

SPRING 2023 | VOL. 28 NO. 2

# northeast carwasher



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Cover photo: Premier Auto Salon, Hyannis, MA.







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[northeastcarwasher.com](http://northeastcarwasher.com)

*Recently, I have had the opportunity to actually write a few of our features and visit some washes. Interacting with operators and suppliers and learning about the history behind each site, old and new, gives me great satisfaction. No two washes and no two operators are alike, and that is what makes each story unique.*

*The two washes I got to cover in this issue are both sites where the owners really didn't have a carwashing background, but that didn't seem to deter either from jumping in with both feet. Our cover story, She's a Beauty, features a striking 135-foot express tunnel in Hyannis, MA. The other wash I got to learn about, not far from where I grew up in New Hampshire, has gone through a major transformation in its short five years and is destined to capture a huge market share. Both operators approached the industry with different backgrounds but confident in their ability to service their customers with professionalism and attention to detail. I admire their chutzpah and business savvy as running a successful carwash is not for the faint of heart. It takes a whole lot of skillsets that not every entrepreneur possesses. And I'm just guessing that neither one of them really fully understood that before finishing up their first week of washing cars.*

*Also in this issue you'll learn about industry veteran Mike Conte (but many of you know him already). Mike has been washing cars since he was nine years old when his family opened their first wash in New Jersey. Mike's first job at the wash was doing back windows, enough to sour anyone to the industry, but he didn't cower and only recently retired after 60 years as a carwasher. Let's just say that he's seen a lot, learned a lot and still realizes that he doesn't know it all.*

*And realizing that you don't know it all will take these new operators, as well as the seasoned carwashers far if they embrace it. This industry is ripe with knowledge, experience and kind, helpful men and women. It's an honor to be a small part of it and to know that asking for help can only make you a better carwasher.*



Suzanne L. Stansbury  
Editor/Publisher

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# A Blast from the Past

CCA Past President and Connecticut operator Fred O'Neill (far right) shared this little gem of the first Connecticut Carwash Association (CCA) meeting in Cromwell, CT, in the '80s.

NC



Pictured left to right are Bill Judson of Sparkle Car Wash in Glastonbury, Ken Gustafson (the first CCA President) of Quik Car Wash from Middletown, Tom Rando, the President of the New England Carwash Association at the time from Randy's Car Wash in Waltham, MA, Jim Melko of Villa Car Wash in Fairfield, and Fred O'Neill of Fred's Car Wash in Norwalk.

## Congrats!

Congratulations to Splash and Golden Nozzle for making *Professional Carwashing & Detailing's* Top 50 List.

The annual list acknowledges the leading tunnel professionals based on number of locations. Splash (Milford, CT) came in at #16 with 55 sites and Golden Nozzle (Worcester, MA) came in at #17 with 53.

NC

To learn more about the survey visit [carwash.com](http://carwash.com)

## WASH VOLUME INDEX

Ugly. That's a fairly accurate adjective to describe Jan. 2023. Whether you had too much snow, wind and frigid temps or just plain rain, rain and more rain, none of our participants were up in January. The kindest decline was from the Mid Atlantic with a 10 percent drop and the largest decline, a -21, came from our Jersey Shore operator who said the month was the "worst January in 25 years." I'd call that "ugly," but, this too will pass with the promise of bugs and pollen in our futures and the never-ending resiliency of our Northeast operators.

NC

Thanks to input from Doug Rieck (NJ), Dave DuGoff (MD), Steve Weekes (NY) and Dave Ellard (MA).

-21% ← → -10%

## Fly Eagles Fly

New Jersey operator, Amin Khalifa, is for sure a Phillies and Eagles Super Fan. His impressive signage and loyalty to both teams has garnered him a lot of press from outlets like the *Daily News*, NBC10, Fox29 and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*! And, despite a devastating, nailbiting 38-35 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs in Super Bowl LVII, his Eagles will soar again and Amin will be right there cheering them on!

NC

Superbowl Super Fan  
Amin Khalifa.



## Sammy's Weathers the "Storms" With Ease!

East Aurora, NY, operator Sam Cosmano of Sammy's Car Wash & Dog Wash Emporium has weathered a few pretty impressive snowfalls this past winter with grit and resiliency. After all, he's located in a Buffalo suburb and is used to a whole lot of snow! The first snowfall hit in November and shut him down for 2-3 days, as did the Christmas storm, which took the lives of nearly 30 in Erie County and saw more than 50 inches of snow, but no worries. He said his unlimited customers took full advantage of getting off the snow, once they dug out, and the storms drove in some new customers as well. His new Motor City equipment package didn't skip a beat and despite some new corporate washes moving into his market his team is focused on giving customers the experience of individuality with lots of smiles and attention before sending them off with, "Have a great day!"

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*Sammy's Car Wash & Dog Wash Emporium in East Aurora, NY, outside Buffalo, took a hit but dug right out of two early season snow storms.*



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## Hail, Former Mister Exec, Joins Amplify



Dave Hail

Amplify Car Wash Advisors, Scottsdale, AZ, has added Dave Hail to its leadership team. Hail was the former Senior Vice President of Store Development at Mister Car Wash, Inc. (NYSE: MCW), where he helped lead much of the company's scale, according to a company press release. Hail joins Amplify Growth Partners as Managing Partner and will continue the firm's mission of maximizing value for its

clients through improvement in operations. "Drawing on his extensive experience in the carwash industry, Dave is perfectly suited to lead this charge," said Jeff Pavone, Partner at Amplify Car Wash Advisors. "With a tightening economy, achieving operational efficiency is paramount to increasing cash flow and maximizing long-term value. Dave has executed this time and time again across hundreds of locations. He is an incredible asset to our growing team and the full spectrum of services we can offer carwash owners."

Hail began his career with Octopus Car Wash in 1978, where he spent more than a decade gaining valuable operations management experience at the high-volume full-service carwash chain. He then worked with Blue Coral/Ecolab as a manager of dispensing and applications.

Hail has assumed many leadership roles during his 20 years with Mister, including managing store operations, facility management, research and development, and safety/environmental work. "With 44 years invested in this space, I am truly passionate about the carwash industry," said Hail. "My role at Amplify draws on the experiences I've had throughout my career and provides an avenue to pay that knowledge forward, helping operators understand and improve their operations."

For more information visit [amplifywash.com](http://amplifywash.com)

## WashTrends Stops Publication



*WashTrends* Magazine, a monthly carwash publication that showcased articles on the latest cutting-edge technologies, has stopped publication, according to founder Patricia H. Troy, President of Bay Media, Inc. "After much consideration, I have made the decision to stop publishing *WashTrends* and *Carwash Industry Insider*," said Troy. "This move at this time was precipitated by a very serious family medical situation. We will continue to hold the *WashTrends* brand and make our publication archives available online."

Troy formed Bay Media, Inc., a publication management firm specializing in nonprofit organizations, websites and local interest books in 1989. In 2000, she formed Next Wave Group, LLC, to handle requests for full-service organiza-

tion management. The company's association management group now manages 25 associations primarily in mental health and oncology.

## Amplify Adds Sigfusson to Team

Amplify Car Wash Advisors, Scottsdale, AZ, has hired Paul Sigfusson as Head of Capital Solutions. With a goal of helping carwash owners understand all of their options for funding growth, according to a company press release. Sigfusson brings 15 years of investment banking, capital markets, and private equity investing experience to the Amplify team. "We are excited to welcome Paul to the team," said Chris Jenks, Chief Operating Officer at Amplify Car Wash Advisors. "With a wealth of experience and deep relationships in capital markets, Paul will be able to creatively source and structure optimal capital solutions for our clients."



Paul Sigfusson

Sigfusson was most recently a Director at KKR & Co. Inc. (KKR), focused on the consumer industry within KKR's Americas Private Equity platform. Prior to that, he was a member of the KKR Capital Markets team in New York, supporting KKR and third-party investors on capital markets solutions. He played a role in KKR's investments in First Data, Dollar General, Academy Sports + Outdoors, The Bay Club, Fleet Farm, National Vision, and 1-800 Contacts, among others.

Before joining KKR in 2011, Sigfusson was with Deutsche Bank Securities in the industrials and transportation investment banking group, where he was involved in several corporate advisory and debt and equity transactions. "I've been studying and meeting operators in the auto services space for a good portion of the past decade and was seeking an investment opportunity in the carwash space," said Sigfusson. "When looking at the broader consumer services ecosystem, there are very few business models that have such durable and desirable unit economics as the carwash industry does."

For more information visit [amplifywash.com](http://amplifywash.com)

## Flagship Opens Manassas Location



Flagship Carwash, Rockville, MD, has opened a new location on Manor Drive in Manassas, VA, according to a company press release. "We are thrilled to fulfill our commitment of convenience as we expand across Prince William County and the greater DMV (Washington, DC) area," said Dave Dittman, VP and General Manager of Flagship Carwash. "We look forward to

*Continued ...*



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## Newsworthy ... continued

meeting the growing demand for efficient, quality carwash services with a shine that onlookers will be envious of from both our full-service and express locations.”

Flagships’ full-service sites have been operating since 1986. The company is one of the fastest growing brands in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC, according to the release. The company currently operates more than 25 full-service and express sites with plans to double its footprint over the next 24 months, said the release.

[For more information visit flagshipcarwash.com](http://flagshipcarwash.com)

### OPW VP Named to ICA Board

OPW Vehicle Wash Solutions, Northville, MI, is pleased and proud to announce that Mark Tentis, the company’s Senior Vice President for Global Sales and Service, has been named as one



Mark Tentis

of two new Vendor Directors on the 2023-24 Board of Directors of the International Carwash Association (ICA). The ICA is a non-profit organization that for more than 65 years has represented the interests of the vehicle wash industry in the United States and around the world. “For many years, the International Carwash Association has been a vital and steadfast advocate for the vehicle

wash industry worldwide, so it is a great honor to be selected as a Vendor Director on the association’s Board of Directors,” said Tentis. “I can’t wait to start collaborating with my fellow board members as we work with a wide array of ICA members and their companies to find new and exciting ways to identify challenges, craft solutions and generally optimize performance within the vehicle wash industry around the globe.”

Tentis, who has 22 years of experience as a professional in the vehicle wash market, will serve a two-year term, which began on Jan. 1, 2023, as a Vendor Director.

[For more information visit opwvws.com](http://opwvws.com)

### Marketing Agency Wash Brands Opens



Wash Brands, a new carwash marketing agency based in Miami, FL, has opened its doors, according to a company press release. With 25 years of combined experience in the industry and 30 years of expertise in marketing and design, the agency specializes in brand strategy, web and graphic design, content services, multimedia production, social media marketing, SEO services and online reputation management, said the release. The agency will cater to single and multi-site operators, carwash service companies, manufacturers and wash construction and real estate companies. “Our goal is to help carwash businesses stand out in a crowded market and attract more customers through effective marketing strategies,” said Valerie Sanchez, Wash Brands Partner/VP Operations. Added Founder/CEO Wash Brands Andres Mateus, “We understand the unique challenges that carwash businesses face, and we’re excited to offer our expertise to help them succeed.”

[For more information visit washbrands.com](http://washbrands.com)

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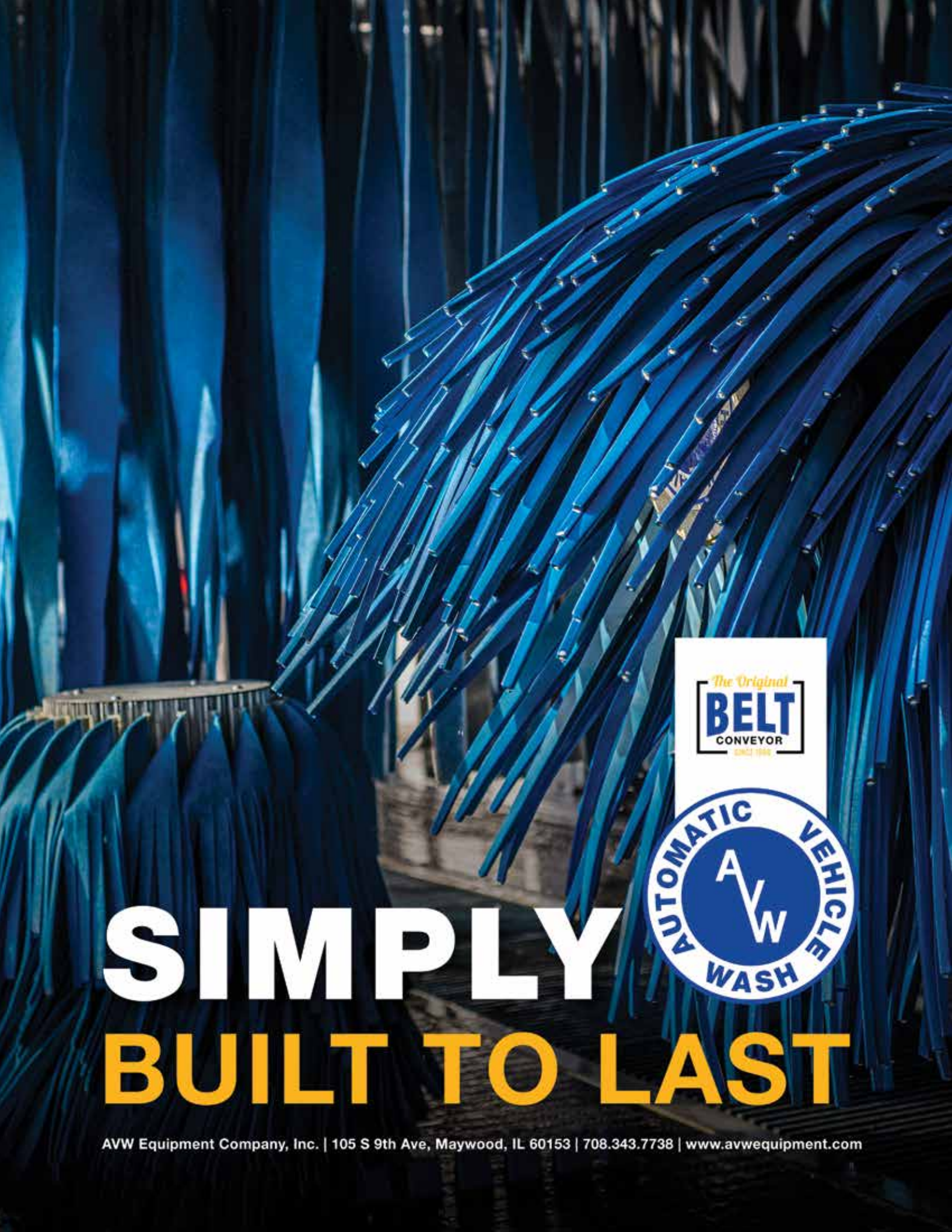
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*This mid-Cape stunner took a village of talented suppliers to shine bright, and owners with a vision of giving their customers more.*

# She's a Beauty

*By Suzanne L. Stansbury*

**T**here's no question that Premier Auto Salon in Hyannis, MA, a popular summer beach resort town, is commanding. Its physical presence on the Cape Cod peninsula is substantial given its 14,000 square foot footprint, 135-foot express tunnel, eight-bay detail shop, office and waiting area on a little more than an acre.

But what is notable about such a significant and unique build mid-Cape is that the owners of the wash, the Laham family, are relatively new to the industry. Their primary business is Premier Companies, with established auto dealerships in Hyannis and Plymouth, MA, but their only wash experience has been with smaller units for customer cars only at their dealerships. So although they certainly know how to sell and service cars, opening a wash to the public and learning the industry nuances has been challenging, according to Chris Laham, who along with his brother Nick, are vice presidents of the auto dealerships their father Joe started in Massachusetts in 1979. Chris also serves as

their COO and oversees wash operations. "It's a totally different animal than the auto dealer business, and there is so much more to it, but it also has similarities," said Laham. "In both industries we strive to make the best experience we can for our customers. We try to make sure that the optics are pristine. Our dealerships are very clean and we want a very clean carwash."

Laham admits that the site might be a bit overdone, and Arlen's General Manager Matt Traffie, who was instrumental in the site's design and \$6+ million build, agrees. "It's the nicest wash on Cape Cod," said Traffie, "and maybe in New England. The directive I was given was to create a wash like nothing else in New England," he said. "I think we did that."

But it didn't happen without its challenges including COVID supply chain issues and opposition from neighbors at the original site. "It wasn't easy to build this wash," said Traffie, a 24-year industry veteran. "After our first presentation to the town the neighbors said they didn't want a wash in their back yard. Luckily, the owner had another available site on Yarmouth Road that we could win approval on and after agreeing to put some money

*Continued ...*



*Detail customers can enjoy an attractive and functional pergola while waiting for their vehicle.*

*The \$6+ million site is certainly eye-catching.*



*Arlen's Matt Traffic saw the build from start to finish and was instrumental in its unique design.*



*The Autowash Maintenance ceramic package is a popular extra service.*



## *She's a Beauty ... continued*

into the road behind the site, we started building.”

