



THE LITTLE DIGGER

MINNESOTA ONSITE WASTEWATER ASSOCIATION

A Quarterly Publication

Spring 2026 - Vol. 41, Issue 1

2026 MOWA CONVENTION RECAP: ...And a good time was had by all!



2026 Roe-D-Hoe winners were (left to right): Peter Bonnema, Bonnema Excavating, 3rd place winner; Steve Rolla, Bonnema Excavating, 1st place winner; and Brandon Ligneel, Liggy's Excavating & Septic, 2nd place winner. Congratulations to three skillful backhoe operators!

visit with exhibitors and learn about new products and services. Popular events included the RoeDHoe competition and our Silent Auction fundraiser supporting the scholarship fund. The fun continued at Hoops Brewery with Bingo and additional scholarship fundraising, where attendees enjoyed relaxed networking and building new friendships.

The MOWA Annual Business Meeting was held for members and included a special moment of recognition as two individuals were honored with Lifetime Membership in MOWA. Kurt Christopherson and Greg Halling were recognized for their many years of dedication to the industry and their continued support of MOWA. Their commitment and leadership have made a lasting impact, and we are grateful for their service. Be sure to read the accompanying article in this newsletter to learn more about their achievements. (And for more convention clips, go to pages 6-7)

The 2026 MOWA Winter Convention in Duluth was a tremendous success! Nearly 300 industry professionals gathered to network, earn continuing education credits, and sharpen their skills to help grow our industry. With the support of more than 25 exhibitors, the event offered outstanding opportunities for learning, collaboration, and connection. We sincerely thank all of our sponsors and supporters who helped make this convention possible.

We were honored to host two outstanding keynote speakers, **Luke Eggebraaten** and **Ben Kele**, who each delivered insightful and engaging presentations. Luke shared valuable strategies on marketing your business to future clients and maintaining a strong professional reputation in today's digital world. Ben provided a unique international perspective, discussing wastewater treatment practices in Australia and highlighting the benefits of having a strong state association to advance the industry. We greatly appreciate both speakers for traveling to be with us and for sharing their expertise.

The trade show and exhibit hall featured a wide variety of companies, giving attendees plenty of opportunities to

The convention also featured a strong lineup of continuing education sessions. We extend our thanks to all of the presenters who dedicated their time and effort to develop quality sessions that met CE requirements for our professionals. Securing engaging and relevant speakers is one of the most challenging aspects of planning the convention, and we are always looking for new presenters interested in contributing to future MOWA events.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this year's convention such a success.

The 2027 MOWA Convention will be held February 9–10 in Waite Park at The Park Event Center.

We hope you'll plan to attend another great MOWA event! ■

In this Little Digger

2026 Convention Recap	Pg. 1
Message from the MOWA President	Pg. 3
NOWRA MegaConference Notice	Pg. 4
Lifetime Member Awards Presented.....	Pg. 5
MOWA Convention Snaps	Pg.6-7
SSTS Advisory Committee Call-out	Pg. 8
Pepin Profile from Onsite Installer	Pg. 9
Viita Excavating Expertise Recognized	Pg. 11
MOWA Membership Form	Pg. 15

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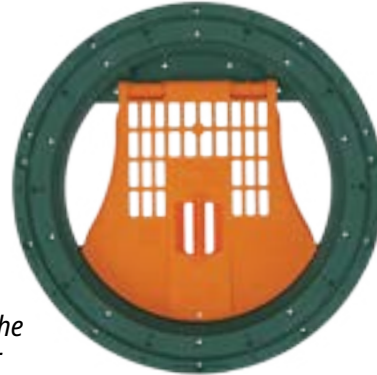
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A Message from the MOWA President

MOWA Board Changes and Focus for 2026!

MOWA members,

I hope your 2025 working season was good for you, and the upcoming 2026 season is looking even better. With nicer weather, and road restrictions on for some of the state—and not too far off for the rest of the state—it now gives you the opportunity to start firming up your plans, making that equipment purchase, and getting your fleet ready to go. I personally love this time of the year; it's like the start of a race....lots of anticipation while waiting for the green flag to fall.

