

## Facilitator — December 2015/January 2016



### No Way Out

*Rod Towns*

How La Madeleine's Director of Facilities solved a grease outflow issue

What is your position at La Madeleine? Director of Facilities

Briefly describe your plumbing problem at the new store location in Louisiana. After the café's opening, we discovered that the exterior underground grease trap did not have an outlet.

When was this restaurant constructed? 2013.

Was it ground-up construction or a conversion? Free standing or part of a retail strip? It was an existing endcap, and it was formerly an Italian restaurant.

How soon after opening did the first issue arise, and how was it noticed? Two to three days. The grease line backed up into the kitchen.

What immediate action was taken, besides clean-up, to correct the problem? We started with grease trap pumping every other day until we tied into the sanitary line after the grease trap.

Were the lines jetted and/or photographed? Unfortunately, there was no line to jet.

Was the backflow periodic? How often did the grease line backup? The line backed up every two or three days (whenever the grease trap got full).

What actions were taken to identify and correct the problem? The grease trap was pumped, vented and entered to see why the exit line was clogged. We could find no two-way cleanout since the exit line was non-existent.

Did the restaurant close during the repairs and how long did it take? The restaurant did not close. We just pumped the trap every couple days. The entire process took a couple of weeks.

Was the grease trap existing or installed new as part of the construction? It was existing.

How do you think the previous restaurant worked around this problem? We had to re-pipe the main drain lines within the building to match our line up. There seemed to be no need to map the existing piping; we just demolished it and when we laid our lines, we attached our grease line to the entry line for the grease trap within our building footprint. We surmise that the previous tenant, for some unfathomable reason, chose to bypass the grease trap and run his grease line directly to the sanitary within the building footprint.

How long was the new exit plumbing line from the trap to the main drain line? The new exit line ran a few yards to connect with the sanitary line.

In hindsight, what, if anything, could have been done differently to prevent this from happening? If we had mapped the existing lines as we were demolishing, we might have discovered this problem. But it is such an unusual incident that the extra work on every conversion would not be cost effective. That said, I am a big proponent of jetting and smoke testing all new construction after all work is completed. I have had to resolve far too many issues on new stores involving foreign objects in the drain lines and sewer gas issues caused by nails or screws hitting vent lines or vent lines terminated within the building envelope. The piping pressure test occurs much too early in the construction schedule to be effective for this purpose.

Rod Towns, CRFP, is the Director of Facilities at La Madeline Country French Cafe. Towns is also a member of the RFMA Advisory Council and previously served on the Editorial Board for the Facilitator Magazine. Towns is a

veteran in restaurant facilities and has worked for several companies, including Burger King, Spaghetti Warehouse and Jack-in-the-Box.