The site took about a year to complete and included a collaboration from a number of industry suppliers who not only lent their equipment expertise but their carwash knowledge to Laham's team. Premier Auto Salon opened with a soft launch in April of 2021 followed by an official opening in January of 2022.

One of the biggest challenges to the site's functionality was the fact that sewer hook up was two years out, according to Bob Keane, Vice President of Equipment Sales and Coordinator for Autowash Maintenance Corp., the site's equipment distributor. “During the pre-planning phase we were told that we would not get connection to town sewer for a couple of years, so the challenge was to reuse as much of the carwash water as we could,” said Keane. “For this reason, we went with a large, full underground biological reclaim system (from Aqua Bio with specifically-designed detergents from Autowash Maintenance). It puts out great water and is maintenance free.”

*Continued ...*

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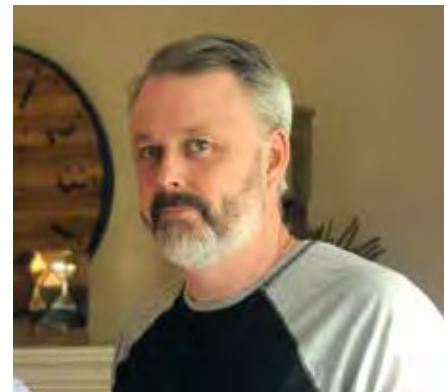
*The 135-foot express tunnel features AVW equipment and arches.*



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*Chris Laham, COO and head of wash operations, takes great pride in the immaculate site he and his family have created.*

---



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*Autowash Maintenance's Bob Keane was instrumental in creating the wash's equipment package.*

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## Critical Supplier Relationship

Despite an array of impressive equipment in the tunnel including its AVW conveyorized belt system to ensure ease of loading, Premier features all-stainless steel custom AVW frames with a mix of Neoglide, double-gated Micrologic pay stations with digital menus, and custom Industrial Vacuum/Ginsan vacs with Micrologic credit card pay terminals so customers are able to redeem codes or activate barcodes from any vacuum. The site also boasts Autowash Maintenance's Formula Finish chemistry. In addition, Premier Auto Salon features an eight-bay detail center and an impressive outdoor pergola where customers can wait for their vehicles while full details are being done. The detail facility is also used for dealership cars.

Although all the equipment selections are critical to a coordinated and effective wash process, when you're a new operator the relationship you forge with your key suppliers is important in your long-term success. "Most of our



The eight-bay detailing facility is used for dealership cars, primarily, but will grow into an added service for wash customers as well.

customers tell us that guidance during the project and the support after it is completed is more important than the equipment itself," said Keane. "Ron Campagna, the owner of Autowash Maintenance started installing carwash systems and building carwashes in New England more than 50 years ago.

"I have been involved in hundreds of ground-up carwash builds (and) that includes coordinating with our customers and their contractors, plumbers, electricians and engineers to make sure everything is getting done the right way." Added Keane, "We have been here for 50+ years supporting our customers before and during their carwash builds and most importantly, continuing that level of service and support after the carwash opens."

According to Laham, "The team at Autowash (particularly the service team) has done a great job working with our management team and following up on any issues."

## Controlling Costs and Expectations

Traffie added that as the general contractor for the build, he and his team were responsible for producing a finished product to the owner's satisfaction while guiding them through the build and operation of owning a carwash. "It's very hard during the building process in today's world to be able to control the costs to the owner's satisfaction," he said. "But we've produced a beautiful, long lasting, durable asset for the owners and the community of Hyannis."

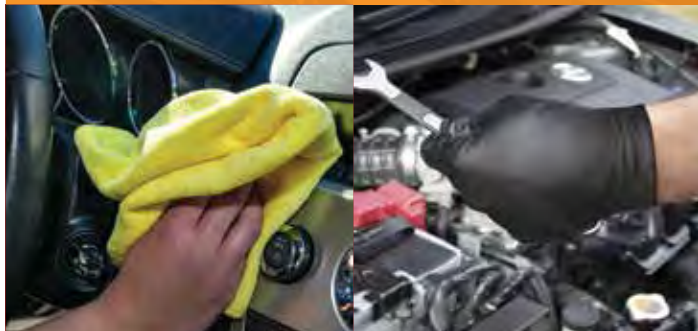
Another build challenge was the height restrictions placed on the design from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). "The requirements given to us by the Design Committee from the Town of Hyannis was a complicated process," said Traffie. "The height restrictions governed by the FAA rulings that came with building next to the airport wouldn't allow us to build more than 35 feet high. We came in at 21 feet, which wasn't difficult but filing the permit was another story."

*Continued ...*



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The wash, now in its second year in operation, still does not have a street sign. “Unfortunately, we do not have a sign yet,” said Laham. “The town permits are currently what we are waiting for and in process.” But despite the lack of street signage, volume at the beauty continues to grow. “Our volume has lived up to our expectations,” said Laham. “We didn’t open this Auto Salon with the expectations that we would have everything figured out within six months to a year,” he said. “We were looking for a sustainable business to help grow with our sales at the stores and with the experience the customers have at our Auto Salon. We now have a good clientele within our monthly/yearly subscription plans, in addition to corporate accounts servicing their fleet of vehicles within our Auto Salon.”

But just like with their auto dealerships, making sure the customer is seen, heard and valued at the wash is a focus. “We find that if we exceed the customers’ expectations and experience it will help us establish a loyal customer base,” said Laham. “We have been over-invested in staffing so that we not only prep the vehicles prior to the carwash, but we also towel dry them at the exit end.”

Chris’ father, Joe, who opened his first business, Laham

Motors, a used car lot, in 1979 in a Boston suburb, applauds his sons’ hard work on the new site and enterprise. “He is very proud not only of the facilities and projects we invest in for our community, but the overall satisfaction scores we have been receiving,” said Chris Laham. “When we take care of our customers and give them a memorable experience they come back over and over again.”

“His dream was to always own a carwash. Our facilities are always top notch and we want to create a premium experience with everything we do. He has done a great job of allowing myself and the management team to try new things and adapt to a new area of the business.”

Although it’s too soon to tell if the Lahams have another wash build in their future, the possibility exists. “The proximity to our automotive stores made this an easy and simple connection,” said Chris Laham. “Over time, if some opportunities open up and our subscription business increases the goal would be to cover more of the Cape and Plymouth markets so our customers have options. Only time will tell.”

**NC**

*Suzanne L. Stansbury is the Editor/Publisher of the Northeast Carwasher magazine.*



*The AVW belt conveyor creates ease of loading while the equipment package, including its signature dryers, unite for a uniform look.*



*The site took more than a year to build and opened with a soft launch in April of 2021 followed by an official opening in January of 2022.*



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# The Impact of Grace For Vets Continues to Grow

By Alan M. Petrillo

Veterans Day, November 11, has been an important day for carwashers around the country since 2003 when Mike Mountz, the military veteran owner of Cloister Car Wash in Pennsylvania, began offering free carwashes to veterans on that day to honor their service to the country.



Hoffman Car Wash in upstate New York has participated in the Grace for Vets program since its inception.

From its start with Mountz's three Cloister locations that washed 222 veteran vehicles in 2003, Grace For Vets has exploded into a powerhouse event that washed more than 375,000 veteran's vehicles at 4,400 sites (2021 figures) in four countries (US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand).

Mark J. Curtis, chief executive officer of Splash Car Washes in Connecticut, who has served as the director of Grace For Vets since Mountz retired in 2012, said the 2022 Grace For Vets event had participation from carwashes in nearly every state in the US. "Some locations had good weather while others didn't, as you would expect," Curtis said. "At Splash, the event this year fell on a Friday, so we continued Grace For Vets through the entire weekend, and later learned that a lot of operators did the same thing."

Curtis noted that Grace For Vets is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that honors the service of veterans and current members of the United States military by offering free carwashes, oil changes, and other services to those who have served and are still serving. "We believe in showing our appreciation to those who have given so much to our country, and through the Grace for Vets program, those participating are able to thank veterans nationwide for their service and sacrifice," he said.

Curtis pointed out that Mountz, who was inducted into the International Carwash Association's Hall of Fame in 2010, served in the United States Army and sustained injuries while serving stateside. Afterward, he was taken to a facility out-

side of Valley Forge, PA, that had many amputee soldiers. The thousands of soldiers with missing limbs made a huge impression on Mountz, which led to his creation of the Grace For Vets organization.

Thousands of veterans' vehicles have been washed every year on November 11, Curtis said, and employees of the participating carwashes have told the organization it was their favorite day of the year. Curtis estimated that well over three million cars have been washed since the Grace For Vets program was founded.

*Continued on page 24...*

“

*I should not get any credit for Grace for Vets. The credit should go to the veterans for all they have done.*

*- Mike Mountz, Grace for Vets founder*

”

# Cause Marketing Is Solid Promotion Strategy For Carwash Operators

By Alan M. Petrillo

Carwashers have been using cause marketing, which can be defined as “a mutually beneficial collaboration between a business entity and a nonprofit organization, designed to promote the former’s sales and the latter’s cause,” for many years, but not really identifying it in such terms.

Many carwash operators sponsor local sports teams, donate to local schools, churches and other charitable groups, and participate in national cause marketing efforts like Grace For Vets, and other regional and local causes. The end result for operators is increased brand awareness, acquisition of new customers, and exposure and remuneration for the nonprofit partner.

Mark J. Curtis, chief executive officer of Splash Car Washes in Connecticut and director of the Grace For Vets program, said there are big benefits to the business partner in cause marketing, including improving their image, building a relationship with the community, increasing brand loyalty, boosting employee morale, standing out from the competition, and assisting the nonprofit partner in their mission.

Curtis said Splash once did a promotion with the Association for Retarded Citizens at its Greenwich, CT, location where

*Continued on page 24 ...*



*K & S Car Wash's Amanda Kubarek said her company thought using a HUGE 30-foot American flag would be a good way to help promote the event.*



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## The Impact of Grace For Vets Continues to Grow ... *continued from page 22*

Veterans don't have to show their IDs or any kind of proof to get the free wash on Veterans Day, because as Curtis noted, the team behind the Grace For Vets organization believes that the program must be based on one of the guiding principles for a veteran, which is "honor."

He said that, "Giving back to the community is very important, especially when it comes to people who have served their country and sacrificed so much for it. Everyone can chip in their own way, and if you are a carwash owner, you can also contribute and show how thankful you are for the service of the veterans by taking part in Grace For Vets." Interested carwash operators should go to [graceforvets.org](http://graceforvets.org)

Curtis pointed out that Splash Car Wash was giving free carwashes to veterans in the 1990s. "When Mike started Grace for Vets and we heard about his success with it, we registered with him in 2004 and have been doing it ever since," he said. "The benefit of registering with Grace For Vets instead of doing it solo is that an operator gets a lot of group promotion

on Facebook, Instagram, and other Internet sites, as well as with a huge number of veterans organizations nationwide. It's a good reason for carwash operators to register to participate in Grace For Vets."

Curtis believes that Grace For Vets will continue to grow, even though there has been a lot of consolidation in the carwash industry in recent years. "A number of big companies have been involved in acquisitions, and they see the value in participating in Grace For Vets," Curtis said. "As more carwashes come into their fold, we think the program will grow. When we talk with new people in the industry, the message resounds with them and they want to be a part of it."

He said the organization's doubling in participation in the last 10 years is a measure of peoples' interest in the program. "Our target is 5,000 operators and more than 400,000 washes," Curtis said. **NC**

*Alan M. Petrillo is a Tucson, AZ-based journalist, a former upstate New Yorker, and contributing editor of Northeast Carwasher. He writes for a number of national and regional publications, and is the author of six nonfiction books, and three historical mystery/thrillers.*



Owner Michael Balboni of the two Infinity Car Wash locations in Manchester, NH, promotes the event on digital signage and Facebook.

## Cause Marketing ... *continued from page 23*

the event got television, radio and newspaper coverage. "Carwashes were free with a donation to the association," Curtis said. "This was in the 1980s and that location went from 40,000 to 60,000 cars washed that year. That's the power of cause marketing where you use the energy of the nonprofit group to push your promotion. Cause marketing became part of Splash's DNA after that."

Amanda Kubarek, one of the owners of K&S Car Wash with four locations in central New York, said that she's been involved in her family's carwashes since 1977, and learned early on that it's nice to do something good for the community of which you are a part.

"We have a fundraising program for schools where we sell carwash books to their sports teams and other activity programs," Kubarek said, "and the kids sell the washes and get to keep half of the proceeds."

"We also do a lot of work on behalf of Matthew House, a hospice facility, where our kiosk screens have an area that allows customers to donate money to them. Matthew House, veterans groups, and Grace For Vets are our biggest donations."

Kubarek pointed out that for Grace For Vets this past year, K & S had a concrete pumping truck come to the K & S flagship location and hang a 30-foot long US flag over the carwash and the main road. "We also did it on Memorial Day," she said. "It attracted a lot of attention from folks on both days." **NC**



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# Technology Solutions to Improve Operational Efficiencies

By Lanese Barnett

During the last half-decade, there's been a major boom in technology and innovation. So much so that companies are now hiring for specific positions to process data, like business intelligence analysts, who are responsible for taking the data a company holds and translating it into quantifiable and valuable insights that are often used to shape and inform key business decisions and influence how a company operates.

On the heels of such explosive growth in the carwash industry, there is no reason why carwashing shouldn't be at the forefront of utilizing such innovations to help owners improve operational efficiencies and maximize overall performance. For many carwash owners, however, hiring a dedicated person — or team — to focus on capturing, organizing, and turning data into meaningful information that creates actionable insights is simply not in the current operating budget. Fortunately, more and more data-driven tech companies are turning their attention to the professional carwash space, and with it, the plug-and-play

resources available to carwash owners of all sizes are growing. Here we'll take a look at some companies we've been following.

## Capturing Customer Sentiment, Reducing Churn

Most business owners can attest that negative online and social media reviews aren't generally thought of as creating constructive dialogue and generating helpful insights for a business to improve. What's missing is the conversation before the customer is really upset. And it's not just heading off a bad Yelp review, but what about all the customers who've called a carwash location to cancel a plan or share a concern and didn't reach someone? Many times, they simply slip out the back door unnoticed.

Retention Express provides carwash owners and operators with an in-brand customer experience support solution, with POS access, that closes the loop with their customers across all inbound customer touchpoints. For example, when a monthly

*Continued ...*




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### Customer Interaction on Their Turf

While Starbucks and many other retailers have used cell phone apps for years, in general, the carwash industry has been slow to widely adopt this technology. Building a custom app, especially with the functionality to interact with existing carwash systems, can be clunky and expensive.

One company bucking the trend is AMP Membership which creates a fully customized, fully branded mobile solution for carwash operators. It's easy to set up and run on the back end and easy to use and fun on the front end for their customers. Be-

cause the platform was born out of a carwash owner's personal frustration with this void in the market, it is built with the carwash owner in mind, allowing them direct access to their data and messaging without needing to submit a support ticket to a developer for most of its functions. By providing an advertising and promotion engine with powerful marketing tools to launch, grow and maintain a successful membership program, the platform captures rich data about customers and then allows carwash owners to use that data to create audience segments for marketing and derive insights into the performance of their carwash. AMP Memberships help to increase sales with a recurring, dependable revenue stream while building brand loyalty over convenience loyalty by engaging with customers through playful and effective ads, promotions, family plans and referrals.

### How to Ditch Spreadsheets

In a world of larger wash volume, more metrics (though often disjointed), and an increasing desire to optimize across multiple data sources, business intelligence software company WashMetrix has invested significant time and resources to build a series of bridges that connect POS data, consumer data and financial data. As another company born out of an operator's

*Continued ...*

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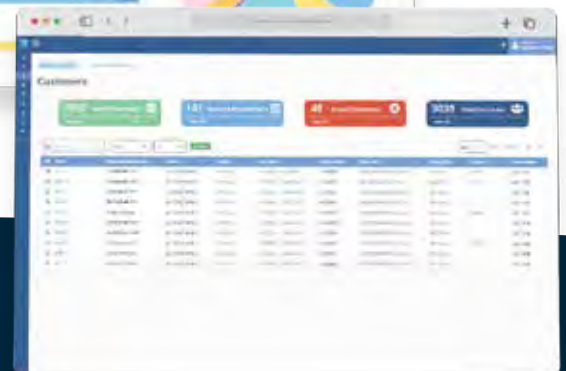
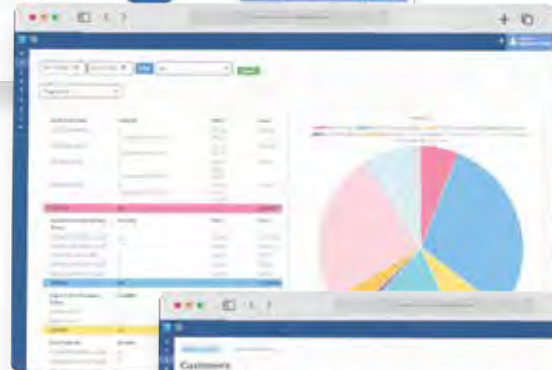
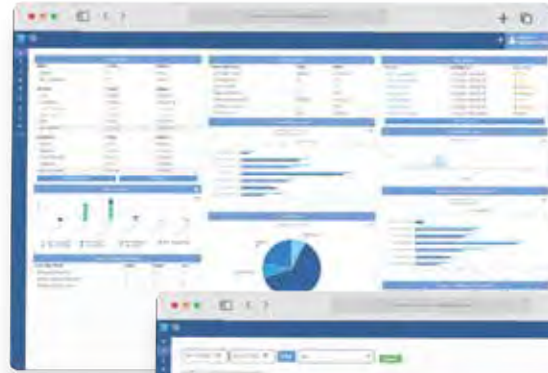
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own experience, WashMetrix aims to unify POS and accounting systems to optimize financial and operational performance to create a holistic view of a company's data in one dashboard, eliminating the need to run tedious reports and manually enter the data into a spreadsheet.

