

Priming the Pump

By Marty Daks

A plumber-turned-entrepreneur creates a cure for balky wells

Three years ago the Boehmer family built an 8,000-sq-ft. dream house on 13 pristine acres in Far Hills. But soon after moving in, the family got a sinking feeling when it found that the property had a low-pressure well that couldn't meet the home's water demands. That can be tough when you've got three high-pressure showers, two Jacuzzis and an irrigation system for two acres of lawn.

Fortunately for the Boehmers, their builder had a solution—an East Amwell plumber-turned-entrepreneur named Andy Reid and his device, called Well Manager, that can coax high performance out of low-pressure wells.

"After we moved in, our attempts to use the irrigation system caused the well

to run out of water," recalls Colleen Boehmer, the owner and president of Warren Lumber and Millwork in Washington. Her company, which has locations throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania, sells lumber and products such as doors, windows and trim to building professionals. "During the summer, when temperatures reached the 100-degree mark, we actually had to have water trucked in to save our landscaping."

That's because "it is possible to move into a new home which has met all code requirements and still not have enough water to operate more than one bathroom at a time," says Reid, 59, the CEO of Reid Plumbing Products and a 30-year veteran of the plumbing business.

"The plumbing code specifies that the piping must be sized to properly supply the entire fixture load connected to it," Reid says. "But there is no rule that says the minimum acceptable well must provide enough pressure and volume to properly supply that pipe."

That shortcoming provided a business opportunity for Reid, who developed the idea for a special water-pres-

Well Manager saved the landscaping at the Boehmer's spread in Far Hills.



sure pump while serving on the East Amwell Board of Health. That led to a prototype in 1996 and then to a patent on the Well Manager in 2000.


The device consists of an auxiliary pump and a storage tank. The pump runs at preset intervals to draw and store water. An electronic controller times the withdrawals and matches them to the well's capacity so that it is not drawn down too far. Reid charges \$2,775 for the controller; a complete, installed system starts at \$5,900.

These days, Reid's five-employee company, which operates out of a former general store built in 1777, has revenue of close to \$1 million a year but is struggling to turn a profit. "Our expansion efforts are still burning through all our cash," says Reid, who has financed the business with his own

savings plus home-equity loans. "We're hoping to move into the black sometime this year."

While Reid and his group fabricate some of the plastic and electrical parts themselves, other processes are handled at places like Kooltronic, a Pennington manufacturer of air conditioners that coats metal parts requiring paint. A local welder does some subassembly work; a local machinist makes special parts.

Reid first advertised the Well Manager on his Website, www.well-manager.com, and then began distributing the product through well-drillers, plumbers and other tradespeople who receive training from him. He recently signed a distribution agreement with a dealer in Canada. Ads in trade journals have also generated business



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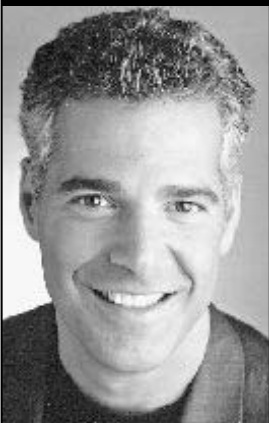
This week Steve talks with two college presidents, Jack Noonan of Bloomfield College and Robert Altenkirch of NJIT. They will explore such issues as diversity on campus and the proposed reconfiguration of UMDNJ, Rutgers and NJIT.

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This week on Caucus



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and one in *New World Water*, a magazine published by the France-based World Water Council, led to inquiries from 62 countries but no sales so far.

Reid's customers include the U.S. Forest Service in Colorado's Grand



For now, Reid is keeping his day job.

Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests, which host some 6,000 campers a year. "Because of the geology of the area, surface water contamination of the aquifer is a potential problem," says Reid. "By slowing the rate at which

"Our expansion efforts are still burning through all our cash. We're hoping to move into the black sometime this year."

Andy Reid
CEO, Reid Plumbing Products

water is drawn from the well, Well Manager reduces the likelihood that contaminants, like parasites and biological agents, will be drawn toward it from nearby lakes and streams."

Moreover, he adds, "a high flow rate means you're picking up more sediment. Multiply that effect by an entire development of homes, and you're drawing a lot of dirty water."

In traditional storage tanks, "When the preset pressure is reached, the pump shuts off and waits for someone to use the water stored in the pressure tank," Reid says. "But when you don't use water the pump just sits there. The well is collecting water, but the pump isn't harvesting it and once the well fills to its

static level, it too stops producing. All the time that your well lies dormant represents wasted opportunity."

By making regular water withdrawals, Reid's product keeps wells producing. That maximizes their performance and minimizes potential strains on wells and aquifers.

Reid says someone who's handy could install a unit in a weekend, while a professional could do it in about six

hours. Reid himself is usually available to provide assistance over the phone.

"One fellow who lives in the Rockies, about 70 miles from the nearest plumber, ordered a Well Manager and decided to install it himself," says Reid. "He had a digital camera and sent me photos of his system over the Internet. As he progressed, he kept me updated with real-time pictures and I advised him, by e-mail and phone, of the prop-

er steps. The installation was a success, and he was very happy."

For now, Reid's keeping his day job as plumber, although he says he accepts fewer jobs and instead focuses his energy on Well Manager. Colleen Boehmer is glad for that. "I wish I had known about Andy Reid and Well Manager before we had the house built," she says. "It would have saved a lot of trouble." ■

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