

**JOHN  
ALLISON:  
ENVIROSPEC'S PASSIONATE,  
CHARITABLE OWNER**

by April Hirsch



**D**o whatever it takes to get a job done right. That—in a nutshell—is the lesson that John Allison, the owner of EnviroSpec in Homerville, GA, learned very early from his father.

John's father was a rural mail carrier for 49 years. One fond memory takes John back to a day when he was about eight years old and riding along with his dad. As father and son made the trek down a five-mile stretch of water-covered and muddy, unpaved road to deliver a piece of advertising mail to the only family that lived there, John wondered why. He recalls telling his father, "It's only a piece of advertisement."

John's father set him straight, saying: "Yes, and that piece of advertisement may be the only mail the family will receive in some time."

Caring about people and animals is such a part of life for John and his wife, Shelley Allison, they point to their charitable interests as an essential driver of their business. "We are a philanthropy-driven business," says John. "The only thing that growth really means to us is that it generates more revenues that we can pass along to the charities that we serve."

Over the years, explains John, his company "has gathered an incredible group of customers" who share in the successes of what he and Shelley accomplish. "What we do is merely the smaller part of what our customers make possible," say both John and Shelley, when asked to talk about what pulls their enterprise forward.

Helping others begins with assistance to the contractor network that John and Shelley's company serves. "Contract cleaners are hard working people, who, more often than not, find themselves with their backs up against the wall and nowhere to turn," says John. "I have been there."

John started in the industry as a contract cleaner in 1972. Riding from Connecticut to Vermont one particularly snowy weekend, he noticed a

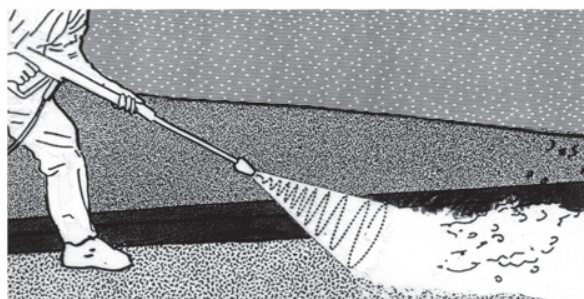


"dirty" tractor-trailer rig as it passed. It was a quiet, uneventful ride, and he began wondering how such trucks were cleaned. The more he considered

the question, the more he realized he had an idea for a business.

By the Monday following the weekend trip, John was making cold calls

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to companies lining up jobs to clean trucks at the owners' sites. He soon was doing his first job, knee deep in snow, using his pickup to carry in 55-gallon drums of wash water. John perfected techniques. And he grew his business.

"I developed my own chemical line, just out of need," says John. The original environmental specialties component of the contracting business grew into EnviroSpec, which officially

tornado swarms that moved through the Midwest and South at the end of February and beginning of March. The goal was to get everyone the tools they needed to get their businesses back in operating form as fast as possible.

John and Shelley are also busy gearing up for a new, year-long venture slated to begin in June 2012. Through their Soap for Hope Charity, they will be starting their Washin' Warriors Project, which has the goal of putting 12

help them sidestep the pitfalls that, at one time, I was not fortunate enough to avoid," he says.

For many years, John's company has been offering a roster of System Certification Courses and Symposiums. The contractors enrolling not only learn how to repair equipment by hands-on immersion, but they also get the opportunity to talk with other contractors and to enjoy some great barbeque.

Knowing how to maintain a machine saves a contractor time and money. And those are precious commodities that the contractor can reinvest in his business.

Day-to-day, the objective of John and his employee team is to keep contractors "energized and profitable," he explains. "They are our partners—not our customers."

A member of the Power Washers of North America, John always has contractors in mind. Innovation is a big part of the equation and much of the innovative design begins with John's tinkering.

In 2012, several new products will become available from EnviroSpec, including a burner diagnostic system, a foam turbine, a new trigger gun, three new pumps, and a line of 40-hp, big block, high volume dual pumpers.

Working alongside employees is the best way to stay connected to them and to the industry, says John. "Get just as dirty as they get and work as hard as they work." A first time visitor to his company would not be able to pick him out as the boss.

Before John got into the industry, he worked for Chrysler Corp. in Lansing, MI. Prior to that, he served with the U.S. Navy in Vietnam for two years.

