

Flying high with the Navy

Air station gives growing Nevada dealership its largest contract ever.

776 HYDROTECH R/O SYSTEMS FOR ARSENIC !!!!

By Doreen M. Ercolano

Truckee Meadows Water Systems in Reno, NV, named after a valley area in northern Nevada, has been awarded two contracts from the US Naval Air Station at Fallon, NV.

The first will provide 76 reverse osmosis (RO) drinking water coolers to meet US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for arsenic, a serious problem in the Fallon region and beyond.

The second contract, awarded in late April, calls for 360 additional undersink RO systems to be installed in residences located at the air station, home to naval personnel and their families. Together, the contracts ensure that all drinking water, in every building on the naval base, will come from Truckee Meadows' H₂O systems.

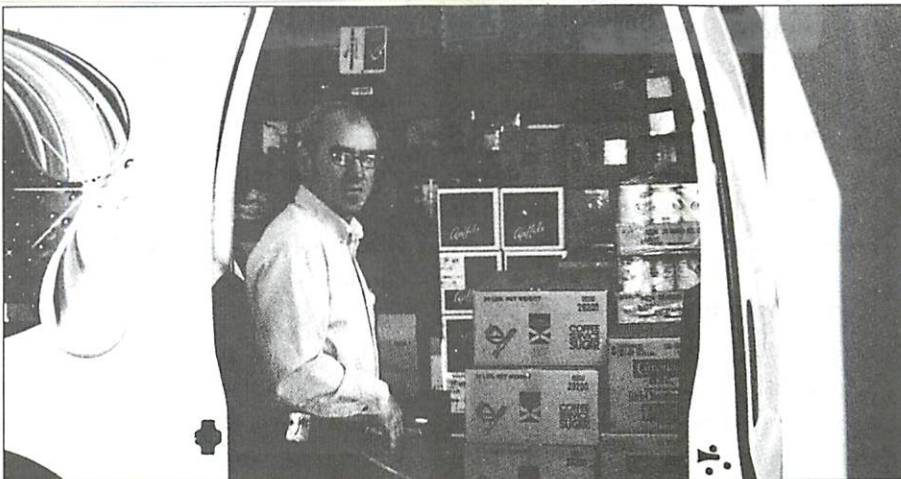
The dealership's success in securing the contracts surprises its owner.

"Sometimes I say we're just a rinky-dinky little business, but when we get contracts like these, it makes me think again," says owner Mike Guidara. "We've been growing steadily, and it sort of sneaks up on you. We just set goals every year and try to meet them."

The 360-unit agreement, worth in excess of \$100,000, is the largest contract ever secured by Truckee Meadows, says Guidara. It will increase company revenue and the company's presence in the entire Fallon region, which should lead to business and residential contracts in an area that is undergoing serious water and health problems, he says.

Bigger things ahead

"Now that we've convinced the naval base as to the effectiveness of this technology, the whole town should follow



Truckee Meadows service manager Chris McClintock loads a truck to go out on his coffee route.

suit," says Guidara, a native of Marina, CA. "We're already having discussions with the school district to install coolers in their facilities. I expect this contract to lead to even bigger things."

The Oasis brand RO coolers and Hydrotech RO undersink systems are expected to lower the arsenic levels in the drinking water on the Fallon Naval Air Station to well below the EPA's new on-again/off-again maximum contaminant level of 10 parts per billion (ppb), says Guidara, whose 5,000-square-foot headquarters in downtown Reno is about 63 miles from Fallon.

The coolers will also replace the air station's existing bottled water coolers, freeing up storage space formerly used for 5-gallon water bottles.

"This just proves that persistence pays off," says Guidara, who will hire temporary workers to meet the contract's 60-day installation deadline. "I've been trying to convert the naval base over from bottled water to RO coolers since 1993. Every year, I'd stop by and drop off brochures and try to get on the bid list. Finally, after

seven years, they decided to take advantage of modern technology."

Although the new EPA standards are on-again, off-again, the public's fear of arsenic and its health ramifications are very real, says Guidara. In fact, Fallon's water problems have made national headlines in past months, including public concern about the number of leukemia cases among children, a number that has grown to 13.

According to Guidara, Fallon's tap water has a pH level of 9.4 and an arsenic level of 100 to 140 ppb, with a hardness level of 2 grains per gallon. Total dissolved solids are about 600 parts per million.

Tap water in nearby Fernley, where Truckee Meadows has been installing whole-house water conditioners and undersink ROs, has arsenic levels of about 47-56 ppb.

"Quite often, it elevates, and the local water utility company has to send out warning letters to each customer," says Guidara.

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"The water in the city of Fallon has consistently exceeded EPA arsenic standards for over 20 years, but for some reason, the city felt that it didn't have to send out noncompliance notification letters, and after a lot of controversy, just started sending out letters in 2000."

"High arsenic levels are also being found in Washoe County and the Reno/Sparks region. Officials are 'blending' water in a couple of downtown Reno wells to get arsenic levels below EPA standards," he says.

A cooler way to do business

The point-of-use (POU) cooler technology that has secured the naval contracts is the same technology that gave Guidara his start in 1993. He had been working as a general manager for a local bottled water company, putting in long hours and thinking how he could be



Truckee Meadows owner Mike Guidara.

working for himself instead.

Then the Oasis company introduced POU coolers with filters inside, and Guidara says he recognized opportunity knocking.

"I put on a suit and tie, grabbed a briefcase and started going door-to-door in downtown Reno. People thought I was crazy, giving up my job to work out of my garage," remembers Guidara. "One guy even bought a cooler from me out of sympathy. He said, 'if you're

crazy enough to be selling them, the least I can do is buy one from you."

When banks turned down his business loan applications, Guidara turned to Oasis for start-up capital, receiving a \$30,000 loan to sell the company's new technology. Two months later, he borrowed more from Oasis, and continued to knock on every door he could find. He then brought on best friend and ex-bottled water colleague Chris McClintock to help service and sell, and then the company took off.

Coffee time

The technology that gave his business its start still represents 60 percent of Guidara's revenues today. From coolers, Truckee Meadows made a natural transition to an office coffee service that ties into the cooler's water filtration system,

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allowing coffee to be made at the push of a button.

"I went into coffee service because people asked for it," says Guidara. "It's grown well for us and our customers couldn't be happier with it. The coffee is great, and it's one less thing they have to worry about doing themselves."

Guidara listens to his customers. Those who were satisfied with his business services soon asked him for residential applications. Today, 20 percent of Truckee Meadows' business is generated from residential water softening systems, a sector that is also growing each year.

His staff, including service manager McClintock, service technician/softener installer Ray Kester, office manager Brenda Tucker and sales representative Alan Enzler, gets the lion's share of the credit, says Guidara, for securing new

customers and keeping the old ones satisfied. He also just hired a sales service representative to visit customers, wipe down their coolers every three months and solicit new business.

"We could be a lot bigger if we could find the right people to add to our staff," says Guidara, echoing the challenge of water treatment companies coast to coast. "It's my staff that grows this company every day. They, and our loyal customers, are what keeps me in business."

"People always try and get us to advertise on TV, radio and the newspaper. They tell me if we don't, that we'll go out of business. I tell them that as long as we take care of the customers that we have, everything else will fall into place," Guidara says. □

Doreen M. Ercolano is a free-lance writer in Castleton, NY.

AT-A-GLANCE

**Truckee Meadows
Water Systems**
Reno, NV

Number of employees: 6

Size of business: \$700,000 in annual sales

Years in water treatment: 8 years

Sources of advertising:
yellow pages
vehicle signage
customer referrals

Percentage of business from:

