marker, according to the maker. Each case contains six canisters, with each canister holding 70 wipes that are 9 ½-by 12 inches. **800-348-3505; www.centurychemical.com**

ODOR CONTROL

ARMAL SCENT BOX

The **Scent Box** from **Armal** incorporates a fragrance — vanilla balm, rose sensation, apple blossom, pinewood trail or strawberry field — in the wall panels of the restroom during the manufacturing process, ensuring a pleasant scent. The unit has a heavy-duty, spring-coil door with a wind-resistant device to ensure closure when unlocked and an overlapping wall assembly for greater safety. Options include a recirculating kit with filter and freshwater flush that works in combination with the pump kit. **866-873-7796; www.armal.biz**



J&J PORTABLE SANITATION PRODUCTS TRUEX LIQUID POWER

Truex Liquid Power from **J&J Portable Sanitation Products** provides long-lasting odor control, masking fragrance and deep blue color, according to the maker. The advanced, time-released formula will break down paper and waste to reduce mounding. The biodegradable, nonformaldehyde deodorizer is available in multiple fragrances and strengths. **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 nonstaining 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. **888-729-6478; www.johnnyschoice.com**



LUNARGLO LUNARVENT

LunarVent solar ventilation fans from **LunarGlo** utilize the same high-efficiency solar cells used in LunarGlo solar lighting units. Its ventilation fan can move air at more than 40 cfm during daylight hours, providing a complete restroom air exchange in less than two minutes on average. When mounted to a standard 4-inch vent stack and used in conjunction with a scented wafer laced near the fresh air inlet, the fan rapidly removes unpleasant odors, helping create a safer, more hygienic atmosphere in portable restrooms. **574-294-2624; www.lunarglo.com**

POLYJOHN DEODORIZING POWER PACKETS

Deodorizing Power Packets from **PolyJohn** are suitable alternatives to traditional liquid deodorizers, according to the maker. 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. **800-292-1305; www.polyjohn.com**



SATELLITE INDUSTRIES ECO BLUE BYSAFE-T-FRESH

Eco Blue by **Safe-T-Fresh** from **Satellite Industries** is designed to stand up to restrictive dumpsite regulations. It is available in four strengths — Event, Regular, Plus, and Winter arriving in fall 2022 — and three fragrances — lavender, bubblegum and lemon. It can help protect the business from treatment/dumpsite violations by utilizing non-disruptive technology to control malodor. In addition to other active ingredients, the nonstaining blue dye and fragrances are recognized as non-hazardous, eco-friendly agents. It is biocide- and bacteria-free, making it fully biodegradable and treatment plant friendly. **800-882-1123; www.satelliteindustries.com**

(continued)

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** is designed to eliminate stubborn odors and dirt in portable restrooms and provide long-lasting freshness. Its uses Metazene, an odor-neutralizing additive that destroys particles that cause vaporous malodors at their molecular level, to clean and disinfect portable restroom units. 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**



T BLUSTAR USA BLUPAC

BLUPAC nonformaldehyde deodorizer packets from **T blustar USA** are environmentally friendly and easy to use. They are drop-and-go packets with concentrated deodorizers meeting the GHS (Globally Harmonized System) standards, meaning they have a specific label/document valid around the world that explains chemical hazards

to anyone potentially exposed. They are available in a berry fragrance and are easy to transport. **404-482-0736; www.tblustar.com**

WALEX BIO-PAK

Walex's Bio-Pak is a drop-in deodorizer that uses natural enzymes to eliminate odors. The product can also reduce mounding in restroom trailer and portable restroom holding tanks. The packets are designed to be mess-free and dissolve quickly when placed into liquid. Each bag comes with 50 pre-portioned sachets to provide about one week of odor control depending on the usage and climate. It is biodegradable, nonstaining, biocide-free, formaldehyde-free and California-compliant. The formula can break down paper, eliminating the need for special toilet papers. It digests built-up waste on tank walls and sensors that are a common source of odors in portable restrooms even after pumping the tank. **800-338-3155; www.walex.com** ■

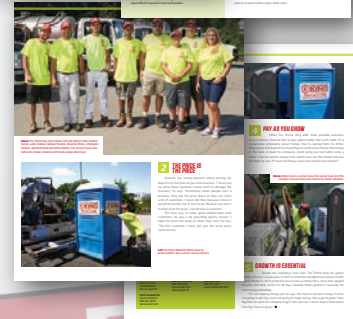


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PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Satellite Industries introduces redesigned Aspen standard restroom

By Tim Dobbins

Satellite Industries has updated the Aspen standard-sized restroom.

