



# We're In This Together.....by Theo Terry III

Lessons learned long ago are the foundation of the business principles of Bear Onsite's owner

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Several folks, especially installers, have asked me why Bear Onsite does not have a contractor price and why, as the owner, I'm not willing to sell filters to them directly. I'm expecting to hear this question quite often at the upcoming Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo in a few weeks, because Bear's ML3 series of filters have gained a broader following over the past couple of years.

Those who know me as the "filter guy" from my days at Zabel Environmental Technology always point out, and rightly so, that when I was there, we *did* sell directly to installers. At that time, I worked for Harry Nurse, Zabel's owner, and it was my job to carry out his company policies. Now, as owner of BEAR ONSITE,<sup>®</sup> I set the policies, and from the beginning, it's been my policy to sell only through Wholesale Suppliers, Precasters and a few national and international OEM accounts. Here's why:

I grew up on a small farm in Sonora, Kentucky, and from my teen years into my young adult years, I worked as a



In the field, with Mom & Dad

field hand for several other farmers, in addition to laboring on our own farm. In the summers, I worked to get hay into the barn to feed the cattle during the winter months, and in the fall of the year I cut and housed tobacco in the barns for curing. These were long hard days, but from this experience, I learned several valuable lessons. There is gratification, and yes, even joy, in seeing the fruits of one's own labor, as row after row of cut tobacco grew larger, and the uncut patch continued to shrink. Those days also taught me to appreciate the things I was able to purchase with the wages I earned, like my first car (a *really* sweet baby blue Mustang!) and eventually my college education. Funny, how much more you appreciate the things you have, when they are bought with money earned by the sweat of your brow, than simply with "Dad's" money. Thanks for that truly valuable lesson, Dad!

But the greatest lesson I learned so long ago relates to why, today, I do not sell my filters directly to installers. As I explained earlier, those farming days were long, usually starting while the dew was still on the tobacco patch, and didn't end until sunset. Cutting hay or tobacco definitely works up an appetite, too; so I either had to bring my own meals, or as was often the case, the farmer's wife would provide us with a delicious home-cooked meal for dinner ("lunch" to all you Northerners!) At the point when the sun was directly overhead, we workers would line up at the well pump, where a bar of soap and towels had been left for us to wash up. Then we'd all sit down at the table together: the farm owner and his family, his foreman, and us hired hands. Our host blessed the food, and we all enjoyed a meal together before returning

to the fields. No one would have ever thought to exclude *anyone* from the table! We were all an essential part of the process, and we all had to eat in order to get the job done.

"We're all an essential part of the process"—that's how I think of the onsite industry. We are all in this together, and we all have to eat. It's true that Bear Onsite could make a few dollars more by selling directly to installers. And I'm sure that it would increase sales in areas where installers want to use my filters, but where I don't have wholesale distributors or Precasters. But the Precasters and Wholesalers have to be sitting at the table with the rest of us, just like I experienced all those years ago in rural Kentucky. We can't move this industry forward without all of us working together! If we can't share the profits of our industry to grow our businesses, we won't be able to work our way together through this historic housing slump. We can't afford to have any empty seats at the table! Other companies in our industry may choose to by-pass the Wholesalers or Precasters, but that's just not how I want to operate my business.



From the field, to the barn!

No single company or segment of the industry can take the entire market, nor should they. If we support one another, our industry will have the resources to get through this rough time together. That is why I'm focused with Bear Onsite on developing products that allow for repeat business, not just for my company, but also for the wholesale suppliers, the installers and the pumper/maintenance person. My newest patent, (8,075,774) will allow me to produce a more economical *true* filter, one that also provides progressive filtration, a standard of Bear Onsite products. But more importantly, this new cartridge is designed to fit into the same filter case as my existing ML3 filter series. Why is this important? It allows the more economical ML2 filter to be installed initially, but then gives the pumper or maintenance person when it's time to service the unit in a couple of years the chance to offer the end user (the homeowner) an upgrade to the higher performance ML3 cartridge. This not only generates a new sale for the pumper/maintenance person, but also generates a second sale for *everyone else* that I invited to sit at the table with me.

By designing products that work together, working with NSF International to develop higher standards and seeing that everyone has a place at the table, Bear Onsite is doing its part to help keep this industry moving forward. As an industry, we may never again see the boom years that we enjoyed in the mid-2000's, but we will be able to prosper our businesses and support all of our families by working together.

