

SPRING 2024 | VOL. 29 NO. 2

northeast carwasher

The Ever-Increasing Minimum Wage

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Guidara NRCC Keynote

Bye, Bye Quarters, Bye, Bye

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Industry Innovator Bob Hodge

Venus & Mars Talk Frustration

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Advertising space reservations
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issue are due April 19, 2024.
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The *Northeast Carwasher* is produced by Media Solutions, 2214 Budd Terrace, Niskayuna, NY 12309, in conjunction with the design firm Media Magic, for the New York State Car Wash Association, New England Carwash Association, the Car Wash Operators of New Jersey, Inc., Connecticut Carwash Association, Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association and Carwash Association of Pennsylvania. Neither Media Solutions nor Media Magic assumes any responsibility for claims made in advertisements, classified or otherwise, listed in this magazine. **All contents property of Media Solutions. Reproduction in whole or in part without express written permission is prohibited.**



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northeastcarwasher.com

Have you ever been on Candid Camera?

Now, many of you are too young to even know what that is, but a few weeks ago I found myself asking that exact question. I was on my way out of the mall when the greeter holding the door open for me asked, "Hey, you wouldn't know where I could get my car washed, would you?"

"Seriously? Am I on Candid Camera," I asked?

Of course, the greeter was too young to know what I was asking, but he went on to say that his car was covered in salt and he needed to get it off. I then said, "My friend, it's your lucky day!"

Still shaking my head wondering how this is my life, I proceeded to tell him that there was a Colonial Car Wash just a mile down the road on Rt. 20 heading toward Schenectady, on your right, that would meet his needs nicely. I then told him I even knew the owner and that he was my neighbor!

Next, I "educated" him on the wash's Unlimited Plan (I just happened to be a member at one of their sites near my home) and then "nudged" him to consider it as I was guessing that his vehicle might be his most valuable asset. I added that he could cancel his plan after the winter, if it wasn't in his budget, but that it would be worth its weight in gold for the next several months. After all, he could wash as often as he liked and would likely get the carwash bug and keep his membership.

Not wanting to pour it on too thick, we then parted ways and I left the mall feeling like I had answered my calling. I had done my job. I wasn't wearing anyone's wash logo, and this young man had absolutely no idea that I was in the industry. Honestly. No idea!

As you may, or may not know, despite not owning a wash I kind of live, eat and breathe this industry. Maybe I was exuding that as I was exiting the mall. Maybe it was fate, kismet or some kind of weird gravitational pull, but I was more than happy to spread the gospel of carwashing that day and equally thrilled to share this story with you all.

*Oh, and in case you've never heard of Candid Camera, it was an American hidden camera reality television series from 1948 until 2014. It was originally created and produced by Allen Funt and featured practical jokes. It initially began on the radio as *The Candid**

Microphone in 1947. And although no one came out and said, "Smile, you're on Candid Camera," I will always kind of believe that I was!



Suzanne L. Stansbury
Editor/Publisher

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A Family Legacy of Service

A striking display of generational valor was present at Idaho's Veterans Parade as Bill Martin, owner of Metro Express Car Wash and founder of Amplify Car Wash Advisors, walked alongside his grandchildren and his 92-year-old brother, John Martin. The family is a living tribute to service and sacrifice, with a military history that spans from the Korean War to the Vietnam War and beyond. John, at the age of 18, served as a Marine during the Korean War, while Bill was a member of the prestigious U.S. Army Green Berets during the Vietnam War.

Service to country is a Martin family affair. Bill's son, Andrew, served in the Marine Corps and their late brother Eddie had an illustrious career in the U.S. Air Force serving in Vietnam. "Military service is part of the fabric of our family," said Bill Martin. "It's our responsibility and honor to give back to fellow Veterans and active-duty military. Every Veterans Day we offer



Brothers Bill and John Martin proudly participated in their state's Veterans Day Parade.

free carwashes at all Metro Express locations as a gesture of our deep gratitude." Metro Express also extends year-round discounts on wash services to all Veterans, said Martin, and he and his family distribute carwash tickets during the annual parade. NC
To see what others, in our region, did on Veterans Day turn to page 24.

HAPPY 50TH



Congratulations to industry icon and innovator, Bill Martin, on 50 years of carwashing! He is also celebrating the opening of two new sites in Idaho. Martin, a founder of Amplify Car Wash Advisors, is a past ICA President and 2012 Hall of Fame inductee. He is also one of the original founders of Car Wash Partners, which later rebranded as Mister Car Wash. His Metro Express washes are in Idaho, Montana and Washington state. NC

Colonial Car Wash in Schenectady targets near-by potential customers with colorful street signage.



hyetal (hy-e-tal) (adj)

:of or relating to rain, rainfall, or rainy regions.
Origin - Greek

WASH VOLUME INDEX

Here's our numbers from a three-month comparison to last year at the same time. Our participants are identified by the region/state in which they represent. Our goal is to give you a snapshot of what volumes look like across the Northeast.

Comparing October-December 2022 to 2023 this is what we found:

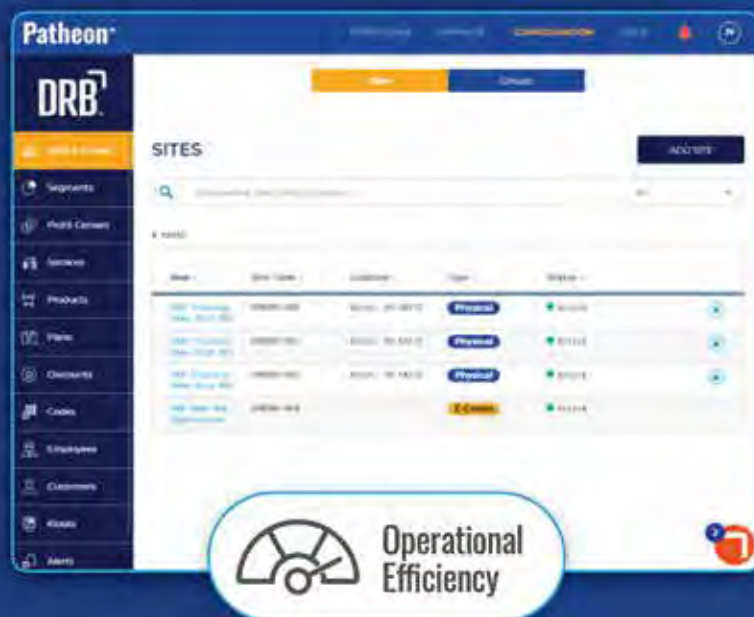
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A frank message about car wash equipment service.

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Source: *Supersonic News*, Vol.6 No. 5; provided by Mike Prudente, Madison Car Wash, Madison, NJ.



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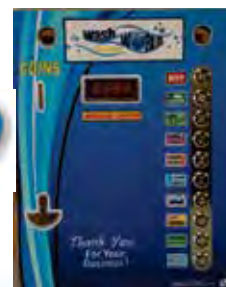
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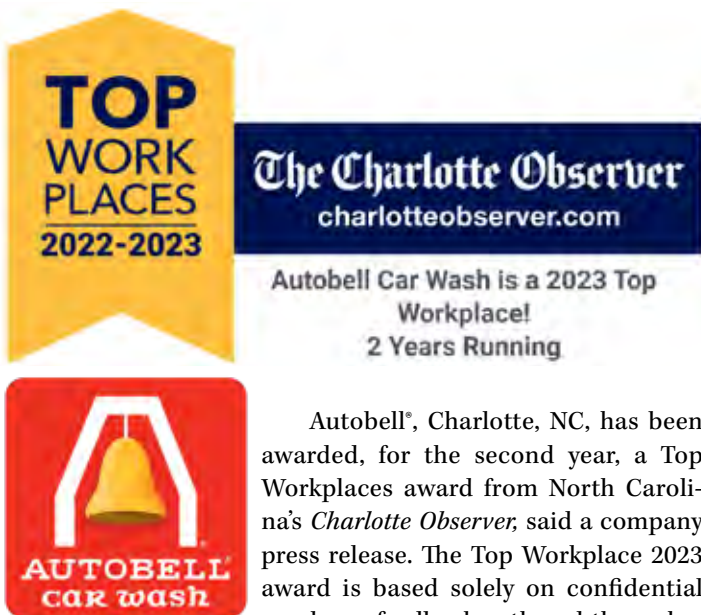
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Autobell® Earns Top Workplace Award



Autobell®, Charlotte, NC, has been awarded, for the second year, a Top Workplaces award from North Carolina's *Charlotte Observer*, said a company press release. The Top Workplace 2023 award is based solely on confidential employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey, recognizing companies that create a people-centered culture that gives employees a voice.

In conjunction with this year's award, the company also earned a special distinction for Appreciation, which highlights companies that understand and prioritize the self-sustaining performance and positivity boost that results from genuine employee appreciation. "We are thrilled that our team members love working at Autobell," said Katie Sons, Autobell Director of Human Resources. "We value them, and we show it by offering flexible work schedules, opportunities for growth and development, generous benefits and educational assistance through scholarships. Plus, Autobell provides training and coaching to help them succeed on the job and in other areas of their lives."

For more information visit autobell.com

NCS Acquires International Drying Corp.

National Carwash Solutions (NCS), Grimes, IA, has acquired International Drying Corporation (IDC), a leading manufacturer of proprietary drying systems, flat belt conveyor systems and related components, according to a company press release. Art Stephens, president and CEO of IDC, and a dynamic leader with a long and successful history in the carwash industry, joins NCS as part of the acquisition. "After 42 years in this industry, partnering with NCS and its incredible team is a tremendous privilege," said Stephens. "Thanks to the entire NCS team for making us feel like part of the family. We eagerly anticipate serving the industry with our new family for years to come."

NCS CEO, Jesse Wurth, echoes those sentiments. "The expertise and dedication of the IDC team, combined with the leadership of Art Stephens, will bolster our commitment to excellence and innovation."

To learn more visit ncswash.com and internationaldrying.com

OPW Acquires Transchem Group

OPW, Hamilton, OH, has acquired Transchem Group, according to a company press release. The company will now become part of OPW's Vehicle Wash Solutions platform, which includes PDQ, Belanger and ICS.

Transchem, headquartered in Cambridge, Ontario, offers a variety of chemical and cleaning products including Turtle Wax Pro and Autolux chemistry. "We are excited to have Transchem join the OPW team, expanding OPW VWS' portfolio of world-class solutions that helps our customers' carwashes perform better, safer and more sustainably," said Keith Moye, vice president and general manager of OPW Vehicle Wash Solutions.

Nathan Ewing, president of Transchem, reflects on the importance of relationships in the industry. "At Transchem we pride ourselves in building true long-term partnerships with our customers, and we are excited to join a company that shares the same values," he said. "OPW Vehicle Wash Solutions is the perfect partner to continue driving Transchem's growth and maintaining high standards of customer service for our existing and new customers."

For more information visit opwglobal.com and transchem.com

Motor City Raises \$340K For St. Jude's



Motor City Wash Works (MCWW), Detroit, MI, raised \$340,085 for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital at its 2023 Open House and Charity Auction, as well as its "Washing Cars. Fighting Cancer" point-of-sale promotion at carwash sites across the country in 2023, according to a company press release.

For the last decade, Motor City Wash Works has partnered with St. Jude, headquartered in Memphis, TN, a renowned research hospital founded by Danny Thomas to treat children around the world at no cost to their families. Its fundraising has raised nearly \$2 million in total donations, said the release. The recent auction that included a bidding war for MCWW equipment, St. Jude patient's handmade artwork and Give-to-Live segments, was held at the historic GEM Theater, built in 1926, in Detroit.

