

Dealer Profile

Contoocook Artesian Well Co.

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New Hampshire's Artesian Quality Water Specialists

Contoocook Artesian Well, started in 1936, was purchased in 1957 by Merle Patenaude with his son Wayne, who ran it until 2001. The family-owned business is today operated by the third generation of water specialists, including Wayne's son, Rick, who has been working in the business since age 17.

Wayne ran the business from his farmhouse for decades, dispatching trucks and crews from a small garage bay. "When the phone would ring late at night or on holidays, my dad took the calls and sent the service truck out right away, no matter what day of the year," Rick reminisced.

"Our business was always open and that's how people came to know they could count on us to get them water," he said. "It's the same story today: seven-day-a-week service, a quality job, a fair price and a name that's been trusted for over 70 years. We feel that our family name is on the line with every job we do." The company can also boast that it holds the very first New Hampshire water well license.

Contoocook Artesian Well serves southern New Hampshire, a region that extends from the Massachusetts border up to the Lakes Region. They provide a wide array of products and services: drilling artesian water wells, installing and servicing submersible pumps, drilling and installing geothermal well and

By Denise M. Roberts

pump systems, out-of-water service and water testing and filtration.

Arsenic, radon, high acidity and iron are problems common to the region. Testing is accomplished in the customer's home or at a state-certified lab to identify contaminants and mineral issues with particular water sources. Those lab results are used to guide Contoocook staff with engineering and building custom systems designed to ensure the perfect fix.

At the peak of business in 2002, the company drilled more than 700 wells before the construction industry ground to a halt in the state. A large customer base was established over the decades and Rick observed how often customers were looking for referrals for water filtration systems, after a well and pump system was installed.

"We're glad we made the investment in water filtration as an additional source of income and connection with our customers," Rick said. "We've found it to be a natural extension for our business and a drilling-to-drinking-water approach is good for our bottom line."

"Our water filtration operation is small by design," Rick continued. "We built it as a subset of our residential and commercial water well drilling business, specifically to take care of our customer base and expand the products and services we

can offer them. We've kept it a small part of our business in order to maintain an effective and low-overhead business model.

Nick Freyenhagen, CWS-1, manages the filtration segment. He started out as a helper, installing filters and systems before working his way up to managing the division because he has a natural talent for chemistry and diagnosing issues. A very bright and innovative person, Freyenhagen is also a good communicator.

"Nick's certification makes him stand above others in the industry," said Rick. "He can give our customers a higher level of comfort and confidence than other companies in the water filtration business. We see that as a competitive advantage and a reason to call Contoocook Artesian Well first."

"Our best market is our current customers—the people we work with through our drilling and pump service. We don't market ourselves as a stand-alone water filtration mega center. We tend to get leads for water filtration as a natural part of our well drilling and pump service business and through our relationships with building contractors. We find that neighbors tell neighbors when they are pleased. Those referrals have become a substantial part of our business."

In these difficult economic times, Rick's sense is they will continue to be challenging for at least the next five years, maybe longer. The company was forced to take a very close look at the costs of every project. In the boom years, it was moving so quickly and competition was so intense that it was easy to lose sight of exactly what made the business profitable.

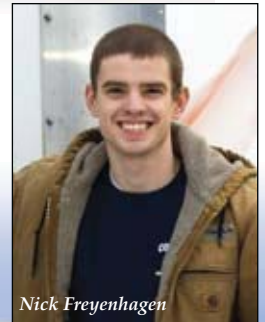
Now Contoocook Artesian Well is using the downturn to conserve, study the business and be well positioned when the demand increases. The new strategy is to pick the right partners, know the demand for products, stay on top of accounts receivable and innovate wherever possible. "The next five or ten years will likely not be about high volume, so we want to be sure everything is done high quality," Rick offered. "We'll stay focused on quality of service, because we know the power of referrals and a good name." ♦



Rick Patenaude



Jeff Coppo



Nick Freyenhagen