I'd like to take a moment and introduce myself to those that may not know me. My name is Keith Valento. My family and I live in the small town of Scandia, Minnesota, located in the northeast reaches of the Twin Cities. I am a co-owner of Smilie's Sewer Service where we offer septic system maintenance, service, repair and installation. I have been involved in the on-site industry for 30 years. This is my second consecutive term on the MOWA Board, and my final year during which I am honored to serve as your President.

I hope you were one of the 315 people that had an opportunity to attend the 2026 MOWA Winter Convention, which was held in beautiful Duluth. It was a great show and a great opportunity to learn, meet up with old friends and even make new friends. A huge *THANK YOU* goes out to the MOWA Winter Convention Committee. Without you, the Convention would not be possible. Being on the MOWA Board may not be for everyone, but if you are curious or have questions, please reach out to me or any other Board member. We'd love the chance to talk with you. We are excited to welcome three new members to the MOWA Board: Janet Coon, Mike Heiman and Jerame Tysdal. Thank you for taking the leap. We look forward to your help in moving MOWA forward. I'd like to also thank Ryan Lashinski and Alex Pepin for their dedication and years of service in various Board member roles. They have officially stepped down, but I bet there's a chance you may see one or both of them again someday in some new role. They have really enjoyed their time on the Board and have truly helped move the needle.

The work of the MOWA Board is ongoing! We have committees working towards solutions on several hot topics such as mentorship and land spreading of septage to name a couple. These are some of the big challenges that we face in this industry, and many of members have brought their concerns forward to the Board looking for help, clarity and answers. We will continue to work towards getting answers, although sometimes the process moves along a bit slower than we would like.

I need to give a big shout out to Tammy Trantham who serves as our Executive Director and quite honestly is the person who keeps this organization moving forward and upward. Tammy has been incredibly instrumental in raising the bar of professionalism for MOWA. Thank you Tammy!

I'd like to close on this note and ask the seasoned professionals in our industry to make an honest effort to teach the young and upcoming professionals—to the best of their abilities—how to do the job right and remind them about how important this job truly is!! ■

Thank you for this opportunity,

Keith Valento, President of MOWA

**This is a quarterly publication of the Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association.
Editor: Tammy Trantham, Email: mowaexec@gmail.com**

The articles printed in the publication do not necessarily reflect the opinion of this organization. Readers are encouraged to respond to the articles with their own points-of-view. We welcome industry-related comments or articles. Information or inquiries should be sent or made to any of the following:

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MOWA Recognizes Lifetime of Service to Industry

MOWA presents Lifetime Member Awards to Halling and Christopherson



Greg Halling (left) and Brian Koski (right)

The first Lifetime Member award for 2026 was awarded to **Greg Halling**, founder and CEO of **Halling Engineering**. He has dedicated more than **40 years** to wastewater engineering and onsite system design. Throughout his career, Greg has been a steady and trusted force in advancing our industry—bringing new treatment technologies into practice while never losing sight of what matters most: systems that work, are affordable for the client, and meet regulatory requirements.

Greg's work spans the entire state of Minnesota, from single-family homes to subdivisions and large resort systems, under both local and state permits. Many of us have seen firsthand his hands-on approach—carefully balancing client needs, refining designs, and making sure performance meets expectations, even when he's breaking new ground with new technology.

In addition to his technical contributions, Greg's service to our industry has been just as impactful. He has served as a **MOWA Board Member** and has been an active participant on the **MPCA Technical Advisory Committee** for many years. In these settings, Greg is known for thinking through issues from all angles, offering thoughtful input, and consistently putting the needs of the industry first.

More recently, Greg has continued to lead by helping address one of the most important issues we face today: the role of operations, maintenance, and operating permits in ensuring long-term system performance.

Greg Halling's career reflects a rare combination of technical skill, integrity, and commitment to continuous improvement. His influence can be seen not just in

individual systems, but in the progress of MOWA and the onsite industry as a whole.

The second Lifetime Member award for 2026 was awarded to **Kurt Christopherson**.

Kurt Christopherson began his distinguished career in the industry with Pump Co. in 1992. Demonstrating a commitment to growth and innovation, he established the **Pipelines Sewer & Water Division** in late 1994 and early 1995. Kurt continued to make significant contributions as Vice-President at Pipeline until its acquisition by Dakota Supply Group (DSG) in 2015, where he ultimately retired in 2023.

