

ELK RAPIDS NEWS

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Where Are They Now?

Building a family business

BY MARK McALPINE,
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Whit (short for Whitney) Blakeslee graduated from Elk Rapids High School in 1992, he was not sure what direction his life would take. “I had other things that I thought I would be doing,” he said. “I went to Western Michigan out of high school for a couple of years. Nothing piqued my interest at the time. I always enjoyed living in Williamsburg and working in the Elk Rapids area. I wanted to run my own business. That brought me home.”

The business that Blakeslee dreamed of owning was Gmoser’s Septic Service. His stepfather, Mike Gmoser, started the business in 1972 and located it in a pole barn across the street from the current Pearl’s restaurant. By 1982, the business had grown, and Gmoser moved the operations to its current Cairn Highway location and purchased the building from Phillips Sand and Gravel in 1989 after the death of Orville Phillips.

By that time, Blakeslee was already a part of the family business. During his high school years, Blakeslee found time for varsity basketball and football. Outside of school, he was busy working. “I grew up in the business,” he explained. “I learned from the school of hard knocks. There was no discussion about anything else. When the summer came, you went to work and did whatever you were asked to do.”

In 2000, six years after returning from Western Michigan, Blakeslee began to follow his ownership dreams by purchasing the family business from Mike Gmoser. The business has since grown to two pump trucks, two portable toilet trucks and six staff members. Service coverage has expanded to all of Antrim county and a portion of Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Charlevoix counties. Gmoser’s Septic Service continues as the only septic service in Elk Rapids.

Blakeslee sees a strong future for Gmoser’s and continues to invest in equipment, buildings, and people. “Business is steady every year,” he said, “and the portable business might grow. We manage 200 portable toilets now. We have a new pump truck on order that should be ready



Gmosers staff includes Whit, Carrie, Mike and David. Photo by Mark McAlpine

in 2026. Mike will drive the new truck. It will make his job easier.”

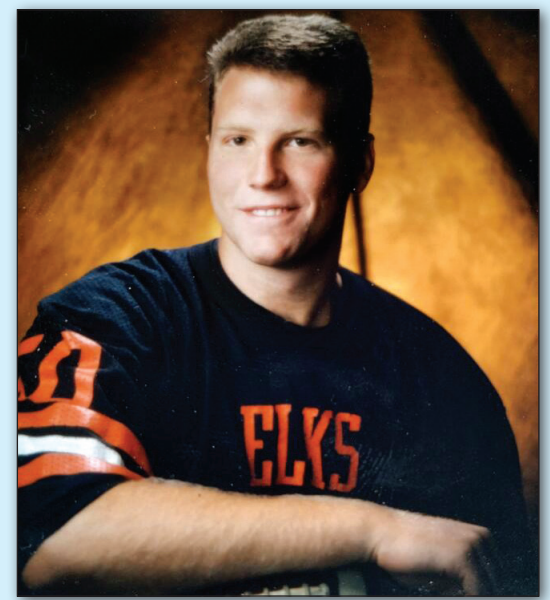
Making everyone’s job easier is important to Blakeslee. He considers his staff as family. “We have been fortunate to have kept a core group of employees,” he said. Mike joined Gmoser’s in 2002 and drives a pumper truck. David, who operates the portable toilet business, will celebrate his twelfth year with Gmoser’s in November. Mike’s sister Carrie has been with the business for six years as the office manager.

With so many properties in northwest Michigan relying on a septic tank and field service, Blakeslee and his staff become a part of every homeowner’s maintenance schedule. They consider their customers as part of their extended family. “The current recommendation is to have your septic tank pumped every three to five years depending on the use,” Blakeslee said. “The tank is a filter for the drain field. The better you take care of it, the longer it will live. The busy season starts after the road weight restrictions are lifted. After they are lifted,

we will run steadily until the snow flies.”

While the future is bright, Blakeslee knows there are challenges ahead. He admits that at 52 years old, the physical demands of the job will continue to be a challenge. Finding someone younger to work in the business has been difficult. “We are in the trades,” he explained, “but I do not think that kids graduating high school have our business on their radar. It would be a good opportunity for somebody young to take the reins and go forward. It would be an opportunity to learn the business from the ground up. We are a family operation. Our customers know us. They know our names. There is a lot of trust between us to take care of their septic system.”

“For those reasons, we have been blessed to have a good clientele base,” Blakeslee said. “We also could not do it without support from our families. My partner Amanda and the families of our employees know that it is not the easiest work, but they are there for us every day. Elk Rapids is special because of the people and natural beauty that surrounds us.”



Whit Blakeslee, Elk Rapids High School, Class of 1992. Courtesy photo

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