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2007
EXPO:



Prepare to be
'Amazed'

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Treasure Map

Route-planning software controls
labor, fuel costs for Texas contractor

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ON LOCATION:

588 Units,
One Day in
Louisville

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The fleet of freshly washed service trucks will soon head out for the day, cleaning restrooms throughout the El Paso area. (Photos by Stacy Kendrick)



Treasure Map

Using route-optimizing software, growing Texas operation saves on fuel bill, truck wear and tear and trims driver overtime

By Carol Brzozowski



Lorraine Wardy is shown with a 32-foot restroom trailer from Advanced Containment Systems Inc., one of several restroom trailers used by the company's special events division called Blue Sanitation.

Sarabia's Portable Jons El Paso, Texas

President & CEO: Lorraine Wardy

Employees: 15

Years in Business: 5 (company has been in business for 30 years)

Number of Units: 1,500

Service Area: 80-mile radius of El Paso, Texas, including New Mexico

Associations: Women Business Enterprise, Minority Business Enterprise, El Paso Association of Remodelers, Portable Sanitation Association International, National Association of Women in Construction, El Paso Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, and the Association of General Contractors.

Web Site: www.sarabias.com



After retiring as a designer and manufacturer of women's sportswear, Lorraine Wardy decided retirement wasn't to her liking. Though she knew nothing about portable sanitation, she seized an opportunity to buy a portable restroom business, Sarabia's Portable Jons in El Paso, Texas.

While she wasn't up to speed on the sanitation industry, Wardy knew the importance of providing excellent products and services. Focusing on that, her company has grown 30 to 40 percent annually over five years. Wardy attributes her company's growth in large part to acquiring computer software that offers her route optimization.

OUT WITH THE OLD

When Wardy purchased Sarabia's, the company had outdated restroom inventory and service equipment, as well as outdated computer hardware and software.

"We set out to make our company efficient and do as much as we could to support our services," she says. "Everything we do in the office is to support our drivers to be able



Driver George Roman adds deodorizer to the tank of one of the company's service trucks.



Left, foreman Jesus Martinez rallies the troops for a morning meeting before drivers head out for the day.

The Sarabia's office staff has to work closely using the RouteOptix software to coordinate delivery and pickup of restroom units throughout the El Paso area. Shown below are Claudine Navarro (fore-ground), Martha Chiu (back left) and Lorena Lozano.



to do their job, such as giving them good trucks with good pumps, tires and brakes.”

In the office, existing software did an adequate job for bookkeeping and tracking equipment, but not in making the most of service route planning.

“Routing is important, because if you streamline your operation and make it very efficient, your bottom line is better without sacrificing what you are giving to the customer,” Wardy notes.

In order for her company to grow, Wardy had to put a platform in place where the company could launch from 500 units to its present number of 1,500, “without having to change our system all the time,” Wardy says.

Soon after installing RouteOptix software two years ago, Wardy said her company began running more efficiently ... and saving lots of money in the process.

“This (software) system will allow us to grow as big as we want to without having to

change anything,” she notes.

One of the biggest benefits: Wardy has been able to keep four of her company's trucks in the warehouse on Wednesdays, a slow day, thus enabling her to reassign four drivers to the typically busy Saturday shift without paying overtime.

Her company still handles emergencies on Wednesdays.

Not only has that move saved Wardy labor costs, but also fuel expenses and wear and tear on the trucks.

“Routing is important, because if you streamline your operation and make it very efficient, your bottom line is better without sacrificing what you are giving to the customer.”

Lorraine Wardy

IN THE YARD

Sarabia's provides portable sanitation rentals to the construction and special events sectors. The company also provides extra products and services, such as hand-wash stations, restroom trailers and holding tanks, as well as pumping service. The operation has 15 employees, including five in the office and 10 in the field.

Sarabia's routes extend in an 80-mile radius from El Paso, including the Las Cruces, N.M., area. The company will travel practically anywhere for special events, Wardy says.

Sarabia's units are primarily from



Driver Rudy Marquez stocks up for a service route, filling this 2004 Ford F-650 pump truck from Satellite Industries with paper goods and other provisions.



Driver Saul Stevens cleans out a restroom trailer using a 2004 Ford F-650 pump truck built by Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc.

Part of the inventory of Sarabia's Portable Jons is cleaned, lined up and ready to go out on the job, serving construction or special event customers. The company uses units from several manufacturers.



Synergy World Inc., Satellite Industries, PolyPortables Inc. and Hampel Corp. Equipment runs the gamut, from non-flushing to flushing, as well as special event trailers from Advanced Containment Systems Inc., NuConcepts and Olympic Fiberglass Industries.

Sarabia's truck fleet includes a 1996 Ford F-250 pickup truck; a 2000 Ford F-450 with slider and 450-gallon waste/250-gallon freshwater Satellite tank; a 2005 Ford F-550 with slider and 450-gallon waste/250-gallon freshwater Satellite tank; a 1997 Dodge one-ton pickup truck; a 2001 Ford F-650 vacuum truck with an 850-gallon waste/350-gallon freshwater Satellite tank; a 2003 Ford F-650 vacuum truck with an 1,100-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater Satellite tank, and a 2004 Ford F-650 vacuum truck with an 1,100-gallon waste/450-gallon freshwater Abernethy Welding & Repair Inc. tank.

The company also has a 2004 Ford F-650 vacuum truck with an 850-gallon waste/350-gallon freshwater Satellite tank; a 2004 Ford F-650 vacuum truck with a 850-gallon waste/400-gallon premixed cleaning solution/300-gallon freshwater Satellite tank; a 2005 Ford F-650 vacuum truck with an 1,100-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater Satellite tank; a 2006 Ford F-750 vacuum truck with an 1,100-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater Best Enterprises Inc. tank, and a 2006 Ford F-750 vacuum truck with an 1,100-gallon waste/500-gallon freshwater Best tank.