Kurt played a pivotal role in supporting MOSCA and facilitating its transition into MOWA. Throughout his career, he

served as a dedicated **MOWA Board Member** and continued to lead as President of MOWA into his retirement. Even after retiring, Kurt remains highly involved with the Association and the industry, sharing his expertise and experience. Kurt and his team have been invaluable resources, and their commitment has helped elevate the onsite wastewater industry in Minnesota to its current success. ■



Pete Otterness (left) and Kurt Christopherson (right)



MOWA 2026 Convention Meets Members' Needs!

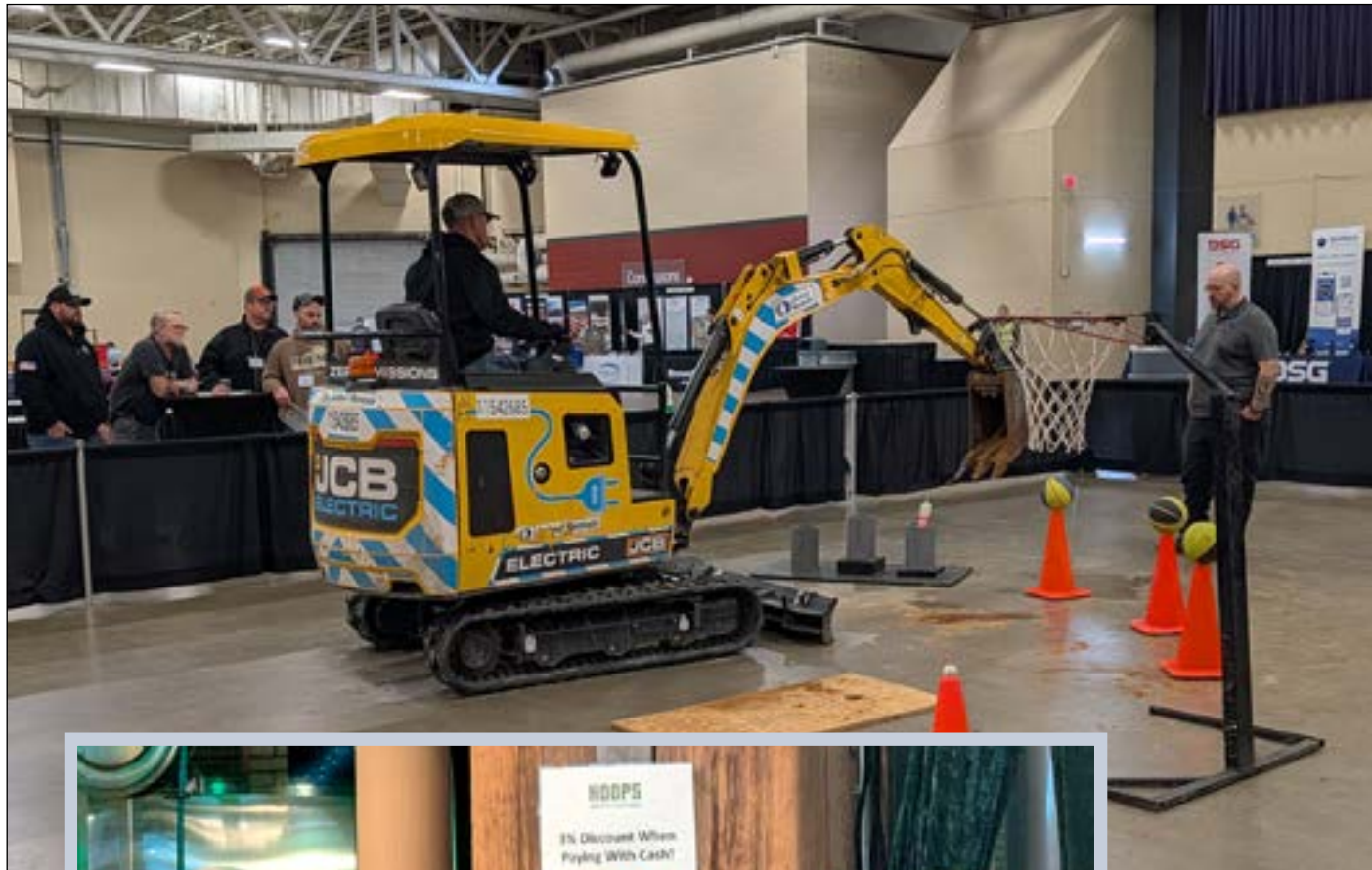


By going to several of the 27 CEU sessions, a person could earn up to 13 CEUs. The Convention, attended by 315 industry professionals, was a convenient, efficient way to meet state licensure requirements.



