

**NRVIA  
Member of the Month**



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## **WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN BECOMING AN RV INSPECTOR?**

Originally, I had signed up to take the live, 5-day RV Maintenance Tech course; I had no intentions of becoming an RV inspector. Taking this course was purely for my own personal knowledge. I felt I already had a good understanding of the various RV systems and how they operate; I just wanted more in-depth instruction on troubleshooting and repair from people who are knowledgeable. YouTube videos are ok in a pinch, but that's not how I like to learn things.

I took the course in June of 2015 at a campground in Benton, Illinois taught by Mr. Terry Cooper and Mr. Steve Anderson. Although the days in class were long, they were NEVER boring. I found Mr. Cooper's teaching style to be quite engaging and thorough. Mr. Anderson was equally engaging in presenting business aspects for potential NRVIA inspectors.

I think it was their vision and passion that rubbed off on me during this class that led me to take the next step and sign up for the advanced inspector course – Learn by Doing, to get more insight into the actual inspection and reporting process. It was after taking and passing this class that I became a "Level 2" inspector.

The idea of Mr. Cooper and Mr. Anderson to have a nationwide network of trained and certified RV inspectors to help people know what they may be purchasing intrigued me and seemed like a fantastic new niche in the RV industry. Too many people are buying used RVs and have little idea what they are actually buying or how to use them. I see it every day in various online RV forums. If I had a dollar for every time I read "but, the seller told me everything worked and there are no water leaks", I could probably buy an island! I knew this was something I could help people with!

Starting a business, to me, was a bit intimidating; I wanted to do it right. It took me about 8 months after taking the Learn by Doing class before I finally decided to commit. I had asked many questions regarding NRVIA membership and about the inspection business. But, in the end, I did it! Professional RV Inspections, LLC was established in April 2016.

## **WHAT WAS YOUR RV BACKGROUND BEFORE BECOMING AN RV INSPECTOR?**

My RV background was simply limited to RV ownership for recreational use and performing my own maintenance for the most part. My family's first experience with camping was with my wife's uncle's church group in the early 90's. We slept in the back of my pick-up truck that time. We then upgraded to tenting for a few years.



Our first RV was a 1996 Coleman Bayport pop-up which was purchased new. We kept that until the kids outgrew it and in 2006 purchased a 2007 Gulf Breeze travel trailer. Over the years, my wife Donna and I, along with our three, now grown children, have taken many wonderful and memorable trips all over the country with our RVs.

Prior to starting my RV inspection business, I had spent nearly 20 years in the demolition and environmental remediation industries. I had initially started out as a laborer and quickly worked my way up to senior field superintendent, estimator and project manager. It was working in those industries where I

gained a functional knowledge of electrical and mechanical system operations. Another aspect of those industries that helps me now was the safety training. Over the years, I had attended countless safety courses from federal, state and local agencies as well as private institutions. That training carries with me today. Prior to that, I was a warehouse and inventory control manager for an electronic parts company.



## **DO YOU OWN AN RV AND IF SO, WHAT IS THE YEAR, MAKE, AND MODEL?**

We currently own a 2015 Coachmen Freedom Express Liberty Edition 305RKDS travel trailer.

## **STICKS AND BRICKS OR FULL-TIME RVER?**

My wife Donna and I, and our youngest son, are still rooted in our sticks/bricks home in Algonquin, Illinois.

# WHAT TYPES OF MARKETING DO YOU DO ONLINE AND LOCALLY?

I have done several types of marketing to try and promote my business and services:

- a website – PRORVI.COM & a Facebook business page – facebook.com/prorvi
- signage for my vehicle, and business card holders that I take to campgrounds to display while we are camping
- monitor various online RV forums and post comments about RV inspections and the NRVIA to people indicating they are looking to purchase a used RV,
- attend RV shows within a 2 to 3 hour radius of my home location to pass out marketing materials and to talk to anyone who may want to listen about the services I offer,
- visit campgrounds and ask the owners or managers for permission to display my marketing materials in their office or registration areas (most are very accommodating),
- purchased targeted Google ads as well as targeted Facebook ads,
- remain a current member with NRVIA which includes being listed in the NRVIA member directory.
- established a YELP page for clients to post reviews, if they choose to,
- always keep marketing materials with me, as well as a presentation folder,
- contracted with a couple of RV extended warranty companies and am listed on their websites as an affiliate (these companies require inspections to qualify the units prior to issuing policies)
- speak with dealers about my services, the NRVIA and the potential benefits to them; (some seem



receptive, others, not so much. Most all dealers where I have performed inspections for clients have been very accommodating. Some were even impressed with how in-depth the inspection process was!