As regional chains continue to scale and private equity firms deploy more investable dry powder in the carwash space, this kind of enterprise resource planning (ERP)-type software becomes even more attractive to coordinate the data for optimal performance, reduce data entry across the organization, and automate manual workflows.

### Recovering Wasted Credit Card Fees

Though the subscription model has created greater revenue stability for many carwash owners, it still comes with issues and challenges from automatically processing (or failing to process) credit or debit cards. Attempting to recover credit card fees, even with documentation, can be a pain point. Merchant Advocate is a resource for businesses that helps negotiate and secure lower rates and fees and helps owners save money from the unregulated credit card industry. Carwash owners don't have to switch credit

card processors and the fees for Merchant Advocate are paid out of the savings achieved from the service with an upfront cost.

"Work Smarter, Not Harder..." "Work On Your Business, Not In Your Business..." Okay, these phrases may be overused. But most business owners would agree they want to increase the bottom line, grow customer loyalty, reduce churn, and optimize their operational strategy and execution. Entrepreneurs can often get stuck in the day-to-day of their business, which hinders meaningful growth and can burn some folks out trying to do it all. Luckily as the carwash industry evolves and becomes more sophisticated, so does the technology, providing new tools and resources that offer robust solutions on how to capture, quantify, and use data in a meaningful way to improve operational efficiency. It seems we may only be at the tip of the iceberg, and it will be exciting to see what's next for the industry. **NC**



Lanese Barnett

*Lanese Barnett is a Senior Vice President of Business Development at Amplify Car Wash Advisors. You can reach Lanese at [LBarnett@AmplifyWash.com](mailto:LBarnett@AmplifyWash.com) or connect on LinkedIn.*

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# Why Banks Deny Small Business Loans

By Michael Ford

According to *Forbes Magazine*, Big Banks decline more than 85 percent of all business loans. Smaller banks do a little better. Their decline ratio is approximately 80 percent\*. That means that only 15 to 20 percent of business loan applications are being approved by banks. That statistic is truly unbelievable!

For small business owners, it is a nightmare scenario: You were counting on getting that small business loan to help your carwash business, but the bank said “No.” What do you do next?

That depends on exactly why your loan application was rejected! Step one: find out the reason for the denial. Some bankers will be more specific while others won't share details, but by law, banks must mail you a notice explaining the reason/reasons why your loan application was denied.

If you've been turned down recently, you might be quite discouraged right about now. But don't feel down! It happens to many successful carwash owners, sometimes more than once. Understanding the reasons why is the first step to a successful future financing application.

Here are some of the most common reasons for a business loan rejection and some suggestions for overcoming those hurdles.

## Insufficient Liquidity

The number one factor in obtaining a business loan is liquidity. The underwriter is going to ask if you have the CASH needed for the down payment and to operate your wash. You can have the best credit in the world, but still be declined if you don't have the required liquid funds. When buying or building a wash, borrowers typically need anywhere from 10 to 25 percent of the total project costs to use as a down payment. For equipment financing, the requirement is less demanding. The lender is going to confirm you have enough cash to cover a couple payments and have some excess capital for operational needs.

**Pro Tip:** Be prepared to identify the source of your down payment up front. If you don't have the cash, do not apply. Secure your source of capital first. Some entrepreneurs look to friends, family and investors to help accumulate the funds needed for the down payment.

## Poor Credit

Virtually all lenders will consider your personal and business credit score when you apply for a business loan. At any point in time, you most likely had incurred some form of personal debt or expense (such as a car payment, mortgage payment, or credit card bill), and indicators of your creditworthiness, such as your payment history, can be seen in your personal credit. Your past payment performance is an indicator to lenders on how you may handle future debt. This is why your personal credit score matters. As a general rule of thumb, you should strive to have at least a 650 FICO® Score or preferably higher (above 700).

**Pro Tip:** A quick way to improve your personal credit score is to pay down your credit card debt. Your personal credit score can go up to 850. Thirty percent of that credit score or 255 points

is based on credit card use. If you reduce your credit card balances to below 20 percent of the total amount available, your credit score can significantly increase (as much as 100 points).

Business credit is also important to help you gain favorable rates. In other words, when you are looking to grow your business but lack the funds, building business credit becomes essential to your business' creditworthiness and a bank's assessment. For example, you do not want to have a bad rep such as civil judgments for unpaid debts or collections accounts popping up and hurting your chances of getting approved.

**Pro Tip:** A simple way to build business credit is to obtain a business credit card (don't forget to pay it on time and pay down your balances monthly). In addition, separating your business and personal bank accounts can be helpful. Banks monitor business checking and saving activity. Most banks will send credit offers to business clients that manage their business accounts properly.

## Not Enough Time in Business

Getting a carwash loan when just starting up can be tricky. After all, you need capital to pretty much do anything, but haven't proven that your business model will work. In short, if you've been in business for less than two years, then you shouldn't expect to get a traditional bank loan. Most banks will require at least two years of business and personal tax returns when you

*Continued ...*

“

*...only 15 to 20 percent of business loan applications are being approved by banks.*

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apply, which means you may even need to be in business longer.

If you plan on trying to get a bank loan, you may find yourself in a Catch-22 situation. The bank requires that you have a proven track record of paying on time and meeting your financial obligations, but you're just starting.

**Pro Tip:** The Small Business Administration (SBA) offers loan guarantees to financial institutions to help incentivize them to make loans to new businesses and to stimulate growth in the economy. If your bank won't consider a conventional loan (a loan without a federal guaranty), ask if they offer SBA loans. If they don't, you may want to seek out a lender who specializes in SBA lending.

## Cash Flow

Most banks won't offer money to a company that is not showing positive cash flow (income exceeds expenses). If a carwash business isn't making money (or showing profits on paper), lenders may consider it too much of a risk. In the eyes of the bank, how is your business going to pay back the loan with interest if you aren't showing positive cash flow? Even if a business does have good cash flow, it doesn't guarantee that a bank will give them a small business loan.

**Pro Tip:** One way to avoid the hassles of having to prove your cash flow by providing tax returns and financial state-

ments is to seek out a lender who offers application-only financing. In some cases, businesses established as little as two years can get funding for up to \$400,000 or even more with a single page credit application.

## Industry Concerns

Some lenders consider carwashing as a "risky" industry. While their concerns are not based on fact, perception is what counts. Many financial institutions are basing their attitude toward carwashing on models and systems that stem from 20+ years ago. They may not be familiar with the new cleaning technology and the membership-based programs that can create ongoing revenue and help reduce seasonality in cash flow.

**Pro Tip:** If your bank is not accustomed to lending to the carwash industry and not open to learning, you may want to seek out a lender who is familiar with the industry. Not only can using an experienced carwash lender alleviate the difficulties in having to educate your banker on carwashing, it can also reduce the time it takes to get the funds you need to grow or build your business. As we all know, time is money.

## Collateral Concerns

Traditional banks almost always require loans to be fully backed by collateral before they will lend. This can be particularly

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## Focus on Finance ... continued

difficult if you're trying to finance carwash equipment. This is because many banks consider carwash equipment as "soft" collateral. When a financial institution classifies carwash equipment as "soft" collateral it means they value the equipment at less than its invoice cost and may require additional collateral to fully secure the request.

**Pro Tip:** If your bank is requiring additional collateral, you may want to ask your carwash consultant for a referral to a source of funding that is more industry friendly. Remember, all lenders are not created equal.

### Bad Plan/No Plan

If you're building a new wash, buying an existing wash or rehabbing an underperforming site, it is critical to have a good business plan. If your lender is going to use the SBA to guaranty the loan, the business plan is the key to obtaining approval. A good business plan gives the underwriter the comfort to know the SBA will honor the guaranty in the event of default. This is because the SBA guaranty is not automatic. The Small Business Administration will evaluate each loan guaranty request to confirm the lender made a prudent lending decision.

The business plan is one of the primary documents that will be evaluated by the SBA. It's not that your loan is going to default; the important factor is that your lender knows that there

is a valid government guaranty backing the loan. That is attained by having a solid business plan with reasonable projections.

**Pro Tip:** When preparing a business plan, be conservative with your assumptions. Don't overstate your projected performance. Be thorough to address all of the important factors impacting the business. Some of the items that should be covered include: your business model, management, pricing, competition, area demographics and other major influencers.

### Final Thoughts

Getting rejected for a business loan when you need financing is one of the worst feelings ever. Remember, it's not personal and you can try again. After you get past the initial frustration, make it a learning experience. What you learn from your initial missteps can prepare you for success next time.

NC

*Michael Ford is the Managing Director of Coast Commercial Credit, a firm specializing in financing for the carwash industry. You can reach him at 800/400-0365 or MikeF@CoastCC.com*

*\*Source: Forbes.com - Small Business Loan Approval Rates - January 12, 2022*



Michael Ford

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# Are you Going the Distance With Your Customers?

By JoAnna Brandi

The other day I was out walking when I heard a small voice in my head and it said, "Go the Distance."

That's the phrase that Kevin Costner kept hearing in his head in the movie *Field of Dreams* and so it really caught my

attention. There were a number of ways for me to interpret what it might mean.

That month I was celebrating the day I took the great leap of faith and started my business 33 years ago. Was I being directed to hang in there and keep

at it forever? Maybe.

Or, maybe it meant that I was supposed to go further on my walk that day. It's been a while since I added distance to that.

Or, maybe it meant that although I had experienced some great customer caring after a problem with the company that is printing my updated *54 Ways* book, I was wishing they had gone the distance and made sure that the thing that was broken initially stayed fixed all the way through the final delivery to the customer. Go the distance.

I won't bore you with the details. Suffice it to say that I found myself in a Big Mess, so big in fact that I had to jump in and make a call to the manager of managers and ask for help. He helped and got a really wonderful rep on the phone with me fast. She was able to take it as far as she could technically and connected me to a really wonderful rep in customer service who could take over and bring it all home for me.

I was happy. Oh so happy. So happy indeed that I sat down late Friday evening to write an email acknowledging these wonderful people, in email, to their boss, copying them, of course.

I was feelin' good and all was right with the world.

That is until Monday when I realized that the process we set up on Friday somehow got accelerated and the books that were supposed to deliver this week, precisely when the client specified, got delivered last week, the one thing my client stipulated was NOT to happen.

I jumped into action again and the wonderful customer service rep jumped into action again and tried to get those boxes back! But alas, UPS had done their job well and they had been delivered.

**Way. Too. Early.**

I lucked out, though. I called the person who was aggregating the confer-



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ence materials and explained what happened and fortunately she turned out to be wonderful as well, so I didn't have to beg. Although it was outside their system (seems I keep requesting things that fall outside people's systems) she would personally watch over all those customized copies of books and make sure that they got to the right client along with all their other materials. She saved the day. I sent her an autographed copy of the book and thanked her from the bottom of my heart.

But here's what I wonder about you. Do you have wonderful and capable people who know how to treat that customer well and solve their problem with skill both technically and emotionally?

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NC

*JoAnna Brandi is a certified Chief Happiness Officer working mostly in the business world to help companies keep employees and customers happy by creating more positive cultures and practices. She is the author of three books including the delightfully illustrated "54 Ways to Stay Happy in a Changing, Challenging and Sometimes Negative World." You can find her on the web at [ReturnOnHappiness.com](http://ReturnOnHappiness.com) if you are looking for her work in the business world; and [PositiveEnergizer.com](http://PositiveEnergizer.com) if you are interested in her online leadership course — *The Practice of Positive Leadership: Use the Science of Happiness to Engage Your Employees and Keep Your Customers Happy*.*

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If you want a copy of my **BE Attitudes (for Positive Leaders in Difficult Times)** send me an email, "Be Attitudes" in subject line, and I'll get it to you! [JoAnna@ReturnOnHappiness.com](mailto:JoAnna@ReturnOnHappiness.com)



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Carefully crafted email campaigns can make a huge difference in overall customer satisfaction & retention.

# The Art of Email Marketing

By Beth Martin

If you are like most carwash operators, or any small business owner, deciding how to best allocate your marketing budget can often be overwhelming. With so many options — from television, radio, billboards, print, social media, digital ads to even events and sponsorships — how can you be assured you are investing valuable time and resources to marketing that will most efficiently deliver results? What are the best channels for keeping your business top of mind for existing customers, and how can you best attract new customers?

Most experts agree that a multichannel marketing approach is the best approach for building — and maintaining — favorable brand awareness. Digital marketing is absolutely a piece of this puzzle and encompasses not only digital advertising on platforms like Google, YouTube, Waze and Facebook but also email marketing that can easily be managed through services including Constant Contact, Hubspot, Mailchimp, Salesforce and other industry-specific platforms.

According to the Data and Marketing Association (DMA), businesses and consumers should expect to see a 15 percent increase in the number of outbound email industry-wide this year alone. What that means is whether you are a seasoned email marketer, or new to the space, you will be competing now more than ever for coveted email inbox real estate. The following are some tips, from setting goals through actionable data analysis, to help make your email campaigns shine above others.

## Setting Goals

Taking the time to set measurable goals and objectives will dramatically impact the overall success of your email marketing program. Like your social media calendar, a well-defined timeline and proactively mapping out content and corresponding customer journeys will go a long way.

For example, one of your main email campaign goals will likely be to increase revenue, with specific objectives potentially centered around re-engaging inactive Club Members and acquiring new Club Members. Think about setting customer-focused goals and creating email campaigns that will present these audiences with compelling reasons to engage, such as personalized discounts, easy customer service access, and car care educational pieces.

When setting goals, it's natural to think primarily about engaging new customers. Just as important is engaging current customers, however, whether it be your Unlimited Wash Club members or retail washers. Strive to target emails that will resonate with all of your audiences and conduct timely campaign check-ins to adjust your goals and objectives, if needed.

## Building the List

Building a solid email marketing list will not happen overnight, and maintaining it involves an ongoing commitment, as well. But if you spend a little time each day building and nurturing your customer lists, it will in time become less of a daunting task and become one of the most valuable pieces of marketing real estate that you own.

First things first — you should be actively providing ways for customers to easily opt-in to your email marketing in every piece of marketing that you put out! Onsite, provide signage where customers

*Continued ...*




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*Strong graphics with text help set the tone and drive action from email recipients.*

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*An email campaign introducing a new service offering is a great communication tool for existing customers. Remember to tout the product benefits and provide a "Call to Action" such as an upgrade button.*



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can easily text to subscribe for promotions, giveaways and other wash updates. Offer a promotion or one-time-only incentive like a free wash to entice them to join. Don't want to go the text route? Try print signage or handouts with a QR code they can easily scan with their smartphone that directs them to a sign-up landing page. If your team attends events, provide a method to collect information in exchange for free washes or a raffle. Finally, provide a sign-up on the home page of your website for customers to stay "in the know."

If you are actively seeking customer data, you will see your list grow quickly from hundreds, to thousands, to tens of thousands. As your lists grow, remember to segment your contacts. This will enable you to create targeted, personalized communication that will have a much higher overall engagement.

When getting started with your email campaigns, you'll need to research and understand the process of "warming" your IP address. Building an online reputation takes time — so initial email volume will need to start low and gradually increase over a period of several weeks. Once your IP has been properly warmed, it's important to maintain consistent volume and frequency.

There will be a small percentage of emails from your list that have deliverability issues, so make sure you are monitoring those and scrub your list often. Another tip is to understand spam filters and know that with each email campaign you will see a minimal unsubscribe rate, which is normal. Finally, research setting up email authentication which is a verification process to help protect your reputation from spammers posing as your company.

## Impactful, Meaningful Content

You can have a great database, but if you don't have creative, engaging content that piques the interest of your customers enough to click to open, read and ultimately take action, you're throwing money and effort down the drain. If possible, create personalized emails and content based on your segmented audiences. Delivering personalized content and experiences specific to your audience's individual needs can work miracles vs. non-targeted, generic emails.

The most important piece of content of an email campaign is not a catchy graphic (though that is important!) it is the subject line. Make it impactful! Concise! Sparingly use emojis if that coincides with your brand. The use of emojis in subject lines is continuing to grow due to popularity of use among "digital natives" Gen Y and Gen Z. But be careful — excessive use of emojis can trigger spam filters.

Having a strong visual graphic is important and will set the tone for your call-to-action (CTA) better than any text will. Touting the benefits of your Unlimited Wash Club during spring pollen season? Consider a car covered partially covered in pollen with the words "Wash Me" in the windshield. Want to drive home your free vacuum messaging during spring Little League season? Stage a photo near your vacuums with a pair of dirty baseball cleats, a handful of Cracker Jacks, a bat and glove.

Knowing that you only have precious seconds to pique interest, keep text in the body of your email minimal and instead rely on

your subject and graphic to communicate your intended message. Always include a specific CTA and button so readers can easily act.

At the bottom of your email, always include links that allow customers to sign up to follow your social media pages and contact you for additional information. Make it easy for them to engage. On the flip side, always include a clear method to unsubscribe in the message footer. An unsubscribe will always be better than a disgruntled customer filing a spam complaint!

## Data and Analysis

Before pressing send on your first email campaign, determine what data is important to you in measuring success. According to Mailchimp, the average open rate for emails across all industries is currently around 21 percent. But data privacy initiatives, including Apple's Mail Privacy Act, are accelerating the demise of KPIs (key performance indicator) like open rates. More meaningful metrics to consider monitoring include click-through rate, deliverability rate, bounce rates and unsubscribes. If you have access to even more advanced data, you will want to monitor conversions and lifetime customer value.

Keep track of campaigns and content that are showing high levels of engagement, as well as those campaigns where you notice mass unsubscribes. This is a critical and invaluable glimpse into how you should be tweaking content for future campaigns.

When sending timely content keep in mind that your customers may not open the email on the day it is delivered. Stay on top of trends - currently, Friday is the best day to send out campaigns and tends to have the best open click-through rates.

Don't forget to seek data from customers on why they are opting out of your marketing messages. Give them the opportunity to provide feedback on why they are choosing to leave — whether it be frequency of emails, irrelevant content, no longer interested in content, etc. Your email marketing strategy is one that will remain fluid over the course of the year, as you should constantly be adjusting it based on your overall data and analysis.

Even though you will likely be competing with other carwash operators in the email marketing space, be smart and follow your strategy based on your unique goals and objectives. There's plenty of opportunity, with thoughtful preparation, for your content to shine above all others. Refer often to your stated goals, maintain your lists, create engaging content, and analyze and refine your strategy based on your data collection. The result? Increased customer brand loyalty, and raving, engaged fans.

NC



Beth Martin

*Beth Martin is the Vice President of Marketing at Express Wash Concepts, the 80+ location parent company of Central Ohio-based Moo Moo Express Car Wash and Bee Clean Express Car Wash, Greater Dayton, Ohio and Richmond, Indiana-based Flying Ace Express Car Wash, Cleveland & Toledo, Ohio and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania-based Clean Express Auto Wash, and Virginia and North Carolina-based Green Clean Express Auto Wash.*



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*Dear Venus and Mars,*

---

*What has been your most successful  
spring promotion at the carwash?*

---



## Venus Says

Spring is a great time to explore new promotions! You have your typical carwash type of marketing, but thinking outside the box could bring in a new customer base. Pairing up with others might be the niche you need to reach the unwashed.

Heather Ashley

Some of the typical promotions include the normal discount tokens whether they are personalized coins, paper tokens, codes, gift cards or QR codes. Also, many are starting to offer certain promotions related to dates and times in self-serve bays. For example, Thursdays you get extended wash times during a few hours mid-day. While these are nice and work, you are reaching your same customers but just giving a discounted price. Your goal should be to bring in new customers with your promotion.

Creating partnerships within the community is a way that we find gets more than a customer, it creates great vibes in the community. With social media reviews and complaints, it seems that positivity is something we all need. Partnering with community groups such as the Scouts, churches, rescue squads, fire departments and youth sports teams gives you a lot more street credit. With their assistance in selling people on your promotion, you reach a new customer base and they receive a percentage of the sales as a donation. It also may have tax benefits. It is a win, win!

Check out your competition and do something different! Look at other businesses with a keen eye and see how they are marketing themselves. Maybe you could apply that to a carwash promotion. Maybe you could pair up with local businesses and let them help you while you in turn find a way to help them.

NC

## Mars Says

Every year after the winter salt and sand is gone the demand for express detailing picks up. Even when washed regularly if you live in the Northeast your car is going to need a little more TLC in the spring. For 20+ years we aggressively promoted express detailing services starting around the end of March beginning of April.

To run a successful express detailing campaign in the spring at a carwash it's essential to plan and budget effectively. First, determine your target audience and the services you want to offer. This will help you determine your budget for advertising and marketing. Consider offering a variety of express detailing services, such as interior and exterior cleaning, and waxing. These services should be completed in less than an hour and will not be a huge labor burden.

Next, advertise your campaign through multiple channels, including social media, flyers, email marketing and local newspapers. Make sure to highlight the benefits of express detailing, such as saving time and effort, and offer special deals and discounts to attract customers. If you run a membership program offer your members a discount. One great promotion for non-members is to offer a free month of unlimited exterior washes with the purchase of a \$100 or more detail service. This will also help increase membership as a good percentage will become paying members after the initial free month ends.

It's also important to train your staff on the express detailing services you are offering. Provide them with the necessary tools and equipment, and ensure that they understand the importance of delivering high-quality services. This will help ensure that your customers receive a professional and enjoyable experience.

To maintain high standards of cleanliness and quality, regularly evaluate your express detailing services and make any necessary improvements. Gather customer feedback and use it to improve



Paul Vallario

*Continued ...*

Venus and Mars, aka Heather Ashley and Paul Vallario, are carwash industry veterans. Heather Ashley is a past President of the Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association. She is also co-owner of Virginia Car Wash Industries, Inc. and Shenandoah Valley Coin Laundries, and Ashley's Shenandoah Valley Rental Properties in Toms Brook, VA. You can reach Heather at mhashley@gmail.com, as well as LinkedIn and Twitter @hrashley or www.thecarwashblog.com. Paul Vallario owns LI Car Wash Consultants. He is also a New York State Car Wash Association board member. You can reach him at iwashcars@optonline.net or 631/484-5829.

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## Mars ... continued

your services and marketing efforts. This will help build a positive reputation and attract repeat business.

Finally, consider partnering with other local businesses or organizations to promote your express detailing campaign. Offer special deals or discounts to their employees or customers, and work together to promote your services to a wider audience.

By following these steps, you can successfully run an express detailing campaign in the spring at your carwash and achieve your goals of attracting new customers, increasing sales and delivering high-quality services.

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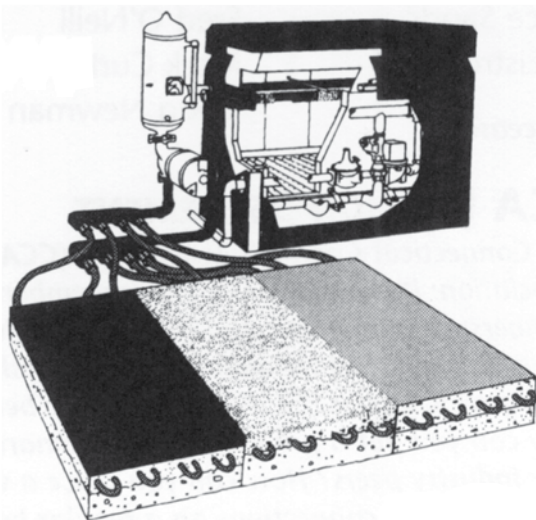
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# We Need a Weather Change for the Better

By Doug Rieck

Let's be honest, the winter of 2022-23 was not a good one for many of us in the Northeast who wash cars for a living. The most silly statement that any carwasher can make is that carwashing is a weather-dependent business. Weather affects most business activities, some more than others, but what is open for discussion is the weather characteristics of your location, first macro then your specific site. The Northeast is located next to the Atlantic Ocean and it has a large influence on what we get in snowfall and cold. During the winter months, the most common phrase on New Jersey weather forecasts is "East of I-95". On the coast think milder temperatures, more humidity and many more cloudy days. That can hurt, but we seacoast residents can still get the fun stuff of snow, cold and the resulting road salt and dirty cars of course.

Looking out on a regional level, this winter season has been different. Boston has had a snow drought with only nine inches of snow at this writing. New York City had its last snowfall on March 9th (and its only snowfall to date). I think this is the longest period without snow there in 154 years. Atlantic City, NJ, had its first snowfall of well under a half inch on February 1. This is the third latest first snowfall recorded ever for the AC Airport.

Where I live on Long Beach Island, it has been warm. As far as cold goes, the bay has yet to freeze over. I used the floor heat for perhaps three days at my self-serve bays.

The winters for the two prior years were better with some cold and snow, not the wipeout of this year. I am a realist and know that the Jersey Shore is not a snow capital, and I'm OK with occasional moderate snow. Rarely only in severe coastal storms do we get eight to 10 inches. When I need a snow fix, we drive to the Poconos. That being said, I have recent pictures of snow and ice and my kids tobogganing down ice flows on the bay at my street's end. The conventional wisdom is "global warming" is the culprit. I lack the desire or expertise to pontificate one way or another on that subject.

What I can discuss is the El Niño and La Niña weather cycle. This is just one of the many factors that affect our weather but it is a significant one. El Niño refers to the upwelling of warmer Equatorial waters in the Pacific off the coast. The converse is a La Niña event where this does not happen. La Niña typically during the winter influences the Jet Stream and the blocking high-pressure areas over the Northeast. The La Niña has the Jet Stream exiting high over New England making it harder for the Canadian cold and storms to get down. In short, the Jet Stream serves as a blocker. During an El Niño event the jet stream is much lower exiting over the Southeast coast which enables the Canadian cold to dip down much lower, chill the atmosphere and instead of rain we get snow. If we had the cold this winter we would have been buried in snow with all of the rain. I think that most weeks since November have had only one to two days of sun. The rest had just clouds or rain.

There are many other factors and events that help create our weather. Certainly during a La Niña we can and will get snow

and cold. When the El Niño is present the Jet Stream dives south and exits our continent over the Southeast. There is no blocking and a greater chance of snow for us starved Northeasterners. I believe that our La Niña is the cause of our snow starvation.

The current La Niña started in 2020 and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) classifies it as a Triple-Dip La Niña. This means it has lasted for three winters. Since the weather service started measuring and recording the El Niño cycle this is the third recorded triple dip. This has been a very long duration. The prior recorded Triple Dip was from 2008 to 2001.

The good news about the current La Niña is that it is forecast to exit between February and April. We are told to expect a period of neutrality transitioning to El Niño conditions. Typically, El Niño will produce more cold and wetter Northeast Winters. YAAY, think snow. During the summer the lower Jet Stream helps inhibit Hurricane formation. Atmospheric science is exceptionally complex with much variation. Despite the presence of weather models and super computers, many times your local forecaster can have a problem in predicting tomorrow's weather. Expecting weather generalities to hold up six months away is not reality. But because they are generalities there can be truth in them. I was told in one meteorology course that a butterfly flapping its wings in China might affect our weather tomorrow. I think that is an extreme, but it does show the complexity.

Our modern understanding of weather and system of forecasting began during World War II, with the needs of aviation and the vast stretches of the Pacific and our Navy. The US Navy sent weather observers to the Gobi Desert in Mongolia to improve the weather data and help forecasting for the Naval fleet in the Pacific. The NWS (National Weather Service) started keeping weather records about 1870, but these are fragmentary in comparison to current or even the standards of the 1950's. Today we have satellites, radar and millions of gigabytes of weather data being crunched and massaged by weather modeling computer systems. The question of tomorrow's weather is still subject to change and the answer is only a forecast. Trying to look out at next winter entails hubris.

What does this mean for us as carwashers in the Northeast? I am hoping for a return to more normal winters, some snow and ice and cold. I live on the coast and am content to get the dregs of winter. What I have been surprised at is the overall lack of a winter this year throughout the Northeast coastal areas. December can be a toss-up month for me, but January at least brings cold and dirty cars, well, usually.

NC

*Doug Rieck operates Magic Wash in Manahawkin, NJ. He is the Immediate Past President of the Car Wash Operators of New Jersey. You can reach him at 609/597-SUDS or dougrieck@gmail.com*



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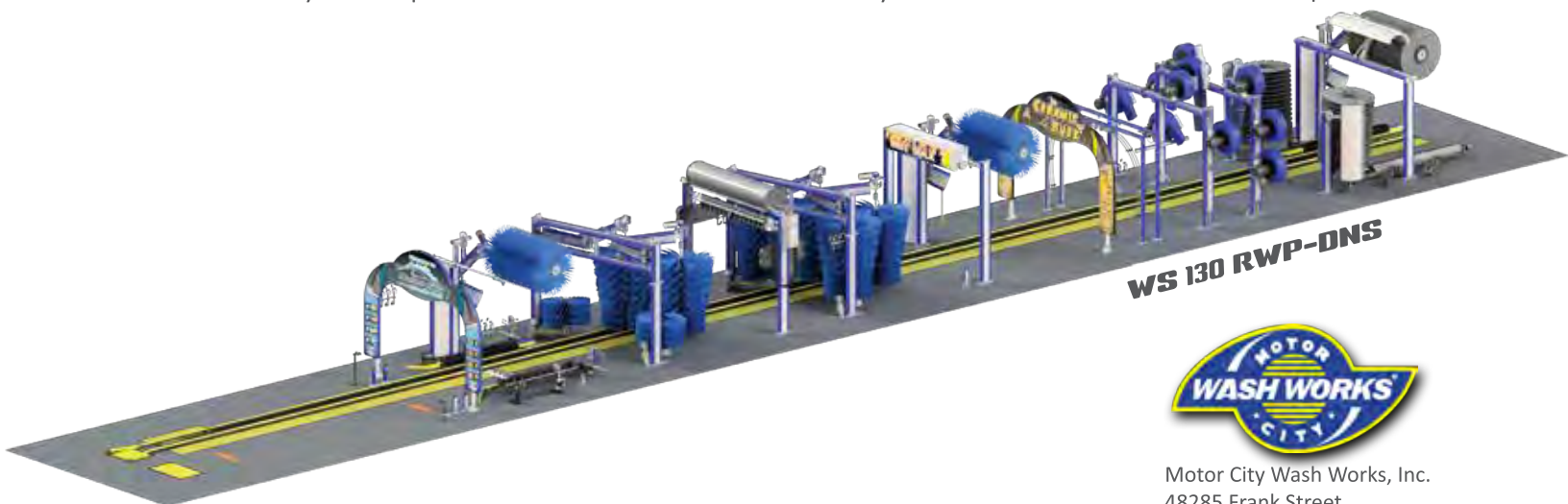
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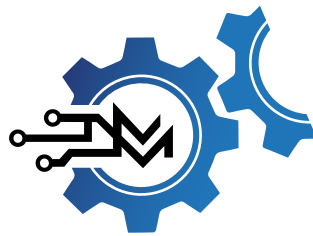
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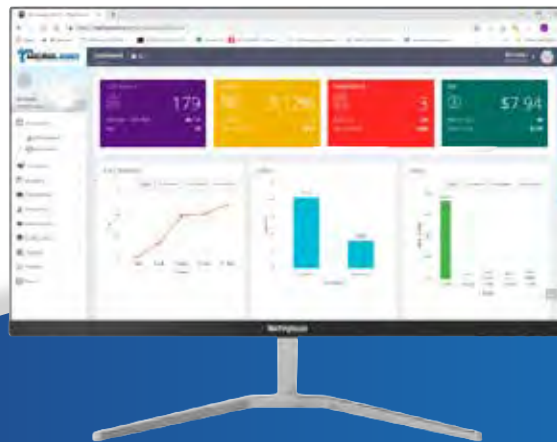
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# Combating Extreme Weather Challenges

By Gary Sokoloski

It appears that our seasonal timetables have changed over the past few years. The old standard of getting ready for colder weather and winter by Halloween and then packing away all those heaters and preparing for spring clean-up at Easter is no longer a science.

Even in some of the most northern areas of the Northeast, winter does not seem to show up until the new calendar year, and only sticks around until St. Patrick's Day. While many would think this makes dealing with washing cars in the winter easier, it presents its own new challenges in trying to plan for quicker yet more extreme conditions. Added to that, we also seem to be experiencing some new surprises in the summer months that used to be a calmer washing season.

In this last cold spell we had in early February (which only lasted two days) the temperatures and wind chills were far below anything we normally experience. It is hard to imagine that two days of cold can be worse than two months, but, it was. The typical winter brings us all sorts of little issues with a frozen airline here or a weep valve that sticks there, and of course the classic boiler that needs resetting because it hit its high-limit setting. These are all expected winter challenges and can be fixed in a few minutes with a heat gun, a tap on a valve or a reset button. But with these new spells, it goes from 40 or 50 degrees to -40 or -50 degrees in hours and if something is not fully prepared there are lines that start to freeze in the bays and continue through the attics, troughs, and all the way in to the heated spaces inside the building. It's certainly a new twist on an age-old problem.

