

ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

# AOWA news

Better Living Through Improved Sanitation

Vol. 29 No. 1 January, 2023



[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)

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Is Grease Trap Service Right For Your Pumping Company?

A New Perspective from AOWA Board Member David Mastin

The 2023 AOWA Annual Trade Show & Onsite Wastewater Conference

and more.

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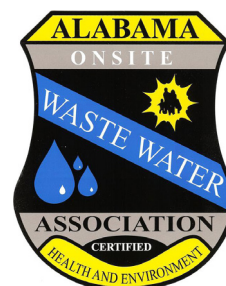
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[www.aowainfo.org](http://www.aowainfo.org)

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*On the cover: David Mastin is the subject of this issue's feature article. He is also an AOWA board member. Read more beginning on page 10.*

## Message from the President



*Randy Anderson  
AOWA President*

I hope you are making plans to join us for the 2023 AOWA Trade Show in my hometown of Guntersville Alabama on March 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. If you are at the AOWA trade show (not fishing on Lake Guntersville), then I know you will enjoy this year's gathering. Our Executive Director, Debbie Johnson and her team have done a great job of bringing in the folks you need to meet to make your job easier.



Based on your feedback, the board has changed the format of the show so that you can spend all day Friday with us and hopefully you will spend the weekend (and your money) in Guntersville. While the state park is fantastic, we now also have the City Harbor to enjoy on the waterfront in Guntersville.

Safety Lids continue to be an important issue to us pumpers. Make sure you are updated on the latest news and procedures to protect your customers and their families. And don't forget about Sadie's Law regarding food service grease traps.

Education, Education, Education.. we have added a number of new topics to the online training program through the AOWA website to meet your needs of continuing education (CE). The CE classes for 2023 will be outlined on our website and in this publication so make sure to pick one close to your office. For the first-time folks, make sure you learn about the changes that the AOWB has made to the requirements and focus. I know I am very happy with the path we are on.

Remember, we are all in this together! While fierce competition is great for all, we want to make sure our industry is serving our customers, and the local economy, and protecting our neighborhood for our children and grandchildren.

Randy





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# Septic Tank Safety - What Can We Do?

*We have all heard the news stories:*

- **2-year-old dies in South Carolina after falling into septic tank**
- **74-year-old Florida woman dies after falling into septic tank while watering plants**
- **1-year-old boy falls through rotted piece of plywood into septic tank and dies**
- **Toddler falls 10 feet into an unsecured septic tank at a campground and dies**
- **And an 11-month-old baby died after falling into a septic tank right here in our own state**

These headlines are becoming far too frequent and are entirely preventable. There are many products on the market today that can help prevent these unfortunate accidents, ensuring that septic tank covers are secure and prohibiting unauthorized access. Polylok offers a heavy-duty riser safety screen that acts as a secondary layer of protection if the riser cover is unknowingly damaged, removed, or not put back on. Infiltrator has a similar product in their Safety Star System that prevents unintended entry into the tank. Tuf-Tite's safety lid fits inside the ledges of the riser and can be secured with screws.

"You see stories of kids falling into unsafe septic tanks every year, and the outcome is mostly not pretty," says Patrick Mulhall, vice president of sales at Polylok. "As a manufacturer of septic system accessories and equipment, we have a responsibility to make sure the product is as safe as possible."

AOWA shares this sentiment and is committed to work toward eliminating or reducing the number of these incidents in the future. AOWA board members have met with manufacturers, local distributors, other states, and Montgomery seeking a solution but as of today, no clear path exists except to make our industry aware of the problem.

## **What can we do to help prevent these unnecessary deaths and protect our businesses at the same time?**

Make it a policy to always check tank lids to ensure that they are secured properly and in good condition, with no visible damage. Are there cracks in the lid? Are any screws missing? If you do find damage, be sure to alert the homeowner and document the conditions you find. It is a good idea to have a standard inspection sheet that you



can use to document conditions and have the homeowner sign that they were notified of these conditions. Use a multi-copy form so you can leave one with the homeowner and have one for your records. While this may not excuse you from all liability in the event of an accident, you will at least have done your due diligence.

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Encourage the use of secondary safety measures with each installation and inspection and incorporate this cost into your quote. If the homeowner refuses the additional safety device, have them sign documentation that the product was recommended and they declined the option. This may not reduce liability in the long run, but at least we are doing our part to promote and encourage the use of these products.