SATISFIED EMPLOYEES

While other PROs lament the challenge of driver retention, Wardy

reports low turnover, attributing her success to treating workers like "family." But like many people, her drivers don't like change, she concedes.

What Wardy did not know until she installed the routing software is that some drivers were on their route for eight hours when they could have done it in six.

"RouteOptix allowed me to time them better, bring them in sooner, and give drivers the time to do other things with their trucks: maintenance, cleaning and washing," she says.

Wardy pays her drivers for 40 hours of work regardless of the hours they put in. "The worst thing is if they're out there for 40 hours when they really didn't need to be," Wardy says. The new procedure makes her drivers "very happy," she adds.

MANY APPLICATIONS

The RouteOptix software package enables Wardy to perform a number of functions:

- Customers are assigned numbers that not only show up on the map, but also are linked to a detailed customer database.



Above, a 32-foot restroom trailer from Advanced Containment Systems Inc. is one of several upscale restroom options offered by Sarabia's. At right, the interior of the ACSI unit is cleaned and ready to go into service.



Angel de Santiago uses a pressure washer to clean and sanitize a PolyPortables Inc. restroom.

- Billing: Wardy bills in advance 28 days, so she'll do an unbilled revenue inquiry to know what she'll be invoicing at the end of the period. The accounts-receivable feature enables staff to review an account weekly, monthly in arrears, monthly in advance, yearly or quarterly. Other billing features enable Wardy to see which customers owe the company money, how much and how long the bill has been past due.

Invoices can be printed by location, as some customers have multiple locations; statements can be printed to compile all invoices to show total owed amounts.

Invoices or statements can be customized with past-due notices for 30 days, 60 days and beyond.

- Route information is trackable: whether the driver is doing a rental or a service, how much it costs, types and number of units, how often he stops there and on what days. A fixed-route feature shows route numbers and color codes each route on a map. Time estimates for each stop also are included.



"Good service is everything. You don't want your customers to ask about a charge, or say there was a unit in the wrong place, or they didn't get certain equipment."

Lorraine Wardy

By looking at the map, Wardy can determine, for instance, that the driver is spending three hours of driving time, driving 104 miles, and is making seven calls. Start and stop times are listed. Wardy says she can avoid route duplications by visualizing overlapping routes, enabling her to make necessary adjustments. Unassigned calls are indicated so dispatch can assign the call for route optimization.

• For asset management, equipment is assigned an inventory number and is tracked on the software program each time it is put into service. Specifications for each piece of inventory — age, size, cost — are noted, helping Wardy's company keep track of availability and usage.

DRIVERS GET DETAILED INFO

Each day, the office generates printouts of the day's route information for the drivers. The printout instructs the driver where to start, a description of the job, and needed equipment. The printout also indicates if a customer hasn't paid, with notations such as "no service," "stop service," "service canceled," "item removed" or "pick up."

If a customer calls to say the driver didn't service the units, Wardy can refer to the printout where the driver indicated what time he had stopped, if the gate was closed or if there had been another reason preventing service. Also, the driver can note a unit may need a new seat or a latch is missing. The dispatch manager reviews the sheets daily.

As anyone working with computers knows, training — as well as technical support — is essential. "All the time, we'll have something come up, like a glitch or human error," Wardy notes. The problems are fixed remotely, and in a timely fashion, she adds.

Wardy gets software updates every three to six months, and receives customized updates at her request. She has asked for different types of invoices, or that check posting be made easier. She also wants a master customer list so she can manipulate it for the 10 best customers, or determine who hasn't used the services for six months.

Wardy acknowledges that in order to attract and retain customers, "good service is everything. You don't want your customers to ask about a charge, or say there was a unit in the wrong place, or they didn't get certain equipment."



CUSTOMER SERVICE

What good customer service means to Wardy is not only having well-equipped field operations with on-time delivery and monthly service, but an office with employees who answer the phone courteously and are knowledgeable about the products. She wants customers informed about all of their options. For instance, special events units can be used by construction clients for groundbreakings and grand openings.

Although she has a relatively steady customer base, Wardy is always marketing through the company's Web site, e-mail, a biannual newsletter, and networking through business association involvement.

"The loyalty is not always there," she points out. "They are price shopping."

Wardy says her company's overall success is rooted in her decision to run Sarabia's as a "sanitation company" rather than simply a portable restroom company.

"Everything we do is geared toward cleanliness and sanitization. Our trucks and units go out clean and free of graffiti. Our guys wear uniforms," Wardy says.

Moving forward, Wardy says she wants

There's always a time to trust experienced employees

It's been said that computers are only as good as the data input by humans.

Lorraine Wardy, owner of Sarabia's Portable Jons in El Paso, Texas, acknowledges there can be room for "fudging" with computer software, but her drivers have been with the company for so long that she trusts them when a customer makes a claim of "no service."

In the rare case a driver lies, he's suspended.

"I tell my drivers I will face the customer if you tell me the truth — you couldn't go, you had a flat tire, you ran out of time, or whatever," she says.

When drivers have a problem and call the office, a replacement unit can be dispatched.

"As long as my customers do not complain, I know my drivers are doing a good job," Wardy notes.

her company to continue steady growth.

"But there's no use in growing too fast and not being able to handle it," she says. "I don't want to lose my old customers in the process." ■

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Three Lakes, WI 54562
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