## Summer Issues Too

The same type of issue is also happening at our hottest times in the summer. In past years there were a couple days a year that were considered "hot spells" and then things went back to normal. Now we are seeing weeks of hot spells and they are going from temperatures in the 90's to well into the low 100's. Fortunately, the only real victim in extreme heat is electronics. Unfortunately, when they overheat and fail, we are out of business. In past years it was as easy as opening the equipment room door and turning a fan in the direction of the electrical panel. Now, with all the new controls and electrical devices there is a need in some areas to enclose the electrical control room and install air conditioners to keep these items from overheating and failing.

## Start at the Top

Both temperature-related problems can be dealt with in the same manner and approach. Start at the top and work your way down. Amazingly, in this day and age someone will build a new building and think that because it is a bay with garage doors it does not need insulation in the attic. They will insulate the equipment room but do not see the value (saving) in doing the

“

*Pay special attention to the north side and prevailing wind side of your buildings and make sure there is proper airflow through the eaves to allow for ventilation.*

”

bays or tunnel. No matter how much insulation you have above your bays you should consider adding more if it is not at your regions' maximum level. This has both heating and cooling advantages. Pay special attention to the north side and prevailing wind side of your buildings and make sure there is proper airflow through the eaves to allow for ventilation. We do not want to seal the attic up tight but rather add another blanket of protection for what is below it. Attics are supposed to be cold, not just the ceilings below them.

Once you have a good layer on top the rest is easy. Seal up any doors or windows that might be drafty. Make sure to have an annual inspection and service of your heating equipment before the heating season starts. On a cold morning go around your facility with a heat detector and find those spots that are letting the air in and seal or insulate them. It is quite surprising the drafts you can find when its 0 degrees that you don't feel or find when its 32 degrees.

All of the insulation and sealing that is done to keep the cold out will also help keep the heat out when the summer sun is beating down. It will also help in preventing damage from extreme temperatures, like the ones we are seeing.

One final tip is to do an attic inspection in the early winter. All too often a perfectly insulated and sealed attic can be ruined by the work that was done last year when someone forgot to put the insulation back in its place after upgrading to those new lights. With the cost of everything rising, I wish it could be said that all of this will save you money over last year's heating and cooling costs. It will at least save on the amount of energy needed to heat or cool your carwash and hopefully protect your business from extreme temperature-related breakdowns. **NC**

Gary Sokoloski owns Centerline Carwash Sales and Service in Wales, ME. You can reach him at 207/375-4593 Office, 774/248-0171 cell or [gary@centerlinecarwash.com](mailto:gary@centerlinecarwash.com).



Gary Sokoloski

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# How to Select the Right Towel Over the Phone

By Valerie Sweeney

Some products are easy to order over the phone, especially when you know exactly what you want. But what if you don't know? People usually call around to other vendors because they are either price shopping or they are not happy with the product they received. What if you don't like your towels? Maybe it's the feel, maybe it's the quality, but how can you be sure to get the towel you really want?

If you're lucky enough to head to Atlantic City or The Car Wash Show™, then picking out towels can be easy just by visiting the different booths of the towel vendors. For those who cannot go to a show, or if you are looking to make a change in between shows, then you will have to pick up the phone and talk to your towel vendor.

Here are some tips on how to get the towel you desire.

## Size Matters

It's important to know the size of the towel you seek. For the most part, carwash owners are looking for the standard body towel size which is 16" x 27" (hand towel). This size might vary by an inch or two, but it's the most popular size in this industry. If you don't like that size, however, then you will need to describe what size towel you want. For example, if you need larger towels because you wash trucks and other larger vehicles, then you might want a small bath towel (20" x 40"). If your towels are square, then they are probably half-bath towels, around 22" x 22" or 24" x 24".

## What Thickness?

Do you like the thickness of your current towel or do you want something thinner/thicker, etc. Most towel vendors measure thickness by the weight per dozen. Body towels that are 16" x 27" usually range in weight between 2.5 pounds per dozen and 4.5 pounds per dozen. The most common weights are 3 pounds and 4 pounds per dozen. If you know the weight per dozen, then you can tell your vendor, "I currently use a 3

lb. towel, but I want something thicker." If you don't know the weight, then it can be a little harder to describe over the phone since thickness can be relative.

## Low Pile or Standard Nap?

Is the pile on the towel important? If so, you need to vocalize that to your vendor, as well. Most towel vendors carry several different styles of towels, so they may have one that matches your needs. Some carwashes like a low pile or sheared look because they tend to be less linty, while most carwashes choose a standard nap.

## Color Preference

Are you picky about color? Blue, green, red and white are the most popular color towels in the industry. However, if you only like a particular shade of blue, you need to let your vendor know. For example, some carwashes will only use navy or dark blue. If that is important to you, then tell your vendor you are looking for "dark blue," not just "blue."

## Hems, Etc.

Most towels have traditional sewn hemmed edges. Some towels are made with selvedge edges. These are made on special towel looms, and do not have a traditional sewn edge. Selvedge edges can't unravel so they wash well. Also, many towels have a cam or dobby border which is either a decorative strip or a strip of non-terry about an inch from the hem. Other towels are straight terry from hem to hem.

## Price Points

Price is important to everyone, but for some carwashes the lowest price prevails over the quality of the towel. If you are set on spending a certain amount of money on your towels, let your towel vendor know your range or budget, and they can work with you. Sometimes towels go on clearance, or perhaps a certain color is looking to be moved. There are always options.

If you know what you want, and can vocalize your preferences to your vendor, then you should be able to get the towel that works for you. And, once you find a towel you like, stick with it. If you get a batch of towels that don't work for you, then articulate that over the phone to your vendor outlining the factors that made it a bad fit. The more specific you are, the easier it will be to guide you to the best towel for you.

NC



Valerie Sweeney

Valerie Sweeney is a towel consultant with ERC Wiping Products. You can reach her at 800/225-9473 or [erc@ercwipe.com](mailto:erc@ercwipe.com)

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\$195 Single location operator

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings Carwash Association of Pennsylvania (CAP) Members, PA operators and carwashers near and far. As we look at Spring 2023, let's take a brief moment to reflect upon what we can learn and apply for a better 2023.

In Pennsylvania, CAP closed out the fourth quarter with our highest level of membership in recent years: inspired through four well-received and attended CAP events in late 2022 which provided many a renewed interest in the benefits and comradery of this state carwash association. Plus, our own home state founded company, Kleen-Rite Corp., hosted its bi-annual Expo in November which brought in a host of vendors, suppliers and operators alike. Kleen-Rite Corp. is a major CAP sponsor and supporter, as well as just about every carwash event throughout Pennsylvania each year. CAP is proud of each of the manufacturers, vendor, and suppliers who call Pennsylvania home.

Winter started off soft here in Pennsylvania and in much of the Northeast, making for softer than normal sales. Yet, we must be mindful that weather-changing patterns have adversely affected our carwashing brothers and sisters in many other states recently. When and wherever possible, we should look to lend a hand in the face of adversity.

This sets up a nice segway into weathering the ever-changing economics we all currently face. Most notably is inflation across the board. While the consumer is faced with needs and necessities vs. wants and vanity. Each of us carwashers are faced with walking that fine line to balance our operating costs vs. keeping our sales revenue up.

There's an adage, "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger." So, keep your game up, find ways to keep your customer base coming to your wash. Take a few minutes to watch your customers leaving your wash. More often than not, you will see them smiling and this is because they feel good. A carwash makes anyone feel good! Keep a positive perspective amidst whatever challenges you may be facing and keep delivering "good feelings!"

The Carwash Association of Pennsylvania is looking forward to hosting multiple events this year including our Baseball Outing, New Investor Seminar, Annual Dinner and Tabletop Show, and Golf Outing and Picnic. We encourage everyone in the carwash industry who touches business in PA to consider joining CAP. We await you with open arms! Learn more about membership and our upcoming events as details are announced at [www.pacarwash.org](http://www.pacarwash.org)



Dave Edwards, CAP President

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## CCA MISSION STATEMENT

The Connecticut Carwash Association (CCA) is a member-driven association: it exists solely to serve members' needs, protect members' best interests, and to be responsive to members' requests. The list of tangible CCA membership benefits is long (and growing), but the list of intangible benefits is even longer. How can you put a price tag on the camaraderie you enjoy with your industry peers? How can you place a value on having the ability to make connections on a regular basis with other carwash operators who can help you through tough times? What price would you be willing to pay to have the chance to learn from our industry's most successful operators? Stay active in your local industry trade association.

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*It's a balancing act, isn't it? Life, I mean.*

*Some days you wake up and think, now, how am I going to be in five places at once and give my customers, my family, my association and all my other responsibilities what they need?*

*But, somehow, we all manage to do that — for the most part!*

*It's a true balancing act and let's face it, we won't be giving 100 percent to everyone, every day, but we sure do try. I try.*

*In my world I have my family, my wash, my work with an industry supplier and my responsibilities as the President of the Connecticut Carwash Association (CCA). I'm immersed in carwashing, but my family and friends are equally, if not more, important.*

*I think what works for me is making sure I can reach out for help when I need it. I can ask a fellow operator or supplier to lend a hand, share a part, or give me advice on how I do what I am doing — better. It's sometimes hard to ask for help, but it shouldn't be as it is not a sign of weakness. It is a really a sign of strength. We all need help from time to time and in this industry we are all there for each other. That's one of the beautiful things when you are a carwash operator or supplier. We are this unique family full of knowledge and the ability to share that knowledge when needed. I am so thankful for that!*

*And with that I look toward our annual event in Atlantic City, the Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC), October 2-4. The CCA is the host association this year so make sure you put that date on your calendar. You can walk away with a whole lot more knowledge after participating in the wide array of seminars, listening to an enlightening and inspirational Keynote Speaker and walking the expansive show floor where you will see nearly 160 vendors.*

*Remember, we all need a little help from time to time and at this year's NRCC you can get that and more. Visit [nrccshow.com](http://nrccshow.com) for more information and to register in the coming months. I hope to see you there!*



*Bob J. Rossini*

Bob Rossini, CCA President

**CCA to Host 2023 NRCC!**  
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# Splash Expands Its Northeast Footprint

Splash Car Wash, Milford, CT, has acquired the Guilderland, NY, Knockout Car Wash, according to a company press release. The express exterior site with a 190-foot tunnel and 20 self-service vacuums is the company's second Capital District location while bringing its wash count to 56 with 38 of the sites being in New York State. The remainder are in Connecticut and Vermont. According to Mark Curtis, Splash CEO, "We're excited to welcome Knockout to the Splash family. This is complementary to our June 2022 acquisition of Wash Boss and further builds out Splash's footprint in the Albany market. The acquisition connects our locations from Long Island through the central, northern and western parts of the state."

He added, "The Hameroffs did a wonderful job constructing this beautiful carwash and we are proud to continue their legacy."



In addition, the company is continuing construction on two new express sites in Oswego and LeRay, NY, slated to open in May. Additionally, five more washes are set to begin construction in that market and two additional sites in Milford and Derby, CT, are expected to open in the second quarter of this year. Two sites in Vermont and one in Massachusetts have also begun construction. All washes will be express models. **NC**

For more information visit [splashcarwashes.com](http://splashcarwashes.com)

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\*deceased

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*It's spring and with that will hopefully come the passage of our legislation to deem carwashes "essential" (A 3703). Your board has been working with the Princeton Public Affairs Group (PPAG) out of Trenton for more than a year to secure this classification that will mean so much to our industry and our members. We all worked so hard during COVID to stay open and serve the public, as well as police and medical professionals. Our lobbyists Al Gaburo and Sam Weinstein, who spoke at our November Membership Meeting in Kenilworth, have strong relationships with our sponsors and those in the Legislature who can help us bring this home. It's been a significant investment but one your board feels will be critical to our members and carwashing in New Jersey. Stay tuned for future updates and hopefully GREAT news!*

### Tour Heads South

*Our Annual Carwash Tour, May 24, is heading south to tour some exceptional washes in south Jersey. As always, the day will include an outstanding lunch where we can all take a moment to catch up and talk shop — or not. What I really enjoy during these tours is the fact that I can talk openly with other operators about business, the economy, politics and family. I look forward to this event every year. Don't miss it and keep an eye out for our Constant Contact communication, as well as our mailers and information on the website, cwonj.com*

### NRCC Sure to Please

*Last year's Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC) was a home run and this year's event is sure to exceed it with a full lineup of educational seminars, an ever-expanding show floor and a keynote speaker who will motivate and inspire. The event is again at the Atlantic City Convention Center, right in our back yard, October 2-4. The host hotel will again be the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino. It's a great opportunity to recharge and reward your key employees with a day or two away from the wash growing, learning and networking. The Connecticut Carwash Association (CCA) is this year's host, and then in 2024 the CWONJ hosts. Please make every effort to attend, spread the word and put this down on your calendar. It's the best educational investment you will make and again, it's right in our back yard.*

*Sending everyone my best wishes for a pollen-filled spring.*



Dino Nicoletta, CWONJ President

# Save the Date! Carwash Tour Heads to South 'Jersey'

Wednesday, May 24



*CWONJ Board Member Tom Fuller of Team Car Wash (left) and CWONJ President Dino Nicoletta of Asbury Circle Car Wash (right) met with Assembly Speaker Craig J. Coughlin at the Princeton Public Affairs office in Trenton to discuss the association's bill to deem carwashes "essential," A3703 (Dunn R-25).*

## If This Link Could Talk!

Magic Wash's Doug Rieck said he installed his conveyor in 2007 and replaced his rollers once. He is now replacing the rollers and chain. While removing his chain he found this broken link. If links could talk!



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# An Interview with Industry Icon Mike Conte

By Suzanne L. Stansbury

**SS: Mike, you literally grew up in the business. Can you tell us about your indoctrination into carwashing?**

MC: My family opened its first wash in 1962 when I was nine years old. It was a 100-foot full-service wash and my first indoctrination was learning to do the back windows, a miserable job. A man named Lou Rendemonti with Sherman was using our wash as their test site and he trained me for nearly a month. He was my mentor. I asked him if he knew that my dad owned the wash and he said that was why I was doing the windows!

**SS: So after your stint as a “back window guy” you moved up to become the “hook guy?”**

MC: Yes. Back in the ‘60’s we used to pull the cars through with a chain and I was the hook guy. It was a special talent!

**SS: How many washes did you have and what types were they?**

MC: We had seven washes at one point. One full serve, four

exteriors, and one eight-bay and one four-bay self serve. The sites spanned about 20 miles and all were in Monmouth County.

**SS: You sold your last wash in June 2022 (in Ocean Township). You said you helped build and painted that wash as a kid. How difficult was it emotionally to sell it?**

MC: It was a tug at my heartstrings. It was the wash that I basically built, sand blasted its walls, painted and helped install the equipment.

The one in Bradley Beach was emotionally difficult to sell too as it was a run-down wash when we bought it that we turned into a success.

**SS: You also ran a successful Laundromat and Dry Cleaning business for many years. Tell us about that.**

MC: We were in the Laundromat business for 25 years and bought the business in 1995 from my Aunt who had been running it as a hobby.

**SS: But the Dry Cleaning business you jumped into with no hands-on experience, right?**

MC: That’s true. I told my wife Janice that I wanted to rent the vacant storefront next to our Laundromat and open a dry cleaning business and she said, “You don’t know anything about dry cleaning!” I told her not to worry about it. I’d figure it out.

**SS: So, you opened a dry cleaning “drop store?”**

MC: That’s right. We’d collect the clothing and once a day the actual dry cleaner would come and pick up the clothes and then clean them. To make the storefront look legitimate we had one of those revolving clothing racks that you see at dry cleaners running. It was very profitable and we ran it from 1995 until 2010.

**SS: Most operators spend a lot of time anguishing over raising their prices. Have you ever hesitated when raising your wash price?**

MC: Well, here’s a funny story. I used to race boats and I’d have to get my racing jumpsuit cleaned. When I found out how little product went into cleaning the suit, yet how much the specialty dry cleaner got for it, I didn’t have a problem raising my price. I also didn’t have a problem raising my prices after going to the movies years back. I remember seeing the Titanic and thinking I had purchased four tickets for \$24, when in fact I only bought two!

**SS: You have been an active member, board member and president of the Car Wash Operators of New Jersey for years. Why have you devoted the time and energy it takes to serve on a board?**

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MC: We provide a lot of worthwhile information and are a place where you can ask questions and get answers. It's about thinking, knowing and wanting to make a difference.

**SS: What has been being a carwasher for 60 years taught you?**

It taught me that contrary to what people believe, and what industry you are in, you don't know everything. You can always go somewhere or talk to someone who has a new idea and learn to do something a different way. I never thought I knew it all, but I always thought I had something to learn. And, nothing is impossible. Find the guy who is doing something better than you are and figure out how he, or she, is doing it.