It would also be helpful to provide homeowners with information on Septic tank lid safety, reminding them to routinely inspect lids for



problems, not to drive or park over septic systems, and teaching children not to play near lids. An example of such a document can be found on the AOWA website.

Hopefully with everyone working together, these unnecessary tragedies will become a thing of the past. AOWA Board Member Shane Gilbreath summed it up perfectly: "If a safety lid can save even one child's life, why wouldn't we do everything we can to promote using them?"



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36<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL

**AOWA Trade Show & Onsite  
Wastewater Conference**

**March 16-17, 2023**

*(more on page 14)*



## Republicans Maintain Supermajority in Alabama Legislature Alabama State House of Representatives to Elect New Speaker

The 2022 Elections are over and there were very few surprises this year. Republicans swept the top of the ticket and retained their supermajority in the Alabama Legislature. At the federal level, there are two new faces in the Congressional delegation. Republican Katie Britt, the first woman to be elected U.S. Senator from Alabama, will fill the seat left open by retiring Senator Richard Shelby, and Dale Strong (R) was elected to the 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District seat previously held by Mo Brooks. All of the other members of the Congressional delegation were re-elected to another two-year term: Jerry Carl (R-AL01), Barry Moore (R-AL02), Mike Rogers (R-AL03), Robert Aderholt (R-AL04), Gary Palmer (R-AL06) & Terri Sewell (D-AL07). Voters approved updating the Alabama Constitution to remove racist language, and they also approved all ten amendments that were on the ballot.

Leading the ticket for statewide offices was Governor Kay Ivey, along with Lt. Governor Will Ainsworth, Attorney General Steve Marshall, and Agriculture Commissioner Rick Pate, who were all re-elected to a second term. New faces to statewide office are Secretary of State Wes Allen and State Auditor Andrew Sorrell, who were elected to open seats. Both are former members of the Legislature. Elected as Treasurer was Young Boozer, who has previously served in this position before being term-limited. John McMillan resigned from the post last year to take on the challenge of starting up the Alabama Medical Cannabis Commission. Boozer filled the remainder of his term and has now been elected to serve another four-year term, making him the longest-serving treasurer in state history.

The Alabama Senate will have six new members next quadrennium, the four-year term that legislators serve. The breakdown in party affiliation, however, will remain the same, with 27 Republicans and 8 Democrats.

In the Alabama House of Representatives, there are 31 new members.

The Republicans will hold 77 seats and the Democrats will hold 28 seats (same as the last quadrennium).

Just two days after the General election, the Republican Caucus of each chamber met to elect their candidates for leadership. In the Senate there were no changes, as the caucus re-elected Greg Reed (R-Jasper) as Senate President Pro Tempore and Clay Scofield (R-Guntersville) as the Majority Leader. Bobby Singleton (D-Greensboro) is currently the Minority Leader in the Senate and is expected to be re-elected by the Democrat Caucus to that position.

In the House, a number of legislators in leadership positions decided to retire this year, sparking competitive races for several top posts. Elected by the Republican Caucus as their nominee for Speaker of the House is Nathaniel Ledbetter (R-Rainsville), and as Speaker Pro Tempore is Chris Pringle (R-Mobile). Although not official until the Legislature meets in organizational session in January, the decision of the caucus is tantamount to election due to the supermajority the Republicans hold. Also elected by the House Republican Caucus was Scott Stadthagen (R-Hartselle) to serve as Majority Leader, a position previously held by Ledbetter. The House Democratic Caucus re-elected Anthony Daniels (D-Huntsville) as the Minority Leader. All of this, along with several other retirements, will also lead to lots of changes in committee chairmanships in the House.

The Alabama Legislature will meet next on January 10 for a brief Organizational Session to formally elect leadership, adopt rules, and perform other housekeeping duties. They will return to Montgomery on March 7<sup>th</sup> to begin the 2023 Regular Session, which will last through early summer.

If you have newly elected legislators from your area, now is a great time to get to know them – before the Regular Session begins and bills are considered that may affect the onsite wastewater industry in Alabama.



