

Borrowing Barba

Mechanical Maharishi offers services to local contractor

It just so happened that, on the very day that eastern Minnesota contractor, Eric Aune, won the services of Taco trainer and hydronics guru John Barba, he needed a few things done around the house. Coincidentally, Aune's lawn — and his wife's Honey-do list — were longer than they had ever been.

"It pains me to say this, John," said Aune, when he fetched Barba at the airport, "but I'm gonna need some help around the house before we can solve some mechanical mysteries."

We're still not quite sure where fact meets fiction, but the story Barba brought back to Taco after spending a "long and grueling day" with Aune went something like this:

Aune's "work-related" challenges (which Barba was on loan to assist with) included toilet-snaking, a full-fledged truck detailing, lunch preparation with freshly-squeezed lemonade, live-baiting hooks at the nearby lake and, if this wasn't enough, cancellation of Barba's late afternoon flight, because the lawn had to be mowed one way and then another for proper cross-hatching.

Later in the day, with time on hand from a cancelled flight, Barba and Aune tackled the mechanical mysteries.

According to Barba, the day's housework ended something like this:

"Come on John, we don't have all day," shouted Aune. The man



Good humored John Barba helps Minnesota contractor Eric Aune snake his toilet.



Last year, Eric Aune (r) had the chance to have John Barba over for a day. The connection began with Aune's involvement with Taco's online community, taking online courses through the manufacturer's FloPro University.

pushing the mower through Aune's yard didn't raise his head; he merely wiped his brow and pushed faster. "After all," continued Aune, shouting over the mower, "my truck needs washing, and we still have to run out to the Anderson job and put that new 007 in."

At that, Barba let go of the mower and placed his hands on his hips. It rolled a few more feet before the Briggs sputtered to a halt. "Why didn't you tell me earlier we had important work to do?" he said. His sentence was punctuated by several deep heaves. Sweaty, and looking a bit fatigued, Taco's contractor training and trade program manager was ready for a change in pace.

Borrow Barba

Last year, Aune had the chance to have Barba over for a day. The connection began with Aune's involvement with Taco's online community, taking online courses through the manufacturer's FloPro University. This year, contractors across the nation and Canada are going to have the opportunity to "borrow Barba."

"And the winner," quips Barba, "will be the boss. Hey, when the day rolls around, I'm like a ship on the sea or like leaves in the wind, entirely at the contractor's disposal. So whatever the need is, I'm all in."

"John helped me size circulators for

an upcoming job," said Aune. "We also went to another jobsite and did some troubleshooting and replaced a circ on an existing system. That evening we hit the lake for some fishing too."

Mechanical caddy

"This year, I'm given the opportunity to spend a day getting to know another great contractor through the Borrow Barba program," said Barba. "Last year, getting to know Eric was a great time. We both learned some new things, and we had a blast in the process. Maybe I exaggerated the Eric Aune experience just a tad."

This year, Barba's taking some goodies along on his trip. Taco's new eSmart system identifies their most energy-efficient technologies, easily matching them with installation tasks at hand. When Barba visits the winning contractor for a day next year, he'll be taking along an eSmart package, custom tailored to the kind of work the contractor does or to a jobsite they're working on at the time.

"If the contractor I visit is in the midst of a new construction, full heating system installation, I might take a handful of Zone Sentry zone valves and control box, a PC700 outdoor reset control, maybe some iValves and a few other goodies,"

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said Barba. "Then we could spend the day installing the equipment. It all comes down to what they're

toilet or mowing the lawn!" "I can conduct a half-day seminar for the company's staff," added Barba



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working on at the time. Hey, anything's better than snaking a

as new ideas percolated. "Whether it's an overview of the new eSmart

system or an abridged version of the Taco factory and field training course, The Complete Boiler Room, I could do a seminar at their facility."

To become eligible to win John Barba for a day, join Taco's FloPro Neighborhood and enroll in a FloPro U class. "I Wanna Borrow Barba" ballet boxes will be at all Taco events until the drawing in August. Just drop in a business card. Also, Taco's contractor network, The Neighborhood, will have a link to sign up for the drawing. The FloPro homepage will also feature a link.

Barba keeps a blog, humorously blending the topics of music, movies and mechanics. Live, Internet-enabled webinars are a great way to get to know Barba and to learn a lot in the process. A range of different topics, from "Anatomy of a circulator" to "Variable speed pumping" are covered.

"Barba lets the contractor call all the shots when he comes to visit," concluded Aune. "And no, I didn't make Barba mow my yard. Well... not the whole thing." ●

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