

off the lip

Get back to where you once belonged

JIM PARADISE

Disaster remediator

The people who call him are at a pretty low point in their lives. Jim Paradise helps them regain what they've lost to fire, flood and other disasters and move on. That makes the owner of Paradise Cleaning & Restoration in Middletown kind of like a therapist in addition to a remediation expert. For 40 years, Paradise has helped property owners rebuild their lives by tackling their water and smoke damage, mold problems and issues with other biological pollutants that affect air quality, such as pollen, animal dander, and other allergens and infectious agents. Visit www.paradisedisasterrestoration.com for more details. **BY MARY STUART**



After the fire. Jim Paradise, shown on a job site at a Newport home where a kitchen fire occurred, helps property owners clean up after a disaster and get on with their lives. PHOTO BY DAVE HANSEN

What do you do?

We mostly help people who have water damage in the house, from a broken pipe, a hot water heater, a washing machine hose, and things like that. Our job is to go in as quickly as we can, try to save as many of their personal belongings as possible, dry out the structure and make sure there are no biohazards, such as mold.

Of the things that you deal with, water, smoke, and mold, which causes the most damage?

Definitely water. That has to be dealt with correctly because if you miss things, you will have a problem later; with water that is trapped in walls, under carpets and in places where you didn't realize it seeped. We start with the source of the water damage, we ask questions and we trace patterns. If water seeps down an outer wall, the insulation gets wet and we have to address that.

Cost-conscious people probably try to take care of things themselves. What do you say to them?

Besides the fact that we're better equipped to handle this because we are trained, they put themselves at risk of electric shock, coming into contact with contaminants, slipping and falling and hurting their backs. Many people also don't realize that they might have insurance coverage that covers our service. Instead, they'll work very hard but not get much accomplished. They might vacuum the top of their wall-to-wall carpet, but the pad and the floor will stay wet and if you don't take care of it, mold will grow. They should call us first, because we can help them make that call to the insurance company. We know the routine and we know the questions that they should ask. In any case, people should just call us and we will advise them. We are part of the community. We have been in Middletown for 40 years.

Are you a neat freak?

I grew up in a house that was cluttered, and I really don't like clutter. Today, if I don't use something, I don't hang onto it. I don't stick it in my basement or attic. We find that the average basement is just loaded with stuff.

Are you mainly saving the structure of the home, or are you also able to save the things in it?

Because of the techniques we have today, and we take courses to stay up to date with the latest technologies, a lot of their personal belongings can be saved. I will tell people like it is. If

something can't be saved I let them know, and we advise them to take pictures. We tell them not to throw anything away until the insurance company has a chance to look at it.

Many of your customers are probably in despair when you meet them. How do you deal with that?

We have to be very compassionate and realize what they are going through. The average person feels like everything is a total loss and their home will never be the same. In reality, that's not the case. I tell them, give us a week, you'll see.

Are you busy all the time? Is the work seasonal?

We are always on call, we just have to respond, but it is unpredictable. It is like a roller coaster. We are as busy as we can be, and then suddenly it's over and we are back to waiting. I feel better when I'm engaged in these projects and challenges. I experience a letdown when we aren't busy.

Is the weather one of the biggest drivers of business?

Well, we do know that when it is going to be bitter, bitter cold for a long time, we need to stay alert, but other than that, you can never tell. Usually that happens around the week of Christmas and New Year's but this year in February, all heck

broke loose. We had that unusual blizzard with hurricane force winds, when people were out of heat for days and pipes broke.

What was the first success story you had when your business was young?

One customer had a furnace that backed up. That used to be very common. There was soot on the wall behind it. You can't put water on it, because it makes a stain, and then there's nothing you can do but put a coat of stain sealer on it and two coats of paint. We tried out a new kind of dry sponge that one of our suppliers gave us, and the wall was as clean as if nothing had ever happened. The customer was so happy he wrote a letter to his insurance company about us. That's what got me to pursue techniques of restoration.

What is one of the craziest disasters you were ever part of?

We went out to a farm and we couldn't believe how black all the walls were with soot. The guy was using a kerosene heater to save money on electricity. In the middle of the night, when he needed to refill his heater, he grabbed the wrong can by mistake and filled the heater with gasoline instead of kerosene. The next thing he remembers is hearing the smoke alarm before being propelled out of the house like a rocket ship. Every night we left that job looking like coal miners.

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