

OSWEGO COUNTY

June / July 2011

\$3.50

BUSINESS

OswegoCountyBusiness.com



CAN THEY BRING THE BIG CROWDS BACK?

Brothers John and Eric Torrese recently bought the Oswego Speedway for more than \$1 million. They have big plans to turn it into a top-notch destination

By Aaron Gifford

New Septic System Can Boost Region's Development

Use of non-traditional sewage systems expected to increase thanks to new legislation

One of the keys to Oswego County's economic development is no longer underground. Local experts say the tax base could be expanded if new construction takes place on potentially hundreds of acres of vacant land that has remained undeveloped due to traditional septic system environmental regulations. The state and some Central New York municipalities, meanwhile, have modified laws to undo regulations that used to prohibit non-traditional sewage systems.

"Oswego County has really poor

soil for the use of [traditional] septic systems," said Eric Murdock, a Syracuse-based engineer who specializes in alternative septic system projects and oversaw a successful implementation program for 19 devices on Skaneateles Lake. "It's really important for that county to change if they're going to grow."

Traditional septic systems, which required a buried tank, chemicals and a leach field, are used where municipal sewer is not available. They require minimal service other than having to

be pumped out every few years. By contrast, alternative septic systems are essentially personal wastewater treatment systems for homes or businesses that treat the intake inside a tank before clear water is discharged back to the surface; solids must still be removed from the tanks. These systems require more maintenance, including 24-hour electronic monitoring, but the devices are smaller than septic tanks and usually require significantly less land.

Alternative septic systems, also called advanced treatment systems, cost \$18,000 to \$25,000, compared to \$5,000 to \$10,000 for a conventional system.

Despite the substantial cost difference, engineers and county officials believe more Oswego County residents and business owners may switch to more high-tech systems in the wake of a recent state law (February 2011) that reduces the dispersal lot size by 33 percent for approved enhanced treatment systems. For example, if local laws require a leach field for a residential tank near a body of water to be at least 1 acre, the minimum amount of space for a system where the waste is treated inside a tank and not released into the ground would be about 2/3 of an acre.

"You're going to see them mostly in remediation, where old septic tanks failed and the property owner will have no other choice [but an alternative system] if he wants to enjoy his property again," said Norm Schreib, an engineer from Three Mile Bay who does consulting work for the Oregon-based Orenco Systems, which manufactures residential septic systems.

Schreib has installed Orenco systems on lake-front properties in neighboring Jefferson and Wayne counties, but none yet in Oswego County. He recently fin-



Foundation for alternative septic systems. They are essentially personal wastewater treatment systems for homes or businesses that treat the intake inside a tank before clear water is discharged back to the surface.

ished work on a 169-home subdivision in Albany County where the lot sizes were too small for traditional septic tanks. The smaller lot sizes reduced the developer's costs by more than \$1 million.

"With the other type [traditional], it's either all or nothing and you have to sink in over \$1 million in order to build the first house," he said.

Annual monitoring and maintenance costs for high-tech systems like Orenco's cost about \$300 a year. The electrical portion of that bill, however, amounts to about \$1 a month, as the systems only consume kilowatts for a few seconds per hour, Schreib said.

He's optimistic about his business potential for Oswego County, but also thinks local governments would hesitate to allow septic systems that discharge water and require 24-hour monitoring. As a home-rule state, New York empowers county health departments and municipalities to add their own regulations for approving or disapproving septic systems and sewer districts.

"It's tough to get people educated about this," Schreib said. These systems are crucial on the lake [Lake Ontario]. People are scared because they feel it involves a lot of time and effort, but that's not the case. And towns can charge annual fees to allow these."

Schreib and representatives of various alternative septic system manufacturers have offered two-day training sessions to local lawmakers. An information session was scheduled for May 17-18 in Wampsville, the county seat in Madison County. The Town of Cazenovia is already in the process of updating its local ordinances to allow the use of alternative septic systems.

Evan Walsh, a sanitarian with Oswego County Health Department, said the state health department is also trying to reach out to local governments to foster increased awareness of alternative septic systems. At the same time, he said, people also need to know that the newer technology is not necessarily more worry-free.

"You still have to be judicious about what you flush down the drain and what you flush down the toilet," he said. "They also require more attention because of the electronics and the wires."

