

SRK POOL SERVICES; *Working*

BY AMANDA STAR FRAZER

Some people's picture of a pool cleaner might be a guy with a truck and a bucket of chlorine. That assessment, which is only occasionally on the mark, drives Stephen Kenny of SRK Pools Services nuts.

Pool cleaning is a science, he said. "The main thing is, the water is in perfect balance." And it takes much more than a rake and a bucket of chlorine to do the trick.

"The long and short of water chemistry is, water wants to dissolve things," said Matt Delson of Sag Harbor, Mr. Kenny's "left-hand man." Anything that enters a swimming pool will affect its chemical makeup, whether it is a pile leaves, molecules of sweat, saltwater, or a Baby Ruth chocolate bar. Water that is clear is not necessarily clean, Mr. Kenny said.

Each entry changes the composition of the water, and a pool cleaner's job is to reset the balance. Mr. Kenny compared a pool to the human body, 90 percent of which is made up of water. While a body can balance its composition by releasing its own chemicals, pools have no such capacity.

The company's staff members, who make rounds twice a week to clients' pools, use testing methods such as "drop titration" to monitor chemical levels. They then change the pool's chemical makeup based on the results. Chlorine and sodium bicarbonate, or baking soda, are two of the potions in SRK's shed.

Mr. Kenny said his staff is the best at what they do. "People tell me they feel better getting out of our pools than they do getting out of the shower," he said.

Besides being outdoors in good weather, Mr. Kenny said he likes the chemistry of it all. It reminds him of an earlier calling — cooking. Educated at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde park, N.Y., he was a pastry chef. There, "they taught me a lot about service," he said. "It's all the same whether you're collecting garbage or cleaning pools."

He also found that making desserts and cleaning pools are oddly similar. In either case "there is no room for error," he said. The wrong combination of chemicals can produce water that would burn the eyes or irritate the skin, so balance is extremely important.

But most people don't know the logistics of pool cleaning. "They don't want to know about it, they just



Kevin Maye, Stephen Kenny, Dallas Rogers, and Matt Delson
Amanda Star Frazier

want it done," Mr. Kenny said. "They don't want to see the pool guy." That's why the business operates only on weekdays, when many clients are out of town.

The firm's client base between Wainscott and Amagansett is just about all the company can handle, Mr. Kenny said. It is hard to estimate exactly how many pools there are in SRK's coverage area, he said, when "it seems like every house has a pool."

Mr. Kenny, who grew up and lives in East Hampton, founded SRK Pool Services with his father and twin brothers over 18 years ago. At first they worked out of a van — "until the fire marshal found it and said it was a time bomb." Today their base is in on Route 114.

"We work like a family here," Mr. Kenny said, even though he is the last Kenny to remain on the job. "Our biggest asset here is our employees." With a staff of 11 or 12 and a fleet of custom-built vans, SRK uses a global positioning system to track its trucks, so Mr. Kenny and Mr. Delson can send whichever pool cleaner is in the vicinity if an immediate problem arises.

They are obviously quite serious about their jobs. "We're not just cleaning pools," said Mr. Kenny. "We take care of someone's \$50,000 investment."