To register your wash for the 2024 effort visit stjude.org/washingcarsfightingcancer

For more information visit motorcitywashworks.com and stjude.org

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PC/D Annual 2023 Top Leading Brands Released

Professional Carwashing & Detailing magazine's annual Top 50 List of U.S. Conveyor Carwashes is out and congratulations are in order to five prominent operations in the Northeast.

- #19 Splash Car Wash, Milford, CT, with 57 locations
- #20 Golden Nozzle Car Washes, Worcester, MA, with 55 locations
- #31 WetGo PRO, Pittsburgh, PA, with 33 locations
- #33 Delta Sonic, Buffalo, NY, with 31 locations
- #38 Hoffman Car Wash, Albany, NY, with 25 locations

The location numbers are based on year-end projected tunnel locations. For a complete list visit carwash.com

**The above numbers were compiled in 2023 and may not reflect current site counts.*

Sonny's Fazio Assumes Chairman of the Board Role



Paul Fazio

Paul Fazio, who took over his family's business, Sonny's® The Carwash Factory in 1991, has assumed the role of Chairman of the Board after serving as its CEO. The move is the result of the company's massive growth and its need for a leader who has expertise in running an organization the size of Sonny's, said Fazio, in a company press release. "This is not the little family business that I took over in 1991," he said. "It now needs a talented CEO who has experience taking a company of this size to the next level."

After an extensive search, Fazio and the board selected Curt Hutchins as its new CEO. "Curt comes to Sonny's with over 30 years experience with large, multi-national manufacturing companies," said Fazio. "With experience in both operations and sales, Curt has twice taken companies of Sonny's size to the next level."

Fazio, who said he is not leaving the company, but "shifting gears" will focus on strategy, M & A and other special projects. "After 32 years in the role, I am looking forward to helping Curt continue to make Sonny's the best supplier of equipment, parts and services to the carwash industry in the world!"

Sonny's currently employs more than 2,000 and is now comprised of 29 family businesses, said Fazio.

For more information
visit sonnysdirect.com

Spark Secures \$30 Million Series B Funding Round



Spark Car Wash, with locations in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, has opened its fourth location in the Mount Holly/Lumberton (NJ) market in Burlington County, according to a company press release. This expansion is another stop toward addressing the growing need for effective and efficient carwash services across New Jersey, said the release.

Noted for its technology, speed, conscious environmental choices and community connections, Spark is excited to expand its presence in the Northeast, said the release. The company's regional expansion effort has a current pipeline of more than 32 locations fueled in part by a recent \$30 million Series B funding round led by GoPoint Ventures.

"Spark is dedicated to making carwashing an energizing experience for everyone, from our loyal customers to our incredible team members. We achieve this through a constant commitment to quality, service, sustainability and

local community building," said Kyle Van Decker, founder and CEO of Spark Car Wash. "We are grateful for the support from both existing and new investors, and appreciate the shared passion for building Spark into a dominant leader in our markets."

In support of the company's ongoing commitment to making a positive impact in the communities in which it serves, from December 12-17 there was an opportunity to donate to Burlington County's Vineland's Family Success Center, said the release.

For more information
visit sparkcarwash.com

Splash Opens 61st Location



Splash Car Wash, Milford, CT, has opened its 61st location, an express site located in Derby, CT. This marks Splash's 38th express wash and features a 130-foot tunnel outfitted with 19 self-service vacuums, said a company press release. The project was overseen and completed by Glen Sheeley, Splash's Director of Development and Construction.

Splash continues construction on eight additional Greenfield washes, two of which are expected to open by year end — one in Shelburne, VT, and the other Randolph, MA. In 2023, Splash opened seven new express washes, with another three existing sites having been completely refurbished and rebuilt. The remaining six new developments are all located in New York with expected completion dates between late spring and mid-summer 2024. Another five sites are in various stages of entitlement or permitting and should be under construction soon. "We are excited to see the growth at Splash continue," stated CEO and co-founder Mark Curtis. "As we develop more sites within the Northeast region, we know we're bringing more convenience and an unmatched customer experience to

Continued ...



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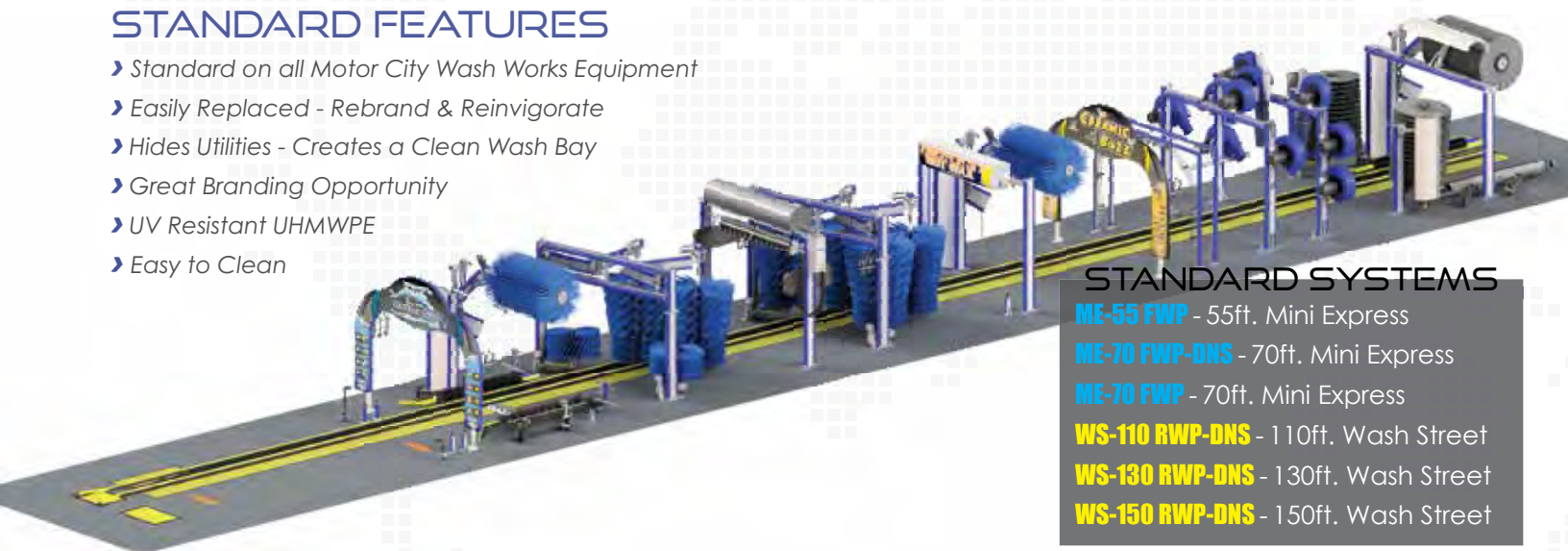
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- WS-130 RWP-DNS** - 130ft. Wash Street
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Splash currently employs more than 1,200 and has been named Top Workplace for the past nine years.

For more information
visit splashcarwashes.com

Washworld Grows Manufacturing Facility



Washworld, De Pere, WI, a leader in inbay vehicle washing, has expanded its manufacturing facility here doubling the production square footage, according to a company press release. "The decision to expand our facilities is a testament to the unwavering support and loyalty of our customers and the dedication of our hardworking team," said Pete Jensen, co-owner. "This expansion represents an exciting milestone for us, enabling us to better serve our customers and reinforce our position as a market leader."

The expansion will include eco-friendly features and cutting-edge technologies to optimize operational efficiency, said the release. Its completion is expected by the spring of 2024 with daily operations continuing uninterrupted.

For more information
visit washworld.com

WashMetrix Becomes DRB® Certified Interface Developer



WashMetrix, Dallas, TX, a carwash analytics and business intelligence software company is now a DRB® Certified Interface Developer, said a company press release. DRB®, a carwash technology

solutions provider, offers the certification to enable the secure data exchange between DRB and third-party providers, giving carwash operators enhanced integrations across DRB's SiteWatch® and Patheon® platforms, said the release.

Rex Womble, Co-Founder and CEO of WashMetrix said, "As a DRB Certified Interface Developer, WashMetrix offers advanced business intelligence solutions to DRB customers of all sizes. WashMetrix serves as the industry's first purpose-built carwash data analytics software that unifies POS, accounting and HRIS systems into one intuitive data dashboard, saving carwash operators hundreds of hours of reporting time and the ability to more intuitively manage their carwash locations."

DRB's President and CEO, Ian Williams, emphasized, "The Certified interface program plays a crucial role in DRB's data-driven solutions for the carwash industry. The collaboration with WashMetrix provides shared customers with reassurance that their technology requirements are being supported by both providers."

For more information
visit washmetrix.com and drb.com

Express Wash Concepts Opens 94th Location

Express Wash Concepts (EWC), Columbus, OH, continues its strategic core market expansion with the opening of the company's 94th express carwash location in Toledo, OH, according to a company press release. With the opening of the new Dorr Street location, Express Wash Concepts now operates seven locations throughout greater Toledo under the Clean Express Auto Wash brand. An additional location in Maumee on Dussel

Drive is scheduled to open in early 2024, with future development sites including the corner of Airport Highway and South Reynolds slated for mid-2024.

"In a short time, we have remained focused on the responsible expansion of our Clean Express Auto Wash portfolio," said John Roush, Express Wash Concepts Chief Executive Officer and Clean Express Auto Wash Founder. "We are proud to continue building out a footprint that provides our customers with even greater access to more convenient locations and the highest quality wash experience possible."

From January 12-21 the Dorr Street Clean Express site celebrated its grand opening with all customers receiving a free Cleanest-Ultra signature wash featuring ceramic (a \$22 value). In addition, customers were able to sign-up for the Founders' Club Special, which includes up to six months of the company's top two Unlimited Wash Club membership packages for 50 percent off the retail price. Onsite complimentary professional grade vacuums were also available.

Express Wash Concepts announced its Clean Express Auto Wash brand expansion into the Toledo market in late December 2020. Clean Express currently consists of more than 26 locations throughout Pittsburgh, greater Cleveland, Toledo and Detroit. Companywide, EWC operates throughout Columbus, Dayton, Cleveland and Toledo, OH; Pittsburgh, PA; Hampton Roads and Richmond, VA, and Detroit, MI, under the following brands: Moo Moo Express Car Wash, Flying Ace Express Car Wash, Clean Express Auto Wash, Green Clean Express Auto Wash and Bee Clean Express Car Wash.

For more information visit
expresswashconcepts.com





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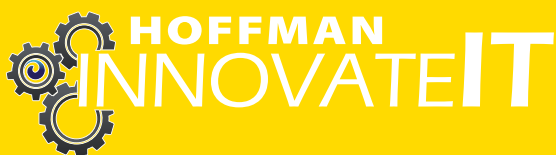
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The Car Wash Operators of New Jersey (CWONJ) Host Association

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Valet Car Wash's Mike Black Honored with Paul Harris Award

Rotary Cambridge Sunrise Foundation Chair, Marianne Blasman presents Valet Car Wash's Mike Black with the Paul Harris Fellow Award.



Donna and Mike Black, pictured with Mike's daughter Sara and Valet Car Wash Site Operations Manager Jaclyn Kennedy.

