

# Record-setting inaugural 'temporary toilet event' ends in mystery

By Katherine Tandler and David Coffey, McClatchy Newspapers

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WASHINGTON — Among other things, the inauguration of President Barack Obama was "the largest temporary toilet event in the history of the United States," an official of Don's Johns, the firm that provided most of them, said Wednesday.

Here's the mystery, however: Did it have to be? According to Conrad Harrell, vice president of Don's Johns in Chantilly, Va., most portables were about a quarter full Wednesday morning. Harrell had thought they'd be half full, as they are after most events.

Adam Carter, the operations manager for Alpine Portable Restrooms of Round Hill, Va., was puzzled, too. He said Wednesday that he'd "found whole rolls of unused toilet paper in some."

Here are the possibilities: The planners overestimated demand. The crowd was so dense that people couldn't get to them. The crowd chose to use Smithsonian museum restrooms, the better to escape temperatures in the 20s. Or the crowd thought ahead.

The evidence appears to support all those theories, and also to suggest a slight lack of enthusiasm.

Kristen Tortorici, 28, an accountant from Birmingham, Ala., for example, admitted that her experience with a portable toilet "could have been worse."

Harrell and Carter think that inaugural committee planners overestimated the crowd. Planners did, at any rate, pay the Smithsonian Institution \$700,000 to open all its museums, including their bathrooms, to the public on Inauguration Day, and long lines of waiting customers trailed from the museums all day Tuesday.

There also were long lines at several McDonald's restaurants close to the National Mall, and at other restaurants.

"We bought doughnuts because they were checking receipts to use the bathroom," said Hanna Kim, 22, an exchange student from South Korea who's attending Montgomery College in Silver Spring, Md.

Other tactics required planning.

William Broker, grocery manager at the Giant supermarket in Bethesda, Md., said he'd noticed that sales of Depend, a common brand of adult diaper, rose 20 percent in the days leading up to Tuesday.

Several couples told him they were getting them to survive the dense mall crowd.

"At an event like this, you really have to wear Depends," said Karen Johnson of Fredericksburg, Va. , who isn't a fan of portable toilets.

"It's so nasty inside those things," she said.

Carter, the Alpine operations manager, said that he loved his job but was saddened by customers' disdain.

"People just don't appreciate them," Carter said.

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