# Tough Septic Repair Sites Are Our Specialty



## Effectively Promote Your Business by Advertising with the AOWA.

*The Alabama Onsite Wastewater Association News Magazine is published twice a year. Issues are released in January and August.*

**Ask for the AOWA Media Kit today by emailing: [cbaker@asginfo.net](mailto:cbaker@asginfo.net)**

## A New Perspective from AOWA Board Member David Mastin

David Mastin is offering a new perspective on the wastewater industry. David is an Alabama native and was born and raised in Pike Road in Montgomery County. At 37 years old David is young in the wastewater industry but don't let his age fool you about his experience. David's father, a wastewater industry member himself, raised him around the industry. While most kids spent their summers hanging out or going to summer camps David spent his summers in the septic fields putting in field lines. This experience helped build the foundation that would inevitably help David in his career. David was not initially interested in getting into the field himself.

Growing up David recalls telling his father that he would never join the wastewater industry and to that, his father laughed and said simply, "never say never." Fast forward, after venturing outside of the industry to pursue a career in the police force, David returned to wastewater. He realized that the wastewater industry could provide him with something the police force couldn't—time.

For almost six years David worked for private utility companies, managing, and maintaining four different plants across Alabama. His day-to-day tasks included managing all the flows, ensuring the plants are operating smoothly, tending to the customers, and maintaining residential systems to make sure they were functioning properly. David has taken the lessons from these experiences and started his own company A-Z Services LLC, in May of 2022.

Although working in the wastewater industry allows him to spend more time with his family it still presents its own set of unique challenges. One of these challenges is working advanced utility equipment into black belt soil. Black belt soil has the difficult property of swelling when it's wet and shrinking when it's dry which makes it



David Mastin (Photos courtesy of Ashley Dennis Photography)

challenging for David and his team to work their equipment in.

In addition to the challenging environmental factors, David expresses difficulty in keeping up with the ever-changing industry. When asked what the hardest part about the wastewater industry has been for him so far David says, "New technology. It's hard to keep up with the current technology and the stuff that's coming out, so I try to be open-minded." Although the new up-and-coming technology can be intimidating, David is dedicated to expanding his knowledge, which is one of the functions of the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Association (AOWA) he values the most.

He has been a member of the AOWA for the past eight years and served on the board for the past seven years. When asked about his favorite part about being in the wastewater industry he states, "I get to do a lot of education and teaching, it's one of the things I really enjoy. Talking to classes and helping with the AOWA, I really enjoy the education." He considers himself a lifelong learner and being open to new ideas is not only important but necessary in an ever-changing industry.

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Ever committed to learning and growing, David holds industry certification on all levels from Advanced Level II certification to Manufacturer and Plumber certification. In addition to serving on the AOWA, David is also a part of the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board (AOWB) which is the regulatory board for licensing.

David's advice for all those in the wastewater industry is simple but important, "Learn and get educated." He stresses the importance of remaining involved and continuing education as a key factor to his success in this industry. "If you're not willing to change and get educated you're not going to grow as you should. Be a part of the solution, not the problem."

David also credits his involvement with the AOWA and AOWB as a large part of his success. "I didn't realize how important the association was from legislation to rule revision to everything important in my day-to-day work life."

He encourages AOWA members to use their voices and become involved in association business. "I can't encourage people enough if they disagree with something and they're a part of the association, they can come to the association meeting and voice it and there are people on the board who can do something about it. I can't push involvement enough; everybody needs to be a part of it." His involvement in the AOWA also keeps him prepared for the future. "Being a part of the association keeps me up to date on all the new changes and upcoming changes and prepares me for the future."



*The Mastin Family*

# News from the AOWB



## Welcome 2023 Licensees!

Happy New Year Licensees! There are still quite a few of you that haven't renewed your license for 2023. Just want to remind you all that the late fee went into effect on January 1. \$100.00 per license. Let us try to get this taken care of as soon as possible. Your Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board license must be renewed between October 1st – December 31st each year. It is important to renew your license before the end of the current year to have an active and valid license on January 1st. Remember that you can always call the Board's office for any assistance or questions you may have regarding the renewal of your license – (334) 353-9250. Below is information that will be helpful to you regarding your license renewal process:

### RENEWING YOUR LICENSE WITH THE ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER BOARD

As you can see on your AOWB license certificate, the expiration date is December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year. The renewal season for each year begins October 1, of each year. Licenses are recommended to be renewed online, however; a renewal application can be requested by contacting our office. Renewal notices are not mailed out as they are the responsibility of the licensee. Licenses that are not renewed before January 1 of each year shall pay a late fee of \$100.00 per license. Your bond must be current, so make sure AOWB has your bond continuation or renewal on file. Continuing education is also part of the renewal process and shall be obtained before December 31 of each year.