ABOVE: The Annual Tony Ruppert Youth Scholarship fundraiser staffed by Auctioneer Dave Gustafson (left) and Kurt Christopherson (right) raised over \$5,000 for the 2026 scholarships that will be awarded this fall.

LEFT: Luke Eggebraaten delivered a timely keynote about incorporating digital marketing into business promotion to over 300 convention attendees.



The annual Roe-D-Hoe competition drew many entries from members willing to test their skill. The winner was eligible to compete nationally at the NOWRA Roe-D-Hoe that was held at the WWETT Convention Feb. 17-19 in Indianapolis.

ABOVE: Time at MOWA conventions is divided between learning, networking, and researching vendors, processes, and products. The Social Event held at HOOPS Brewery was one highlight of the first busy day at the 2026 MOWA Convention.

RIGHT: Keynote presenter Ben Kele brought an international perspective to the opening keynote presentations, and to his breakout session, Troubleshooting Advanced On-Site & Decentralized Systems.





SSTS Advisory Committee Wants YOU!

Make an Impact on Minnesota's Water Future; Join the SSTS Advisory Committee

SSTS Advisory Committee Vacancies

Current As of March 2026

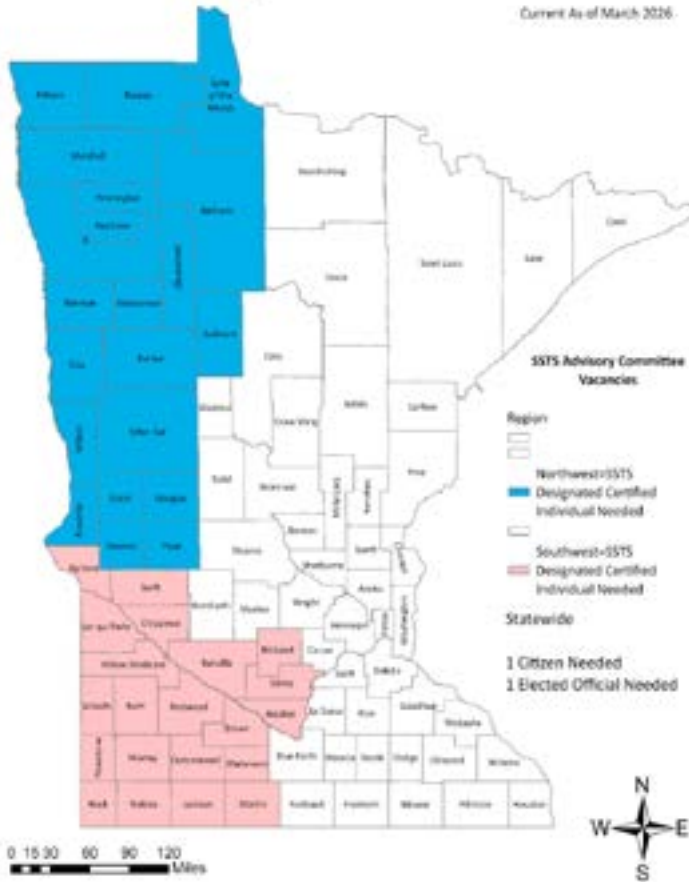


Image provided by Madalyn Bollig, MPCA

Are you passionate about protecting Minnesota's water resources and strengthening the subsurface wastewater treatment system (SSTS) industry? The **SSTS Advisory Committee** is seeking dedicated individuals to help shape the future of onsite wastewater treatment across the state.

The Advisory Committee provides critical guidance to the **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)** on issues affecting individual, mid-sized, and large subsurface wastewater treatment systems. Committee members play a key role in ensuring practical, informed perspectives are heard in policy and program development.