**SS: What was the best part and worst part of being a carwasher?**

MC: Relying on the weather is the worst part of being a carwasher but when everything goes right you can have a great life for many years in this industry.



*This is the original Conte's Car Wash that opened in 1965.*

**SS: Can you pass any gems of wisdom along to the next generation of carwashers, or even operators who may be struggling?**

MC: Many operators doubt the value of a club plan. I was late to the game, but I'm a believer. If you have a carwash, you should have a club.

**SS: What is the secret to a successful operation?**

MC: Quality and personality.

**SS: In your new role as a carwash consultant, what are you learning about today's buyer/investor?**

MC: They don't have a clue. They haven't done their homework and they are looking at projections that are unrealistic.

*Continued ...*

*All the Contes were accounted for on the Opening Day of their Joline Avenue location in 1962.*



**CLEANING UP** — Conte's Car Wash, Joline Avenue extension, officially opened for business Saturday morning. Taking part in the ribbon-cutting ceremonies are (left to right) Councilman Edgar N. Dinkelspiel, Mrs. Louis Conte; Louis Conte Jr.; Louis Conte Sr.; Joseph Conte; Councilman Vincent G. Ronca, Elmer Lawyer of the Chamber of Commerce, and one of the younger Contes in the foreground.



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## An Interview with Industry Icon Mike Conte ... continued

**SS: Where will the industry be in 10 years and where will Mike Conte be?**

**MC:** At some point the private equity impact on the industry will shake out, but it remains to be seen just when. And, thank the good lord no one has figured out how to wash a car online! For me, hopefully, I'll still be alive and if I'm still here I'll be taking a sunset picture of the Shrewsbury River. **NC**

*Suzanne L. Stansbury is the Editor/Publisher of the Northeast Carwasher magazine.*



*The formidable team of Janice and Mike Conte aboard their Sonic powerboat.*



*The original site's stucco was removed in 2018 to reveal its original facade sign.*



*Mike Conte, aka Santa Claus Conte, has spent years bringing joy to under-privileged kids at local schools.*



*The family's Bradley Beach wash was impacted by Hurricane Sandy in October of 2012.*



*Extensive work was required at the site after the devastating Hurricane that made landfall near Brigantine.*



*The wash took on a new look post Sandy.*



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# “Essential” Classification Still Top of Mind for CWONJ Board

By Sam Weinstein

This year, Governor Phil Murphy’s (D) State of the State speech highlighted his administration’s accomplishments and legislative priorities for the coming year. The Governor’s speech focused on the issue of affordability and his administration’s efforts to make New Jersey “stronger and fairer.”

## A Look Ahead

Governor Murphy signaled his intentions to overhaul the state’s “antiquated” liquor license system; support a legislative package to combat car thefts; unveil a plan, dubbed the ‘Boardwalk Fund,’ to upgrade Jersey Shore boardwalks; and commit to allocating resources to combat opioid and substance abuse.

The Legislature continues to meet on a regular cadence, with two (2) more voting sessions planned before the end of March. Princeton Public Affairs Group (PPAG), along with

our sponsors, continue to advocate for the passage of our legislation, A3703 (Dunn R-25), which permits carwash businesses to operate during a state of emergency or public health emergency. **NC**



Sam Weinstein

*Sam Weinstein is a lobbyist/strategic advisor/government affairs for Princeton Public Affairs Group (PPAG) in Trenton, NJ, the association’s lobbying firm. You can reach Sam at [sam@ppag.com](mailto:sam@ppag.com)*



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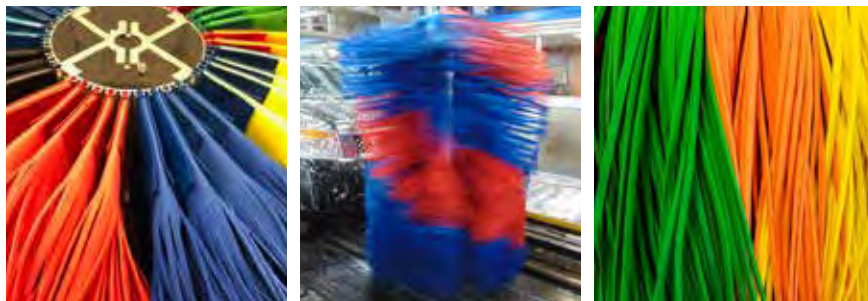
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*If you have an MCA story idea or wash you think we should feature, drop us an email at:*

[Suzanne.Stansbury@icloud.com](mailto:Suzanne.Stansbury@icloud.com)

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*Happy spring from the Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association (MCA)! I hope your winter was great and profitable. In my area of the East Coast we did not have much of a winter. We are grateful, however, for the little bit of salt on the roads that did generate some revenue but we certainly yearn for winters we had in the past.*

*The MCA has a lot going on! We have a new website in the works and spring meetings are around the corner. We look forward to seeing each other again and we have more new announcements coming in the future.*

### Springtime Cleanup

*Spring is always a good time to think about new growth, new promotions and new members. It is also a great time to spruce up your carwash!*

*As we think back to when we first got started in the carwash business, we are reminded of how becoming an association member opened new doors and new relationships for us in the industry. We encourage you to find a new owner and make a connection. Invite them to our next meeting and show them what an asset being part of a carwash association can be. Share with them your experiences and those important events that steered you and have guided you along your carwash path.*

*Keep an eye on our website for our upcoming meetings dates and plans. Everyone is always invited, just let us know you are coming. If you are just traveling through and you want to meet me for lunch or just talk, please reach out. I have forged many valuable relationships over the years and met a lot of exceptional and kind carwashers who are more than willing to share their journey and experiences as carwashers. We are all in this industry together and together we as an association can do great things!*



*M.H. Ashley*

Mike Ashley, MCA President

## Greenhill Opens Wilmington Location

Greenhill Car Wash, Wilmington, DE, has opened its fifth location on Concord Pike, according to a company press release. This is Greenhill's second ground-up carwash site while taking advantage of local contractors, engineers and architects to develop the eye-catching wash.

The new site features LPR (license plate recognition) for club members, a Motor City Dry 'N Shine unit as well as free vacuums. The site also features two self-service bays. The site is open daily and is led by a six-year veteran manager and staff of 10-12. **NC**

For more information visit [greenhillcarwash.com](http://greenhillcarwash.com)



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# NECA NEWS

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*Hello fellow carwashers. I hope this message finds you well. What an unusual beginning of the year we have had so far. January was the warmest on record across the country, and we are on pace to have one of the top five warmest winters ever. Unfortunately, our salt pile stood tall due to the lack of snow. The New England weather never ceases to keep carwashers on their toes and can be unsettling when one of our busiest seasons gets washed out before our eyes. While we had a bleak beginning, carwashers are still confident in a good rest of the year, growing and improving their businesses, and pushing our industry forward together.*

*The New England Carwash Association (NECA) looks forward and intends to provide another year's worth of meaningful events and valuable benefits. We are in the process of updating resources such as an improved website and NECA wash locator website carwash-safe.com. I am proud to announce that last year's annual golf outing was able to produce \$2,000 towards educational scholarships and a \$7,500 donation to Cradles to Crayons, a non-profit organization that provides resources such as school supplies, clothing and diapers to homeless and low-income children. Despite fighting the rain for the first hour, the tournament went off without a hitch. This is thanks to our members and players who attended the event at the Marlborough Country Club. A special thanks to Mark Delaney of Allston Car Wash, Felix Taranto of Triton Wash Car Care Center, Tony and Taylor Lombardo of Scrub-It Car Wash, and all of our many sponsors. The New England based non-profit partner for the 2023 golf tournament has not yet been chosen, so please feel free to send a recommendation to me or any NECA board member for consideration.*

*More than 110 members from 20 different companies attended the NECA Winter Meeting: Employee Appreciation Event at Supercharged Entertainment in Wrentham, MA. This venue features indoor Go-Kart racing. While carwash topics were discussed when not speeding around the track, the main purpose of this event was to offer an opportunity for our member companies to bring their teams together and have some fun away from the wash, warehouse or office. This was our first racing event in more than 10 years, and after a decade of demand and positive feedback, the NECA was happy and excited to host another one. I would like to thank John Shalbey of RoJo Company, Inc., Chris Ouimet of Fitzzy's Car and Pet Wash and Jack Hutson of NEAS for all their help planning the event, as well as our generous sponsors of the event: Simoniz USA, Inc., Auto Wash Technologies, Car Wash Pros, LLC, and Autowash Maintenance Corp. Thanks to them, we were able to award our fastest (and slowest) racers with some great prizes. We know our teams in our everyday businesses are crucial to their success, so it is satisfying to have an event where our members can show their gratitude to their team members with other carwashers from around New England.*

*I highly encourage you to get involved with your local organization. The NECA has another great year planned with more fun and educational events such as the Carwash Bus Tour, Golf Outing and Fall Meeting. Remember, if your company is a member of the NECA,*



## President's Letter ... continued

all your team are members, as well, and are encouraged to get involved by coming to meetings or asking about one of our many committees. The annual NECA Bus Tour will be held on June 20 this year, and is heading to central Massachusetts. Be sure to stay tuned for more NECA news and information.



*Jeffrey Katseff*

Jeffrey Katseff, NECA President



## Welcome New NECA Member

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# Mint-ed Into the Industry

By Suzanne L. Stansbury

Jay Clarke didn't start out as a car-washer.

He was born into the family business, Clarke Distributors, founded by his grandfather, Richard. The notable beer and non-alcoholic beverage distributorship, founded in 1949 and headquartered in Keene, NH, employed 300 people in three states until its sale in 2017.

But for Clarke, 52, who began investigating the industry five years prior to the sale of Clarke Distributors, when

one door closes another one opens. "You certainly don't know what tomorrow will bring, but I am confident now that I can create it."

And it's apparent from visiting his sole location, Mint Car Wash on Winchester Street in Keene, that Clarke is a go-getter who is not afraid to get his hands dirty.

## No Options

Clarke first started thinking about

opening a wash out of frustration. He couldn't find a facility to wash his Class B delivery vehicles so he thought that building a truck wash would solve that problem. He would then also build a car-wash to subsidize the cost of the truck wash. "I presented the idea (and costs) to my brother and father, but at that time we were expanding into Vermont and had just bought another distributorship and they turned it down," said Clarke.

But Clarke wasn't willing to let the idea of building a wash go. He became a dog with a bone. He then decided to seek financing on his own. But despite his family's long history in the region, the local banks were not bullish on financing a carwash. "These people have known me (and my family) all my life," said Clarke. "It was beyond frustrating, but then I got news that a soda brand we were involved with was offering a buy out and I took it. The amount was exactly what I needed and it was at that point that I knew this project would happen and all the energy that had gone into it would be part of my story. I was going to prove myself right and make this a success."

But as many of you know, it's never quite that easy.

Clarke, with the guidance of Autowash Maintenance's Ron Campagna Sr. and Bob Keane, set out to build two in-bay automatics, one soft touch and one touch free on the site of a former auto body shop. There would be no employees and Clarke would certainly make money on this high-traffic count site in the growing college town of Keene.

He then rolled up his sleeves and got a real taste of the industry. "I was there from 5:30 am until 8:00 pm, seven days a week," recounted Clarke. "I did that from February until May, every single day."

After learning a lot about the industry, literally hands on, he was able to hire his first employee in April of 2017 and his first part-timer that summer.

But despite the attractive new facility with the first Unlimited Wash Program

*Continued ...*



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The site is built near a flood plain and required some additional drainage. The site's previous owners also sold some of the frontage to the city of Keene and as a result, Mint's street signage had to be moved further back from the road.



Owner/operator Jay Clarke came to the industry after spending much of his career in the family business, Clarke Distributors, based in Keene, NH.



The attractive site was designed by Arlen's Matt Traffic and equipped by the team from Autowash Maintenance. It opened in 2017.



## Mint-ed Into the Industry ... continued

in Keene, as well as offboard dryers in each bay, Clarke wasn't able to wash the number of cars he wanted to wash. His customers were also becoming increasingly frustrated with the lines. "I wanted to create a culture of great customer service," said Clarke. "Our (beverage) facilities were immaculate, our customer service was incredibly high and I wanted the same for the carwash."

Just about this time the property next door to Mint became available and Clarke's wheels began turning. He now had the room to build a tunnel and wash more cars. He went to the city of Keene and proposed

*Continued ...*



*The site's DRB pay stations include an option to join Mint's club program as well as the ability to connect with the wash's APP.*



*The entrance to the wash has two lanes which are easily distinguishable with these Windmaster signs.*



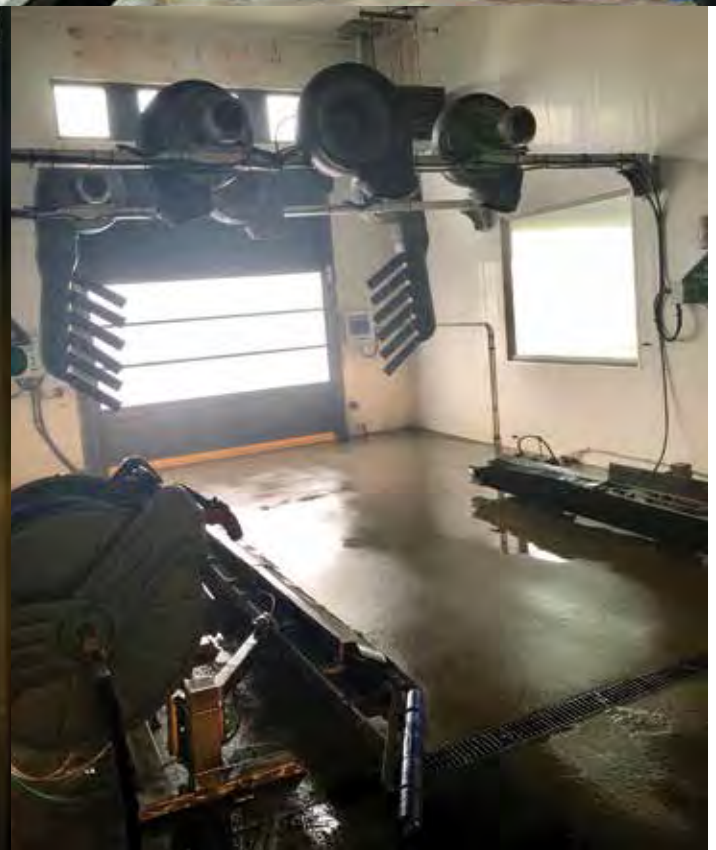




*The site includes a touchfree and soft touch bay. This soft touch bay includes an AVW belt.*



NECA



*On the day of our visit to the wash cars were lined up to use this touchfree Washworld bay.*



## Mint-ed Into the Industry ... *continued*

a rework to his existing site, but they voted him down 5-0. “The city was concerned that too many additional cars would be added to area traffic,” he said.

But being the enterprising entrepreneur that he is Clarke knew there had to be a work around and so did his supplier Autowash Maintenance. They then proposed doing a mini tunnel, laid out an equipment package and asked Matt Traffie with Arlen if he could design a building within the existing bays.

Clarke kept the touch-free bay in operation, while the mini tunnel was under construction and he changed out his equipment package. The reconfiguration of one bay to a mini tunnel just had to fit within the existing bay. “The tunnel has

*Continued ...*

---

*The site features two paid J.E. Adams vac islands.*



*The self-serve vac customers can take advantage of some impulse items housed along the side of the wash or use the Bill Breaker.*

NECA

---

*The site's bay can accommodate larger sized vehicles with the frictionless bay accepting vehicles up to a 7'8" clearance.*





# **NRCC Show 2023**

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## Mint-ed Into the Industry ... continued

a high-pressure prep arch because we have no room to hand prep, and an online tire shine unit because my customers are used to that and they like it,” said Clarke. “It puts out a really good car and our customers love it and they also love the fact that they don’t have to wait in the lines as they did with our previous setup.”

### Bay Gut

To accomplish the retrofit, Traffie came up with a traditional contemporary wash design using PVC concrete forms, corner details and Clerestory windows and Autowash Maintenance equipped it with a 65-foot long soft-touch tunnel with a 50-foot self-loading AVW belt conveyor in one bay, and a touch-free Washworld Razor in the other. Both feature an offboard dryer with six AVW 15-hp blowers. Clarke broke ground on the renovation in November of 2021 and finished it up in June of 2022. In addition to retrofitting the bays, Clarke had to re-engineer the driveway as its on a floodplain and bring in fill, as well as work on the adjacent site that formerly housed a restaurant to accommodate four J.E. Adams vacuums. “It’s essentially a brand new site with all brand new equipment,” said Clarke.