### CONTINUING EDUCATION HOURS REQUIRED

Portable Restroom License (only) is **4 hours** of continuing education annually.

Basic, pumper, or manufacturer, or portable restroom licenses (or with any combination) is **6 hours** of continuing education annually.

Advanced Level I Installer (or combined with a pumper, manufacturer, or portable restroom) is **8 hours** of continuing education annually.

Advanced Level II Installer (or combined with a pumper, manufacturer, or portable restroom) is **10 hours** of continuing education annually.

### WHERE CAN I GET CONTINUING EDUCATION?

Call the Board's office or view the "Continuing Education" tab on our web page for a listing of all approved continuing education courses. Our website is [www.aowb.alabama.gov](http://www.aowb.alabama.gov).

In addition to those approved by the AOWB, courses may be taken at educational institutions in your area. *Call the AOWB before attending any course not listed as an approved course for more information.*

I look forward to seeing many of you again this year at continuing education classes across the state!

Here's to a prosperous new year in the onsite sewage industry!!!

Sincerely,  
Melissa Hines,  
Executive Director  
Alabama Onsite  
Wastewater Board  
(334) 353-9250





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# SAVE THE DATE

## 2023 AOWA ANNUAL TRADE SHOW



LAKE GUNTERSVILLE  
STATE PARK

MARCH 16-17, 2023

The 36th Annual AOWA Trade Show will be held at beautiful Lake Guntersville State Park in Guntersville, AL. If you are connected in any way to the onsite wastewater industry in Alabama, this conference is a must for you. There will be industry exhibits and seminars to keep you up to date with what is happening in YOUR industry, as well as networking opportunities with others in your field. Join us for this “can’t miss” event and get your CEUs for the year!

**NEW**

This Year’s Trade Show offers a half day of education on Thursday, March 16th, and a full day of classes on Friday, March 17th. A total of 12 hours of education is available over this 2-day period. Trade Show exhibits will be open from 12:30 pm Thursday through 5:00 pm Friday.

### IMPORTANT DETAILS:

**TRADE SHOW HOTEL** - Reserve by January 15th, 2023 and take advantage of our special Trade Show pricing!

Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge (800) 548-4553 - Mention the **Alabama Onsite Wastewater Association** to receive the special rate. (If booking online, enter **Group Code 9201**)

Lake Guntersville State Park Lodge is located at 115 Lodge Dr. | Guntersville, AL 35976

**You need to attend this Trade Show!**

**For your convenience, we are including registration, sponsorship, and exhibitor forms on the following pages.**





# THE ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

2023 AOWA Annual Trade Show  
 March 16 –17, 2023  
 Lake Guntersville State Park  
 Guntersville, AL  
 REGISTRATION FORM

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

COMPANY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Items to note:**

- ⇒ Only **one** licensee per member company is entitled to the discount. Other licensees at the member company must pay full price.
- ⇒ Please note that the 2023 AOWA Annual Trade Show will offer 4 hours of education on Thursday, and 8 hours of education on Friday. If you require more than 4 hours of education, you will need to attend Thursday and/or Friday sessions.

**REGISTRATION FEES:**

Registration includes training material and attendance certification.

Mail Form and Registration Fee (see chart to the right) to:

AOWA  
 P.O. Box 10  
 Lanett, AL 36863

Make check or money order payable to "AOWA".  
 There will be no refunds and no transfers.  
 There will be a \$30.00 fee for all returned checks. No exceptions!  
 Registration deadlines for the classes are always 2 weeks prior to class.  
 Please note: You are not registered until we receive your registration form and payment.

