

# Pumper

Exclusively for the liquid waste industry

## True Professionals

High standards  
propel Rhode  
Island installer  
Superior Septic

Superior  
Septic  
Service Inc.  
789-9360  
JOHN DEERE

### ONSITE SYSTEMS

Recirculating Media Filters:  
Solution for high water tables

Choosing the right effluent pump

PRSTD STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT NO. 411  
Beaver Dam, WI

August 2002  
Mailed 8-02-02

COLE PUBLISHING INC.  
1720 MAPLE LAKE DAMI RD.  
THREE LAKES WI 54682  
800-257-7222 • 715-546-3346 • www.pumper.com  
CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

# True Professionals

**As Rhode Island tightens its onsite regulations, a family business steps up to the plate with training, certification, and years of experience**

**By Marian Bond**

**M**any aspects of business have changed since Rick and Darlene Gardner opened their excavation and septic system installation company in 1980. What hasn't changed is their highly professional approach to the work.

Today, the Gardners operate two companies — Backhoe and Dozer Service Inc. and Superior Septic Service Inc. — from South Kingstown, R.I. They have done more than keep pace with changes in onsite technology and regulations. They have become leaders in their state in education and training for other professionals.

Their companies serve three adjoining communities (combined population 60,000) where septic systems are gradually replacing older cesspools and are the primary treatment systems for new homes, as well.

"Of course there are sewers in some areas, but we don't anticipate they will be town-wide," Darlene says. "The cities are requiring that cesspools be replaced with septic systems within the next few years."

The Gardners opened Superior Septic Services in 1993 to handle system repairs and pumping. "We were sending that business to others," says Darlene. "People liked our work and were more comfortable with us for service and maintenance. So we decided that we would do the job from start to finish."

Their three grown children have come into the enterprise, Amanda Horan and Amber Gardner working with Darlene in the office, while Rick G. Gardner helps his father with installations. Their youngest son, 13-year-old Jared, works for the companies during school vacations. Long-time employee Dave Boisclair operates the pumper truck for Superior Septic. Part-time employee Kevin Anderson works for Backhoe and Dozer.

## **Certified inspectors**

Nearly 2,000 customers can attest to the quality of the Gardners' work. The high standards they set are causing competitors to step up to the plate and improve their performance, too.

"In our area, homeowners are required to have their systems inspected every three years," says Darlene. "That opens a lot of doors, as we can see what the homeowner has and recommend



**Rick and Darlene Gardner, owners of Superior Septic Service, set their company apart with thorough industry knowledge and the highest professional standards.**

ways to upgrade systems, rather than let them go by the wayside."

Rick and Darlene have attended an inspector's course at the University of Rhode Island (URI), and they are on an approved list as certified inspectors. Darlene helps teach the course and also sits on the steering committee at URI for the Onsite Wastewater Training Center, where the courses are conducted.

Superior typically has about four appointments per week to pump and

---

***"In our area, homeowners are required to have their systems inspected every three years. That opens a lot of doors, as we can see what the homeowner has and recommend ways to upgrade systems, rather than let them go by the wayside."***

**Darlene Gardner**

---

inspect systems and give recommendations on repair and upkeep. "We have focused on being ready to supply our customers with information," says Darlene. "Some people don't know anything about wastewater treatment — what it means to have a septic system in their yard. We try very hard to pass that information on to them.

"When we put in a new installation, we give the homeowner a septic packet that includes information from URI on how to maintain the system and the do's and don'ts of operation. We give them a drawing and description of the septic system and provide space to keep track of what has been done to the system.

"We also supply information about our company, and I enter them into my computer. We send a reminder postcard every two to three years. We like to touch bases with the homeowner and have routine maintenance done. We also do this for customers who order pumping or a septic system repair. Any type of service, we give a packet."

Darlene says customers appreciate the information packet as well as the service reminders. In some cases, she follows up with a telephone call about two weeks after the card goes out. "Actually I would say we get about a 60

## **P R O F I L E**

### **Backhoe and Dozer Service Inc. and Superior Septic Service Inc., South Kingstown, R.I.**

<b>OWNERS:</b>	<b>Rick and Darlene Gardner</b>
<b>SERVICES:</b>	<b>Septic system design, installation, repair and maintenance</b>
<b>MARKET AREA:</b>	<b>South Kingstown, North Kingstown, and Charlestown, R.I.</b>
<b>YEARS IN BUSINESS:</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>CUSTOMER BASE:</b>	<b>2,000</b>
<b>AFFILIATIONS:</b>	<b>Work with University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and Rhode Island Independent Contractors and Associates</b>
<b>WEB SITE:</b>	<b><a href="http://www.superiorsepticsservice.com">www.superiorsepticsservice.com</a></b>



Above, a Superior Septic technician places galleys on top of crushed stone during a septic system installation. At the right, technician Dave Boisclair pumps out a cesspool.



*"When we put in a new installation, we give the homeowner a septic packet that includes information on how to maintain the system and the do's and don'ts of operation. We give them a drawing and description of the septic system and provide space to keep track of what has been done to the system."*

**Darlene Gardner**

to 75 percent response on the notice alone," she says. "When we call as a further reminder, the customer has frequently intended to call, but has just put it off."

When Superior personnel complete a tank installation that includes a riser, they use a stencil to paint the company name and telephone number on the lid so that the customer can easily contact them for service.

### Tighter regulations

The rules for onsite systems are changing in Rhode Island. "In 1999, the state said that in order to draw up a plan for a conventional system or make a repair, you needed to go through a class and pass a test," says Darlene. "The class

is pretty extensive, and it covers the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) rules." Those rules specify setbacks from wells and property lines and prescribe the type of system required for a given site.