To support effective collaboration, the committee is guided by a steering team representing MPCA, the **Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association (MOWA)**, the **Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)**, and the **University of Minnesota Onsite Sewage Treatment Program (OSTP)**. Broad participation from across the industry and the public is essential to this work.

We are currently looking for individuals to serve in the following roles:

A **Citizen** (anywhere in Minnesota)

An **Elected Official** (anywhere in Minnesota)

SSTS Designated Certified Individual (DCI) – Northwest Minnesota

SSTS Designated Certified Individual (DCI) – Southwest Minnesota

Serving on the SSTS Advisory Committee is a meaningful way to give back, share your expertise, and help influence decisions that protect public health and the environment.

Interested in joining?

Reach out to **Sara Heger** at sheger@umn.edu or **Aaron Patrick** at aaron.patrick@state.mn.us to learn more and express your interest. ■



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Engineering for the Environment

Alex Pepin sees an aging workforce in the wastewater industry and hopes for a push in promoting the trade to young people looking for career options



Alex Pepin, owner of Ten Thirty Environmental Solutions

States Snapshot: From the January 2026 E-zine issue of Onsite Installer

Name and title or job description: Alex Pepin, environmental engineer/septic system designer. I design onsite wastewater solutions for a wide range of clients including single-family homes, small subdivisions, schools, campgrounds and others. I also inspect onsite systems for compliance and am a certified service provider. I provide ongoing operation/maintenance of advanced systems in the state of Minnesota.

Business name and location: Ten Thirty Environmental Solutions, Blaine, Minnesota

Services we offer: Design, inspection and service provider, O&M of advanced/performance systems

Age and Years in the industry: : 46 and 12

Association involvement: Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association. Current Board member and past president.

Benefits of belonging to the Association: The biggest advantages are the ability to learn from others in the industry and make connections with others in the industry. Association members have so much knowledge and experience, and I learn so much just talking shop. You never know when those connections can come in handy. On many occasions, the connections I made in MOWA have led to obtaining jobs and/or doing those jobs more effectively.

Biggest issue facing your Association right now: I think the biggest issue facing our organization right now is an aging

workforce. People have been in the industry for a long time and have been a part of our association for years. Now they are aging out.

Our crew includes: Me, my CAD specialist, Arie, who helps draw up site plans. Not a big team, but we take pride in our work and try to do the best we can.

Typical day on the job: My typical day usually starts the week before when I prepare for the site visit. I make sure I have all the information I need on the soils I expect to find on the site, the property lines, any water bodies or other sensitive features I need to be aware of, as well as the characteristics of the establishment I am going to be designing for. Then, when it is time to conduct my fieldwork for that site, a typical day on the job involves me driving out to the site, usually about 45-60 minutes away, and meeting with a client to discuss their needs.

State Snapshot - Alex Pepin, Continued on Page 10

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12" x 4' Riser	2017-04
12" x 5' Riser - Round Poly	2017-LP05
12" x 6' Riser	2017-06
12" x 8' Riser	2017-08
12" x 10' Riser	2017-10
12" x 12' Riser - Round Poly	2017-LP12
12" x 15' Riser	2017-15
12" x 18' Riser	2017-18
12" x 20' Riser - Round Poly	2017-LP20
12" x 24' Riser	2017-24
12" x 30' Riser	2017-30
20" x 12' Riser - Round Poly	2017-LP12
20" x 15' Riser	2017-15
20" x 18' Riser	2017-18
20" x 24' Riser	2017-24
24" x 12' Riser	2017-12
24" x 15' Riser	2017-15
24" x 18' Riser	2017-18
24" x 24' Riser	2017-24
24" x 30' Riser	2017-30
30" x 12' Riser	2017-12
30" x 15' Riser	2017-15
30" x 18' Riser	2017-18
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State Snapshot - Alex Pepin, *Continued from Page 9*

I find it incredibly important to walk the site with clients and discuss their water usage and desires for the property. More times than I can count, little tidbits of information come out of those conversations. If I wouldn't have known that information, we would have faced some really big issues.

Next, I start my fieldwork. I lay out the system, do soil borings/pits and collect all the applicable field data. My CAD specialist and I get to work on finalizing the paper side of the design (calculations, site plans, etc.). For single-family homes, we have gotten pretty streamlined and are usually able to complete the fieldwork and office work in one day. Other establishments are more time-consuming, but we have a pretty good system in place for homes.

