

Up, Up and Away

AAA Pumping provides winning service at Albuquerque's 2003 Balloon Fiesta and so earns the event contract for the next two years

By Scottie Dayton

The Albuquerque (N.M.) International Balloon Fiesta is one of the largest events of its kind, attracting 880,000 spectators, vendors, aerialists and their crews.

For nine days in October, 1,800 to 3,000 recreational vehicles (RVs) fill the campgrounds. Crowds start arriving at 4:30 a.m. for the 5:45 launch of the Dawn Patrol. Meeting their portable sanitation needs efficiently and without disrupting activities requires almost laser-guided precision.

Mike and Phil Krepfl of AAA Pumping, Albuquerque, met these challenges by ordering additional portable restrooms, hiring temporary help, inventing a new RV service tool, and establishing an almost flawless

communication network that enabled them to address problems before they became emergencies. Their employees' exemplary performance at the 2003 event earned the company the 2004 and 2005 Balloon Fiesta contracts.

The brothers began working with Balloon Fiesta officials in 2002, providing portable restrooms at the event's Park and Ride locations and deploying some toilets at Balloon Fiesta Park throughout the year. After winning the bid for Balloon Fiesta 2003, they met with officials in April to stage deployment, then set up the units a month in advance of the event, which ran Oct. 4-12.

FRESH, NEW IMAGE

Eighty percent of AAA's supplies

came from Satellite Industries Inc. The company sent representatives to help assemble 375 new Maxim 3000 and Tufway standard portable restrooms, 12 Liberty wheelchair-accessible units, and four Freedom II Standing Room Only urinal rooms.

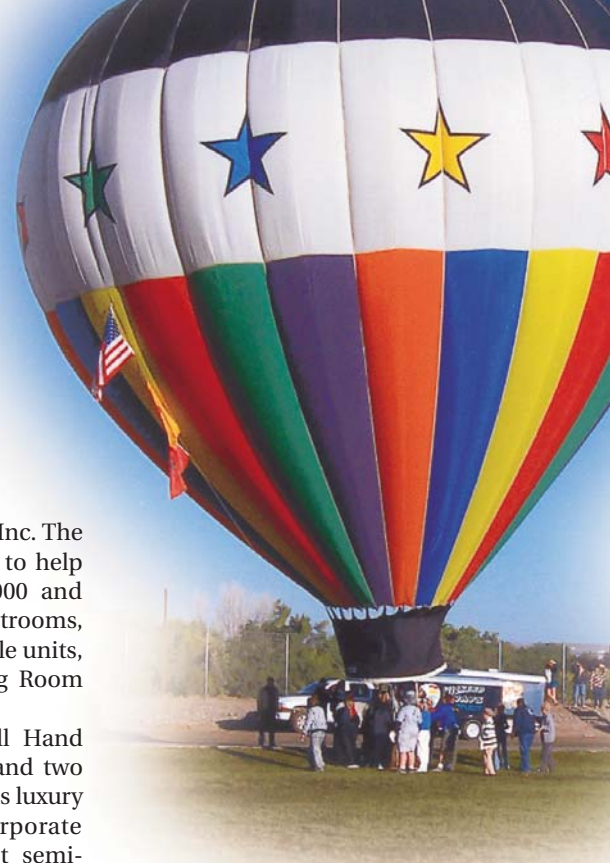
"We also set up 28 Purell Hand Sanitizer dispensing stations and two Advanced Containment Systems luxury restroom trailers in the Corporate Village," says Mike. A 50-foot semi-trailer left at the park was the company's supply depot.

Their contract specified servicing the restrooms from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and again from 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. A Special Shape Glowdeo (in which pilots ignite their burners to illuminate the balloons) and fireworks were scheduled for five of the nine nights. "We had a lot of work to accomplish during the day before they started lighting up those balloons," says Phil. "Although the large crowds had cleared out, working around those still in the park really put the pressure on us."

Knowing where the fewest people were was part of the key to staying on schedule. Mike and Phil gave each of the 16 regular employees and four temporaries working the event a digital wireless phone with two-way radio. "The Balloon Fiesta staff had them, too, so we programmed them into our radios and communicated instantly with event organizers, RV park managers, and our crew," says Phil. "Those radios went nonstop from 4 a.m. until well into the night."

FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

To ensure responsive service, Mike, Phil, and the men working the longest hours stayed in a camper on the grounds. AAA also kept a delivery truck on site. Such planning paid off on the first day when Mike received a 4 a.m. call from event officials. A vendor had



The Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta attracted some 800,000 participants and spectators.

just complained that the portable toilet that he had ordered for inside his tent wasn't there. He wanted it now.