Most importantly, I believe the BEST marketing tool is a positive experience for both clients and potential clients. I hope that having satisfied clients will translate into a willingness for them to recommend Professional RV Inspections and/or the NRVIA to others. The word of what NRVIA members do and the benefit to potential RV buyers, and even current RV owners, needs to get out there and I can't think of a better way!



## WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE INSPECTION/CLIENT EXPERIENCE AND WHY?

My most memorable inspection has to be my first paid inspection.

I was still debating starting a business when a client had seen my listing on the NRVIA website. He lived in Connecticut and was traveling in Europe for business when he contacted me on a unit he found online located in Wisconsin. I was very clear with him that I hadn't started a business yet, but he wanted it inspected right away and apparently no one else in the area was available. We came to an agreement; I performed the inspection on a "new" travel trailer that had been sitting on the dealers' lot for 2 years. It had many condition and function issues that I noted in my report. He then used the report information to negotiate to have the items repaired by the dealer and even hired me again a couple of weeks later to verify the repairs before he decided to complete the purchase.



In his YELP review, he stated in part, the following: *"When I picked up the RV, the dealer remarked that Rob was too detailed and found every little defect. Thank you Rob for being so detailed and flexible with your time."*

It was that first inspection and the client's appreciation that gave me the confidence boost to start Professional RV Inspections, LLC (Pro RVI).

## WHAT TIP(S) WOULD YOU OFFER TO SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING A NEW VENTURE IN THE RV INSPECTION BUSINESS?

A few things that help me now and have in past business environments:

You must be professional, have keen eye, be well presented, patient, knowledgeable, persistent, courteous, prompt, responsive, flexible, grateful, respectful and appreciative to all who you may come in contact with, be it a client, potential client, dealer representative, private seller or anyone else you may have professional dealings with.

I believe you must have a willingness to want to help and educate the people who hire you, in a straightforward, non-condescending manner. Your customers are counting on you to provide accurate and helpful information to help them make a large decision that not only affects their pocketbook, but their enjoyment, safety and possible view of the RV industry in general.

NRVIA inspectors may be some of the very first people in the RV related industry some of these customers come in contact with. It makes sense to do your best to leave a good impression. There may be a few sectors in the RV industry that might leave a bad impression on some; I don't want ours to be one of them! →

If, for some reason, a potential client contacts me and I can't help them for whatever reason (scheduling, distance, etc), I will do my best to help them find another suitable NRVIA inspector who may be able to assist them. Being as helpful as possible is good customer service and reflects well not only on your business, but on the NRVIA in general!

Try to offer a variety of services, if possible. Not only does Pro RVI offer 2 comprehensive levels of RV inspections (this is mostly for varying client budgets and needs), I also market stand alone fluid analysis, a safety level inspection and RV set-up and use instruction. I have also at times, customized my Points of Inspection or safety testing to meet the needs of the client. My services are marketed to RV buyers, sellers, current owners, dealers, lenders extended warranty and insurance companies. Some NRVIA members may also decide to offer RV maintenance and repair services. Be prepared for a lot of "behind the scenes" work involving setting up your company's procedures, protocols, policies, advertising, etc.

## **HOW HAS BEING A MEMBER OF NRVIA HELPED YOU IN YOUR RV INSPECTION JOURNEY?**

I believe being a member of the NRVIA gives member RV inspector's credibility to potential clients and perhaps with the RV industry in general. With the Code of Ethics that is to be followed, the initial quality training that is given, the continuing education requirements, the willingness and cooperation of the fellow members to network to assist potential clients and, of course, the support from the office and instructional staff, all are signs of a quality organization with members that care!

I also believe being a NRVIA member also gives a consistency to what is to be expected with quality inspections and reporting.

Being listed on the NRVIA member directory is also a great source for referrals. I get many contacts from potential clients, both local and from around the country, who have found me from the NRVIA websites' Inspector Locator found at [www.nrvia.org](http://www.nrvia.org).

It is very helpful that there are many opportunities to earn RV related continuing education credits, both on your own and through the NRVIA, via webinars, seminars and the NRVIA yearly conference.

I look forward to the time when having independent pre-purchase RV inspections will be as commonplace as having pre-purchase home inspections!

Being named as an Inspector of the Month, especially after a relatively short time, is quite an honor and I am very appreciative and grateful!

Thank you NRVIA! - Robert Wilhelm—Professional RV Inspections, LLC.

