

KEEPING IT CLEAN

Environmental Firm Tackles Tanks and More

By Matt Ottinger

It's early July, and much of the furniture has yet to be delivered to Creek Run Environmental Engineering's brand new 11,000-square-foot office building in Montpelier. But founder and COO Jason Lenz eagerly offers a tour.

As the smell of new construction wafts through the humid summer air, Lenz navigates the building's layout, which caters to the varied needs of his staff. He gazes out the window, admiring a new wooden bridge that reaches over a ditch on the 20-acre property. Old gas station signage adorns the walls, and Lenz highlights one he purchased in Iowa from the History Channel's famous collector gurus – the *American Pickers*. He explains when you buy from them, they tell you in which episode the item was purchased.

The history of his company began nearly a quarter of a century ago. While in the United States Air Force, Lenz had been tasked with putting his environmental science minor to use and lead an environmental clean-up office in New Mexico.

"Then I went to Iceland for a year and did the same thing, before coming back to Indiana to help prepare for the closure of Grissom Air Force base," he relays.

Lenz and his wife ended up near her childhood home in Blackford County, and he initially had visions of becoming a social studies teacher. But his first job was working

for a company that installed and removed underground storage tanks. He opted to venture out on his own in 1993 – and would hire his first employee in 1995.

"One of the jobs I had in the Air Force was to hire contractors, and I noticed it was hard to find qualified people who were willing to travel and were qualified to deal with underground storage tank problems as well as the environmental side of things," he recalls. "I knew there was a need."

Foot on the gas

Now, Creek Run and its 45 employees help clients with underground storage tank management, cleaning and remediating distressed properties, and site mapping and drafting, among other services. Gas stations are its largest clients as it serves the likes of Ricker Oil and Family Express, and the company also works with Budget car rental in Kentucky as well as other clients in Ohio.

Most of Creek Run's staff operates in Montpelier, although some are in Indianapolis and LaPorte.

"I'd like to see us grow to 60 employees by

the time I'm 60," projects the 53-year-old Lenz.

Creek Run is also a family affair as Lenz's three grown children are part of the company team. He explains that one of his sons supervises the other in the LaPorte office.

Environment of success

When asked about the major challenges in the industry, he responds, "Getting the right people.

"It's not a career most college students even know about when they graduate," Lenz offers, clarifying that many geology students have visions of analyzing landslides and earthquakes in California or helping petroleum companies find oil.

He labels Creek Run's hiring process as "rigorous," but notes the company pays very competitively and adds three or four people each year. Ball State, Indiana and Purdue universities produce their share of Creek Run employees, and Lenz notes the company also hires graduates from Shawnee State (Ohio) because of the school's strong geology program.

Keeping up with evolving regulations is

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A Creek Run field technician conducts quarterly groundwater monitoring to measure contaminant fluctuations and flow. Removing underground storage tanks is critical when a gas station goes out of business or upgrades are needed.

Creek Run Environmental Engineering

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another challenge for companies like Creek Run.

“You have the federal (underground storage tank) regulations and then the state regulations – some of them mirror each other and some don’t,” he reports. “Then there are local regulations.”

The company continues to build upon its distinguished history of successful clean-ups, however, and celebrated the milestone of 100

“No Further Action” letters last year. It now boasts nearly 140 – each framed and mounted on the wall in its new meeting room.

“When you have a distressed property with petroleum impacts, you have to deal with the state regulators to clean that up,” Lenz explains. “Once you get to a completion point, they say ‘You’re done’ and issue the letter. Of course, we’re very proud of those.”

RESOURCE: Jason Lenz, Creek Run Environmental Engineering, at www.creekrun.com