"Fifteen minutes later he had his restroom," says Mike. "Having staff and equipment on site dramatically reduced our response time. The Balloon Fiesta staff and vendor were thrilled."

Mike originally assigned two men per service truck. The driver pumped

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the toilets while a technician recharged and pressure washed them. For the first two days, they also replaced the toilet paper. However, many restrooms were in groups of 20 or 30, and papering them was slowing the team.

"We rented a John Deere Gator utility vehicle, loaded five cases of toilet paper on its flatbed, and made one service tech our TP man," says Mike. "That really sped up the service process and helped us accomplish



AAA service technician Rito Estevis pressure-washes a set of Maxim restrooms during the Balloon Fiesta.

Professionals At Work

Event: Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta
Contractor: AAA Pumping, Albuquerque, N.M.
Location: Balloon Fiesta Park, Albuquerque, N.M.
Duration: 9 days
Staff: 18

The AAA Pumping RV and holding tank service fleet stood ready to provide service at the Balloon Fiesta.



No Muss, No Mess

The nationwide industry standard for pumping RV holding tanks is to let them gravity-drain into a 5-gallon bucket. Then the pumper truck empties the bucket (the vacuum a pumper creates would collapse a tank). This process is noted for its numerous spills, mess, and smells.

Phil Krepfl, co-owner of AAA Pumping, Albuquerque, N.M., designed a tool that solved these unpleasanties. "It was a huge hit among the RVers," he says. "They suggested I patent it, and others threatened that if I didn't, they would."

Phil calls his invention the Cannon. It's a 6-inch-diameter pipe that hooks to the RV holding tank to receive the sewage. A 2-inch-diameter pump hose connects the pumper truck to the Cannon. A 2-inch vent in the cannon eliminates any possibility of creating a suction off the holding tank while the pumper empties the Cannon. "They enclose the whole process," says Phil. "The Cannon also reduces odors and prevents the possibility of any spills."



Phil Krepfl (left) and Mike Krepfl with the RV Cannon.

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Phil Krepfl

Bright colors filled the sky over Albuquerque during the Fiesta. AAA Pumping helped make the event a big success.



everything within our four-hour window." Balloon Fiesta Park has a three-mile radius.

Another thing the brothers did to streamline servicing was hook a 500-gallon Water Buffalo trailer-mounted tank behind a 4,000-gallon septic truck equipped with a pressure washer. The driver of this truck cleaned only large groups of 35 or more toilets, thereby reducing the number of trips to the dump zone. "Albuquerque allowed us to discharge wastewater into its Balloon Fiesta Park sanitary sewer. That saved a lot of time," says Mike.

UNEXPECTED TEMPEST

Then, it rained. Showers came on Tuesday and again for 12 hours on Wednesday (sustained showers are rare in New Mexico). "We had to service in the rain at night, and that threw a little wrench into the works," says Mike. "We scrambled to buy slickers and rubber boots for the guys." Fortunately, 90 percent of the units were on asphalt, so trucks bogging down was never an issue.

However, portable restroom units were not the only concern. AAA also pumped the twenty 185-gallon grease containers and thirty 250-gallon holding tanks supplied to vendors. Phil assigned four 4,000-gallon and two 2,000-gallon septic trucks to tackle those jobs.

And then there were the RVs. Temporary employees helped pump the vehicle holding tanks. "With prob-

ably 3,000 vehicles there, it's pretty tough driving our trucks to them, so we ran 100 feet of hose," says Phil. "The helper prevented it from tangling as the driver serviced the holding tanks."

RV owners caused most of the emergency pumping problems. Anyone wanting a tank pumped placed a ticket under the vehicle's wiper blade. But after morning festivities, the people locked their RVs and went sightseeing until the evening show hours. By then, Phil and his crew had left the campgrounds. When the owners returned, they discovered full holding tanks. "Of course, they called the park managers to complain," says Phil. "Stationing trucks at the campgrounds throughout the evening solved that problem."

For companies interested in expanding into portable restrooms or the special events market, Phil and Mike say the first prerequisite is a good credit rating. The second is not to price your services too low.

"A lot of people entering this field make that mistake — and it is a mistake," says Phil. "It affects everyone's ability to compete at a fair price. Another mistake is not to supply top-notch units. Taking shortcuts with equipment, products, and services to make a profit reflects negatively upon the entire portable sanitation industry." ■