Walsh does not think that the newer technology will completely replace traditional septic systems, largely because



Alternative septic systems, which can function as a household wastewater treatment plant, require significantly less space than traditional septic tanks. There are also fewer regulations restricting their placement in relation to homes. This allows homeowners greater flexibility to landscape their property around the systems. Unlike septic tanks, alternative systems are placed partially above ground and don't usually require excavation for maintenance after the initial trench is dug.

the tank and leech field systems are significantly cheaper and work fine if they are properly maintained. His septic system at a seasonal camp in the Tug Hill Plateau, for example, has functioned fine for the past 16 years without having to be pumped out.

"If they get the attention they need," he said, "they work fine."

For now, towns can reject a personal wastewater treatment device if it is not listed in their current description of allowed septic systems. Municipalities can also reject particular designs for alternative septic systems without ruling out the entire concept. Either way, state law still requires any type of system to be installed under the watchful eye of a licensed engineer and land surveyor.

"The technology is changing so much that the changes in the laws haven't kept pace," Walsh said.

Donna Scanlon, director of Oswego County Planning Department's Community Development Programs, believes there are several alternative systems scattered across Oswego County, though few of them reflect the latest technol-

ogy available. She has a system herself that dates back to the mid-1990s. It's significantly larger and more noticeable than the newer technologies, but Scanlon hasn't had any problems with it yet. She thinks these devices allow for responsible and environmentally friendly development at a time when planners favor mixed-use development that allows more public access to Oswego County's waterways.

"First off, they allow you to build closer to the water," she said. "There's also better water quality. You could use the [effluent] water at golf courses."

Murdock, the Syracuse-based engineer who specializes in alternative septic systems, said these devices, like cars, are getting smaller and more efficient. In Japan, a Fusion brand system is used by more than 10 million households. Locally, there are fusions systems on Otisco Lake in Onondaga County and DeRuyter and Tuscarora lakes in Madison County. He estimates there are about 200 alternative septic systems in Oswego County, many of them at campgrounds, and most of them were installed more

than 20 years ago. "I think the biggest potential for these is building up the recreational areas around the Salmon River," he said. "You can put them closer to water and you can have bad soil," he said. "And it's cheaper than extending a sewer line. It's the cheapest way for a town to be able to expand."

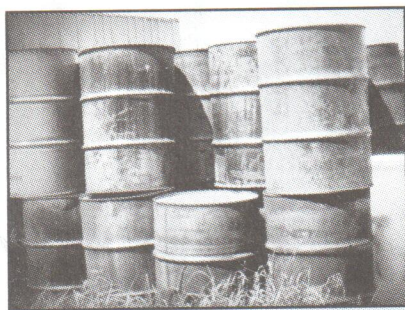
Mark Noga, vice president of Knight Treatment Systems in Oswego, provides support services and equipment for advanced treatment systems. He said several businesses in Hannibal have installed these systems in recent years, along with a number of waterfront property owners who have upgraded their seasonal homes for year-round use.

"Oswego is notorious for having shallow ground water," Noga said. "That's one of the reasons you see them out here. The technology allows you to develop property that normally wouldn't be developed."

According to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, about two-thirds of the total land area in the United States is unacceptable for the installation of traditional septic systems.

Oswego County Business Owners.....

SAVE MONEYon your Hazardous Waste Disposal Service



Acids/Caustics
Solvents/Cleaning Materials
Mercury Containing Devices



Fluorescent lamps
Pesticides
Oil Based Paints
Disinfectants
Poisons
Batteries/Vehicle
Used Oils



The Oswego County Department of Solid Waste now accepts Hazardous Waste from businesses at the Household Hazardous Waste Facility located at the Bristol Hill Landfill in Volney.

- Hazardous Waste disposal services for businesses are by appointment only. Facility is open May-September.
- Businesses must meet the regulatory requirements for **Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (CESQG)** to qualify.
- Payment must be made at the time of appointment.

To inquire regarding qualifying status and obtain a quote for disposal of specified material, contact:

**Oswego County Department of Solid Waste
Main Office, 3125 NYS Route 3, Fulton
Phone 591-9200**



This service is sponsored by the Oswego County Legislature and the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.