Please Circle the Class Type and Price	
BASIC INST./PUMPER/MAN (6 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$280.00 \$230.00
ADVANCED INST. LEVEL 1 (8 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$325.00 \$275.00
Advanced Inst. Level 2 (10 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$380.00 \$330.00
Portable Restroom Only (4 hrs) (AOWA Members)	\$220.00 \$170.00
ADPH Thursday	\$40.00
ADPH Friday	\$50.00
ADPH Both Thurs & Fri	\$80.00



## 2023 AOWA TRADE SHOW

March 16 -17 | Lake Guntersville State Park, Guntersville, AL

### Sponsorship Levels & Benefits

#### **DIAMOND SPONSOR** \$1,500

- Two complimentary Trade Show registrations
- Logo recognition & hyperlink in promotional e-blasts and on website
- Logo recognition in conference program
- Logo recognition on signage onsite at Trade Show
- Priority in selecting booth space if also exhibiting

#### **PLATINUM SPONSOR** \$1,000

- One complimentary Trade Show registration
- Logo recognition & hyperlink in promotional e-blasts and on website
- Logo recognition in conference program
- Logo recognition on signage onsite at Trade Show
- Priority in selecting booth space, following Diamond Sponsors, if also exhibiting

#### **GOLD SPONSOR** \$750

- Logo recognition in promotional e-blasts and on website
- Logo recognition in conference program
- Logo recognition on signage onsite at Trade Show

#### **SILVER SPONSOR** \$500

- Name recognition in promotional e-blasts and on website
- Name recognition in conference program
- Name recognition on signage onsite at Trade Show

#### **BRONZE SPONSOR** \$300

- Name recognition on website
- Name recognition in conference program

Interested in sponsoring all year long? Continuing Education and Lunch sponsorships are available for all of the Continuing Education and Licensing classes throughout the year. Ask for details!





**THE ALABAMA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION  
2023 ANNUAL TRADESHOW**

**March 16 - 17, 2022**  
**Lake Guntersville State Park, Guntersville, AL**  
**EXHIBITOR BOOTH REGISTRATION FORM**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COMPANY NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**INDICATE YOUR BOOTH SELECTION BELOW:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **8x10 Booth or Tabletop Exhibit—\$500**

**\*Sponsoring companies are given priority. Space will then be assigned on a first come, first serve basis.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Outdoor Space—\$500**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Outdoor Space + Inside Booth—\$750**

Please indicate if electricity will be needed by circling the voltage type: **110V** or **220V**.

**One complimentary registration is included with each exhibitor booth. Additional registrations can be purchased for \$100 each. Please indicate the names of registrants here:**

**Please Note:** Payments made by credit card will be charged a 4% convenience fee. You may call our office to pay over the phone or register online.

**Make check or money order payable to "AOWA"**  
There will be no refunds and no transfers.  
There will be a \$30.00 fee for all returned checks. No exceptions!

ALL registration forms must be received by the AOWA Office by **Friday, March 3rd, 2023.**

**REGISTRATION FEES:**

Registration includes training material and attendance certification.

**Mail Form and Registration Fee (see chart to the right) to:**

**AOWA Training Program  
P.O. Box 10  
Lanett, AL 36863**



Scott Harris, M.D., M.P.H.  
STATE HEALTH OFFICER

Greetings AOWA!

It has been a busy few months within the Department of Public Health. We have finally moved forward with the Repeal and Replacement of the Onsite Treatment and Disposal Rules. They will become effective February 13, 2023.

Here is a list of the proposed changes:

- Reorganized and condensed to create a more uniform flow.
  - Removed outdated figures
  - Updated tables
  - Revised Condensed Tank, Controlled Fill, Performance Permits, Product Permits, Lot Modification, Drip Irrigation, and Soil Mapping sections
  - Added an index
- Created consistency by utilizing similar terms, concepts, and definitions.
  - Changed the definition/section of “Sand-lined Systems” to “Combined Treatment and Disposal” to allow for new technologies
  - Added definition/section for “Innovative EDS” to be used in specific areas of the state with extreme soil conditions
  - Added “mobile tiny houses” to the definition of a recreational vehicle (RV)
  - Added “processed septage” to the definition of sewage to allow for disposal through an onsite sewage treatment and disposal system
- Eliminated state specific standards by incorporating national standards.
  - American Society for Testing and Materials for concrete tanks and piping/fitting materials
  - International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials for non-concrete tanks
  - International Plumbing Code/International Private Sewage Disposal Code for piping materials for specialized applications
  - Portable Sanitation Association International/American National Standards Institute for portable, composting, or incinerating toilet specifications
- Changed the definition of “replacement” to “relocation” that eliminates confusion with the various terms associated with “repair.”
- Modified the application time limitations section to align with the Red Tape Reduction Act.
  - Applications must be acted upon within 28 calendar days by the Local Health Department/Alabama Department of Public Health.
  - Incomplete applications will be given an additional 30 calendar days (58 total days) to be completed before they are allowed to expire
  - Applications that do not meet the rule within the 58 days will be denied
- Changed the wait time from 1 hour to 30 minutes past the agreed upon installation inspection time to allow an installer to self-certify the installation.
- Removed “RV Camps” to eliminate confusion of the effluent disposal field sizing of RVs that are not in an “RV Park.”
- Signature requirements are now exclusively the “responsible person” excluding professionals.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to give me a call!