Longtime *Northeast Carwasher* reader and industry leader, Mike Black, founder of the Valet Car Wash brand, based in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada, has been honored as a Paul Harris Fellow. This award is the highest form of recognition that a Rotary Club can bestow upon a member. The honor recognizes

someone who has done something significant for others and is named after the Club's Founder, Paul Harris, who organized the first Rotary Club in Chicago in 1905.

Black, who has been the president of the Canadian Car Wash Association, as well as the International Carwash Association,



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The Valet Voice is a great tool that Black uses to communicate with his employees and share information on community initiatives and volunteer programs.

built his first carwash at age 29. Since opening that wash in Cambridge, Ontario, he and his partner Bill Barber have added nine more sites that in addition to washes include quick lubes, gas stations and c-stores. But giving back has been paramount for Black over his 30-year-career, not only to the industry he loves but the communities in which his businesses serve. This effort includes supporting little league teams, various charities or organizations and, of course, the Rotary, an organization whose purpose is to connect people who then work together to solve community problems, provide humanitarian aid and promote goodwill and peace. Rotary International has more than 1.2 million members. Their motto is “Service Above Self.”

Black has also gotten his team at Valet involved in giving back. Valet Car Wash has an internal initiative called the Valet Volunteer Program that pays its employees half of any hours in which they volunteer, up to eight hours a month. “For the company, it’s a great way to not only get involved with our communities on a one-on-one level, but it also teaches our employees the importance of giving back to the communities we operate in and the role small business plays in the fabric of a community.”

All High School students in Ontario must volunteer in some capacity as part of their curriculum, said Black. “Each couple of months we post a list of the different groups, organizations, charities, etc. looking for volunteers so that the employees can see if something grabs their interest.”

This information is also published in the *Valet Voice*, the company’s quarterly employee newsletter.

But not only is volunteerism a wash affair, it’s a family affair with the Blacks. Mike’s wife, Donna, who you can see at many carwash events, was voted KW Woman of the Year for her outstanding fundraising work with the MS Society. She has also organized the “Run for the Cure” and has volunteered at both Cambridge Memorial Hospital and Trinity Church in downtown Galt in Cambridge.

Volunteerism Runs Deep

Black attributes his passion for volunteerism to the core values his father instilled before his passing when Mike was only 16. These include the importance of always giving back and never taking more than you give. Mike’s dad, an executive at Chrysler Corporation, also instilled in his son to always look after your vehicle as it is not only a form of transportation, but a true reflection of your image and personality and how others perceive you, he said. It also provides you with a sense of pride and self awareness. He added, “I feel fortunate to be in a position that allows me to honor these values of giving back and helping others whenever possible.”

Congratulations and well deserved, Mike, Donna and the team at Valet Car Wash!

For more information visit washmycar.ca and rotary.org

Splash Expansion Continues Into MA



Splash Car Wash, Milford, CT, has opened its 62nd site, a new express exterior wash in Randolph, MA, the chain’s first location in the Bay State. This wash commences Splash’s expansion into the Massachusetts market. It is equipped with a 150-foot conveyor tunnel, 15 free vacuum stations and a mat cleaning room, according to a company press release.

The project was led by Glen Sheeley, Director of Development and Construction at Splash, in conjunction with his partner, and father, Wayne Sheeley. The two have managed several of Splash’s new washes, including the two most recent openings in Derby and Milford, CT.

The company has re-opened its Brewster (formerly Fast Lane Oil Change & Car Wash) and Cicero, NY, washes after major renovations which included complete equipment overhauls, the addition of self-service vacuums and various exterior enhancements. A project with similar renovations is currently underway at Splash’s Greece, NY, site.

Additionally, Splash has two Vermont washes near completion — one in Shelburne and one in Rutland, both under the management of Aaron Vincelette, one of Splash’s development partners, said the release. The company has 10 more construction projects underway with anticipated openings over the next 12 months.

For more information visit splashcarwashes.com



The Impact of the Ever-Increasing Minimum Wage

By Suzanne L. Stansbury

Twenty-five states will increase their minimum wage this year. Eight of those increases took place in the Northeast, in January, with Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont seeing increases. Massachusetts, already at \$15 an hour thanks to a 2023 increase, will remain at that rate at least through this year, and even Pennsylvania, a bit late to the party, is set to bump up to \$15 an hour in 2026, but currently uses the Federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour which hasn't been increased since 2009. The only other states that have not adopted a state minimum wage, and thus use the federal minimum wage are Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' inflation calculator, a worker would need \$18.28 today to buy what \$15 got in 2019.

Let's be clear, though, no one wants to deny an employee the ability to pay bills, afford basic needs and put food on the table (defined as a "living wage"), but in the carwashing industry where many employees are entry-level high school and early entrants to the workforce, the ever-increasing minimum wage (the lowest legal pay rate) is forcing operators to take a really close look at their wash models, expenses and overhead.

In New Jersey, where the minimum wage just hit \$15.13/hour, the take home pay just increased by \$1 for 350,000 hourly workers. But the state's Governor, Phil Murphy, a Democrat, is asking if more should be done for the state's "lowest-wage workers." There are several carve-outs including people who employ seasonal workers, as well as many farmworkers. There is also a different set of rules for service workers who earn a "tipped" wage (employer needs to pay the difference between what the employee earns in tips and the state's minimum wage), such as with bartenders and waitresses. Although once used by many full-service operators, states like New York, for example, eliminated it at the end of 2020.

What To Do?

Jersey shore operator, Doug Rieck, sees three ways to combat the ever-increasing minimum wage. "This is not rocket science," says the Magic Wash operator. "Higher man-hours must be recovered. A carwash owner absorbs the higher costs, prices increase to recover the cost increase or reduction of man-hours to cover the increases happens. But most likely, it's a combination of all of that."

Rieck, who has three full-timers, including his manager, and three part-time employees, added that reduced staffing and innovative scheduling needs to occur and a more severe rain-day policy with a quicker hand at reducing staff on weather-related days needs to happen.

But, employee expectations cannot be overlooked. "WaWa (a convenience store and gas station chain based in Philadelphia) starts its south Jersey workers at \$17/hour,"

said Rieck. “Every single high school kid expects at least \$15/hour. It’s an expectation.”

But as all operators know, there are lots of side effects to an increased minimum wage. “With an increasing minimum wage you have increased state and federal taxes, higher workers comp and insurance costs and your senior employees will expect more money too. If a line worker is getting \$15/hour, for example, a manager needs to get a lot more!” said Rieck. “The only givens are that prices must go up and employees will make more money.”

Premier Car Wash owner, Dan Saidel, who runs two full serves in New Jersey, said the overall impact to employers is approximately 20 percent greater than the \$1.00-1.13/annual increase. Passing along those additional fees, however, is challenging, according to Saidel. “Passing cost increases to the customer is imperative, but can be challenging, often resulting in lower volume,” he noted. “There can be a loss of customer to your competitor, reduced visits (mindset of... if it costs 10 percent more than the last visit, then I’ll come 10 percent less often.”



This Hoffman Car Wash in Latham is an example of the express exterior sites the company is now building.

STATE NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

Employers subject to the minimum wage standards in the Fair Labor Standards Act must post the FLSA minimum wage poster in a clearly visible place at all workplaces. For employers with multi-state sites, be sure to review the poster and notice requirements in each state to ensure compliance.

Source: inova Chart of Minimum Wages in the NE

Massachusetts operator, Dave Ellard, who owns two multi-profit center Triple Play sites near Boston, with express wash models, has taken a close look at his operation and decided to eliminate one of his profit centers as a result of the ever-increasing minimum wage. “Obviously, the higher the minimum wage, the higher our costs,” he said. “I consider the minimum wage to be an uncontrollable for me. What’s controllable in response is raising carwash prices over time and/or reducing labor hours.”

Added Ellard, “Rising labor costs directly contributed to our decision in 2023 to close our express detailing shop,” he noted. “In this business labor costs can approach 60 to 70 percent of revenue. So, continued steep increases of the minimum wage is directionally proportional to the amount one can charge for the service. I believe current wage rates have made express detailing too expensive for the average consumer.”

For a larger operation, like Hoffman Car Wash in Albany, wage compression has become an issue, when newly-hired, less-experienced employees earn close to that of current employees/managers. With 650 full- and part-time employees, any increase to the minimum wage is significant, and wage compression is a big deal, said Walt Hartl, Vice President of Learning. “We start everyone at higher than minimum wage, as do most businesses in our market, and even with our full-serves we never took advantage of the tip credit, but the bigger issue we have is with wage compression.”

When your entry-level staff is making close to your supervisors, that’s a problem, he said. “Labor is our number one controllable expense,” said Hartl. “We have tried to combat that with each new build being an express-exterior model, thus fewer employees.”

Building only express-exterior sites that feature auto tellers and adding automation resulting in a prep-less tunnel helps, but it’s not the only answer, said Hartl. “We look really hard at every controllable expense from garbage pickup fees to the paper we buy, to the cost of water, electric and sewer. You have to really be diligent. We are continuously scouring our controllable expenses,” he said.

But, as Hartl noted, there is a point where the cost of a

Continued ...

The Impact of the Ever-Increasing Minimum Wage ... continued

carwash could become too high. “We just took a dollar increase in our top wash. It will make a little dent over the next two-three years, putting us at \$39.99 for that wash.

“But if you cross over the \$40 mark, you’ll see people leave. You don’t want to get to the point where you price yourself out of the market. Luckily, the consumer is seeing the value in memberships.”

There are two minimum wages in New York State. New York City, Long Island and Westchester County are now at \$16/hour, while the rest of the state is at \$15/hour. Governor Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, and the State Legislature have agreed to increase the state’s minimum wage through 2026 with indexing to inflation starting in 2027 to keep pace with inflation.

Hartl is a proponent of a two-tiered minimum wage. “I understand why the increases are so important. I’m not opposed to it, but we employ a lot of young people with their first job. We are providing life skills and they no doubt will learn a lot working at the carwash. If we can’t afford to pay them, though, we are reducing the experience for these people if we are bringing in fewer of them. I’d love to have a two-tiered minimum wage.”

A two-tiered minimum wage would put workers into two categories: current employees keep their existing wages and benefits, while new employees get lower pay and fewer benefits. “I really think there needs to be an entry-level wage,” said Hartl. “A 16-year-old doesn’t have the same expenses as the head of a household.”

NC

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



Magic Wash in Manahawkin, NJ, has three full and three part-time employees to help keep labor under control.



Premier Car Wash owner Dan Saidel said passing cost increases along to the customer is imperative.



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Sheetz has been participating in Grace for Vets since 2015 and has given away 200,000 free washes.



GFV Celebrates 20 Years of Giving Back

Twenty years ago carwash operator and Veteran, Mike Mountz of Cloister Car Wash in Ephrata, PA, founded Grace for Vets (GFV) to honor our Veterans and active service members. Since pouring his heart and soul into it, the effort is now overseen by the very capable hands of industry leader and expert cause marketer Mark Curtis of Splash Car Washes. The 2023, GFV effort gave away 325,507 free carwashes at 3,577 locations in four countries. “I’m excited for the great support carwashers across the country have shown for Grace for Vets 20 years after its founding by Mike Mountz. In spite of being challenged by hackers taking over the original website, which may have reduced our count, I believe the participation was as great as it’s ever been,” said Curtis. “Hopefully, through the course of this year, we’ll be able to direct more washes, both those who have historically participated and those who have never participated, to sign up and support this great effort.”

