

Winter 2006/2007

Heart of New Hampshire Magazine

Celebrating the Heart & Soul of New Hampshire

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NH's Stephen Hodecker**

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Championships**

**Skiing Where
Families Matter**

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The Flag, Watercolor by Stephen Hoedecker, Meredith, NH. This painting is from a series called Remembrance and will be part of an exhibition Steve is working on as a memorial to New Hampshire soldiers killed in Iraq - - - truly the heart of NH.

Dave W. Presby

Shining Stars

In the shadow of the Presidentials, Dave Presby works magic in ways that might just help save the planet.

By Barbara Bald & Wayne King

Dave W. Presby is a man on a mission ... a man with a dream.

With the majesty of the Presidential mountain range and the rolling fields of Whitefield and Jefferson as the backdrop for his growing company, it's probably no surprise that a fellow like Dave Presby would consider himself an avid conservationist and environmentalist. Yet his business, septic disposal systems, would seem to steer him in a contrary direction. Not so.

David Presby's mission is to honor the legacy of his forebearers and his homeland by turning over a world that is cleaner and safer to the next generation. While he is already playing his part in that grand tradition, he hopes to do that in a way that will ultimately change the way we dispose of sewage – to achieve drinking water-quality outflow from a septic system that is less expensive to build, longer lasting, and can be built on any kind of terrain.

He's already within striking distance of those goals. The Presby system is, by most accounts, about 40% less expensive than a traditional system. It also

does not require a flat surface, as most conventional systems do (several ski areas are using it under their slopes), and it uses considerably less space. The biggest challenge still ahead is to produce drinking water quality effluent, but even that is achievable to his mind.



Caricature by Liane LeBlanc

Talk with Dave Presby and he's sure to get that faraway-look in his eyes as he describes the vision of standing in front of a crowd of people and filling his water glass from the downstream-end of his septic system and drinking it as they watch . . . "We'll do it," he says with confidence.

Americans in general - and NH folk in

particular - love ingenious inventions and revel in the success stories of people who manage to bring their dreams to life. Behind each inventor there is a unique story to tell and something in each individual's background that instills an unwavering confidence in both themselves and their inventions. Dave Presby embodies that spirit.

Born in Littleton, NH, Dave has lived his fifty-one years within a ten-mile radius of the town of Sugar Hill, where he now lives with his wife Sheila, four dogs, two cats and two horses. There, they also successfully raised their children. While this may give you the impression that Dave is parochial, that could not be farther from the truth. On any given day you might find Dave jump-

ing into one of his planes and flying off to a convention or a training or to convince some stubborn bureaucrat that his system is, in fact, "all that."

A burly man with the presence of a North Country icon, Dave has a twinkle in his eye, brawny arms, and a persistence that's hard as a rock. He credits his distant relative Ozzie Heath for this creativ-

ity and tenacity. From the ages five to eleven, Dave spent summers, weekends and holidays with him. Since Ozzie had no children, Dave was like a son to him and describes Ozzie as a “thrifty tinkerer who knew how to survive.” Under Ozzie’s tutelage, Dave learned to work with wood, repair machinery, use vintage tools, garden... and become self-reliant.

Dave’s second mentor was his grandfather, Lester Presby, “an interesting, crusty, frugal man who disliked banks and heated with wood till he was eighty.” Dave adds that while everyone else was plowing their fields with horses, his granddad bought the first tractor in the area and began plowing his own fields, as well as the fields of others. His income went from \$.50/day to earning enough to purchase a piece of the Mount Washington Hotel. What was his biggest lesson? “Never quit. If the job seems impossible, it means it’s just gonna take a little longer.” Some other behind-the-scenes influences on Dave’s life were his mother, “who backed you

no matter what you wanted to do, and always pushed you to do more and better”; Ross Coffin, who among other things got him interested in flying; and Shirley Mann who, in 1972, taught Dave to fly.