Leigh Salter, Director  
Community Environmental Protection  
Environmental Services Division

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[alabamapublichealth.gov](http://alabamapublichealth.gov)



Accredited Health Department



## Let's Officially Welcome C.J. Gulley Into the Fraternity of Installers

*Alabama high schooler, 16, obtains his first-tier installer certification and aims to help with a family business succession plan*



*Melissa Hines of the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board, presents C.J. Gulley with his basic installer certificate of license. (Photos courtesy of Chris Gulley)*

As the average age of installers across the country creeps higher, many contractors face the prospect of creating a complex succession plan to either make sure their family business is seamlessly passed on or maintains value to sell to a new owner. Chris Gulley, owner of Gulley Construction in Bridgeport, Alabama, identified a serious shortcoming in his own succession plan recently — the fact that he was the only installer license holder for his business.

In Alabama, the individual holds the license, not the company, so licensing isn't passed along with the business or to other family members when someone dies. Gaining all the necessary installer licensing to work on a variety of septic systems takes time, and if your lone certified installer is out of commission or passes away, the machines stop running and the income stops coming. So

Chris sent his wife, Alyson, and his son, C.J., to the University of West Alabama to start the five-year process to obtain the highest level of installing licensure recognized by the state. They went through the four-day training for the basic installer certification and then passed the exam at the state licensing office in Montgomery. As a result, C.J. at age 16 became the youngest licensed installer in Alabama, according to Chris.

### **GAINING PERSPECTIVE**

Chris is fortunate that he learned all the nuances of the licensing program as a member of the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Board for three years, currently serving as its chairman. He also serves as District 2 director for the Alabama Onsite Wastewater Association, representing installer members in the northeast corner of the state.

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"If I were to die right now, holding the Advanced 2 license, there would be no way for anyone in the family to carry on with anything but the basic license," Chris explained. "Our money is not in basic systems. Our money is in alternative systems."

That would leave the company allowed to install only low-flow conventional tank and drainfield septic systems, while more complex systems pushing larger flows are Gulley Construction's bread and butter. As Chris explained it, basic systems cost \$5,000 to \$7,000, while he concentrates on more lucrative projects with a price tag of \$20,000 to \$200,000.

His demise could be financially devastating for the company — not to mention the many years of expertise that would be lost.

With their basic licenses in hand, Alyson and C.J. must put in five basic systems over a two-year period to reach eligibility to take the Advanced Level 1 course. That license allows the installer to oversee advanced system installs up to 1,800 gpd flow. In two years, the license holder must install five advanced systems to qualify for Advanced Level 2 training, which adds large projects like schools, neighborhood systems into the mix. Chris is one of about 100 Alabama installers with the most advanced license. "Advanced Level 1 is the sweet spot," Chris said, explaining that most new and replacement systems fall under this category of certification. If all goes to plan, Gulley Construction will have licensure to continue handling the most complex system installs for many years to come.

And there's a feeling of security in that, Chris explained.

### TOUGH REGULATIONS

"Several people wanting to retire have come to the AOWB to ask for a variance to waive the time required for their children to be able to test," Chris recalled. That threw up a red flag for members of the board, who are now looking for a way to help

these installers smooth the certification process. "The board is actually working on developing a family succession plan, a way for their immediate family heirs to fast-track to get the licenses they need to keep going."

These rules aren't in place to trip anyone up. Rather, the process is a way to make sure installers are qualified and have enough training to ensure the work is done properly and customers receive a consistently good product.