Shelley also served in Vietnam with the U.S. Army. But the couple did not meet during military service. They met in Connecticut some years later when he was building his contracting business and she was working as a head nurse at a Veterans Administration hospital. They moved to Georgia in 1992. "The winters finally won and drove us south," says John.



launched in 1986 when he sold the contractor component of his business.

In addition to its headquarters in Georgia, EnviroSpec has a facility in Minneapolis, MN. John began his company when there were no 800 numbers to call for advice and assistance. "Now, there are," he explains. In full circle, he stands as one of the experts that takes the calls of contractors, ready to provide the real-time help they often need.

"I speak their language and there is nothing that they can get themselves into that I haven't already done," says John. Indeed, on one of the days we had planned to talk, he had to reschedule; he was too busy helping contractors who had been hit hard by the

veterans into the professional contract cleaning business at no charge to them.

"Recommendations will come from EnviroSpec's customer base and will include veterans returning from all wars," explains John. Across one year, one veteran each month will receive a pressure washer, chemicals, spare parts package, and a training and advertising allotment. Mentoring—from John's company and the person who recommended the veteran—will also be a component of the start-up assistance.

#### **Knowledge Is Power**

What guides John through each day in business? "Knowing that we are fortunate enough to be able to share our knowledge and experience with a generation of contractors [and] may



Giving is a big part of life for John and Shelley. He reckons that his own start in life has made him particularly keen to help others. "I was orphaned in New York City at age two," he explains. "I lived in foster homes until I was four. I was adopted and brought back to Georgia by my real father's sister."

With the adoption and the move, John gained a family and an opportunity. "I could have spent the rest of my young life in an orphanage at a time when orphanages were not the best places to be, but instead I was given a chance to do something else," he explains. "Everyone needs a chance. I had mine. Shelley had hers and maybe we can give that chance to someone else."

#### Charity Begins Near Home

The generosity of their customers who buy their products makes charitable efforts possible, explains John. He and Shelley contribute to Shriners Hospital in Tampa, FL, and Paul

Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, as well as to animal shelters.

Just in the last 18 months, EnviroSpec has shipped 12,500 pounds of dog food to shelters throughout the nation. The food was "much-needed," says John, and he and Shelley were happy to be able to lend a helping hand.

Suzie's Friends Animal Sanctuary is named for the stray dog that showed up in 2002, a dog that a veterinarian determined had been dragging one of her front legs for two years. After the leg was amputated, Suzie stayed and the shelter began. "Shelley said, 'We have to build this animal shelter,'" explains John. She is the force behind it today.

"People will detour [from travel routes] to visit Suzie's Friends," says John. He and Shelley welcome the visitors. Over 99 percent of funding the sanctuary derives from profits from EnviroSpec. The sanctuary operates without volunteers. Employees of EnviroSpec begin their day early

by helping with cleaning and caring for animals.

John and Shelley start each day at five A.M. They get up that early every day to feed and care for five colonies of 75 cats living in their home's surrounding neighborhoods.

Strong advocates for spaying and neutering cats and dogs, John and Shelley want to see a world where every cat and dog can one day have a home. "We have spayed/neutered over 2000 animals in the last five years," says John.

By seven A.M., John and Shelley are replying to e-mail messages. At eight A.M., they both go to their offices. "Shelley handles the money end, and I handle the marketing, engineering, production, etc.," explains John. At five P.M., they go back to the woods and feed the cat colonies. Viewing "Wheel of Fortune" and "Jeopardy" constitutes the evening's entertainment for John and Shelley before Shelley heads off to



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bed and John takes a nap in his recliner—and then, later, takes the dogs for a last walk.

“Shelley and I live very simple lives and require very little to make us happy,” says John. “We are together

99 percent of the time, and we are each other’s best friend. Our last vacation was in 2004, except for two days we took off to visit the memorials in Washington, DC over the winter.”

John has not taken a pay check in four years. “Shelley gets one, so I have to beg \$20 dollars off of her at least once a week,” he says, joking.

“Wealth is defined in many ways,” says John. “Our definition is to enjoy what you do and give back what you can as often as you can.”

There is no single thing that John and Shelley enjoy most about their professional life. That’s because they enjoy every facet of their business and charitable pursuits. It’s everything, says John. “Everything from the moment I get up until I go to bed,” he explains.

“Our work is our life and our goals and needs are quite simple,” says John. “We love helping contractors. We love helping kids and animals. The only thing I really don’t like is having to wake up at 11 P.M. and walk the dog.” **CT**

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