

DEDICATED TO THE LIQUID WASTE INDUSTRY

Pumper

Septic Service LLC

December 2019 pumper.com

USDOT 2043804



WISCONSIN
LICENSE



THE BUCK STOPS HERE

At Wisconsin's Countryside Septic, owner-operator Tom Jakubowicz is solely responsible for quality pumping and top-notch customer service

PAGE 18

FAMILY FIRST

The C.W. Hanover Septic crew remembers Scott Knight's legacy of hard work and customer service [PAGE 44](#)



THE BUCK STOPS HERE

Tom Jakubowicz, who owns Countryside Septic Service with his wife, Tina Jakubowicz, is a one-man pumping crew working in northwest Wisconsin. He is shown with his latest rig, a 2019 International HX with a 5,000-gallon stainless steel tank and National Vacuum Equipment 4310 blower built by Imperial Industries. (Photos by Dan Reiland)

At Wisconsin's Countryside Septic Service, owner-operator Tom Jakubowicz is solely responsible for quality pumping and top-notch customer service *By Dee Goerge*

It's difficult to take a day off when you are a one-man septic service operation. Tom Jakubowicz isn't typically working in the field on Sundays, but he and his wife, Tina Jakubowicz, spend at least part of the day catching up on paperwork. With nearly 27 years in the business since purchasing Countryside Septic Service, Tom Jakubowicz is OK with the long hours because of the satisfaction he gains from his work.

"I hear so many people complain about their jobs. They dread going to work. I love going to work and taking care of my customers. I appreciate my customers; some are the kids of my original customers," he says.

Being a solo operator is common around rural Cadott in northwestern Wisconsin, and to be successful, it's necessary to stand out. To do that, Jakubowicz — a perfectionist by nature — emphasizes quality service, cleanliness and offers service seven days a week to his customers.

Countryside Septic Service LLC Cadott, Wisconsin

OWNERS: Tom and Tina Jakubowicz

YEARS IN BUSINESS: 27

EMPLOYEES: 2

SERVICE AREA: 30-mile radius

SERVICES: Septic and grease trap service, leachate pumping

WEBSITE: www.countrysideseptic.com



GRABBING AN OPPORTUNITY

At age 20, Jakubowicz was in his last year of earning a criminal justice degree when the chance to purchase Countryside Septic Service came up.

"My brother is in the septic business and was telling me about Bill Thill who wanted to get out of the business," Jakubowicz recalls. "I heard about it on Saturday and met Bill, Bev and Frank Thill the next day on Easter Sunday. I rode with Bill and Frank for several weeks, made a deal and took over on June 10, 1992."

(continued)



Left: Tom Jakubowicz makes a disposal run at the Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, wastewater treatment plant. The 5,000-gallon tank on his new truck from Imperial Industries allows him to pump more tanks between trips to the dump station.

Below: Jakubowicz sprays down the inside of a septic tank.

The business appealed to him because, based on his brother's experience, he knew it was a good entrepreneurial opportunity. He also enjoys dealing with people.

"I started out with a 1979 Chevrolet truck with a 1,500-gallon tank and quickly outgrew that. I had to get a bigger tank if I was going to compete with other businesses pumping holding tanks," he says. "In February 1993, I bought a 2,300-gallon Calumet tank from my brother and put it on a truck."

With the majority of the work from residential customers, he added commercial accounts in nearby bigger cities of Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire. He made a habit of stopping in at new businesses and introducing himself and his services. "When Walmart came in 2005, I stopped periodically to get my foot in the door," he says, which resulted in a contract to maintain the septic system. "We just renewed another five-year contract."

Jakubowicz doesn't let himself get distracted by opportunities to broaden his services beyond the vacuum truck. He says he does one thing and does it well. "I don't want to be the guy who has his fingers in everything," he says.

There is enough diversification in pumping in his area to keep him busy. In addition to pumping septage, about 30% of his commercial jobs involve grease traps and moving leachate, polluted water from a landfill. The grease traps are in a wide range of businesses and facilities from all types of restaurants to grocery stores and hospitals. The jobs provide steady, scheduled work, as most are on a maintenance schedule.

"When they do it only once a year, it gets difficult because the grease is

“ I hear so many people complain about their jobs. They dread going to work. I love going to work and taking care of my customers. I appreciate my customers; some are the kids of my original customers.”

TOM JAKUBOWICZ



hard to get out of the tank," Jakubowicz says. He recalls one job when he had to hire a local drain cleaning company to bust the grease with a shovel and rake. The job took four hours and cost the business more than regular maintenance on a quarterly basis. He tries to help customers make wise choices, but in the end, it is up to them.

On a regular basis he also pumps leachate and hauls it to a paper mill that has a wastewater treatment plant.

In order to focus just on pumping, Jakubowicz networks with other dependable businesses — such as Roto-Rooter in Eau Claire, Kevin Bogstad POWTS Maintainer, and Premier Plumbing — recommending them to his customers for line cleaning, repair, and new or replacement septic systems.

DAY TO DAY

Working alone, it's important to be efficient in routes and time management. Jakubowicz knows the area well and occasionally uses Google Maps on his phone to plan routes.

"During the busy season, I run about 15 jobs a day. Many are on an automatic schedule," he says. He tries to schedule jobs so that he works his way closer to home by the end of the day. He also times them to best utilize the

(continued)



Left: Jakubowicz considers the cab of his International an office on wheels as he makes the daily rounds.

Below: Tina Jakubowicz catches up on paperwork in her office at Countryside Septic Service.



two treatment plants where he unloads. The Eau Claire plant is farther away and closes at 2:30 p.m., while he has access 24/7 to the Chippewa Falls plant closer to his home.