Clarke has also nearly tripled his throughput as a result of the carwash upgrade. His club plan continues to grow, after los-

ing some speed during the renovation, and features RFID. He has even developed an app to entice customer use and lures them in with a free wash. And, at the time of this writing, he had experienced his highest-volume day washing 406 cars after being fully operable again since only October. “You just have to stay dogged and committed,” said Clarke. “I have overcome endless hurdles to create an incredible business. It just goes to show you what hard work and determination gets you.” **NC**

*Suzanne L Stansbury is the Editor/Publisher of the Northeast Carwasher magazine.*



*After retrofitting the wash to accommodate a mini tunnel, owner Jay Clarke got creative and built up his equipment room.*



*Both bays feature colorful and easy-to-read signage, while an attendant is there to answer questions and guide the customers onto the belt, if needed, in the mini tunnel or Washworld in-bay automatic.*





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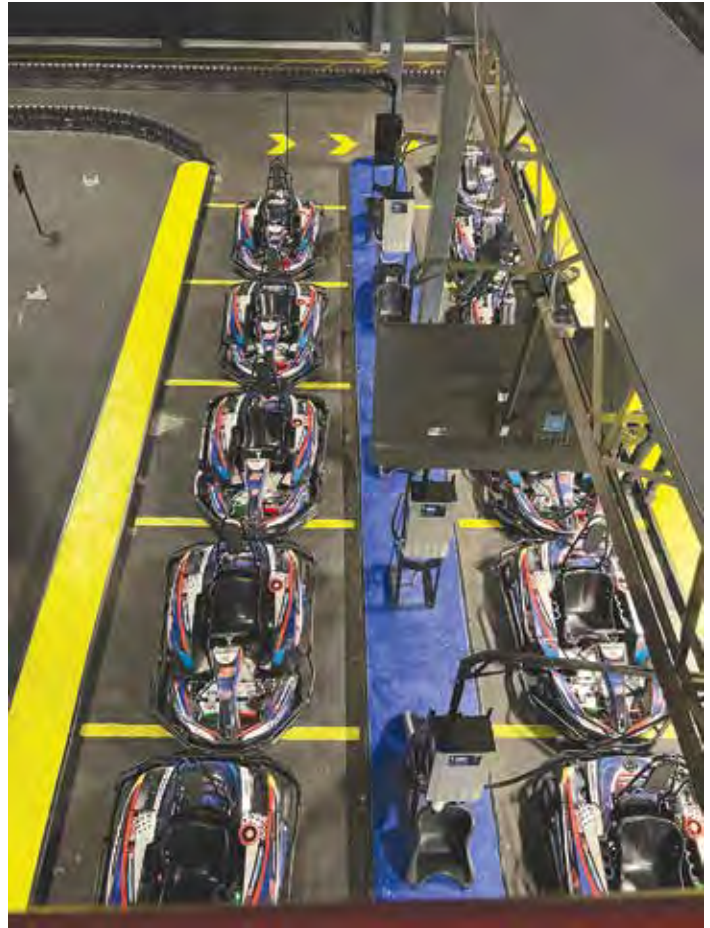


# NECA Takes to the Track

The New England Carwash Association (NECA) Member Appreciation Night At SuperCharged Entertainment in Wrentham, MA, on February 2, was a night to give back and recharge. It was the first event under the stewardship of Executive Director Jack Hutson. According to Hutson, approximately 20 member companies were represented by 100 attendees.

NC

*Continued ...*



*SuperCharged Entertainment in Wrentham.*



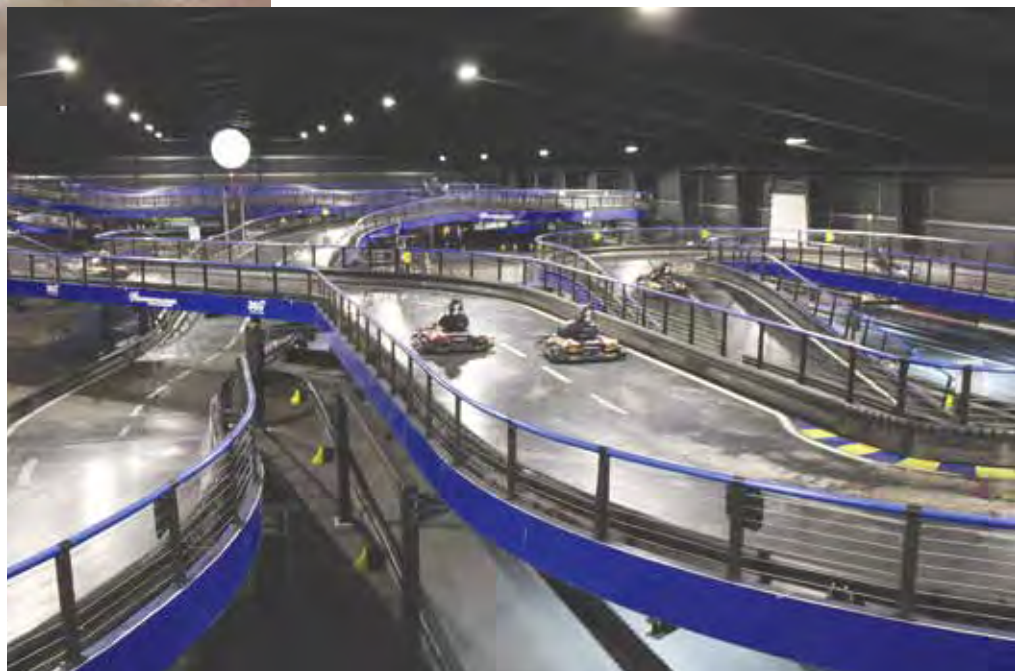
*And the winners are:*

*1st Place, Jake Arimento with  
Car Wash Pros in Shrewsbury*

*2nd Place, Jeff Arimento with  
Car Wash Pros in Shrewsbury*

*3rd Place, Uriel Jimenez (not  
pictured)*

*Last Place, Dannyanna Revas  
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The team from Prestige Car Wash and Triple Play's Dave Ellard.



NECA President, Jeff Katseff, gets the crowd going!

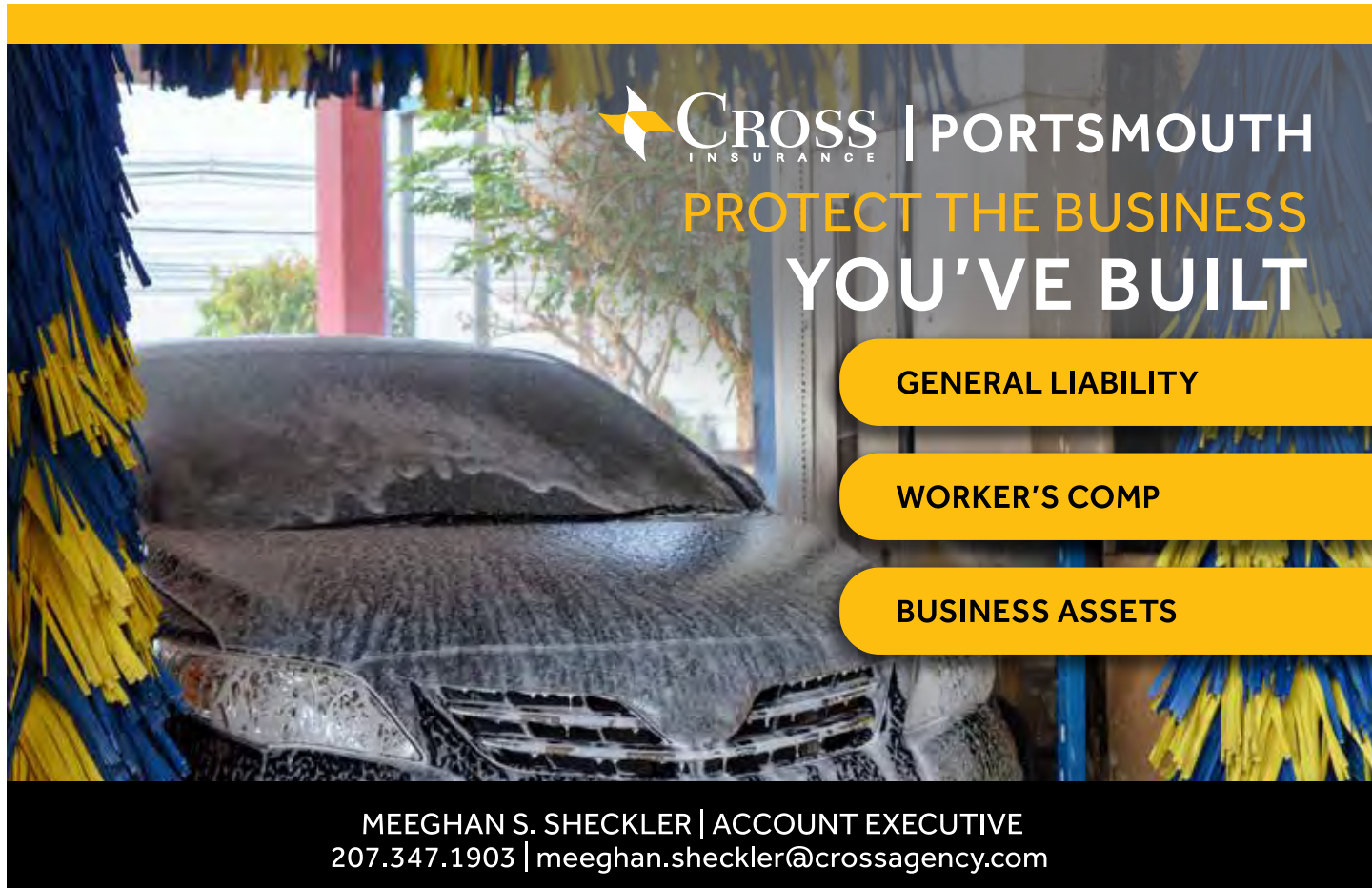






Patrick Mosseso, far right, and his team from Auto Bright Car Care got to tear up the track.

*Continue for more photos!*



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and other companies.*

*NECA Past President Bob Katseff  
and NECA Executive Director  
Jack Hutson.*





# An Interview with NECA's Executive Director Jack Hutson

**NC: Welcome, Jack! Can you start by giving us some background information on your association experience?**

**JH:** My association experience began as President of four organizations – two civic oriented and two business oriented. I began my career in association management 20 years ago, at first with a business partner who sadly passed away three years after we started our business, and continued when I merged my client base with New England Association Services, LLC (NEAS) seven years ago. In 2012, I attained my CAE – Certified Association Executive.

**NC: How many organizations do you manage and what does the support team behind you look like?**

**JH:** NEAS, manages 13 associations in four states with seven staff members. Our staff responsibilities include finance, meeting and event planning, communications and graphic design and membership services.

**NC: What attracted you to the position with the NECA?**

**JH:** We knew Sherri Oken through the NE Society of Association Executives who was moving toward retirement and

frequently had spoken highly of her involvement with NECA. We expressed our interest in speaking with the board about becoming their new management company and we were beyond impressed with the energy they brought. When we interviewed with them in person, we were surprised and happy to see that six board members came in person and another three via ZOOM. The enthusiasm a board shows speaks volumes about what they will be like to work with over time. We are always excited to work with a new board but NECA is unique with the energy they bring to the table and the devotion they have to serving their members.

**NC: What challenges do you see facing small trade associations in the coming years?**

**JH:** Relevance is always the central challenge any trade association must wrestle. For many organizations continuing education has been a central benefit to attract members, but for many organizations, the sea of offerings available to their members on the Internet makes it more difficult to single the association out as the primary source. Associations faced with

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NECA Executive Director  
Jack Hutson

this challenge need to look beyond easy answers and communicate with members to determine other ways to remain relevant.

**NC: How will the NECA be poised to take them on?**

JH: It has been clear from the beginning that the NECA board and committees actively communicate with members and each other and are constantly searching for ways to keep the association relevant. Our recent Employee Appreciation night at Supercharged, an indoor go-cart racing facility, is a prime example. The evening was a win for employees who got a chance to enjoy a night out with their other team members, and a win for owners who had an opportunity to bond with their employees and show them that they are their most important asset.

**NC: What is the most important benefit to belonging to a trade association, in your opinion?**

JH: Information. Whether in the form of networking between vendors and owners or owners to owners, the information exchange increases their knowledge of their business environ-



ment as well as improved ways to operate their enterprise. “Networking” may sound like a tired old word but, it is often the way business owners stay tuned in to the world outside their facility.

**NC: What are your goals with the NECA this first year out of the gate?**

JH: Our goals as with any new relationship is to gain a more in-depth view of the nuts and bolts of the carwash industry and use our experience with association efficiency to help NECA run even smoother than the well-oiled machine it already is. **NC**



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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

*It's currently 22 degrees and snowing. In my last column I addressed the idea of change, and by now (hopefully) the weather has changed and spring has sprung.*

*We are passed the days of ice and snow and we are headed into pollen season. This is a great time to take a look at your business, inside and out. At the risk of showing how old I am, I remember a skit from Saturday Night Live where Billy Crystal played an eccentric character based off real life Argentine-American actor Fernando Lamas whose famous line was, "You look Marvelous." That quote has been cut and edited into memes and GIFs that have circled the Internet for years. For all you young carwashers – Google it!*

*They say presentation is everything, and in today's world of bigger, brighter and better it's important to keep a close eye on the little things. After the gloomy, grey winter days in the Northeast take this opportunity to look around. I mean really look around your operation. Invite a friend to walk the property and have them tell you what they see, what they hear and smell, and how does the property make them feel? When I first started in the industry Tom Hoffman Sr. (the first president of the NYSCWA) asked me to wash my car in one of our self-service bays and tell him what I thought, what I really thought. He was interested in my perspective and took my comments to heart. This is a practice that we continue today. Don't surround yourself with people who tell you what you want to hear. Find people who are willing to be critical, share their observations and make sure you really listen to them. Resist the urge to justify and explain, just listen and let it sink in, and instead of reacting with why it can't be done ask instead if it can be done?*

*Start with the little things and you'll be surprised how much of an impact it can have. One of my favorite coaches is John Wooden. Coach Wooden coached the UCLA men's basketball team from 1948 to 1975 and won 10 NCAA championships, seven in a row, and had a collegiate record of 664 wins and 162 losses. Among his most famous quotes, this is my favorite, "It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen." Legend has it that during the first practice of every season he taught his players how to tie their shoes. It doesn't get any simpler than that and based on his record I'd say he was on to something.*

*With competition seemingly coming from everywhere, as well as non stop economic and regulatory challenges, it's more important now than ever to pay attention to the little things, seek out people who won't tell you what you want to hear, but what you need to hear, and listen, really listen and instead of saying what can't be done ask why it can't be done. If you can do this then, "You'll look Marvelous!"*

*Looking forward to seeing you all at an NYSCWA event soon and at the 2023 NRCC, October 2-4, at the Atlantic City Convention Center.*



Walter Hartl, NYSCWA President

# Minimum Wage, Electrification Top of Mind

By William Y. Crowell, III

The 2023 New York State Legislative Session kicked off on January 4. As of February 6, Legislators have introduced more than 7,000 bills, which represents about 43 percent of the expected bill introductions. On January 10, Governor Hochul delivered the State of the State address that outlines her goals for the upcoming year. The implementation of these goals is found in the Governor's budget, which was presented on February 1. Several issues of interest are addressed in the budget including a minimum wage increase, buildings electrification and a cap and invest program.

A Minimum Wage Report was issued on September 30, 2022, by the New York State Division of Budget, which recommended an increase in the minimum wage of \$1 to \$14.20 for all counties outside of New York City, Westchester and Long Island where the minimum wage remained at \$15. The Department of Labor (DOL) accepted this recommendation, and a notice of adoption was published in the New York State Register on December 28, 2022. Political pressure from the downstate area after this increase was focused on the fact that inflation had reached a 40-year high and no increase was included for the downstate counties. Proponents of an increase argued that a regular increase would prevent the erosion of the minimum wage citing 17 other states that adopted this approach. The Governor's budget proposes indexing the minimum wage annually to an increase based on the year over year Consumer Price Index-W for the Northeast Region. Any increase would be capped at 3 percent. An increase would not be available if the CPI-W was negative or based on specified increases in the unemployment rates. Some legislators, however, support a more aggressive proposal entitled Raise the Wage, S.1978, A.2204, which indexes the minimum wage to inflation and worker productivity. This bill ramps up the minimum wage to \$26.25 by 2027, and thereafter indexes the minimum wage. The supporters of this Legislation do not believe the Governor's approach of tying increases to inflation goes far enough toward their goal of having a living wage. Some business groups have reacted negatively to mandatory wage increases as a particular burden on small business. Minimum wage increases are cost increases for small businesses that are struggling to regain their footing after the Pandemic. The minimum wage despite recent increases continues to be a centerpiece issue for this Legislative session.