"Alabama has some of the toughest onsite laws and rules in the nation, which is a good thing,"

Chris said. "Most other states just go through a 2-3 hour course. This four-day course and then passing an exam for licensing is taking steps to professionalize the industry."

It also discourages fly-by-night contractors.

Chris holds a variety of plumbing and construction certifications because his company provides many related services. Some trades, plumbing for instance, require lengthy apprenticeships to ensure a well-trained workforce, and Chris believes the onsite industry in general should trend more in that direction.

**These rules aren't in place to trip anyone up. Rather, the process is a way to make sure installers are qualified and have enough training to ensure the work is done properly and customers receive a consistently good product.**

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## LOFTY GOALS

Chris couldn't be more proud of the accomplishment of his can-do son, who is already working in the trenches with him as a high school junior. He has hopes for C.J. that include attending Auburn University and taking classes that would allow him to become a soil evaluator for the



*In the trench shooting grades is one of C.J. Gulley's favorite places to be at an installation work site.*

company down the road. For his part, the younger Gulley seems well on his way to shepherding the family enterprise for many years to come.

C.J. will continue on the certification path, but he is also working toward other lofty goals while attending North Jackson High School. He's playing three sports, holding down first or third base on the baseball team, defensive nose guard and right tackle on the football team, and center on the basketball team. He's hunting for a scholarship to play football for Auburn and to pursue a business degree.

But family comes first.

"My whole goal is to make my dad happy. I want to get to the point where my dad can just sit at home and when he retires, he won't have to worry about the business," he said. "He has worked so hard for me, and given me everything I needed to be successful in this world. I don't know how I can thank him for it."

C.J.'s earliest memory of working with his father was at about age 6, eating breakfast in the work truck and Chris calling him out to hold some pipe he was installing. And it hasn't stopped since then; now he is frequently found standing in trenches shooting grade while his father is working the excavator. Between sports practices and working as a lifeguard, he's also found time to learn how to operate every piece of equipment Gulley Construction uses.

## A BRIGHT FUTURE

C.J. said the basic installer coursework and exam were challenging, but he was thankful to the other adult installers in the class who helped him through the process. He realizes few younger people want to enter the wastewater industry. The work is hard and most kids don't want to get dirty, he says. But he sees a lot of potential ahead for installers.

"The sky's the limit. I just try to push myself and go as far as I can," he said.



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## Is Grease Trap Service Right For Your Pumping Company?

*Consider the differences between septage and grease when preparing to start a new specialty service.*



*An electric reel with 300 feet of suction hose helps Cortese Pump Service technician Mike Toscana when he has to make a long run to a grease trap. It's much easier than running sections of hose.*

Septic pumping and grease trap service have some things in common: vacuum trucks, disposal issues, practical routing considerations and customer service are chief among them. But as our profile story this month proves, there are a lot of striking differences between these two services provided side-by-side by a good number of our readers.

Kurt Cortese (pronounced Cor-tees) and his company, Cortese Pump Services in Wayne, New Jersey, focus only on grease trap service. Reading our contractor profile story about his company could benefit all-purpose pumping outfits that want to start a grease trap speciality.

An admitted neat freak, Cortese obsesses over the cleanliness of his trucks, the careful service he provides to well-known grease accounts

— including Dunkin', Pizza Hut and The Fresh Grocer — and the way he tailors his equipment choices for efficiency. He also wants to look sharp on the job for loyal customers he often sees several times a year.

The steps Cortese takes to enhance his professional image can be considered inspiring. But as you will read in writer Betty Dageforde's profile story, Cortese's success could be boiled down to a succinct mission statement.

"It's a dirty job, but you don't have to be dirty," he explains in an online exclusive story at [www.pumper.com](http://www.pumper.com) that complements the profile printed here.

The story about Cortese and his wife, Stephanie, who founded the small service company in 2016,

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got me thinking about how we don't often stop to consider how two popular pumping services — residential septic and grease trap cleaning — differ. I will admit that in many of our profile stories, we have glossed over the important distinctions between the two types of pumping work.

Heck, if a guy or gal pumps septic tanks, they can certainly empty grease traps just the same, right? Well, many of you do it. But reading about Cortese reminds us that in many ways, grease traps are a whole different animal, and unindoctrinated pumpers should embark on that side of the pumping business with caution and a good strong plan in place.