An example of dedication to the effort is noted in the participation of Sheetz, the c-store and gas station chain headquartered in Altoona, PA. Scott Soisson, who heads up the effort for the notable chain, gave away 39,000 free washes in 2023. “I have been with Sheetz for over 25 years, (I have been in carwash for 10) and they have always been dedicated to their employees who



The Hoffman Car Wash chain, based in upstate New York, was one of the first participants in the Grace for Vets event. In 2023 they gave away more than 5,500 free washes to Veterans and active service members.

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are Veterans and have been honoring our Veteran customers for as long as I can remember,” noted Soisson.

The company has a mixture of 181 soft touch and touch-free inbay automatics. They have been supporting GFV since 2015, and have given away 200,000 free washes in that timeframe. “Our washes are unattended, but our store staff interact with every Veteran who takes advantage of our free wash and/or free sandwich and drink offer on Veterans Day,” said Soisson. “It is an exciting day for store personnel.” **NC**

**To learn more and to sign up for the
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Bye, Bye Quarters, Bye, Bye

By Doug Rieck

I think we can all agree that quarters have been losing their value for many years. When was the last time you actually used a quarter? You get them as change, but when you go to a vending machine you use a dollar bill or a credit card. Most carwashes price in whole dollar amounts to avoid them. Their primary use at carwashes is as a base value for vac and bay timers with an example being 12 quarters to start with a value of 15 seconds per quarter which equals \$1 per minute. Or, at a conveyor, \$9 for a basic wash, for example. At my express wash, when I installed EMV chip equipment, I removed the coin acceptors.

When I opened my first self-service carwash in 1983, quarters were king. I think my startup price was 75 cents (3 quarters) for 5 minutes. Bill changers were God. Everyone had quarters in their pocket and their change cup, but you never had enough. In New Jersey, the primary North South road is the Garden State Parkway (GSP). The standard Parkway toll was a single quarter, which you threw into the basket as you went through the tollbooth. You could travel from Long Beach Island (LBI) to Atlantic City for a



quarter. Today, the Parkway is all E-ZPass and surprise, surprise; it is a tad bit more expensive. The same drive from LBI to Atlantic City today has a toll of \$1.50. I am not complaining about the price, in reality it is a bargain. I would much rather use an E-ZPass pass than stop and throw a quarter in the basket. The Highway Authority was very smart and disconnected their toll completely from the quarter. I believe in 2024 they have a 3 percent toll increase planned. Now, how many quarters is that? Does it matter? No.

I also own a Laundromat which while being a valued and complementary business has required me to work under a different mindset. The same location has self-service bays and vacuums which have bill acceptors and card readers, in addition to their relatively jamb-proof coin acceptors.

Then you walk inside the Laundromat. But while clean and modern boasting new equipment, the '60s have returned. Instead of the color flat screen television for customers, I should replace it with a 17-inch black and white unit. Why?? Quarters still rule.

All of my washers take quarters, lots of them. The coin



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acceptors are all mechanical, subject to jams. They are of a smaller size where I cannot install a SlugBuster into, even if I tried. My bill changer is a new 2 Hopper machine because I need the quarters. But it all works — sort of.

A good friend, Mike Conte, a carwasher extraordinaire who has owned Laundromats and carwashes, has been telling me for years to put in a laundry card system. I have always felt that I am too small and my business too seasonal. Besides, all of my competition within a 40-mile radius use quarters. Probably every shore-area Laundromat in South Jersey still uses quarters. The operating theory seems to be, why change? Yes, I'm finally taking Mike's advice.

In my Laundromat my smallest washer needs \$3.50 to start, the largest washer starts at \$7. That's a lot of effort on the part of customers to insert all those quarters for clean clothes. Then there's a lot of effort on my part collecting and handling those quarters. Don't forget, there's also an average of five-plus coin jams a week. Last summer, while helping a new summer customer putting \$5 to \$7 worth of quarters in each washer it was painful for me. Inserting money is not supposed to be take that much effort.

A single customer may spend \$30 to \$50 a visit, all in quarters. There has to be a better way! As a result, this fall I spent about a month doing random customer polling. So far, I have only found a single customer, an older man, who likes using quarters. Every other customer preferred a card system rather than using those *%*% quarters! Card systems are the standard in new Laundromats and the new washers do not even have coin drops. That is the look of 2023 in Laundromats.

So, how does this relate to carwashing? We need to break the tyranny of the quarter in our thinking. We are hurting ourselves by letting our customers continue to think of us as quarter washes. Why not just take cards and bills in the bays and vacs, or just stop dispensing quarters in changers? Shift to \$1. Tokens. At my carwashes all bays and vacuums take bills, credit cards plus coins and tokens. Two of my washes only dispense Tokens from the bill changers. The only reason I do not dispense tokens at the third carwash is that I have a Laundromat and need the quarters for that. I am not ready yet to remove coin drops from my bays, but likely you could run a carwash with only bills and credit cards. In building a new one, however, I'll probably just use cards and bills. And, banks are increasingly reluctant to take bulk quarters. In the past, three of my banks would take bulk quarters, now only one will.

What I have tried to do is show two completely different business models and how they have shifted from quarters. The first being the Garden State Parkway, the second being the Laundromat industry. Both have transitioned very successfully away from quarters completely to the benefit of their customers and themselves. Carwashes are not the quarters business of our parents, now is our time to start the transition.

Push to Credit Cards

I mentioned credit cards previously. The past year has seen a lot of change in the credit card industry, and actually check out the article on page 30 on credit cards by Merchant Advocate. 2024 is the cutoff year for many major card companies discontinuing using mag stripes on credit cards. As retail merchants there are

many good reasons for us to upgrade to EMV acceptance. The only reason not to do so is cost. I get the cost thing, but we as merchants must change which is kind of the theme of this article! I guess if your office computer is still a Windows XP you should be right at home with the old magnetic card stripe readers, or maybe a credit card imprinting machine with carbon copies.

In the past 12 months, I have upgraded all my Auto Sentries at the conveyor and the two inbays. Praise to ICS for having easy upgrade kits. Done, complete. I did the install conversion myself and it was easy, only taking a few hours and I even added barcode readers. Barcode readers are awesome and worth every penny. What you can do with them for promotions is amazing. The easy part of my conversion process is done.

The next part of the equation is the self-service bays. I have been dreading converting them in part because I upgraded two carwashes with a wonderful new credit card system, not just readers but they came with new coin boxes. They still look new. Unfortunately, my upgrade path is convoluted and expensive and obsoletes the existing. The coin boxes at one location are only two years old, the others are three years old. I still have payments on both systems. But the mag stripe readers need to go. I have some time and want to make the best decision before pulling the trigger.

Let's look at a few requirements:

- Putting in EMV readers may mean running a Cat 6 cable from each bay to a switch which then goes to your Internet router.
- Putting in an EMV Chip reader which has electrical contact points which are subject to corrosion/water spray and heat. In the past, mag card readers were sealed waterproof units, no contact required. The other difficulty is corrosion, water and putting an electrical contact reader in a bay (EMV chip reader).

The new chip card readers use contacts. The old familiar Mag stripe readers are sealed watertight units. Some card equipment suppliers are optimistic and claim that their units will survive in a wash bay. I know you are thinking gas pumps are outside, yes, but they have canopies and do not have 1000 PSI spray guns nearby.

What does work in our favor is Tap N Pay. No contact, very secure, simple and easy to use. At my Auto Sentries, I always encourage customers to use the Tap To Pay. This could be the answer — waterproof, secure.

I am going to give a quick overview of the vendors I'm looking at and their solutions to our problem of cards in the bays.

Please note that this is information I have gathered and not in any way promoted by the *Northeast Carwasher* and I am not endorsing any one of them.

My first criteria is looking at independent industry-wide suppliers. I do not own units from any of them, but did see WashCard, CryptoPay, Nayax and MONEXgroup on the Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC) show floor.

The first one is from WashCard. They have a reader that combines Mag Stripe, Chip and Tap. One of their strengths is their U WASH app which allows you to start the bay or vacuum

Continued ...

from your cell phone using an APP. Washcard has a long, strong carwash history and is used to dealing with the carwash environment. WashCard requires a wired Cat 6 connection from each unit to your router and switch.

The next up is Cryptopay. They have a new TAP reader that is small, beautiful and sealed. They use colors to indicate the transaction progress. There is no screen. This is a stand-alone unit designed to be used by itself without a mag swipe or chip. But Tap is all you really need. They have an older Tap unit that is used with their existing card swipe, if you want both. Sealed and obviously watertight many regard existing CryptoPay units as a standard in self serves. This unit uses the existing CryptoPay coordinator with its own WIFI to reach the Internet.

Another reader I'm looking at is the Nayax VPOS Touch. This unit was at the NRCC show as well. My 19-year-old son was walking the show floor with me and saw it before I did and fell in love. The reader is bright yellow with a color touch screen. It takes Tap, EMV Chip and Mag Stripe. Nayax is well known in the vending industry. They are rather different from what I have used in the past, but have potential. One of the features I like is that they can be set up as a standard count up with a stop button or set up with four price buttons each with a different price and time. An example being \$3. One box is 3 minutes, the \$6 box is 7 minutes and so forth. This is supposedly water resistant. The Nayax unit is

unique in having its own cell phone connection, complete with a SIM card. All it needs is 24 vac and a connection to your timer.

The last Chip reader I'm looking at is from the MONEXgroup. It reads magstripe, Chip plus Tap. This reader has a touch screen and it can be set up with preset prices or used as a count-up. It seems to be similar to the Nayax, but lacks the bold color being just Black plastic and a touch screen. This reader connects to the Internet with Wi-Fi going to MONEXgroup's own Wi-Fi.

The Nayax and MONEXgroup units are from very large financial and vending suppliers. That is in comparison to WashCard and Cryptopay who are long-time carwash industry suppliers.

I have given you a few thoughts. Which way am I going to go? I'm still not sure. I bought one reader which I am trying in a bay. By the time I hit The Car Wash Show® in May, I'll have a much better idea. The most important part is that the unit is a TAP reader. TAP is perfect for bays and vacs. No touch, no corrosion. In working with customers at my wash, not many customers understand TAP, but once shown how to use it, all love it. Tap is more secure than Chip.

If you have thoughts or experiences you'd like to share with me on these units, please don't hesitate to reach out! **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 dougriec@gmail.com



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What Every Operator Needs to Know About Credit Card Processing

By Eric Cohen

Credit card spending has more than tripled in the last decade. And when we look at modes of payment in the United States carwash industry, it comes as no surprise that cashless payments are leading the market with a projected growth rate of 8.6 percent by 2033 (fmi). For merchants accepting credit cards, that means billions of dollars in processing fees. While processing may be big money, very few people understand the ins and outs of this unregulated industry.

Carwash owners face even more issues than a typical business, including those related to monthly membership-based transactions, software integration challenges, and the potential for high chargeback volume. Let's dive into how to protect your business while increasing its value and reducing costs. We will also touch on two timely concerns for all merchants — data security and the rise in surcharging programs.

Monthly Membership Challenges

Do you know the percentage of your business that is recurring membership transactions? Carwash membership programs have become increasingly popular, up a staggering 43 percent between 2019 to 2022 alone (2022 ICA Study). While the steady revenue stream is beneficial, it can also lead to processing issues, including being penalized for card declines or not providing all required information at the time of the transaction.

If the decline is due to a card on file that will never be able to be successfully charged i.e.: the client cancelled it, issued a stop payment order, or the account was closed by the issuer, the charge will fail no matter how many times it is attempted — and you may be penalized for each attempt. That's why it is important that you or a third-party auditor reach out to your processor to better understand setup and any associated fees. Merchant Advocate has extensive experience in this area and can help ensure your account is optimized for reoccurring membership transactions.

Software Integration Issues

Many of our carwash clients use a point-of-sale solution with integrated software. Typically, these software companies work exclusively with one processor, which can make it challenging for a business to secure optimal rates on their own.

Another major issue can involve the software itself. If you aren't running the most recent upgrade (which may not be automatic and require an opt-in for install), all the information required by the processor at the time of the transaction may not be shared, resulting in additional charges that can really add



up. While we would recommend calling your provider to ensure you're running the most recent version, they aren't always aware if there's a problem or how to fix it.

Chargebacks

A chargeback happens when the credited amount from the initial charge to your business checking account is reversed. The issuing bank reverses all or a portion of the transaction amount to your acquirer/processor, citing a violation of Payment Card Networks rules or regulations as the reason for the chargeback. The most frequent reason in the carwash industry has to do with the monthly membership charges discussed previously. Others include suspected fraudulent activity with the card, non-receipt of the product or service, or cardholder disagreement regarding the quality/receipt of merchandise.

Managing chargebacks and engaging in representment can significantly reduce your expenses and improve your ratios, but these processes demand a considerable amount of time and resources. If you'd like to do so, check if your processor has a chargeback dispute manager tool. Merchant Advocate can also help set you up with a trustworthy chargeback company. No matter how you decide to handle it, it is incredibly important to respond in a timely fashion.

In the past, merchants could disregard a response request, essentially defaulting to accepting the chargeback. No longer! To expedite the process, Visa has introduced time constraints. Failure to respond promptly will result in fines.

Unclear Surcharge Guidelines

Some business owners have turned to cash discounts and surcharges to cover increases in processing costs, passing the cost onto their customers. The guidelines and laws surrounding these programs are unclear, ever-changing, and vary by state and area. Many states cap the percentage of a transaction

merchants can charge and the surcharge itself is often set up incorrectly, leading to math errors and overcharging. There are serious tax implications and the possibility of fines in these cases. Options include:

- Sign up for a registered surcharge program that only passes the fee on credit cards.
- Raise your prices, offer a cash discount yourself (no need to have the processor involved as they are just trying to make a commission), and keep the extra profit. You'll need to become more familiar with monthly statements — particularly potential hidden or junk fees — and use these data points to negotiate lower fees. You can do this through more vigilant auditing or working with an expert who can help decipher these confusing statements.

Protecting your data

Every merchant that stores, processes, or transmits cardholder data is responsible for its protection. The Payment Card Industry (PCI) Data Security Standard (DSS) was created to help protect consumer data. The good news is that it's easy to become compliant by using a PCI-compliant hosting provider. EMV chip cards are an additional way to protect card-present transactions.

To ensure PCI compliance, you must implement the proper security policies, procedures and staff training. You can start by auditing your merchant statements, which will show

noncompliance via a penalty fine. Other simple steps include changing your user account passwords on a regular basis, using a third party to monitor your network security, and reviewing your physical security measures such as employee training and IT infrastructure.

Protect your Interests & Customers

Third-party auditors are often the best resources for understanding the credit card processing ecosystem, as processors often hide fees and make calculation errors in needlessly confusing monthly statements. It's also normal for them to raise rates three to four times per year. Without due diligence and knowing how to read these statements, fees add up quickly.

The ever-evolving landscape of credit card security and compliance underscores the need for constant vigilance to safeguard your financial interests. Increasing awareness leads to savings and less stress down the line and empowers carwash owners to navigate the credit card payment ecosystem with greater confidence.

NC

A veteran of the finance industry, Eric Cohen founded Merchant Advocate in 2006 to act as a trusted advisor on behalf of all sizes and categories of businesses. He was determined to create a fair value proposition and transparency for merchants with their credit card processors. His vision has driven the development of an entirely new industry of advocacy in merchant services. For help with your carwash credit card processing review contact Mark Sage at msage@merchantadvocate.com or 917/887-8946.



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UNREASONABLE HOSPITALITY Author Will Guidara to Keynote 2024 NRCC



Will Guidara, author of “Unreasonable Hospitality” will Keynote the 2024 Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC), October 7-9, at the Atlantic City Convention Center. The entrepreneur and renowned restaurateur will share his insights on exceptional customer service. Guidara is the author of UNREASONABLE HOSPITALITY, which chronicles the lessons in service and leadership he has learned over the course of his career. “We are beyond excited about this year’s Keynote speaker,” said NRCC Host Association President Doug Rieck, with the Car Wash Operators of New Jersey (CWONJ). “Will is an extraordinary example of what hard work, dedication to his craft and a true understanding of the importance of exceptional customer service can do to propel you to the top, of any industry.”

Guidara, a native of Sleepy Hollow, NY, is a graduate of the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University. He began his dining room training at Spago Beverly Hills and attended culinary school in the north of Spain. He then went on to various roles throughout Union Square Hospitality Group, and from 2006-2012 acted as general manager of Eleven Madison Park (EMP) in New York City.

In 2011, he and renowned chef Daniel Humm purchased Eleven Madison Park and under their leadership the restaurant has received countless accolades including four stars from the *New York Times*, three Michelin stars and in 2017 was given the highest ranking on the list of the World’s 50 Best Restaurants. Eleven Madison Park has also received seven James Beard Foundation awards including Outstanding Service and Outstanding Restaurant in America.

Guidara does a lot of things really well in his industry, but what he can share with carwashers they can take home to make their washes better, without a doubt, said Walt Hartl, NRCC board member and 2025 NRCC Show Co-Chair. “Will had taken ordinary and translated it into extraordinary. He will speak on how he goes beyond the ordinary and that is what sets him apart,” said Hartl. “He makes his customers feel seen and special. We should all, on our own levels, be able to do that at our carwashes. I can’t wait for his Keynote!”

Guidara’s book, UNREASONABLE HOSPITALITY, came to life in S2E7 of @FXNetworks “The Bear.” NC

**The Keynote is slated for Tuesday, October 8,
at the Atlantic City Convention Center.
You can hear a clip from Guidara on
the NRCC homepage at nrcshow.com**



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A Renaissance Man with a Conveyor Legacy

By Fred Grauer

There are many remarkably interesting and talented individuals who have contributed their skills to the growth and success of the carwash industry. Bob Hodge is one of those individuals and in addition may be the carwash industry's only Renaissance man.

By definition "a renaissance man has to be well educated, charming, witty, able to dance, write poetry, sing, play music, and be able to fight as a swordsman." In today's world a few of the classic definitions may not apply but in Bob Hodge's case, as we discovered, many do!

Bob Graduated from Colby College in Waterville, ME, with a BS degree in Philosophy, applied to University of Wisconsin in Madison, WI, and was accepted into their Doctoral program where he received his Master's degree.

While at Colby he read an ad describing the exciting profit opportunities of carwashing. He and his roommate thought this would be a wonderful idea, but how to finance this and where should they operate a wash? As luck would have it, Bob took a summer job on Wall Street as an "office boy." His father had given him \$500. As Bob observed some

of the sales associates' making trades, he decided to follow their example, buy and sell when they did and he turned the \$500 into \$20,000. When summer ended Bob had the seed money to acquire his first carwash.

Bob bought a property in Waterville, ME, where he did his undergrad work, for \$10,000. He built his first carwash in 1964-65. Bob was born and raised in Mountain Lakes, NJ, a neighboring town to Morristown. To learn more about operating carwashes he worked and studied existing washes in Morristown and on a trip home from visiting Madison, WI, a carwash site in Pittsburg, PA, added to his education.

In 1965 Bob left for the University of Wisconsin in Madison, handed the operations of the Waterville wash to a competent manager, and for the next five years was committed to finishing his Doctorate in Philosophy.

To supplement his expenses while in Madison he began working for John Jurkens, the owner of Octopus carwashes. Jurkens, another industry innovator, grew the chain to be one of the most successful in the country before selling the last of its 30 washes to Mister Car Wash in 2017.



Bob Hodge was responsible for the design of the first log chain conveyor for above ground and over and under applications at the carwash.

Hodge is an avid outdoor enthusiast and can often be seen competitively waterskiing, in his early 80's, with the skill and agility of a 20-year-old.



At that time John was experimenting with “touch free” car-washing methods. Bob jumped right into the program and began building equipment for Octopus. He learned to weld, fabricate, and design for John. John moved to Albuquerque, NM, to continue building the Octopus chain. Bob continued to build equipment for Octopus and other operators and in the process acquired another full-service wash in Madison in 1968. The wash was brand new with all Sherman equipment but doing poorly financially under the original owner. Bob approached the owner who jumped at the opportunity to sell and he purchased the wash.

As Bob will share with you, he does not do anything “half ass.” He took that wash and turned it around to be a phenomenally successful facility. That success, according to Bob, was based on hard work, improving production capability, and delivering wash quality and perceived value to his customers.

In looking at what equipment was available on the market at that time, Bob felt strongly that there was a niche for wash equipment that could produce better results at higher conveyor speeds. So even though Bob was busy at school, and operating a new wash, he began producing and selling his own line of wash equipment.

The Hodge Conveyor

During a trip to a farm in Wisconsin Bob was introduced to log chain. He was unfamiliar with log chain but it looked like it could have a great application in the carwash. It appeared more durable, easier to repair and stronger than what was currently used in carwashes. Bob took that experience and went back to the drawing board to design what became the first log chain conveyor for above ground and over and under applications in the carwash.

Bob sold the design to Russ Haverberg who later sold the

design to Sherman for the manufacture and sale of an above ground on-demand surface conveyor.

After his time in Madison ended Bob moved to Colorado Springs, CO, and with a partner opened carwashes there as well as operations in Denver.

As time went on Bob sold his Colorado carwashes and relocated to Washington State opening new washes with industry icon Bill Martin. He continued in the design, and fabrication of big, heavy-duty carwash systems capable of washing well over 200 cars per hour.

To date, Bob has been a principal and partner in more than a dozen carwashes and is recognized, by knowledgeable carwash operators, as the Leonardo da Vinci of carwash equipment design. Bob’s current conveyor design, known as the Hodge conveyor, using log chain is called by many the heaviest duty bullet-proof conveyor in the industry.

In his early 80’s, Bob is keeping with the Renaissance mystique. He is a competitive water skier, a Karaoke performer, teacher philosopher, builder, designer and a dedicated member of the carwash community, unquestionably a true Renaissance man.

I asked Bob what advice he would give to new carwashers and he said, “Do your homework, make sure you have total family support, find the right location, understand your commitment, use your brain, be creative, and always be better tomorrow at what you do today.” **NC**



Fred Grauer is a 65-year industry veteran. He recently “retired” from a position with Vacutech, but is consulting and writing this column for the Northeast Carwasher. You can reach Fred at fredgrauer@comcast.net

Fred Grauer

Seller Carry Loans — Quick, Simple & Risky

By Michael Ford

Seller carry loans or land contracts are an alternative to commercial loans for buying a business or real estate. A Seller Carry is when the person who is selling the business finances the purchase. As a type of specialty financing, a Seller Carry is like a commercial mortgage or conventional business loan. However, rather than borrowing money from a lender or bank to buy a business or real estate, the buyer makes payments to the seller. The seller is now the lender.