In his younger years, Dave worked for his father, who had started Presby Construction in 1948. He also worked other jobs that reflected his broad range of interests and his voracious appetite for learning and doing. Presby Construction’s forte was dirt work, and by the time Dave bought the company from his father in 1986 they had become a major player in various phases of construction in the North Country including septic system installation, maintenance and consulting. Dave had also worked with Gibbs Labs on water systems. It was the nexus between these experiences that started his entrepreneurial gears grinding and meshing with the inventor’s passion that had consumed him since his youth.

Conventional septic systems, he theorized, seemed to work okay in terms of putting the problem out of sight;

however, they caused too many groundwater problems because the bacteria needed to break down the waste couldn’t survive in the environment of a conventional system. They also were prone to failure on a regular basis. Dave saw the need to develop something that created its own unique ecosystem... something where the bacteria needed to break down the septage would not only survive but would flourish. As he puts it, “the faster the (good) bacteria grows, the cleaner the water will be when it emerges from the system.” Having framed the problem, Dave’s mind then went to work on the solution. First you needed surface area for the bacteria to grow – lots of it. Where conventional systems were oxygen starved (anaerobic), you needed instead an aerobic environment with plenty of circulating oxygen, an environment where the bacteria were not killed off by the sludge bonding to the surface of the pipe. With these things in mind, a conceptual framework began to develop in his mind – a multi-layered system of transfer for septage that went far *continued on page 40*

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beyond the traditional pipes of a conventional system to create an underground ecosystem of “scrubbing bacteria.”

At the time, of course, nothing of the sort existed. In fact, even the pipes necessary to form the inner layer of his theoretical system didn't exist. Dave searched around and found a Canadian company that manufactured a pipe that came close to his needs, and he then invented his *continued on page 38* own machinery to perforate the pipes. Dave began to experiment with various media to achieve the goal of an underground ecosystem until he had come up with a system that he named and has patented as the Enviro-Septic Leaching System.

In 1995, the Canadian company that had been producing his pipe sent a representative of the company to tell him that they were doubling the price of the pipe. When Dave protested, the representative told him that he had nowhere else to go and he'd just have to live with the increase. What would have been a disaster for most companies was just a bump in the road for David Presby. Within months, Presby had put together a plan for his own specialized plastics extruder using machinery invented from surplus sawmill machinery and wheelbarrow parts. With the help of the North Country Investment Corporation he built the equipment and began manufacturing plastic piping precisely to his own specifications. Best of all, our environmental-inventor used recycled plastics

for both the pipe and the matting that would surround it, to further minimize the environmental impact of the process.

Today, as you stand on the cement floor of the giant, steel-beamed warehouse, you see an efficient operation with two manufacturing lines along the walls. The center of the building provides a vast inner space for a forklift to deliver materials from one end of the building to the other. A small machine shop sits in one corner of the building to custom-make any new part needed for a particular job. Of the two production lines, one takes recycled plastic pellets and fashions them into perforated pipes called extrusion tubes. The second line manufactures giant rolls of green-fibered mats that are custom-made to fit around the pipes. At the assembly end of the building, where feeders grab the mats, machines sew them around the moving pipes. There, they are cut into ten-foot lengths and stacked for shipping, all within a matter of minutes!

Michelle Crawford, office manager, explains that the raw recycled plastic is routed through North Stratford by railcar and reaches Whitefield via tractor-trailer. The plastic, which resembles “tapioca or styrofoam beads in bean bags,” is stored in six silos on the property and piped into the building to manufacture the tubes and mats. The entire system is completely enclosed with all waste-streams recycled internally.

Michelle describes Presby Environmental as “a company where employees work together as a family, making a product that everyone believes in.” Everyone loves working for Dave and admires his unique ability to have turned a small, grass-roots operation into a successful, nationwide business that is already changing sewage treatment in this country.

So, just how does the Enviro-Septic System work? Why is it so user and ecologically friendly?

In any septic system the first stop outside of the home is the septic tank. In the tank, solid waste settles to the bottom where anaerobic bacteria break them down. The fluid (effluent) heads for the leaching field where it meets oxygen-loving bacteria. Eventually, after flowing through the system, it is released into the ground (at this point the water is known as leachate).

