

DEKALB MEDICAL— OPL INVESTS IN COMPETITIVENESS

TEXTILE SERVICES RECENTLY VISITED SOME ATLANTA-AREA LAUNDRIES, including Pilgrim Mat (see October 2015, pg. 34). Another was an on-premise laundry (OPL) operated by DeKalb Medical in nearby Decatur, GA. We toured the OPL, which processes roughly 87,000 lbs. per week for three hospitals in its service group.



a few questions about his OPL, including some recent improvements he's overseen, such as the installation of a water-recycling

While we've often written about OPLs phasing out their operations in favor of outsourcing, some healthcare providers prefer to keep their laundry operations on-site. After seeing this operation, we asked Laundry Director Grover Evans Jr.

system from AquaRecycle and the acquisition of a scrubEx vending system from IPATM (Innovation + Passion + Automation) to reduce losses in healthcare garments. As it happens, both suppliers also are based in metropolitan Atlanta. Excerpts of Evans' responses to our queries appear below:

Q: WHAT IMPACT HAS THE ADDITION OF WATER RECYCLING HAD ON WATER USE AND THE OVERALL COMPETITIVENESS OF YOUR OPL? ROUGHLY SPEAKING, HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU THINK IT WILL TAKE TO GET ROI ON THIS INVESTMENT?

A: When this initiative was first studied, based on our historical consumption, the return on investment for the project was projected at 26 months. Not only were there savings identified with water and sewage, there are minor energy savings as well since the water being reclaimed, reprocessed and returned is

CLOCKWISE (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): A hospital employee uses a smart card to obtain scrubs from an automatic-dispensing system that's helped DeKalb Medical greatly reduce losses of healthcare garments. Here is a view of the AquaRecycle water recycling system, which is enabling the laundry to reclaim 80% of its wastewater, while also reducing heating costs. An employee in the plant feeds flatwork into an ironer.



already heated. Since the installation of this system, we have been able to reuse about 80% of the water.

Q: YOUR HOSPITAL RECENTLY INVESTED IN A SCRUBEX DISPENSING SYSTEM FOR SCRUBS. HOW HAS THAT AFFECTED YOUR LOSS RATES ON WORKWEAR? WHAT'S THE TIMELINE FOR ROI ON THIS EQUIPMENT?

A: This is a real win/win for the organization. Operationally, because there were no controls previously, we were getting calls all the time to refill scrub locations in the lounge areas and other locations. It was almost impossible to keep those areas stocked because we were not getting used, soiled scrubs returned to the in-house laundry for reprocessing on a regular basis, and we were ordering replacement scrubs to supplement the demand. With the scrubEx system in place we are getting over 98% of the scrubs returned. Also, since it is an automated dispensing system, we only have to fill it once a day and can view on the computer exactly what needs replenishing. The hoarding of scrubs in personal lockers has stopped since the staff understand they will have clean scrubs available when they need them.

From an ROI perspective, we have been able to demonstrate an ROI in months rather than years since we're only spending a fraction of the amount for replacement scrubs.

Q: HOW IMPORTANT IS ENVIRONMENTALISM TO YOUR OPL AND TO THE MANAGEMENT OF DEKALB MEDICAL? ARE THERE ANY ADDITIONAL PLANS FOR MACHINERY UPGRADES OR OTHER CHANGES TO HELP YOU SAVE WATER, ENERGY, ETC.?

A: While our building may be old, we are always trying to identify ways of becoming better stewards of resources from a sustainability perspective. Currently, we are in the process of updating many of our areas from traditional lighting and controls to newer LED technology. For the first time, in April 2015 we received a check from Georgia Power of almost \$22,000 in rebates from this initiative. Also, in July 2015, we implemented a system where we are utilizing a well that we have available on our property. The water is collected, processed and treated and is part of the make-up water for some of the equipment in our Central Energy Plant.

Q: HOW MANY EMPLOYEES ARE CURRENTLY WORKING IN THE OPL? ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE QUALITY/QUANTITY OF STAFF YOU HAVE AT THE MOMENT?

A: There are currently approximately 25 engaged and dedicated individuals that support the Laundry and Linen Processing and Distribution Department. These range from new employees to employees that have been here for over 40 years.

Q: IS STAFF TURNOVER AN ISSUE? DO MANY EMPLOYEES MOVE AMONG DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS OF THE HOSPITAL?

A: While there have been employees who have transferred between some of the various support services areas, this movement has been managed appropriately between department managers and directors. Fortunately, we all work for the same Executive Director of Support Services, (Bill Foley) and we communicate very well as a team.

In the most recent Employee Engagement Survey, 100% of the staff rated as either "Engaged" (18%) or Highly/Actively Engaged (82%). This result led all hospital departments!

Q: DOES THE OPL PROCESS GOODS FROM ANY OTHER HOSPITALS OR CLINICS? ARE YOU SEEKING ADDITIONAL POUNDAGE TO FILL OUT YOUR PLANT'S CAPACITY?

A: Currently we support all three of our campus locations—North Decatur, Downtown Decatur and Hillandale (Lithonia, GA). Our partners in Materials Management transport linen between campuses and Environmental Services assists with bulk distribution. Once again, this is made easier due to the fact that the entire Support Services Team is aligned to support one another.

Q: WHAT'S THE SQUARE FOOTAGE OF THE OPL? ARE THERE ANY PLANS TO EXPAND OR RELOCATE THE LAUNDRY FACILITY?

A: We currently occupy 11,655 square feet, and there are currently no plans in place to expand this footprint. We are considering further investments in equipment, but not geography.

Q: WHAT ADVANTAGES DO HOSPITAL EXECUTIVES SEE IN KEEPING ITS LAUNDRY PROCESSING IN-HOUSE, RATHER THAN OUTSOURCING IT TO A TEXTILE SERVICES COMPANY?

- **FINANCIAL CONTROL**—We own the equipment and maintain it through our Engineering Department to reduce the cost of ownership (depreciation/maintenance).
- **OPERATIONAL CONTROL**—Engaged and dedicated staff; efficient operations within budgetary goals.
- **PEOPLE GOAL**—Employees feel that their work is purposeful and worthwhile, and understand how their work supports the organization.



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