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Eco-friendly Solutions for De-Cluttering and Deep Cleaning Your Home or Office

By Kathy Hunt

As the coronavirus pandemic soldiers on, people everywhere are spending an exorbitant amount of time at home. Today we not only eat and sleep but also work, study, play and vacation there. More time at home gives us more time to scrutinize our living spaces and realize that we own far too much stuff. From dust-covered pianos wedged into dining room corners to towers of cardboard boxes crammed into garages in which no car can park, we recognize the need to clean out and clean up our homes. Acting on that need is where most of us falter. That is where the eco-friendly services of The Junkluggers of Berks, Chester and Lancaster Counties and 24K Cleaning Services, 140 Sunset Manor Drive in Birdsboro, come to the rescue. Together these two locally owned businesses work to cleanse and rejuvenate residential and commercial properties in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Although in its early stages, the partnership between these two companies seems an obvious one.

"We're an eco-friendly junk removal company but we're also in the problem-solving business, helping clients who may have other needs. 24K offers green services that complement ours, so, when we, and our customers, see a need for a cleaning service, we can refer them with confidence," said Jakub Mochon, owner/franchisee of The Junkluggers of Berks, Chester and Lancaster.

The Junkluggers, which is part of the Contractor Nation network, diverts waste from landfills by recycling, upcycling or donating unwanted items. As noted in its franchise-wide mission statement,



JAKUB MOCHON



ANDREA DEPALMA



NIKKI SWEIGART



The Junkluggers diverts waste from landfills by recycling, upcycling or donating unwanted items.

24K Cleaning Services uses eco-friendly products made with plant-based, recyclable materials.

The Junkluggers is a purpose-driven company, one that positively impacts local communities and the environment through its eco-friendly removal services and charity partnerships. It strives to eliminate 100 percent of the waste in landfills by 2025.

Based in Birdsboro, 24K Cleaning Services can identify with The Junkluggers' environmental focus. Co-owned and operated by Andrea DePalma and Nikki Sweigart, 24K uses eco-friendly products made with plant-based, recyclable materials. Nothing that the company employs contains bleach. Pet- and furniture-safe, 24K's cleaning supplies include such renowned green brands as Seventh Generation and Method.

Customers have responded positively to 24K's ecological approach. Along with consistently receiving a five-star rating on Google, Yelp and other review sites, the company has garnered such notable commercial clients as the minor league baseball team the Reading Fightin' Phils and Hearthstone Homes Inc.

A "Covid baby"

Pairing with 24K Cleaning Services is one of several new undertakings for Mochon. Shortly before the coronavirus pandemic struck, Mochon left his 20-year career at Siemens Healthineers to start his own business. In February 2020 he acquired his Junkluggers franchise territory of Berks, Chester and Lancaster Counties. He intended to open two months later, in April. Due to unexpected statewide lockdowns and the business closures resulting from them, he encountered delays in training, hiring and equipment delivery. As a result, he had to push out the company's start date.

Fortunately for Mochon, waste removal was among the categories included on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's list of "essential critical infrastructure workers" or businesses that could operate during the shutdown. Once Mochon had his staff trained and his newly built disposal truck on site, The Junkluggers could open and start transporting junk. With masks, gloves, temperature checks and other CDC safety



guidelines in place, Mochon's "Covid baby," as he affectionately called his business, came into the world on June 1, 2020.

Six months later Mochon has two trucks, two crews, a business developer and social media and marketing strategist. Furthermore, his business possesses the *Rising Star of 2020* award from Contractor Nation. "It's a reflection of the hard work that we have put into it," he said.

Although his main focus is on operations and business development, Mochon still goes out on the truck at times. "It's good exercise," he said.

In spite of early setbacks Mochon observed a positive side to launching a new venture during this crisis. "I do not know many people who want to sit at home and look at their junk all day," he said.

He added, "As we are confined to our houses, we look at our backyards and realize that they are not the oases that we need. Instead, we see things we realize we don't need anymore."

He noted that his crews are frequently asked to remove residential hot tubs. Pianos also rank high on the list of things people no longer want in their homes. In addition to these cumbersome possessions, The Junkluggers takes away and recycles dishwashers, refrigerators and other appliances as well as furniture, carpeting and mattresses, and e-waste such as computers, televisions and cell phones. It offers environmentally conscious storm and disaster clean up as well as estate and garage clean outs. For commercial customers the company safely disposes of construction site materials, purges abandoned storage and rental units, and more.

Mochon and his crew have also been trained on how to help with hoarding situations. "We know that this is a difficult moment in the customers' lives, and we don't judge. We adjust and work differently with these clients, helping them to make the decision to separate from their stuff," said Mochon, who holds master's degrees in public health and business administration.

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COVER STORY

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Almost every day brings a touching story about a customer. “We hear the excitement in their voices and see how rejuvenated they feel when they come back to a home without all that stuff they didn’t need. We give them back time and space. In many situations they are capable, but they don’t have the time to clean out. It’s such a rewarding experience for us,” he said.

Mochon noted that, although The Junkluggers provides a wide range of removal services, there are a few things that the company can’t haul away like hazardous materials such as medical and chemical waste. He advises customers to take unused medications to their pharmacies and ask the pharmacist to discard them. As for cans of unused paint, which are a source of clutter in innumerable garages and basements, The Junkluggers does accept them. However, customers must pay an additional fee for cans containing wet paint. To assist his clients, Mochon instructs them on how to dry out the paint first.

