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**T**he panicked phone call: it's the backbone of every septic company.

**In busy Central New Jersey, a growing family-owned company is using computer savvy, a state of the art pump truck, peat biofilter septic designs and good, old-fashioned consumer education to keep those calls coming in – minus the panic.**

New Jersey Septic Management Group is an up-and-coming "do it all" liquid waste company owned by brothers Jason and Jimmy Drift. The company was born in February 2002, an outgrowth of Dutchtown Nursery, a business their father, Frank, started more than 40 years ago.

The family has offered a nearly fail-proof blueprint for building a successful liquid waste business, one that starts with customer education and includes a highly efficient and unusual Canadian-built pumper truck and a computer database that would be the envy of any company.

The first thing to know about New Jersey Septic Management Group is that the business is not limited to a single service. Over the past five years, the company has focused on meeting all of its customers' septic needs and coordinating those needs with the help of an easy-to-read website ([www.nj-septic.com](http://www.nj-septic.com)) and a constantly updated computerized record of past and potential septic customers in a tri-county area.

The services offered begin with septic system inspections done by a highly qualified, certified inspector who uses underground cameras to examine distribution lines, laterals and every aspect of an existing system.

"There are too few knowledgeable inspectors out there," explained owner Jason Drift. "We're working with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection to make sure inspectors

get certification and have more knowledge. Lesser inspections put new homeowners at risk of buying a home with an existing failed system."

If an inspection indicates needed repair, New Jersey Septic Management Group provides this service as well.

This full-service septic company also provides soil testing and engineering services for Conventional and Eco-Pure peat moss biofilter septic systems for both residential and commercial customers. The company has several sub-contracted engineers to design the labor-intensive and costly systems required in central New Jersey.

Septic contractors in their part of New Jersey face an unfriendly combination of soil conditions when designing a disposal bed – shale, clay and rock. The average cost of a new septic system – from engineering to installation can cost as much as \$40,000 for a four-bedroom house. To combat the near-impermeable soil conditions, septic contractors are forced to excavate the disposal bed sites and bring in their own sand and gravel.

In addition to inspections and engineering, New Jersey Septic Management installs systems. The heavy work is contracted to the other arm of the family business, Dutchtown Nursery. Because the installation employees are involved in the landscaping business, the company's attention to detail is reflected above ground as well as below ground. "We get compliments all the time on how the installation area looks when we're done," Drift said.

The company spends a lot of time making sure all its employees can explain to customers, in detail, all aspects of their services, especially maintenance. To that end, New Jersey Septic Management Group has an array of custom-designed brochures that guide customers through its services and describe the company's maintenance program.

Customer education is crucial to avoiding those crisis calls that often bring business to a liquid waste company. "We're big on

## New Jersey Septic Management Group

by Marie Helstrom

educating people that a septic system is the biggest appliance in a home and the most costly," Drift said. "You can't put it in and forget it. It needs regular maintenance."

As part of the service program, New Jersey Septic Management Group encourages customers to install a filter in their septic tanks to keep suspended solids in the tank where they belong, and out of the distribution field. Without a septic tank effluent filter, the system becomes a "creeping failure," Drift explains to customers. Remember those panicked phone calls? It's only a matter of time before the field becomes so clogged and contaminated with tank solids that things start to back up.

Most customers don't realize that over the years the inadvertent release of solids in a distribution field will cause it to fail. When that happens, the entire system must be replaced. With filters costing under \$300 to install, the preventive measure is a relatively inexpensive addition to the company's service program.

Customers can call the office or go to the company website to schedule a septic tank pump out. The program, a brainchild of company co-owner Jason Drift, drops the pumping prices each time a resident of the target neighborhood signs up. Customers can see the price drop in real time by checking the website.

While much of New Jersey Septic Management's work is based on keeping its customers happy, its owners keep a close eye on the bottom line. That's why they invested in an unusual pumping truck from Canada called the Juggler. The truck is the only one of its kind in use in New Jersey and one of several in the United States, according to Drift.

As all contractors know, the profit margin in tank pumping is gobbled up by dumping fees. Traditional pump trucks remove both solids and dirty water from tanks. With an average truck capacity of 3,400-gallons, that means each truck could do only three or so pump outs before having to go to an approved waste site for dumping.

The Juggler increases the amount of pump out capacity to seven or eight tanks, greatly reducing dumping trips – and fees. Here is how it works: the Juggler works removes all of the waste and liquid in the septic

tank, separates the sludge and solid materials, filters the dirty water and returns the water to the tank. Returning the water containing good bacteria flora to the tank helps jump start the natural, biological process that breaks down solids.

In addition, the Juggler allows New Jersey Septic Management Group to readily measure all of the solids that they remove from a tank. The information is helpful to homeowners who can see how efficiently – or inefficiently – their system has been working, and illustrates the value of regular pumping.

For example, in many 1,000-gallon tanks, a long-overdue pump out may result in the removal of 600 to 800 gallons of solids. Ideally, no more than 200 gallons of the pump out should be solids.

"The Juggler actually gives us the tools we need to educate people," Drift explained. The admittedly costly pump truck makes good business and environmental sense, too, reducing dumping costs and increasing profit margin.

In addition, by returning dirty water to the septic tanks where it belongs, the burden on dumping sites lessens. The Juggler offers convenience for operators, too. It features an automatic, retractable hose.

Diversified services and the smart use of modern technology have been the keystones of the company's success. For that reason, it is no surprise that the company is one of the first in its area to embrace Peat Technology. As an authorized distributor of the Eco-Pure peat biofilter system, New Jersey Septic Management Group has been able to meet its customers' needs in areas that are not always conducive to traditional, below-grade septic systems.

When a high water table or limited useable space complicates septic designs, Peat Technology is a perfect solution. The sys-



tem avoids unsightly above-grade distribution fields (mounds) that are popping up throughout New Jersey, causing property values to plummet.

The self-contained module contains bagged and loose peat moss that offers efficient and effective filtrations. The best part of the new technology is that it's portable – allowing a distribution field to be installed despite a high water table or inhospitable soil conditions. So far, the company has installed about 50 systems.

New Jersey Septic Management Group has successfully combined service, education and technology to expand into the central New Jersey market. By educating its customers and providing a full complement of services, the company has used long-term planning to fashion a profitable business in a relatively short amount of time.

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