Despite the extra disposal cost, Jakubowicz is grateful that he no longer deals with land spreading. “I did it from 1992 to 2015, and trying to find land that met the criteria and deal with the weather was so complicated,” he says.

New Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources rules made finding appropriate land in his area even more difficult; and property approved years ago is no longer suited for land application. With the restrictions, several competitors quit, and those who stayed in business started hauling exclusively to treatment plants.

“Going to a treatment plant took all the guesswork out. It’s made it so much easier. Weather doesn’t affect us. We (competitors) are all on the same page going to the plant so it’s a more competitive price,” Jakubowicz says.

Days can start early and end late, but he follows a disciplined routine.

“I have a Beaver of Wisconsin 2,000 psi hot-water pressure washer in the shop, and my truck gets washed every day,” Jakubowicz says. He washes it outside at the end of the day and parks it inside overnight so it’s ready to go early the next day.

Owning good equipment is another important factor in the continued success of Countryside Septic Service. Jakubowicz purchased a new truck at the end of last year, a 2019 International HX with a 5,000-gallon stainless steel tank built by Imperial Industries. “Because I am by myself, this bigger truck will be more efficient,” he says, noting he can pump up to four tanks before having to go to the treatment plant.

He opted for an National Vacuum Equipment 4310 blower instead of a vane pump, which requires less maintenance because it doesn’t use oil. “The performance of the blower is key. Recovery time is instant. It holds vacuum and maintains really well on the deep tanks and with a lot of hose out,” Jakubowicz says.

He also added a heated water tank, that comes in handy for cleaning his hose before wrapping it up on the truck. Finally, he treated himself to a luxury he once thought he would never add — heated leather seats. “I nev-

“ Going to a treatment plant took all the guesswork out. It’s made it so much easier. Weather doesn’t affect us. We (competitors) are all on the same page going to the plant so it’s a more competitive price. ”

TOM JAKUBOWICZ

Happy wife, happy life

As a sole operator of a pumping business, Tom Jakubowicz stresses the importance of maintaining good business relationships. That includes customers, vendors, his mechanic ... and most of all, his wife, Tina Jakubowicz.

“My wife is my best friend and my business partner. There is no way I could run this business by myself. We make a great team. We do everything together and look forward to weekends with each other,” Jakubowicz says, even when that means doing paperwork for the business.

Tina works full time for sporting goods retailer Scheels All Sports during the week, so she uses Saturdays and Sundays to deal with treatment plant paperwork, monthly ledgers, county mailings and preparing bank deposits. Tom takes care of scheduling the jobs, paying the bills and invoices.

When they have some extra time, they enjoy going to their cabin on Lake Holcombe or walking or riding an all-terrain vehicle on the trails at their farm. Most summers, those times can be rare, and many trips to the lake have been shortened to respond to customers calls. So they make the best of their time together.

“To us, it doesn’t matter what comes up as long as we’re together,” Tom Jakubowicz says.

In 2014, they purchased 100 acres and built a home and a work-friendly 42-by-78-foot heated shop.

“My hobby is my work,” Jakubowicz says, so he built the shop for work and comfort. Besides the garage bay for his truck, he has space for a man cave. It’s just a space to unwind, he says, with a kitchenette, bathroom and television to catch the news or occasional TV shows. “It’s nice to have a spot away from the main shop area to review the next day and schedule jobs,” he says.

It’s also handy when he gets an emergency call and needs to jump in the truck and respond.

“I take my business personally,” he says. “I want to do it right; I want my customers happy.”



er thought I'd appreciate them that much, but it just makes your day go so much better when you come in from the snow and cold," he says.

Tom Jakubowicz pulls away from the office, heading off to one of several daily septic service calls around his Cadott, Wisconsin, home.

FOR ALL SEASONS

The winter of 2018-19 was a true test for the heated water tank and heated seats. With frigid temperatures setting in before snow could insulate the ground, drainfields and mound systems froze, so he was busy pumping some tanks on a weekly to monthly basis. "Then in February I had snow up to my hips, which made it more difficult," he adds.

By early April, he was focusing on catching up with regular customers, before area counties mailed notices to residents required to have their tanks inspected — and pumped if needed — which happens every three years according to Wisconsin law. The notices typically generate calls from old and new customers who aren't on a regular schedule.

For additional work, Jakubowicz sends out mailings. "As haulers, we can get the lists (from counties), so I send follow-up cards. People wait for the card to come and then call me. I found that mailings are the best way; you're direct-advertising," he says.

Looking back, he realizes he has come a long way since he started in the business. Right after buying Countryside Septic Service, he remembers the exhilaration of making \$350 in one day and the anxiety that followed when the truck sat unused for the next five days. But nearly three decades later, he has built up a successful, busy business and has found stamina during times when it is difficult to be a sole operator.

For example, he was down with the flu when he got a true emergency call for Wisconsin. A tavern owner called at 9 p.m. reporting the bathrooms were backed up. It was Friday night — the day before the gun deer hunting season opener. "You deal with it and realize it's got to get done," Jakubowicz says. "I'm available seven days a week."

He adds he is in it for the long haul.

"My goal is to be in business 50 years. Hopefully, physically, I can make it to 70," Jakubowicz, now 47, concludes. "In the next 10 years, I want to find someone who can come into the business as a partner and will eventually take over." ■

MORE INFO

Imperial Industries, Inc.

800-558-2945
www.imperialind.com
(See ad, page 35)

National Vacuum Equipment, Inc.

800-253-5500
www.natvac.com
(See ad, page 3)

Roto-Rooter Corporation

800-848-3375
www.rotorooter.com