This type of financing can be quick and simple, but can also be risky if the proper measures aren't taken in advance. In this article, we'll examine the pros and cons of using seller financing.

Advantages of Seller Carry Loans

With only two parties involved, seller-financed sales can be quicker than getting a conventional or Small Business Administration (SBA) backed loan. There is no waiting for a bank loan officer, underwriter or legal department. These transactions can be super fast. With no underwriting review, Seller Carry Loans can close in less than 30 days. The process can be as simple as drawing up a contract, paying a down payment, signing the contract and then taking over the business.

There is usually less financial disclosure required with a Seller Carry. Without having a bank or commercial lender involved, buyers will most likely not have to go through an extensive financial review process. This also means that closing costs are generally lower for a seller-financed sale, making the overall costs less expensive for the buyer. Without a bank or commercial lender participating, the transaction avoids having to pay lender points, guaranty fees and a host of other charges that lenders routinely get when funding a loan.

In addition, the terms of Seller Carry Loans can be favorable. Those terms can include lower down payments or extended repayment periods. Having a lower down payment can be beneficial for buyers who are tight on cash.

Sometimes the people or companies selling properties via land contract don't have the buyer's best interests in mind. There are many land contract horror stories. These stories usually begin with one common thread — the buyer failed to use professionals when executing the transaction.

Legal Issues

A common error made is when the buyer does not use a qualified business/real estate attorney. The results of saving a few dollars on attorney fees is that the buyer may enter into a contract that is not favorable. Things like rate and term are important, but the details of the buyers' rights are just as important. For example, what happens if a payment is late? Can the seller immediately foreclose?

Use a Title Company

Another mistake made is not using a title company to make sure the title is free and clear of liens and mortgages. In addition, the title company can assist with making sure the buyer is formally on the title of the property and that the contract is legally recorded.

Sellers have been known to offer land contracts even if they don't own the property free and clear and are still paying on a mortgage. While it may not be illegal, one potential problem is that the existing loan may not be assignable. The lender may have the right to demand the loan be paid off in full if they find out ownership has changed hands. Another problem is that the seller could stop paying the mortgage while continuing to collect the buyer's payments.

What happens if the underlying loan is called due or the seller stops making payments? Can the existing mortgage holder foreclose and the unknowing buyer lose everything? What happens if there are liens on the property?

In one case, we had a client who had been paying on a Seller Carry Loan for more than nine years. He did not use a real estate attorney and did not use a title company. While having a contract with the seller, the buyer was never formally on the title. When the client applied to us for a loan to pay off the remaining balance of the Seller Carry note and finance the conversion of the wash, we found that the previous owner had 26 State tax liens on the business. At that point, the buyer had to take legal action to get the seller to clear the tax liens. This is something that could have been avoided if the buyer would have used a title company up front when closing on the Seller Carry Loan.

“With only two parties involved, seller-financed sales can be quicker than getting a conventional or Small Business Administration (SBA) backed loan.”

Environmental Concerns

With the rush to close on Seller Carry Loans, a common mistake made is failing to have the proper environmental inspections completed. This can end up with a buyer purchasing property that is contaminated. The most common contamination is due to petroleum products or asbestos.

Buying contaminated property can be costly. The value of a contaminated property can drop by 50 percent or more depending on the extent of the contamination. Getting a Phase I environmental report completed by a qualified environmental firm can help mitigate the risk of buying a contaminated property.

A Phase I environmental report is a physical inspection of the property and a historical records review for both the subject site and surrounding properties. The report will tell the buyer if there are any recognized environmental conditions that need further investigation or remediation.

We had a client purchase land that was intended for the purpose of building an express-exterior carwash. Even though he was told to get a Phase I environmental report prior to closing on the land, he did not get the inspection. When it was time to close on the loan for the new construction, a Phase I environmental report was completed. The report came back with contamination from the nearby truck stop diesel tanks. Unfortunately, due to the extensive contamination, the loan never closed and the client never built the wash. This is something that could have been avoided if the buyer had used a qualified environmental firm to inspect the site prior to closing on the land.

Condition Matters

Not identifying the cost of deferred maintenance for a building or the replacement cost of equipment prior to closing can be a major mistake. In some cases, the price tag to upgrade equipment can be costly. It is important to have independent professionals inspect the building and equipment to ensure the assets being purchased are in safe and sound condition.

We recently had a client apply for financing for equipment for a wash he just purchased using a Seller Carry. To the client's dismay, the cost of the replacement equipment was more than the cost to purchase the wash. If he would have known the condition of the equipment, it may have changed his buying decision. In addition, he could have used a conventional loan or SBA loan to finance the acquisition along with the cost of the needed upgrades. This would have given him a longer-term loan with a lower rate. Having a carwash professional inspect the equipment prior to purchase would have allowed the buyer to know the true cost of

acquisition and given him the ability to seek out appropriate financing in advance of closing.

The Bottom Line

Before pulling the trigger on Seller Carry financing, be sure to use professionals to help protect your interests. Understanding other options like conventional or SBA financing can be beneficial. This is especially true if there are upgrades for the property or equipment needed to bring the facility up to date. While a Seller Carry Loan can be a fast and simple option, be forewarned, for those who don't take the appropriate precautions, Seller Carry Loans can be very risky.

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



Michael Ford

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Let's Have Some Marketing Fun!

By Jessica Price Easter

Several times I've been asked to write articles for the regional carwash magazines. Typically, they have a topic they would like me to discuss but this time, Suzanne said I could have free reign on what I wanted to talk about. Thinking about a subject matter that would be helpful for operators, I landed on more of a piggy bank of ideas for you to consider. Maybe something here will spark an idea for you to bring to your wash(es). I love carwashing and I love marketing and marrying the two together is almost as fun as a cocktail and laugh with carwashing friends. Enjoying what you do and having fun....that is always my goal.

Having fun with marketing can not only make the process enjoyable for you, but also engage your audience more effectively. Fun and entertaining content tends to capture attention more effectively than traditional or mundane marketing. When consumers associate your brand with enjoyment and positive experiences, it contributes to an overall positive brand perception. This positive perception can influence brand loyalty, customer advocacy, and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Here are some creative and lighthearted approaches to infuse fun into your marketing efforts.

- **Use Humor.** Incorporate humor into your content, whether it's social media posts, blogs, or even video content. Funny and relatable content tends to be more shareable and can leave a lasting impression on your audience. Who doesn't like a good pun?



- **Create Interactive Content.** Develop quizzes, polls or interactive games related to your brand or products. This not only entertains your audience but also encourages engagement and participation, fostering a sense of fun and interactivity.
- **Host Contests and Giveaways.** Organize contests or giveaways with interesting themes. Encourage user-generated content by asking participants to share photos, videos or creative responses related to your brand. The excitement of winning and the anticipation of results can add an element of fun.
- **Tell Stories.** Share behind-the-scenes stories about your brand or employees. Personal and relatable stories can humanize your brand and make it more enjoyable for your audience. This could include anecdotes, milestones or even amusing incidents.
- **Celebrate Unusual Holidays.** Take advantage of lesser-known holidays or create your own quirky celebrations. This gives you an opportunity to create themed content or promotions that stand out from the typical marketing calendar.
- **Use Memes and GIFs.** Memes and GIFs are popular on social media for a reason — they're fun and shareable. Create or share relevant memes and GIFs that align with your brand personality. This adds a touch of humor and relatability to your content.
- **Create Playful Visuals.** Experiment with visually appealing and playful graphics. Whether it's colorful and whimsical designs or engaging animations, visuals can convey a sense of fun and catch the eye of your audience.
- **Collaborate with Influencers or Mascots.** Partner with influencers or create brand mascots that embody the playful and fun aspects of your brand. This can bring a unique and entertaining dimension to your marketing efforts.
- **Share User-Generated Content.** Encourage your audience to create and share content related to your

Continued ...

Make your marketing fun by using eye-catching images like this one created by one of Qual Chem's customers in a customer newsletter.



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The Qual Chem team at the holidays dressed up in funny, matching t-shirts.

brand. Highlighting user-generated content not only builds community but it also showcases the enjoyment and satisfaction your customers derive from your products or services. Everyone loves seeing their post or story shared by a company!

- **Create Interactive Ads.** Develop ads that allow users to interact with the content. This could be in the form of interactive videos, clickable elements or immersive experiences. Interactive ads not only engage but also entertain.
- **Try a Surprise and Delight Campaign.** Implement surprise and delight campaigns where you randomly reward your customers with exclusive offers, personalized messages or unexpected gifts. This creates a positive association with your brand and adds an element of excitement.

Having fun with marketing adds a dynamic and engaging dimension to your branding and promotional efforts. Fun content is inherently more shareable. When people find something enjoyable or amusing, they are more likely to share it with their friends and followers. This can lead to increased

organic reach and engagement, amplifying the impact of your marketing efforts.

Remember that the key to successful fun marketing is to align your approach with your brand identity and target audience. Consistency in tone and messaging ensures that your brand remains authentic while bringing an enjoyable and entertaining aspect to your marketing efforts.

Having fun with marketing is not just about entertainment; it's a strategic approach that can lead to increased visibility, engagement and positive brand associations. By creating enjoyable experiences for your audience, you can build a stronger connection with customers, stand out in a crowded market, and contribute to the overall success and growth of your brand.

NC



Jessica Price Easter

Jessica Price Easter is Director of Marketing at Qual Chem LLC, Akron, OH. You can reach her at 800/616-CHEM or jprice@qualchem.biz



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Dear Venus and Mars,

What is your biggest frustration in running a small business and how are you tackling it?



Heather Ashley

Venus Says

Online drama.

If I am being honest, I have trouble processing what other people have to say when it's negative. That's probably true in many sectors of my life, but in terms of business specifically when they put it out there for other people to see, it's hard. Instead of seeing it as an opportunity, some of us take it harder than we should.

This article is dedicated to all my business friends out there who suffer along with me. There's various angles you can take to try to mitigate the fallout, but man it stinks.

Early in my business life, I learned that you quickly have to separate business from personal. The advice to me was to not take what you do in the business world personally so that you can still be friends after the fact. In this case, I'm not so certain that applies to online reviews because I don't want to be your friend if that's the way you get your point across.

A few years ago at the Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC), several of us took a turn and hosted some round table discussions about countering negative reviews. One of my brothers in the industry summed it up pretty well by saying, "You gotta eat crow!" Sometimes, it's not your fault but you still have to "eat crow" and make it look like you're eating crow. For those who do not understand, it means you ask for forgiveness and say you are so sorry. That response is all well and good for things that are in writing and words that are put in a platform where there are actually paragraphs and maybe a few sentences. But what do you do on social media? In particular, on Facebook? There seems to be random hate that escalates.

Just a few weeks ago we went through this. In a community forum on Facebook such as What's Happening Connecticut (replace Connecticut with a small town name) a thread was started about local businesses. The post started with, "Why can't we get any good businesses here?" To give you some history we have

Continued ...

Mars Says

This is a very broad question as there can be so many frustrations in running a small business it is hard to pinpoint just one. Running a small business, especially in the highly competitive and weather-dependent carwash industry, comes with its own set of challenges. Two significant hurdles that can leave us feeling like we're caught in a endless storm are the ever-increasing costs and the unpredictable nature of weather conditions.

One of the biggest frustrations for me in the carwash industry is the relentless rise in operational costs. From water and electricity bills to maintenance expenses and the cost of cleaning supplies, the financial burden can become overwhelming. In an industry heavily dependent on manual labor the cost of hiring and retaining good employees adds to the financial strain. Keeping wages competitive while managing other benefits and incentives poses a continuous challenge.