The job I'll never forget: One job that I will never forget is when I was working for a local county as an inspector, and we were dealing with a discharge of heavy metals from a dentist into a septic tank. We had representatives from the hazardous waste company taking the contaminated material out of the septic tank and a local pumper there to deal with the rest of the sewage. The hazardous waste representative had a full body hazmat suit on with a respirator. He was pulling out the contaminated material from the septic tank sludge. Meanwhile, the pumper was standing 5 feet away pumping another tank, with a T-shirt and jeans, a baseball hat and a big smile on his face. I remember thinking, I love this industry. We do the dirty work that other people don't even want to get a whiff of, but we do it with a smile and a sense of humor.

My favorite piece of equipment: My Emlid Reach RS3 RTK GNSS receiver. I just got this piece of equipment last year, and it streamlines the design process for site plans. I record GPS points on site and upload them into my CAD drawing software. It's easy for me to delegate my CAD drawing to our CAD specialist, which saves me time back in the office. Plus, if my stakes get removed, I can go back and easily restake everything.

Most challenging site I've worked on: Last year I was on a site that basically had a cliff in the backyard and front yard and an extremely steep hill on the side/back where we wanted to put the system. No room for anything, and steep slopes to put it on. In the end, I was able to break up the mound into three pieces. We put in a triplex pump and alternated doses between the mounds, all of which were different lengths and at different elevations. Not easy, but it felt good to figure something out as they were having their wastewater surfacing out of their cesspools at the time.

Oops, this didn't work out as planned: I worked on a design on a lake property that at least two other designers walked away from. The lot had no room for a system, disturbed soil in many areas and access issues. As an engineer, I was able to go a little off-script and use drip dispersal (not a registered/typically allowed product in Minnesota for single-family homes). I charged more than usual and allotted extra time, but permitting took way longer than expected, and the additional time involved far outweighed the fee I charged for that design.

If I could change one industry regulation, it would be: More training to become certified to do the work on your own. We are working on a utility, and while I appreciate that our state requires classes and testing and even some experience to get certified to do the work, we need more experience before we should be allowed to work on our own.

Best piece of small business advice I've heard or came up with: I had a fellow designer tell me one time, "Call people back, no matter what, no matter how long it takes, call them back." It seems simple, but when you get busy, it is easy to just hit that delete button on your voicemail. I have heard from so many customers who appreciated the callback. They left several messages with other designers, and no one even bothered to call back.

If I wasn't working in the wastewater industry, I would like to: Coach or play baseball.

Crystal ball time – This is my outlook for the wastewater industry: I really think that onsite wastewater treatment is the most sustainable way of managing wastewater. We are able to pull water out of the aquifer from our wells and put it right back onsite after it is treated, so I think the future of onsite wastewater treatment is bright. My hope in our state is that people start looking at our industry like other trades (carpenter, electrician, plumber) as viable career options out of high school, or even before. So, what I would like to see is community colleges or trade schools starting to get involved in training future workers with pathways to internships/mentorships that would help prepare the future workers in our industry. ■

This article first appeared in the online January 2026 E-Zine of Onsite Installer at onsiteinstaller.com published by COLE Publishing, Three Lakes, Wis. It is reprinted by permission.

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Expertise in Lake Country Installs Recognized

Island Installations for Minnesota Excavation Company

Whether on the mainland or offshore on Lake Vermilion, mound systems dominate amid the hardpan and bedrock landscape that's home to Viita's Excavating

By Ted J. Rulseh - Appeared in print as "Island Hopping" in the March 2026 issue of the Onsite Installer



With a set of Infiltrator septic and pump tanks delivered and ready for placement, Rick and Spencer Viita chat with the property owner about the mound system they will be installing. (Photos by Brad Stauffer)

Rick Viita and his team rarely encounter the deep and permeable soils that onsite installers prefer.

In northeastern Minnesota's St. Louis County, in the area of the 61-square-mile Lake Vermilion, shallow hardpan and bedrock are common landscape features. "A typical site on Lake Vermilion has about two feet of usable soil," says Viita, owner of Viita's Excavating.

That means mound systems with timed dosing are more the rule than the exception for Viita's installation crew. The company installs about 30 onsite treatment systems per year including some on the lake's islands, of which there are 365, all but 86 privately owned.