“Satellite spent the last two years refining the Aspen to make sure it’s the best quality product for our customers,” says Joseph Hummel, business development manager for Satellite. “We wanted to make sure that previous buyers of this restroom would recognize some of the Aspen’s design features, while upgrading and modernizing interior and exterior components.”

Hummel says one of the most unique things about the Aspen is its design and shape. Satellite improved the Aspen’s unique elliptical shape to add durability, strength and interior room. The Aspen features a brand-new roof design, enclosed door springs and a larger, splash-resistant urinal.

The standard unit comes with a hover handle, coat/purse hook, oversized mirror and shelves. The units are available in 12 standard, premium and premium plus color options, and special-order colors can also be arranged. Each Aspen restroom comes with an oversized area for custom logos on door and side panels.

“The design makes the Aspen great for special events, but thanks to the new roof design and more durable walls, it makes a great portable restroom for tougher jobs as well,” Hummel says. “If one of our customers need a tough restroom for a construction site, the Aspen can handle it. If that customer needs a modern, easy-to-use and clean restroom for a private wedding, the Aspen can do that too.”

The restroom stands just under 93 inches tall and 46 1/2 inches wide with a depth of 48 1/2 inches. It comes standard with a 65-gallon tank and weighs 150 pounds. The drop tank features sloping lines to keep the tank top dry and clean. Each unit has large integrated vents for air flow without the need for screen maintenance.

According to Hummel, buyers of the retired Aspen say the new model still has the nice and unique style and flare, but with improved function and durability.

“They appreciate Satellite keeping this product offering, improving it and making it relevant,” he says. “Partnerships and special projects like this Aspen redesign keep this industry fun and exciting. It’s not every day you get to redesign such a classic portable restroom.” **800-883-1123; www.satelliteindustries.com**

Royal Restrooms expands in Louisiana

Royal Restrooms expanded into Louisiana with the opening of its newest location in Ponchatoula, with a market focus on Baton Rouge and New Orleans. New franchisees Toby and Rhonda Breland will own and operate the new location. Royal Restrooms has 47 offices in 15 U.S. states.

Satellite Industries acquires Sanitrax International

Satellite Industries has acquired Sanitrax International, a manufacturer in vacuum technology for portable sanitation products. The Sanitrax organization will be a part of Satellite’s new Vacuum Technology Division. Sanitrax developed and sold a retractable, containerized mobile restroom unit, housing multiple self-contained toilets, urinals, wash basins and showers that rely on vacuum flush technology. ■



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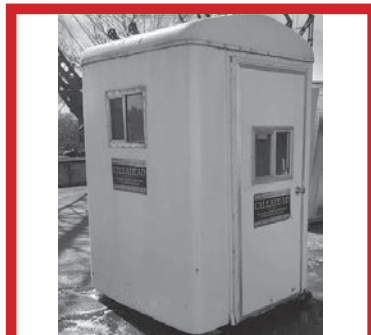
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New Imperial 1,300 U.S. gallon, portable toilet service unit mounted on a 2021 Ford F550 cab and chassis with a Masport HXL4 pump package. (Stock #13990). **www.VacuumSalesInc.com.** (888) VAC-UNIT (822-8648). (TBM)

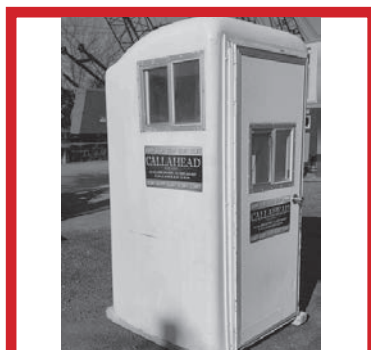
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