Once a customer’s junk has been collected, it travels to sundry recycle and reuse sites. Mochon works with such companies as Allegheny Towing and Sal-

vage in Birdsboro to recycle and repurpose scrap metal and other materials. He also drops off items in good, functioning condition at donation centers. These include Habitat for Humanity and Hope Rescue Mission of Reading.

“Whenever we visit a customer, we look at the job from one perspective, that is whether the items will be acceptable to a donation center. We then pack the truck so that things can be easily removed and donated. And, when we donate, we donate on behalf of the customer. The customer receives the donation receipt,” Mochon said.

“Our green mission doesn’t make our services more expensive or our work less efficient.”

Helping the environment, not hurting customers’ wallets

Occasionally, when people hear that a business is a “green business,” they imagine that the cost to hire an environmentally friendly company will be higher. According to Mochon, this couldn’t be further from the truth.

“Our green mission doesn’t make our services more expensive or our work less efficient. We believe that, because of our green mission, we’re actually more efficient. Everything from how we plan our routes to how we plan our work is designed with this efficiency in mind. This green mission benefits the end user, whether they care about being more eco-friendly or not,” Mochon said.

Andrea DePalma of 24K Cleaning Services agrees with Mochon’s take on environmentally friendly business practices and costs.

“Gentle, eco-friendly products ensure no damage is done to the inside of a home or business. It gives employees and owners the peace of mind that nothing will be destroyed even in the deepest of cleanings,” she said.

In homes with pets, green products can actually save on the cost of repeat cleanings and repairing or replacing furnishings. “Animals, particularly cats, are less likely to mark their territory because eco-friendly products are less pungent,” DePalma said.

Consumers seem to be taking note of these and other benefits of green companies. A 2019 Nielsen global, online survey indicated that 66 percent of its respondents preferred to use eco-friendly products, services and companies. They were especially invested in goods made from natural ingredients and brands with environmental and social benefits. This is great news for both 24K Cleaning Services and The Junkluggers.

Businesses working with businesses

Along with their shared green values, The Junkluggers and 24K Cleaning Services both hold local business associations such as the Chester County Chamber of Business and Industry and the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) in high esteem. Mochon credits not only hard work but also the GRCA for his fast-growing customer base. “Early on we received a lot of good opportunities through the GRCA,” he said.

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The Junkluggers of Berks, Chester, & Lancaster Counties



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The GRCA was also how The Junkluggers became aware of 24K Cleaning Services. Similar to the Junkluggers, the Birdsboro-based business belongs to the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance.

"Being the fact that Jakub is in the same boat we are — we have good help, love working with the community and are committed to working with everyone to keep people safe, clean and happy — it made sense. We're all here to help," said DePalma, who started 24K Cleaning Services in April 2017 with friend and former cleaning service owner Nikki Sweigart. Although Sweigart still works in the field and does scheduling, DePalma now devotes her time to marketing, estimates, partnerships and expanding the business. Presently, the company has 10 employees. DePalma hopes to hire additional hard-working cleaners and has included an online application on 24K's new, soon-to-be-launched website.

Because the pairing between 24K and The Junkluggers is in its nascent phase and, as of early December, was only a month old, the two have yet to announce what their joint services will be.

"We're trying to see where this leads us. But, if Jakub and I were to do a combined removal and cleaning, our team would do one of our deep or move-out cleans," DePalma said. These are more intensive than the company's weekly, bi-weekly or monthly maintenance services.

Mochon clarified that The Junkluggers clients would not be obligated to hire 24K. "There would be no automatic sign-up with Andrea. Our approach would be customized, with each client having the choice of whether to hire Andrea's services or not," Mochon said.

Keeping customers safe and happy

Just as The Junkluggers follows all CDC guidelines, 24K cleans in accordance with current safety practices. DePalma pointed out that long before the pandemic, her staff wore masks and gloves to job sites. Now they also use personal hand sanitizers and EPA-approved, SARS-CoV-2 — the virus that causes Covid-19 — disinfectants with specific clients. They also provide Covid-19 sanitization for companies where workers have tested positive for the virus.

"We mist the entire building with CDC-authorized disinfectants, including Virex II," Andrea DePalma explains. "It gives you peace of mind that the surfaces you're touching are safe and clean and that you're less at risk of getting Covid-19."

During the shutdown DePalma and Sweigart continued to clean for essential business clients. It was just the two co-owners, working during off hours when no one else was on site.

At present DePalma and Sweigart have 26 commercial clients, some of whom have facilities that are cleaned every day. Their business also services between 65 and 75 homes each month. According to DePalma, this ends up being between 230 and 250 cleaning jobs per month spread between three teams of cleaners.

"Our clients love the consistency and the fact that they don't have to ask for anything. We show up when we're supposed to show up and do the job that needs to be done," DePalma said.

She added that many customers have become friends. "We know these people on a very close basis. It's a very comfortable relationship," she said.

For further information about 24K Cleaning Services, please visit www.24kcleaningservices.com or email contact@24kcleaningservices.com. For additional information about The Junkluggers of Berks, Chester and Lancaster Counties, please visit www.junkluggersofbcl.com, or call 1-800-LUG-JUNK or 1-800-584-5865, or call locally at 610.864.6514.



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