

Specialists in dirt tackle jobs we can't handle

Wet basements and other water damage require most help

By LORI GABLE

Renewit Cleaning and Restoration takes pride in being the first on scene after a crisis. The family-owned and -operated business specializes in property damage recovery. Their work begins after a storm hits, a water main breaks or even when a sewage tank leaks.

"We're called after an emergency strikes," explains Peter Alessi, the company president, noting he and his team thrive on working in the midst of chaos.

Renewit crews strive to clean up messes and restore order for homeowners and commercial businesses in the Greater Rochester area and the Finger Lakes region.

Alessi and his original business partner, Jake Adolph, started the company in 2007. Adolph, 26, died of cancer in 2009, and Alessi's brother, Anthony Rebis, became his partner. The business has grown to become a family venture: Alessi's wife, Kate, is the operations manager; his sister, Gena Alessi-Cole, manages the website; brother, Joseph Rebis handles calls, and even his 9-year-old daughter, Bella, helps with occasional advertising flier distribution.



Photo by Kimberly Simpson
Peter Alessi, left, with brother Anthony Rebis: Their family-owned company has grown steadily from a couple calls a week in the early years to between 12 and 20 calls a week now.

The idea for Renewit came to Alessi when he was working for a carpet cleaning company. Many customers would call to ask for service to dry out their carpets that were soaked due to flooding or wet basements. Alessi realized this was an area where he could build a business, and he invested in drying equipment.

Water damage is now his top area of service, but growing his business took time in the early years.

"It's not the thing you can go out and sell," Alessi says. "It takes a while to tap that market."

Much of his business came through referrals from customers. He then initiated relationships with insurance companies and began developing business through referrals from people who had wind, fire or water damage in their homes.

"A lot of times it's something that strikes the home," Alessi says. "It could be a tree that cuts through and rips apart the siding or hits a car."

Today Alessi has six insurance companies that send customer referrals, which he says accounts for about 50 percent of his business. The company website generates much of his business as well, featuring photos of Renewit's cleanup jobs.

The cost of service depends on the work that is needed. There is a minimum service call of \$500 to cover the cost of the crew and equipment, Alessi says.

The largest job Renewit ever had was a \$500,000 cleanup and removal of contaminated materials at a hospital outside of Buffalo after heavy rains caused flash flooding of the river nearby.

"We were originally there for a small job across the street, but I offered to help," Alessi says. "An hour later, they asked how quickly I could get my team there."

Alessi hired a crew of 50 to manage the work, which took two days.

Renewit's staff consists mainly of Alessi and his brother. He hires subcontractors as he needs them.

"I have 40 subcontractors available at any one time," Alessi says. "I may need five or six guys today and then 40 next week. Staffing is something we need to keep simple and flexible."

The company has grown steadily from a couple calls a week in the early years to between 12 and 20 calls a week now. The increase keeps Alessi on the road since he insists on responding personally to as many as he can.

"That's a lot of calls to jump around to," he says. "I spend 12 to 18 hours a day in my van."

He anticipates even more calls now that Renewit purchased a toll-free number, 1-844-FLOODED, which he says is less confusing than remembering how to spell his company name.

"We're always looking for ways to make it easy for people to reach us," he says. "Give us a call and we'll dispatch a crew within an hour."

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