Additionally, staying competitive in the carwash business often requires upgrading equipment and incorporating technology for better efficiency. However, the initial investment and maintenance costs can be daunting for small business owners.

The carwash business specifically, is heavily influenced by weather conditions which can wreak havoc on operations. It not only reduces customer traffic but also affects the quality of the wash. Many customers are reluctant to pay for a service when bad weather is forecast. The emergence of club memberships has reduced this burden somewhat. However, we often see long stretches of rain or snow which causes a certain percentage to cancel and prohibits us from signing up new members to make up for the cancellations.

We do many different things to tackle these challenges. As for cost management we regularly review and optimize operational processes to identify cost saving opportunities. We have explored and implemented some energy efficient technologies to reduce utility costs. We try to negotiate with suppliers for bulk purchase discounts. If you have multiple locations this should be



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.

**If you have a question for Venus & Mars please send it to: Media Solutions,
2214 Budd Terrace, Niskayuna, NY 12309 • Suzanne.Stansbury@icloud.com**

Venus ... continued

just a couple gas stations, a Food Lion shopping center, a Sheetz, a Burger King, a propane and oil company, then our three businesses. We own the local Mexican restaurant, the Laundromat and the carwash.

Things heated up when businesses were being named, “Hey what’s going on down the Family Dollar?” A few negative comments started and other businesses were soon named in the post, one at a time. You can see where this is heading because you have perspective. You are reading this right now and not making a carwash repair or doing a bank deposit.

Hours later, it would come up in our personal Facebook posts and a long conversation had formed that brought in both the carwash and the Laundromat. It was amazing to me that all of these folks had a bad experience and never called as our cell number is posted above each change machine. What was sadder is that no one came to our defense or offered a good experience to counter the negative. The conversation kept going and we decided to wait it out. It may not have been the best approach but one we were willing to try. It would take several days before the conversation died out. A few folks messaged us screenshots trying to provoke a reaction and at least one friend messaged, “Have you seen this post?” but said friend never helped by posting a nice comment.

We learned a few things from this recent experience. During this, our businesses were never “tagged” as we have our social media set to not allow our businesses or ourselves to be tagged in posts. Putting your family name on the carwash was not our best choice and because it is also on our Laundromats, what happens at one brings down all of them. We are currently rebranding as we just had a remodel of one wash.

I also learned that people watch us more than I thought. I mean actually watch with their eyes — where you go to dinner, when you are at your businesses and when you go home. They shared that information online and I briefly felt a security threat (but then remembered I am covered ;-). I almost reacted to that post because the safety of our kids is foremost in our minds. As business owners, we need to be aware that many feel we have more, have access to more, and others want it. They see us when we are just going about our day.

There was a time when owning a business was the ultimate dream but now with the advent of social media anything that’s slightly bad or even untrue is magnified 500 times.

Take heart friends, this next generation hates Facebook. There is a whole movement to stop using Facebook because of addictiveness, information overload, procrastination and privacy concerns. Younger folks are headed to Tik Tok (I have privacy concerns there as well). What’s App, Messenger, Telegram and basically all that will be left on Facebook are a certain demographic of old people checking out what other old people are doing. If you want to find me, head over to What’s App, Messenger or Telegram, it is where all of the youthful folks go! **NC**

Mars ... continued

easy to do. Lastly, we invest in employee training to improve efficiency and reduce turnover.

As for the weather, well that is a battle we cannot win as some things are just out of our control. We can, however, minimize the negative effects of the weather on our business. Offering other services in addition to just an express wash such as interior cleaning or detail services during inclement weather keeps your staff working and supplements some of the lost wash income.

We also try to implement a flexible scheduling system to manage staff levels based on anticipated weather conditions. Although this isn’t always successful as the weather can sometimes be unpredictable and employees aren’t always able to alter their regular schedules. Finally, we have developed marketing strategies that emphasize the benefits of carwashing regardless of weather conditions.

Running a carwash business is full of challenges but understanding and proactively addressing the frustrations of rising costs and unpredictable weather can pave the way for long-term success. By implementing cost management practices and developing weather-resistant business strategies, small business owners can navigate the stormy seas of the carwash industry and emerge stronger and more resilient. **NC**

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If You're Not Romancing Your Customers – Who Is?

By JoAnna Brandi

Did you ever stop to think that wooing customers is a lot like romance? I'm going to show you that building and sustaining customer relationships – probably the most important part of your business – is actually a lot like romance.

I look at the sales and marketing process and it very much resembles the "courtship" we see in our early romantic endeavors. We put our best foot forward, wear our finest clothing, listen attentively, and talk endlessly about the "benefits" of entering the relationship. We wine and dine and woo.

Then, somebody says, "Yes, we can work together." We say thank you, perhaps send a card, and then what happens? Well, if our goal was to "close" the sale, probably not much else. But if our goal was to open the door to the relationship, the romance will continue.

Both in business and in life, romance is a process, not an event. In our acquisition-oriented society we rarely think beyond what will happen after we get the sale (or the mate, for that matter.) I often look at the magazines, some two inches thick, that

focus on having the "perfect wedding," but wonder where people get their information on crafting a lifelong marriage. We seem to focus on the "getting" so much more than the keeping.

I am astounded when I speak to companies that invest heavily in sales and marketing to get new customers, but seem to miss the point about investing in the "maintenance" and "nurturing" activities that help them keep the customers once they have acquired them.

If they ran the numbers, they would probably discover that they might just double their bottom line profitability if they could keep only 5 percent more of the customers they lose. Acquiring customers in the carwash business is estimated to be 25 percent more expensive than retaining them.

Sadly, most don't look at the numbers that way and keep spending money on the "getting" rather than the "keeping." I wonder how many companies really keep track of how much money they spend on getting new customers. My experience tells me that it costs anywhere from six to 30 times more to get

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That it's ...

A process not a place

A skill that can be learned and practiced

A "Work ethic" for some

A choice that changes your brain for the good

A muscle you exercise

Doesn't just feel good, it's good for you

An investment in your resilience

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a new customer than it does to keep the ones you already have (and keep them happy.) Do you know what it costs you?

Here's what you need to consider: How much does it cost to get a new customer in the first place? (Sales and marketing costs and any other acquisition activities.) How long does it take you (in profit) to break even on the cost of getting that customer? This is an important calculation.

If you're "average" it could take many months before you create enough profit from the account to come out even. Depending on what you are spending, if you lose the customer before the first or second year there's a good chance you've lost money on the proposition.

So, what can you do? For one thing you could start doing the math and understand what customers are costing you to get and maintain. For another you could take a look at your existing "Romance" process. Don't have one? Create one.

Do you have regular methods in place for gathering customer feedback (yes, even complaints?) Do you have a means for regular communication with your customers to let them know what's new with you and to find out what's new with them? Do you have a loyalty or subscription program that keeps them coming back?

Do you have a systematic way of saying "thank you" and letting customers know you really appreciate their business? Do

Continued ...

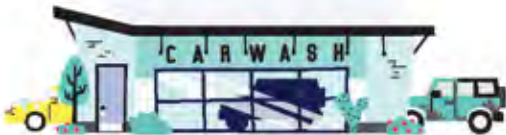


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JoAnna's Gems ... continued

you regularly refresh the "soft skills" that your staff needs to have to demonstrate customer caring? Do you have a dedicated retention budget and process?

If you don't, perhaps you should. Romance is a process, not an event. Think of romance as the "cultivation" of the relationship. Think of it as a synchronized, value-based customer contact process focused on building and sustaining the relationship over time. And, ask yourself this question frequently, "If you're not romancing your customers, who is?"

Want more customer and employee insight? Join me at www.JoAnnaBrandi.TV **NC**

JoAnna Brandi is Certified Chief Happiness Officer and Certified Chief Wellness Officer. She's spent 34 years helping her customers keep more of their customers. She helps leaders sharpen their competitive edge with employee and customer retention, productivity, creativity and increased profitability. She is the author of three books, including "54 Ways to Stay Positive in a Changing, Challenging and Sometimes Negative World." Her online positive leadership course is at positiveenergizer.com and check out her website and blog at www.ReturnOnHappiness.com

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Standing Still Is Not an Option

By Doug Rieck

The past years since COVID-19 have seen many changes in our society and our little world of carwashing. Some good, some not, but many involve rapidly-rising costs from our suppliers and the labor market. I have been part of the carwash industry for more than 30 years. During that period, I cannot remember my overall costs having risen so much in such a brief period of time.

Let's quickly look at a common carwash issue — minimum wage. In July 2019 in New Jersey we were paying \$10/hour. As of January 1, 2024, it is now \$15.13/hour. I have minimized staffing, changed procedures and am at the lowest cost point per car than ever before. But, it costs more now with fewer people. That wage increase of \$5 an hour hurts.

Our suppliers have their own cost issues and I do not begrudge them trying to stay even and recover their own rising costs. However, their rising prices affect my costs. Once again in a different area there are limits on savings. An example being

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During the past four years I have tried to be “fair” to the customers and in the process was not fair to myself or my business.

”

that if the chemical dilution on a soap Hydrominder calls for a Purple tip, shifting to Pink will affect quality and be hurtful to the carwash, so there are no savings or at best false ones.

The point I am trying to make is that many carwashes, myself included, need to bring in more money. Washing more cars can help, but that solely is not solving the real problem. Revenue per car versus fixed and variable cost.

I confess I have been part of the problem. I dislike and avoid raising prices. My last self-service price increase or vacuum increase was around 2019. At my conveyor I did a major signage and facelift in 2022, but the prices I put up were really 2020 prices. During the past four years I have tried to be “fair” to the customers and in the process was not fair to myself or my business. Market conditions have changed rapidly in the past few years, and we need to change and keep up with them.

Look at your expenses, every month, and chart your course. I think that in New Jersey, at least, many of us need to price more aggressively than we are doing now. New Jersey is a very expensive state and I live in fear of impending utility price increases, among other increases.

Most of our customers will understand and likely have been reducing their wash frequency to save their own wallet. Understood. I think frequent, small increases might work better, but you have to start somewhere. My plan in 2024 is to address this issue and be more aggressive.

NC



Doug Rieck

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 dougriek@gmail.com

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Two Decades Worth of Great Advice

By Valerie Sweeney

For 20+ years, I have been writing articles about towels for the Northeast Carwasher magazine, so I thought it might be fun to look at the first article (or at least the first one I wrote using Word instead of WordPerfect) dated November 1998 (for inclusion in the winter 1999 issue). This was back when Microfiber wasn't even on our radar!

Towel Tip: Winter 1999

Controlling Lint

By Valerie Sweeney

It is the goal of every carwash owner and manager to find a body towel that is extremely absorbent, non-abrasive and most importantly, lint free. Unfortunately, no terry towel is lint free. Lint occurs at two stages of the towel's life cycle. The first is in the beginning, when the towel has not yet been broken in. Lint occurs as natural shedding, much like newly installed home carpet.

The other time a towel will lint is at its end, when the towel starts to deteriorate.

The following are several ways to reduce lint:

- 1) Avoid bleach. Bleach breaks down the cotton fiber, which begins the deterioration process. Note that some detergents have bleach additives.
- 2) Never wash old towels with new towels. The lint from older deteriorating towels will transfer on to the new towels. Some carwash managers buy a different color towel every time so they can keep track of the old towels from the new towels.
- 3) Soak in ammonia overnight. Fill the washer up and add a cup of ammonia. Leave the towels soaking overnight. The next day, wash the towels with a cup of detergent and a cup of distilled vinegar. This process will help break your towels in

quickly, and reduce the lint that is associated with new towels.