If you don't currently handle grease but think it would be a good move, here are a few basic points to remember:

### **TRUCK SIZE MATTERS**

The trend with most pumping companies is to always go bigger with vacuum tanks. For the typical residential pumper, the average new-truck tank is pushing closer to the 5,000-gallon range. This makes sense when you can stack up four or five septic tanks on a single load before visiting the treatment plant for disposal. But that strategy is the opposite for pumpers who want to service grease traps.

Mobility, flexibility at urban and suburban grease trap locations, and better fuel economy point pumpers to outfit smaller, more nimble rigs for this specialty. A tank under 1,000 gallons isn't



*Kurt Cortese, of Cortese Pump Service, Wayne, New Jersey (Photos by Steve Hockstein)*

going to do you much good on a septic service route, but it's a great choice for pulling grease at restaurants, kitchens at convenience stores and grocers, and many other businesses that would be your bread and butter on a grease trap route. And practically speaking, you'll want a dedicated truck for grease as most disposal facilities don't want septage and grease commingled.

Consider the need for another specialized truck as you contemplate getting into grease service in a bigger way. If the numbers work, by all means start shopping for that smaller truck.

### **EQUIPPED FOR SUCCESS**

Your grease truck may need a different set of tools on board to satisfy the needs of your customers. For example, Cortese invested in a 300-foot suction hose mounted on a reel rather than dragging sections of hose with couplers through restaurant or retail settings to reach the traps. The long hose is cleaner and more efficient so he can get in and out quicker and with less chance of spillage.

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For grease jobs, a power washer is going to play a more critical role. Steam cleaning might also be important to thoroughly clean out stubborn tanks. And some trap locations may require you to have access to a smaller mobile vacuum unit to roll into a kitchen facility. These smaller wheeled units could allow you to park your truck further from the building or avoid the noise and vacuum pump exhaust odors that sometimes pose problems at busy restaurants or other retail locations.

Speaking of odors given off by vacuum exhaust, contractors who handle a lot of grease work may need to utilize a deodorizing scent box to dampen the impact of offensive odors that could waft into or around their customers' businesses during a service call. In these units, a liquid deodorant is vaporized and mixed with the exhaust to mask odors. Of course, kitchen customers will want you to work around their open-hours schedule to provide your service, which is another challenge of grease work: the potential to work unusual hours.

### **APPEARANCE IS EVERYTHING**

In grease trap work, your technicians will be face-to-face more often with customers — as well as with their retail customers. This differs from working a septic service route, where oftentimes the work is done during the day when nobody is home and a bill is left in the door or payment is in advance via credit card. Also, you tend to see grease trap customers more frequently, so you need to put your most professional foot forward.

If you visit a grease customer quarterly to stay on top of their maintenance needs, you want to leave a positive impression by making sure technicians are clean and wearing fresh uniforms. A uniform program through a service is more of a must-have than if you only serve residential septic service clients. You want to make sure crews maintain a professional demeanor and quickly respond to concerns about clean service and potential odor issues. Yes, relationship building is important for residential septic

pumping, where you may see a customer once every three to five years. But it is critical when you meet grease customers several times a year.

### **DIFFICULT DISPOSAL**

Sometimes the biggest impediment to providing grease trap service has nothing to do with your trucks or your crew. If you can't find a way to dispose of the grease efficiently and at a reasonable cost, it might be challenging to realize adequate profits for this necessary and valued pumping service.

The unfortunate truth is that more and more municipal treatment plants are refusing to process grease. As they reach capacity limits or face government budget cuts, the municipal plants have been shying away from septage as well, but they view grease as an even bigger problem.

If your go-to dump sites turn away grease, you need to find another disposal solution before you tap into the grease trap market. Check the landfills, look for private processors, consider collecting the waste in a bulk tanker and trucking it away in larger loads. You have to nail down disposal costs to determine if there is a profit to be made on the pumping end.

### **IS IT TIME FOR GREASE?**

Many pumpers have found ways to profitably incorporate grease trap work into their menu of services. A few of them have turned what was a small sidelight into the lucrative moneymaker for their pumping company. As with any new business venture, preparation is the key to success. And for pumpers and grease, that means understanding the many nuances in equipment and skills needed to get the job done right.





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