Rick and Darlene studied for and attained their Class 1 Designer Licenses, which allow them to design and install conventional systems for homes up to six bedrooms, as well as replace or upgrade existing systems. They are also qualified to install more advanced systems specified by other designers or by engineers.

State regulations require designers to consider the depth of the water table and the soil types on the site. The soils in their area vary — there can be substantial dif-

ferences from one side of a road to the other.

Each soil has unique characteristics that affect an installation. "In a very sandy area, you have to know those soils will not hold together that well, and you don't want to make just a small trench and expect somebody to work in it," Darlene says. "If you're working in an area with rocks, you have to know that you might be over-digging. You take out one rock and it will make the hole 10 times bigger than you need. Soil-wise, how you set up the job and proceed is pretty important."

Some design projects call for the services of an engineer. For such cases, the Gardners keep a list of three or four

engineers they have worked with in the past. They provide the list to the customer, who makes the final decision. Customers appreciate this guidance during the initial phases of planning for a system.

### Making it work

Systems installed by Backhoe and Dozer include sand filters and conventional trench or galley systems. One of their challenges is to make a design that "looks good on paper" actually work on location. Once excavation begins, surprises can come up. Resolving issues

## Keeping Abreast

Being involved with the University of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has been a big benefit for Rick and Darlene Gardner, owners of Superior Septic Service.

"We discuss many things going on in the state dealing with inspections and methods we can use to help the installer, the designer, and the homeowner, too," Darlene says. "We go over different technologies being introduced into the state."

The university's Onsite Wastewater Training Center installs new systems that can be shown to people to illustrate new technologies. DEM also offers installation training.

"I'm involved by being there to learn as well as to teach," says Darlene. "It's a hands-on learning experience. We install the components the different companies supply us. I know there are only a few training facilities in all of the United States.

I feel fortunate that Rhode Island has one."

Superior's professionalism has brought about change in competing companies. "People are realizing that times are changing, and we have to go along with those changes if we are to stay productive," Darlene says. "We like to see other people being prosperous.

"I've told others who are in training as inspectors that there are so many septic systems in Rhode Island, and with all the new requirements coming out, there are more than enough for all of us. With all the new opportunities, we need to be more of an organization, rather than just competitors."

Disposal is just one in a long line of challenges that Gardners have faced through more than two decades in business. They'll meet it the same way they've met all the others — with knowledge, professionalism and pride.

---

***"Many times, when you go out to do the pumping, you will find that a repair needs to be done. Actually, the pumping side does most of the repairs. We do operate as two separate businesses.***

**Darlene Gardner**

---

requires close coordination with the designer or engineer.

Time is always a factor, especially when a homeowner needs a system replaced or renovated. "From the moment someone calls to look at their site and we visit, it may take three to four days to come up with a price for them," says Darlene.

"If they decide to go ahead and have us do it, we need another two weeks to make measurements and do the design and submit to DEM. Then two to four weeks for DEM to review the plans, go to the site, and give approval. Once we get approval, it will be at least two to three weeks to get on our schedule before we go to the site to do the actual work. The installation takes no more than a week."

As for pumping, Superior Septic's work is fairly routine. However, that business does fit well with the installation company. "Many times, when you go out to do the pumping, you will find that a repair needs to be done," Darlene says. "Actually, the pumping side does most of the repairs. We do operate as two separate businesses.

"We got into the pumping business

starting at the bottom, with a truck we had that we renovated by putting on a tank. It was not a vacuum truck but a diaphragm pump. It was a low investment. Later, we were able to purchase another truck we had seen advertised in *Pumper* magazine."

#### **Clean image**

The company's image is of paramount importance to Rick and Darlene. Their trucks and machinery are painted yellow with red lettering, which displays not only the telephone number, but also the web site: [www.superiorseptic.com](http://www.superiorseptic.com). The site has been up and running for about a year and recently went through an upgrade. Advertising promotes the site, and it gets significant traffic.

Gardners work hard at conveying professionalism in the appearance of their equipment and their people. They work hard at keeping the trucks clean and in good repair. "We have shirts and hats with our logo on them," Darlene says. "As an inspector, I also wear the shirt and hat." The men who do the installations are not required to wear the uniform.

The future is bright for the Gardners'



**Technicians install an In-Drain system supplied by Eljen Corporation. The system includes Bio-Matt fabric that facilitates biomat growth while preserving infiltration capacity. Superior Septic designs and installs conventional septic systems and replaces and upgrades existing systems.**

companies. "We see that there is quite a building boom going on in Rhode Island, and both operations will have opportunity for growth," says Darlene. "In fact, in April we added another truck for pumping — a Mack vacuum truck with a 3,500-gallon tank. We thought about replacing the truck we were using, but we decided to keep it and use it on occasion if we need storage for septage."

The company does face some restrictions on septage disposal. "The treatment center in South Kingstown is only

allowed to take 20,000 gallons per day," says Darlene. "If five trucks holding 3,000 gallons come in the morning, by 10 a.m. they will have taken almost all they can take for the day.

"Fortunately, we dump at more than one site. But we decided it would be helpful if we continued to use the second truck so that if the new truck is full, but we cannot dispose and we need to pump for a customer, we can use the older truck until we can dispose of the waste." ■

---

© 2002, COLE Publishing Inc.

Reprinted with permission from *Pumper*, August 2002  
COLE Publishing Inc., P.O. Box 220, Three Lakes, WI 54562  
800-257-7222 / [www.pumper.com](http://www.pumper.com)