The Governor's proposed budget would require the state to prohibit any fossil fuel equipment and building systems in new construction, phases out the sale and installation of fossil fuel space and water heating equipment in existing buildings and establishes a system of building benchmarking and energy grades. It prohibits the installation of fossil fuel equipment and building systems in new commercial buildings after December 31, 2028. In existing commercial buildings after January 1, 2035, installation of fossil fuel heating equipment and building systems would be prohibited. A carwash needing to replace a high-intensity heating system for drying cars powered by natu-

ral gas would have to retrofit to an electrical heating system. The New York State Building Code Council is given the ability to provide exemptions for the use of fossil fuel equipment and building systems specifically for a manufacturing facility, Laundromat, commercial food establishment, laboratory, hospital or other medical facility, critical infrastructure or crematorium. For the exemption to apply to a new building it must be constructed electric ready. Fossil fuel use is contingent on not adversely affecting health, safety, security or fire protection. The Building Code Council must decide whether physical or technical infeasibility exists to issue an exemption. Financial considerations do not constitute a sufficient basis for determining infeasibility. The NYSCWA is currently gathering data and information to make a case for specific inclusion in this list of facilities that are subject to consideration for an exemption.

A ban without off ramps to enable reasonable exceptions results in significant economic issues for numerous businesses and homeowners. The Governor's budget also proposes a cap and invest program. The Governor directed the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to construct the Cap and Invest program, which was recommended in the New York State Climate Action Council's adopted scoping plan. Under such a program, large scale emitters of greenhouse gases and distributors of heating and transportation fuels will be required to purchase allowances from the emissions which result from their activities. It is effectively a carbon tax on emitters that applies a cost to their use of carbon fuels. The allowances collected would be placed in a Climate Action Fund that houses a Consumer Climate Action Account and an Industrial Small Business Climate Action Account. The latter would receive 3 percent of the proceeds from the Climate Action Fund. The Small Business Climate Action Account would be used to fund rebates to reduce any increased costs from the implementation of the cap and invest program. The amount that would be raised for such rebates and how the rebates would be directed is speculative as no details are provided. The funding for climate goals has mainly been from electric and gas utility bills. This program arguably acts as an incentive for businesses to focus on energy efficiency. Although the cost of allowances is paid by emitters, it will obviously increase the cost of carbon produced products to businesses and consumers.

The budget proposals for a minimum wage increase, building electrification and the cap and invest program will have long-term impacts on operating costs for carwashes and other businesses as New York pursues electrification.

NC

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William Y. Crowell, III



# Long Island Operator Now a Flex-Serve Believer



By Alan M. Petrillo

Michael Avellino, the owner of the East Northport, NY, Five Star Car Wash since 2007, is a firm believer in the flex-service carwash model with unlimited memberships, so much so that he's partnering with a friend who owns a Brookhaven car dealership to build a new flex-service wash in Selden, NY.

"I bought Five Star Car Wash when it was a full-service carwash during the day and an exterior wash for four hours during the evening and night," Avellino said. "At the time, we were doing a thousand cars a week full service, so I couldn't believe in selling a flex-service basic carwash for \$14.99, and then going up \$5 for every level of service."

But in 2015, Avellino happened to talk with Miguel Gonzalez, president and chief executive officer of Micrologic Associates in Parsippany, NJ, and as Avellino said, "He talked me into converting to his system. However, because I thought people would come in too frequently on the unlimited system, I kept the full service and added Micrologic and made Five Star a flex serve."

The move to a flex serve with unlimited memberships made a believer of Avellino. "We charge \$24.95 for a basic unlimited, then \$29.95 and \$34.95 for the upgrades," he said. "We now average about \$30 a wash and have thousands of unlimited members. About 90 percent of our business is exterior washing, but we still make money with our full-service washes at \$40 each, washing about 600 cars a month."

Avellino said that in 2015 when he converted to the flex-service model, "I only laid off two workers. My two daughters came in to help our general manager Shawn Taylor, and we kept 10 employees, including one detailer, all of whom had been with the carwash since before I bought it in 2007."

Five Star has a convenience store where unlimited members can get discounts, snack on free cookies and coffee, as well as sandwiches on weekends, pick up free dash wipes, and participate in a towel exchange program.



*Long Island's Five Star Car Wash is enjoying a growing unlimited customer base thanks to its owner's new-found love of the flex serve model. Owner Michael Avellino plans to break ground on a second location this summer and open in 2024.*



Taylor, who handles all the mechanicals at Five Star Car Wash, said that the beauty of a flex serve's unlimited program, "is you can operate with three employees and everyone is happy with their wash. We're finding that former full-service customers are now buying the express wash and using the vacuums themselves, and are happy to do it. We've attracted customers from a nearby hand wash to come in and do an express unlimited wash themselves."

Taylor adds that Five Star, as a result of the COVID Pandemic no contact rule, has gone cashless. "Our kiosks had taken cash, gave change and did credit cards," he said. "But we got tired of cash jamming the machines and shutting down the lane, especially when less than five percent of our business was cash, so we

changed over to all credit cards, and our average ticket went up compared to when we accepted cash.”

### Partnering with a Car Dealer

Avellino said he is opening a new flex-service carwash in Selden, NY, off the Jericho Turnpike in the town of Brookhaven, Suffolk county, with a partner who owns a car dealership in Brookhaven.

“We went to Car Wash Pro Designers in Chicago, IL, for a turnkey operation,” Avellino said. “They are doing the permitting and zoning with the town of Brookhaven, and will submit the site plans to the town. We expect to get permission to build and hope to break ground in the summer, and open in 2024. We’re planning a 150-foot tunnel, three lanes and three kiosks, and 30 vacuums.”

He noted that the new carwash will be called Bath and Bubbles Auto Spa, and will be located at 1123 Middle Country Road in Selden, in front of a Home Depot.

NC

*Alan M. Petrillo is a Tucson, AZ-based journalist, a former upstate New Yorker, and contributing editor of Northeast Carwasher. He writes for a number of national and regional publications, and is the author of six nonfiction books, and three historical mystery/thrillers.*





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# Train Your Team on the Negative Impact Of Social Media Stunts at the Wash

By Meeghan Sheckler

Every carwash owner's (least) favorite words to hear are, "Your carwash damaged my vehicle."

If you have been in the carwash industry for even a day, I can bet that you have heard those words, or some variation.

Not only has there been a long-standing notion from the general public that if you bring your scratched up car to a carwash they would most likely pay you out of pocket to fix the damage, if the first owner declines, then onto the next wash.

It seems as though these requests have become so much more common. One of the major differences between today and 20 or 30 years ago is social media. How many of you have had a customer claim that your wash caused damage and after a conversation with the client and looking at the vehicle in question, it's determined that this is an old scratch or dent? You have now denied the customer of any wrong doing on your washes part. You can almost guarantee within the next five minutes to an hour (on the longer side) that you now have a one star review on Facebook, a bash on Google or the newest trend, a video of you or your wash on TikTok. This can be extremely frustrating for

the owner as now they have to try and turn this ranting review into a neutral response to not deter new customers who search for local carwashes. The one good thing about social media is that owner/operators are able to share this information on the carwash pages.

How do you handle these negative reviews? Do you leave it as is with no response, or do you reply to have the client reach out to you or notate your side of the story? One thing that I think we have all learned over the recent years with the Internet and social media is that once it's out there, you are going to have a hard time taking it down, and it may be in the cyber world forever. It can be really hard for an owner/operator to remain impartial when you know that you are being blatantly lied to.

Due to these changing times and the potential of videos by customers it is that much more important that you have an adequate camera system at your wash. And it really does matter where you have cameras placed. Do you have a camera at the entrance and exit of your tunnel? This can help in the event that a customer claims that the damage happened in



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the tunnel. Was the damage there when they entered or just when they exited.

Do you have cameras by your vacuum station that could potentially show where someone dragged the vac hose across the hood of the car causing scratches when they blame the wash? Do you have cameras at your entrance and exit? What about in your self-serve bays or any 24-hour operations. As there is typically no attendant in the self-serve bay at all times, or at a 24-hour operation it is critical to have cameras. In the event of a claim, your camera footage could make the difference between your carwash paying out a claim vs. the client being liable.

Not only do carwash owners have to worry about the most common issues at the carwash, but you can do a quick search for "car wash fails" on line and on social platforms such as TikTok and there will be some close to home situations that make any owner's skin crawl. Hopefully, most owners are using those incidents as a learning tool.

Well now you have a few more things to think about. For anyone who has searched "carwash TikTok challenge" on TikTok you will come up with more than two dozen videos of people in self-serve bays washing their cars. Most of the videos are of customers standing on the cars, laying on the cars and laying on the ground, some are covered in soap. For anyone who has had to file a claim for a self-serve bay incident, you immediately panic thinking what this will do to next year's renewal premium or even possibly being non-renewed by your current carrier. Although there is no way to stop this from happening, there are things you can do as a carwash owner. Do you have self-service bay "rules?" Do you have cameras in and around the bay? Is your staff aware of some potential hazards?

The other big trend right now is "carwash windows down" on TikTok. I stopped counting after the first 50 results. As most of you know "TikToker's" want to get as many people to view them and like their videos in hopes of gaining more followers. I'm sure most of you never thought you would have to write "windows up" and "sunroof closed" on your "rules/disclaimer" for a carwash! After watching a few of these videos, I'm sure you can put yourself in that carwash owner's shoes. Not only is this damaging to the interior of a vehicle, but it is extremely unsafe. The passengers of the vehicle can be injured from equipment, as well as contact with chemicals. They can also damage the carwash equipment causing you to have to close down for repairs.

One particular video stood out to me. There is a video of three passengers in a Jeep with the top down going past the attendant (who doesn't stop them) and one of the passengers gets out of the Jeep standing on the wheel well while the vehicle is going through the wash!

There are ways that you can help mitigate that type of situ-

ation, however. Most likely the attendant had no idea that one of the passengers was going to get out of the vehicle as it was going through the wash. This is where it pays to have the most up-to-date controls. One industry-specific tunnel product that may be able to help notify an attendant of this type of situation would be No Pileups. There system allows you to view each vehicle as they go through and would be more likely to catch an object/person outside of the vehicle than not having any cameras in the tunnel at all. If the system picks up the object/person it stops the track allowing the attendant to investigate the incident. If you don't have cameras in your tunnel then you may not even know it's happening until you see a video on social media or something happens and the customer comes to file a complaint. Of course the ultimate worst-case scenario is injury or death.

I can guarantee any carwash owner's biggest fear is to have a customer or employee pass away from injuries sustained at their wash. Even though a customer getting out of his/her car and standing on the wheel well is not the fault of a carwash owner, that doesn't mean there wouldn't be negative impacts to the carwash. Depending on the specific circumstances, as every claim is different, you most likely will have to put a claim in as will the customer with their own insurance. At that point, claims adjusters from both carriers will determine who is at fault and where the payout comes from (if any). While this is happening there may be times when the wash has to be shut down or maybe parts of the wash were damaged and they have to be replaced, not to mention the potential for negative comments.

So, what can you do as an owner/operator to help deter these things from happening at your wash? Make sure to train your attendants to be aware of these situations. Of course, the initial reaction may be to laugh as that's what the "social media" customer wants. It should also be noted to the attendant how dangerous these situations can be and what impact they could have on the wash.

Having a proactive approach with your team to ensure that they are aware of situations, and having proper camera placement can make a huge impact on how a potential claim could be determined.

NC

*Meeghan Sheckler runs the Cross Insurance Car Wash Solutions Program and works with carwash owner/operators to help ensure that their washes are safe for employees and customers. If you are interested in speaking with Meeghan about your wash or would like help with training or a safety checklist, you can reach her at meeghan.sheckler@crossagency.com or 207/347-1903.*



Meeghan Sheckler



# Artificial Intelligence: Will We Love it, Detest it or Both?

By Ray Justice

Twenty-five years ago, I wrote a column in our local Chamber of Commerce titled Think Twice, which is what it was about. When we pause and read something without jumping to a conclusion, we are more likely to have better clarity and remember more.

Allowing ourselves to be curious while not being quick to judge opens up new possibilities. While we contemplate what we read or what is being said, it opens our imagination and natural creativity.

Curiosity and its partner, Wondering, is our gift of inner knowledge.

For this writing, I included a sample of one of those short articles from many years ago as an example of change. The end of this article is a list of assorted questions taken from various writings of the same time period.

Life has changed, as this short article will say. Use it to prepare for coming changes being much faster, and ... will we be ready?

## Think Twice

By Raymond Justice ... July 1996

### Glenwood 3470J

That's my phone number from 40 years ago. I was trying to think why I remember it when I can't remember important things like my mother-in-law's birthday.

Back then, folks weren't quite as busy, and things were a little simpler. Seems as if when GL3470J rang, most times it was a friend. That was then, and this is now.

Today the phone is most often an intrusion, an annoyance, or at least that's how many of us think about it. Can't they see how busy I am?

Today, instead of a friend, and an automatic smile, it's a bother.

Don't they know I'm busy right now?

Today we have to learn to smile as we pick up the receiver, it's not automatic anymore.

According to Nancy Friedman, the Telephone Doctor, it takes only four to six seconds to make a good first impression over the phone. By the time you say hello and who you are, your impression has been cast.

Here are a few tips to help you out:

1. Use rising inflection in your voice as it shows you are happy to receive a call.
2. Hold your head straight. If your head is cocked, holding the phone by your shoulder, so are your neck and throat. When are they ever going to redesign those receivers?
3. Use a headset when possible — this saves trips to my brother (a chiropractor).
4. We no longer have party lines, so how is your privacy and background noise?

5. Pay attention. Don't open mail or use your computer while you are on the phone — you're not really there with your friend on the other end.

6. Keep a glass of water by your phone.

7. Smile — you'll warm up the caller (and yourself).

Our first impressions over the phone are just as important as our visual impressions. So, before you pick up that phone, think Glenwood 3470J. It might be a friend, old or new. And, if you can't remember my old phone number, smile — that's what you do when you see a friend, and besides, it might be me. Think Twice

**The next paragraph was written in a couple of minutes by A.I. (Artificial Intelligence). The only human input was my question: "How does learning how to ask the right questions help in business and life? 100 words or less, please!"**

**A.I. version:** Asking the right questions helps individuals in business and life to gain clarity, avoid assumptions and increase understanding. This results in better decision-making, improved relationships and increased efficiency. Asking effective questions can also demonstrate one's active listening skills and lead to better collaboration, creativity and problem-solving. Additionally, it can uncover hidden needs, opportunities, and challenges, leading to innovation and growth. Learning how to ask the right questions is a valuable skill that helps.

Pretty good, and all written by machine from the question I asked.

AI will have its benefits and its problems. My theory is that we will all need to enjoy it in one sense and deal with it in another. Understanding our own ability to sort the realities can start right now by writing from and about your gut feel.

Write about why you were attracted to a question that caught your eye.

What will be different when you follow a machine vs. following human advice?

What will be our part to make it work beyond our laziest thoughts?

Let's call this Ray J's version vs. the A.I. version. What will it be like? It's coming, and it will be fast.

## Now for the teaching exercise

Scan your eyes along without really reading and see which questions your attention is drawn to. Make choices without thought by using your attraction and intuition. Write what the question means to you and what you are wondering about. If you take the time to do this, you will amaze yourself as you keep writing. It is a way of tapping into your personal intuition with possibilities of new enlightened Creativity.

These are random questions for your writing choices.

Chose any questions as a stand-alone catalyst for Insights and Opportunity. Become your own coach with intuitive writing. Let your pen speak from your intuition and to which you are instantly attracted.

- When you read this, what comes up for you?
- How do you say thank you?
- Why will someone listen to you?
- Do you use eye contact?
- Do they need the information you have?
- Do you believe what you are saying?
- Does your body language say the same thing?
- When someone asks, "How's it going" do you answer about the weather?
- Is 68 degrees warm, or is it cold?
- Does being Gay also still mean happy?
- When tensions rise, now what do you do?
- If we all are magnets, what are your thoughts and feelings attracting?
- Think ahead — what questions will they ask?
- Whose day are you going to make delightful?
- Where does it change from one to the other, and what's in between?
- Do the people in your life energize you?
- What part of being flexible is important to you?
- What doubt is keeping you from taking that first small step?
- Whose voice do you constantly hear and repeat?
- Are you an exceptionally Happy Person?
- I can do it.
- Don't know what to say?
- Do you think there could be something good here?
- Have you ever tried Humming a relaxing song?
- Do you greet with a friendly "Hi" or "Hello"?
- Now, what do you say?
- Do you like or smile at Elvis's, "Thank you very much"?
- What is your hidden strength or Superpower?
- What do you think about almost every day?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would that be?
- What do you fear, and what do you appreciate the most?
- Why this project, and why now?

Save your writing to compare how, a year or two from now, your thinking may be different. What will have changed, and will we, or will we not, have a better life because of A.I.?

NC



Ray Justice

*Ray Justice is an Entrepreneur, Poet & Creativity Explorer. He is a former carwash operator and past president of the NYCWA. Visit him at RayJustice.com where he offers inspiring and useful tools to grow.*



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# northeast carwasher

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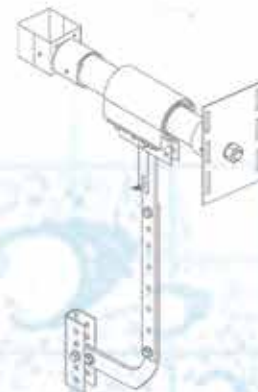
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