The company is one of the few full-service septic contractors in the region, handling septic and holding tank pumping and maintenance, system design, inspection, line cleaning and water and sewer hookups. The team also performs general excavation, site preparation, road and pond construction and other earthwork.

Viita has been in the onsite and excavation business for three decades and incorporated his company in 2000. It's a strongly seasonal business that largely shuts down during the area's long and harsh winters. In recent years Viita's son, Spencer, has joined the business, bringing business and marketing expertise to the 15-member team.

Homegrown business

Viita grew up in Cook, a small city where the business is based. Working in soil came naturally: his family had a small farm, and from a young age he also worked for neighboring farms, one dairy and one beef. His father was a heavy equipment operator, which helped spark his own interest early on. "I loved tractors and equipment," he recalls. At 16 he began helping a friend install gravity septic systems.

After high school, Viita studied heavy-equipment operation in technical college and worked at an iron mine to build financial

Island Installations - Rick Viita, Continued on Page 12

Island Installations - Rick Viita, Continued from Page 11

stability. "I did that just to be able to get bank loans and build up credit," he says. "It gave me the steady income I needed to buy my first equipment and start out on my own."

After five years, he launched his own company. "By default, I ended up doing the challenging lots — and that's been our niche ever since," Viita says. That early drive to take on tough jobs still defines the company today, including the island projects that require hauling sand and equipment by barge.

Across the water

Because islands account for only about 5% of installations, Viita contracts with local and trusted barge operators instead of owning the vessels. Island jobs involve complex and costly logistics.

"Every island site is different," says Viita. "Some have good access right from a public landing, and others require us to move equipment and sand multiple times to get everything in place. It takes a lot of planning and patience, but we enjoy the challenge."

Each barge load typically carries about 30 cubic yards of sand along with the necessary machinery for the site. "If the property isn't far from a landing, we'll drive our loaded quad-axle dump trucks right onto the barges and haul them to the site," Viita says. "If it's not near a landing, we dump the sand onto the barge, then at the landing a skid-steer loads it into a tracked truck that brings it to the mound site. Usually it's three solid days of barging equipment and materials."



When working on islands or boat only access land, everything needs to be shipped in, including good fill like this load of sand and gravel. Anderson Barging Captain, Casey Sundahl operates the company's CAT 287C multiterrain loader to offload the product.

Viita Excavating used to install peat filter pretreatment systems on islands. "But in the last couple of years, the county has gone to sizing based on contour loading rates," says Viita. "Under the newer approach, a peat bed ends up about the same length as a mound. With that, we've found mounds to be the more practical and cost-effective option for most sites."

On sites with shallow impermeable layers, sand mounds are the go-to systems: "Even on the mainland around Lake Vermilion, the lots are pretty small, so we time-dose everything. We make our beds a little bit smaller. We use about a 30% reduction, put in a bigger pump tank and time-dose it."

Tools of the trade

Viita's machinery inventory;

Excavators

- 2013 Hitachi 290 LC-5
- 2012 John Deere 160G
- 2021 John Deere 75P
- 2021 John Deere 26P

Compact track loaders

- 2020 John Deere 325G
- 2021 ASV 65

Wheel loaders

- 2013 John Deere 544K
- 1983 John Deere 644C

The company also relies on a 2008 John Deere 650J dozer and two 2002 International 5600 quad-axle dump trucks. This combination of machines allows the team to handle everything from small residential system replacements to complex multiday island and commercial projects efficiently and safely.

Island Installations - Rick Viita, Continued on Page 13



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Island Installations - Rick Viita, Continued from Page 12

Doing it right

The Viita team thrives on quality work. That includes landscaping after the system installs: "Our yards look like parks when we're done. There are some yards where we lay sod, but typically it's seed and erosion-control fabric. It goes back to professionalism — a site that you're proud of when you leave."

Team members also pay attention to details that customers can't see. "Through the years I've gone back and repaired tanks that have settled because the previous installers didn't properly bed them with sand," says Viita. "Our tanks are set on select sand compacted right to the top. I'm not on many sites anymore, but the crew takes care of it. They know how to do it right."

