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Removing the scars of disaster

September 4, 2011

By MaryAnn Kromer - Staff Writer (mkromer@advertiser-tribune.com), The Advertiser-Tribune

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Construction is a family affair for the Zeises.

Richard Zeis builds homes and does a lot of insurance and restoration work after fires and flooding. He founded Quick Dry in 1994 as a separate specialty company.

Zeis said he and his office manager, Ann Ott, first saw a trailer-mounted drying unit at a contractors' convention in Colorado in the late 1990s.

"We kind of started in reverse. Most drying companies start with 300 or 400 pieces of equipment. ... We started with the biggest piece just because it was so new to the industry and we just thought it would be a good thing," Zeis said. "This unit has been at Katrina for a couple months when the big storm happened there. It's been to several storms on the East Coast."

After a large-scale disaster, such as the recent Hurricane Irene, Zeis said local companies can be overwhelmed by the amount of damage they are called to repair, in addition to their regular schedule. The result is an influx of contractors from other areas.

Property owners may not know which are certified and which are not.

Last year, Quick Dry had a variety of jobs, including a school in Woodmere and a shopping center in Toledo. Zeis said he has contracts with apartment buildings, motels and other structures with multiple units.

Last winter, a water line froze and ruptured on the third floor at Hampton Inn in Tiffin, affecting 35 rooms. Zeis was called in to remove wet carpeting and bedding and set up drying equipment.

Fortunately, only clean water was involved.

When floodwaters spill into a structure, they also bring contamination that requires antimicrobial treatment. Zeis said water is classified as clear, gray (slightly contaminated) and black (sewage). If a damaged building is not dried and cleaned within a few days, toxic mold can set in.

"The worst thing is your mold. Mold can start growing within 96 hours," Zeis said.

Because the equipment is so expensive, not many companies can purchase it.

On occasion, Zeis does network with other companies to rent out his two units.

"When I started this business, we didn't have the big catastrophes like we've seen in the last five years," Zeis said.

The flooding in Findlay four years ago was the first major disaster they went to in the area.

Zeis said he remembered working on a 24-unit apartment building that was mostly salvaged, except for the carpet.

"We had 275 air movers at that one job site. On that job, we brought in five of these big drying units, our two and three other ones. These

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are fired by fuel. We were going through \$1,000 a day in propane. But we saved the whole apartment building. Within one week, they had tenants move back in that building. They didn't have to replace drywall or anything," Zeis said.

Quick Dry was back in Findlay a few months ago to repair hail damage. Zeis said one home had its old roof removed, but rain fell before the new roof could be built. All the ceilings came down while the owner, a truck driver, was away on a job.

During "the storm of 7-23," Zeis didn't have to leave Tiffin to find work.

"When those rains came in, our office alone had 150 calls the first six hours of that storm. I got my first call at 3 in the morning. When I went out to the shop to pick up the trucks, there were barricades downtown," Zeis said.

Once those customers were taken care of, the home makeover call came in. Zeis said he prefers to work within an hour's drive from Tiffin because drying jobs require constant monitoring. He does have computerized equipment, but he said several "man readings" are needed to determine adequate air movement and humidity levels.

Zeis said the day is coming when he will be able to monitor the readings from the office or a cell phone.

He also will be able to tell whether the equipment is not running due to a power outage or human elements.

"Once we leave and have 10 air movers and a dehumidifier running in the house, people want to sit down and watch TV. It's in the basement, and they think it's too loud, so they go shut it off and forget about it. When the equipment's not running, the job isn't drying," Zeis said.

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