In Enviro-Septic System the effluent is filtered through fibered-mats, which trap 99% of any hazardous contaminants, such as coliform bacteria, that might reach groundwater and threaten drinking-water. There, the bacteria proliferate and decompose any remaining solids that were captured by the fibers. The leachate needs only six inches of sand around the pipes to insure its safe release into the environment. This new system requires no pumps, filters, or electricity, no additives or special maintenance. Since it needs no stone and less fill and has pipes that can be bent to ninety degree-angles, the system takes up less land and can be used

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Wendy Eldridge Designer #1540

Eldridge Septic Designs

P.O. Box 842 Plymouth, NH 03264 office 603.536.3311 fax 603.536.3133

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on sloping, hard-to-reach areas. The parts are easy to install, maintenance free, and hence less expensive to a homeowner. The owner need only to hire a designer who will look at the soil, slope, and number of bedrooms to propose a design.

In addition to the environmental and economic benefits of the system, it is far less likely to fail than conventional systems. Statistically one to two percent of conventional septic systems experience failure during their first year. Of all the Enviro-Septic Systems now in the ground in NH, fewer than one tenth of one percent of those systems have experienced problems. To make an apples-to-apples comparison: in a pool of 95,000 systems over a fourteen-year period, 13,330 conventional systems would statistically fail while Presby has documented only 85 system failures. Further, a failed conventional system would require complete replacement, while a Presby system can simply be renewed on site – at considerably less cost.

With a system like this, one might expect it to be sweeping through the nation and beyond. But in-point-of fact the world is a bit slow on the uptake. Dave is understandably reluctant to be critical of bureaucrats - after all this is highly regulated field - but the bare-knuckled truth is that change often comes slowly to government systems, particularly when entrenched interests are involved.

There's also the "Hick Factor" to deal with. Dave laughs, but you can cut the irony in the air with a knife as he says "some of these folks hear that we're from New Hampshire and their first reaction is that we are still disposing of our septage in a VW microbus buried in the backyard! They don't know that we were environmentalists before anyone even coined the term." Nonetheless, forward-thinking regulators have jumped on-board the Enviro-Septic System bandwagon. Today nearly 95% of new septic systems in NH employ the Presby system. Dave beams when he describes the fact that the system is approved in five states including NH and the province of Quebec.

In a five-hour certification class for designers and installers, often taught by Dave himself, Presby Environmental provides engineers and septic installers with training in designing, installing, trouble-shooting, venting, sanding and sloping. Since one system can be placed atop another, the design can increase the amount of bacterial surface in a small area, and thus handle the high-strength wastewater of businesses and restaurants. Dave explains that 75% of the McDonalds chains in the six approved areas are using the system successfully, and he is now speaking at various colleges to promote this eco-friendly, homeowner-friendly approach to waste management.

What's in the future for Dave? While Presby Plastics is adding another production line to the Whitefield plant, Presby Environmental is seeking design approval in other states. Dave strives to keep the business a family-owned company that designs, manufactures, distributes and trains the people who install the product to ensure that quality is maintained.

Dave Presby has all the qualities of the iconic American inventor: creativity, motivation, passion and mentors who supported him. And then, finally, there is that rare blend of patience and persistence – what Yankee old timers called stick-to-it-iveness - that bodes well for all of us and for our beloved planet.

You can learn more at www.PresbyEco.com or by calling 603-837-3826

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Directions:

Cream butter, egg, sugar and vanilla until the mixture is smooth. Slowly add the other ingredients, always stirring to keep the mixture moist. When the dough is done it will be dry and a little like clay. This is good because the children will be shaping the cookies to look like Moose. To make sure the cookies hold together, they should not be flat but about 1/4 inch high on the glass cutting board or plate. When the Moose is well shaped and the form is complete, add 2 chocolate morsels for eyes and a dried plum or prune for the nose. Carefully transport them to the cookie sheet and then place them into the warmed oven and cook for about 12 to 15 minutes. Please note that baking time depends on how thick each Moose is, so check the cookies at about 12 minutes. When the cookies are done let them cool. Serve with Yogurt or with Milk for a delightful holiday treat.

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