Quality materials also come into play. Viita uses mainly plastic septic tanks (Infiltrator Water Technologies) to avoid deterioration that affects many concrete tanks in the area. "Plastic tanks have become a great option because of their current structural integrity, ease of placement and the fact that they eliminate the corrosion issues we sometimes see with concrete," Viita says. "Both materials have their place — it depends on the application."

Goulds is the main pump supplier. Ultra-Rib-Style risers (Orenco) provide leak-free seals on septic tanks and holding tanks. "In northern Minnesota, about 85% of risers are leaking. That's not based on our installs. That's from what we observe in our pumping business — the frost moves those risers. On all of our concrete tanks, we use Ultra-Rib risers, so we have no seams."

On the maintenance side, Viita Excavation operates two vacuum trucks: A 2006 International 4,000-gallon pump truck and a 2010 Freightliner 2,500-gallon pump truck. The trucks pump about eight tanks per day on mainland properties and on islands via barge. A Crust Busters tool comes in handy for stirring tanks and breaking up solids to ease removal.

Electrical control panels are another frequent service item. "We're repairing, replacing or adjusting one of those probably every third day," Viita says. "They take a beating from the weather. When we can mount boxes inside the homes, they last a lot longer — the only challenge is that the homeowners need to be there when we arrive."

Union strong

Viita takes pride in hiring, training and retaining a highly skilled team. His wife, Amy, is his true partner and handles accounts payable. His son Spencer manages estimating and is transitioning into leadership. Zach Cheney, his son-in-law, is lead installer; Pat Fosso is foreman and runs field operations.

Other key team members include Mark Toivela, lead pumper; Thomas Turk, service technician in training; Bob Howe and Scott Erickson, truck drivers; Paul Griffin and Charlie Lefeld, operators and crew members; Sara Niska, office coordinator and dispatcher; Tadd Nelson, mechanic and fabricator; and Cole Snidarich, TerraGator operator.

Like most companies in the trades, Viita's Excavating has faced its share of turnover until about 10 years ago when the company affiliated with the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49. "I used to struggle with retention just like everybody

else. In this industry, you need five years before you really know what you're doing," Viita says. "Employees would get very good and then move on because our seasons are short. Employees are what make a company."

Union wages and benefits, including retirement, helped the retention problem. Also valuable is the training available through the union.

"The Operating Engineers have a training center near Hinckley," Viita says. "I was fortunate to go there one winter and work as a part-time instructor. I got to see all the acreage and the programs that were available. So our operators go there every winter for free training on OSHA, MSHA and confined space entry, and on all the equipment. They're getting trained in a big sandbox, not in customers' backyards."

Viita also serves on the mentorship committee that is developing a program to be offered through the Minnesota Onsite Wastewater Association. The goal is to strengthen industry professionalism and help members build sound, sustainable businesses. "The business side is just as important as being able to put that pipe in the ground," he says. "Sharing knowledge and experience helps new contractors price work correctly and grow with confidence."

New generation

Viita's son Spencer has added a strong business acumen and technology integration to the company: "He started with us as

Island Installations - Rick Viita, Continued on Page 14

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The Viita crew for this particular job included (from left) Charlie Lerfald, operator; Zach Cheney, operator; Rick Viita, owner; and Spencer Viita, estimator.

Island Installations - Rick Viita, Continued from Page 13

a laborer. He didn't have the passion for the equipment like I did. He went to the College of St. Scholastica for business and marketing, and that's where he comes in."

Spencer has taken the company's use of technology and run with it, finding new ways to make operations more efficient and connected.

"Our service techs can take photos right onsite, and the whole team can see them instantly," Viita says. "If Zach runs into an issue during an install, he takes a picture and Pat, Spencer or I can see it right away to help him through it."

The company uses the BusyBusy by Alignops mobile time card app, designed for construction and similar industries.

The app also supports scheduling, dispatching and bill paying and payroll by way of integration with QuickBooks accounting software. In addition, for system designs, Spencer uses NewSeptic land and septic planning software, a GIS-based program that includes geographic data, a septic components database, mapping tools and much more.

Business is going so well that marketing consists of, by Viita's estimate, 95% word of mouth: "It does help that, being our size with our pickups and vacuum trucks, people see our logo always driving around." That bodes well for a prosperous future. ■

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