- 4) Fully dry the towels. It is advised to fully dry the towels after the first few washings. The loose lint will be caught in the lint trap. Be sure to clean the lint trap before and after each drying cycle.
- 5) Try using damp towels when wiping off cars. The dampness will keep the lint from coming off the towel.
- 6) Consider using surgical or huck towels for interior windows and dashboards. Be sure to wash these separately from your terry (exterior body) towels.
- 7) Consider a water softener if you are in an area where water is "hard" or use other water conditioning additives. High levels of acid and other minerals may contribute to the deterioration of towels.

The content of this column holds true today as it did 20 years ago. If you have a towel-related question, please reach out!

NC



Valerie Sweeney is a towel consultant with ERC wiping Products. You can reach her at 800/225-9473 or erc@ercwipe.com

Valerie Sweeney

Have a towel question for Val? Email her at erc@ercwipe.com

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A Strong Foundation Will Stand the Test of Time

By Gary Sokoloski

Foundations, no matter what shape they take, are one of the most important structures in our businesses. With spring having already sprung and the winter in our rear view, take some time to look at your carwash foundation. While many think of their buildings as static structures that just house their equipment, it is almost always on the move. Most of a building's movement comes in two forms, temperature and water. While in certain areas some soil shifting can be a contributing factor, this is rare and usually associated with poor site work when the building was constructed.

Temperature is the easiest way to identify if there is a problem with your foundation or building structure, and spring is the best time to look for it. As the frost leaves the ground the water that has been ice all winter thaws and expands. If you have a good seal between your floors and walls you wouldn't know it was even happening. The same is true for the exterior of the building. If your floor moves or if asphalt pops up in the spring it is usually the result of poor drainage or water getting under it from a building or joint. As we all know, there is nothing we can do about the temperature so all we can do is observe its effects and then try to correct any issues before the next season.

Looking at the leading cause of building or floor movement is the introduction of water along any foundation wall. This could be inside of a bay where the floor is not pitched properly and there is that puddle that is always there, or in the equipment room where the drain is at the highest part of the floor. It could also be on the exterior where roof drainage or poor landscaping traps the water against the foundation and does not let it dissipate into vegetated or drainage areas. No matter what the cause, keeping water away from your foundation is an important item to take note of, and correct, as soon as it is identified.

There are too many different scenarios to try and list each problem and solution in these pages, but let's look at a few that may be able to be done without the need of extensive construction or specialist trades.

An obvious gap between a concrete bay floor and the walls it abuts is an easy way for water to continually undermine your foundation. Depending on the size of the crack it may require some backing rod (material to fill large gaps) and can be filled with concrete caulking or epoxy. The biggest consideration on how to fix it is the size and depth of the crack. Once this is known the correct product can be used to fill and seal it.

Incorrectly Set Drains

A drain that is too high can sometimes be cured by saw cutting the floor in the direction of the drain. While this may sound

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Temperature is the easiest way to identify if there is a problem with your foundation or building structure, and spring is the best time to look for it.

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like an insurmountable task, a standard skill saw with a concrete blade can quickly and easily cut a groove in the floor and lead the water into the drain. In extreme cases, two cuts might be needed before using a spade bit on a hammer drill to remove the material in between the cuts to make a surface drain. Before doing mechanical work on your floor, however, be sure to know what utilities, especially floor heat tubing and its depth, exist before beginning any work.

When inspecting for exterior foundation drainage issues look at two important areas. The first is where the roof drains and how that could impact water collecting around the building. The second is where your asphalt meets the building or any concrete slab. At the entrance of your bay, where the asphalt transitions to concrete, there is a foundation under it so if it is cracked and is letting water absorb into the ground it is washing away your foundation and possibly leading to heaving in the spring when thawing.

As the temperatures rise and the frost leaves the ground, remember to take note of that garage door that doesn't close all the way to the floor on one side, or that puddle in the corner that is only there "sometimes," and that loose piece of asphalt that magically hardens up as the ground dries out. Once things have dried out, investigate your options to repair, update and keep your foundation strong. **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

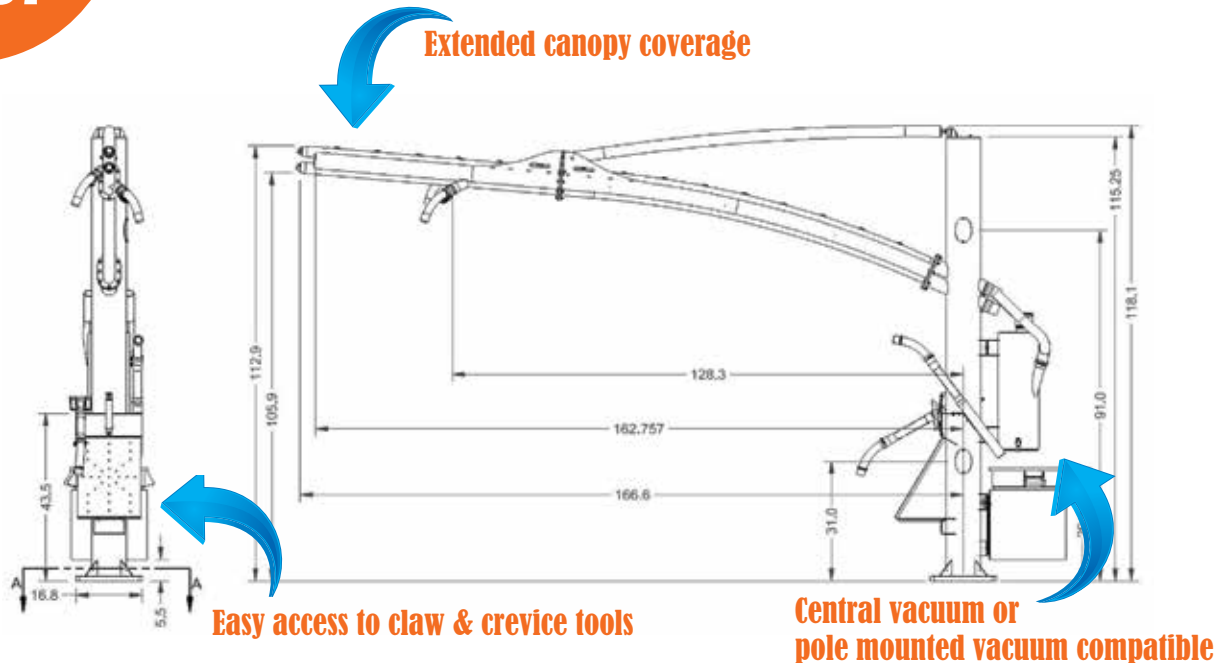


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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings Carwash Association of Pennsylvania (CAP) members, Pennsylvania operators and carwashers near and far. To effectively plan for 2024, we must first reflect on 2023. Pennsylvania carwashing was off to a strong start in 2023 with many operators reporting record numbers between March and June. Many new carwashes were added throughout the Commonwealth in 2023 with more planned for 2024, such as new sites from Clean Express, Riptide Car Wash and Cloud 10.

In 2023, CAP hosted three well-attended events including a Harrisburg Senators baseball game, our Annual Dinner and Tabletop at the Antique Auto Museum where we hosted Mark Curtis of Grace for Vets and Mark Ferraro, Executive Deputy Secretary for the Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, and presented our 2023 Carwasher of the Year Award to Scott Soisson of Sheetz, Inc. for his contribution to Grace for Vets, and enjoyed lively networking at the tabletop. The next day, the association hosted a friendly competition on the links and crowned Mike Burke, III, Tom Burke, II and Rick Bentley the 2023 champions of the annual golf outing.

Mark Your Calendars!

CAP is looking forward to again hosting a number of networking events this year, which should include the Annual Baseball Outing, Dinner and Tabletop, as well as a golf outing.

Please keep an eye on our communications and visit www.pacarwash.org, or email our Executive Director, Jennifer Soisson, at executivedirector@pacarwash.org, to receive updates. Please consider attending one or all of the 2024 events and as always, families and spouses are welcome!

Renew Your Membership Today!

If you are not a current CAP member, we invite you to join our growing network of operators and vendors from across the Commonwealth. Please visit us today at www.pacarwash.org to learn more, get involved and JOIN if you have not already done so. And, the association is always looking to add new board members. Please reach out if you have interest! It's a great way to learn, grow and make lifelong friendships!

Thank you all for serving our industry well and being a part of this very special community.



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

We've had a great run of washing as I write this column in early February. Although that is not always the case in Connecticut, one thing you can do to ensure that your customers keep coming back is to make sure you train, and continue to train, your staff.

You see the results of great training in the big companies like Chick-fil-A and The Home Depot®, and you see it more and more throughout our industry. Continuous training is very important and should never stop. It cannot stop. You have to continuously train your staff from your manager to your line workers and don't forget yourself as the owner.

Today's customer expects it. They want to feel like the person who is selling them a wash or detail is proficient in what he or she is doing, and knowledgeable in the services they offer. And, on top of that, your employees need to go that extra step and make sure that a customer's questions are all answered and that they drive away feeling confident in the product and service they just purchased. Their experience at your carwash needs to be pleasant and positive. Do you encourage your staff to ask, "Is there anything I can answer for you?" or "Can I explain the benefits of a ceramic sealant?"

You don't have to spend a ton of money on the process, but you do need to spend some and put time into it. There are a number of great trainers versed in carwashing out there, and your chemical and equipment suppliers can help you get in touch with them, or send me an email. I'm happy to steer you in the right direction. But, make the investment!

Take a Survey

Do you provide survey cards on site or send them out to survey your customer database? By asking your customers how their experience was, and what else they may be looking for you are showing them that you care and that you want to improve upon their wash experience. It's not hard to do and can have a huge impact on your volume.

Another great way to help educate your staff and yourself is to attend the 2024 Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC), October 7-9, at the Atlantic City Convention Center. One of the featured programs this year is on how to be a better manager. It will be full of a ton of



take-home examples and a program that will truly benefit your management. Visit nrccshow.com to learn more in the coming months.

Bob Rossini, CCA President

2024 NRCC!
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Splash's Philanthropy Abounds

Splash Car Wash and founders Mark Curtis and Chris Fisher began supporting the communities in which they serve with their first fundraising event in 1985 with the A.R.C. of Greenwich, CT. To date, they have raised more than \$3 million* for organizations, charities and associations throughout Connecticut, New York and Vermont. The company's first wash opened in 1981 in Greenwich.

Some of Splash's partners include AccessCNY, Adopt a Dog, Boys & Girls Club, Bridgeport Rescue Mission, Cheshire Interfaith Housing, CLASP, Crohn's & Colitis Foundation, Fighting Angels Association, Golisano Children's Hospital, Kennedy Center, Kids Helping Kids, Kids in Crisis, Make-A-Wish, Neighbor to Neighbor, Special Olympics, Spooner House, Westchester Medical Center, Veterans Outreach Center, Inc. and Whiskers Pet Rescue,

just to name a small number of the organizations the wash supports.

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60-Year-Old Site Celebrates Reinvention

CCA

By Suzanne L Stansbury

It's had a lot of names and owners over its 60 years as a carwash, but what is now a Russell Speeder's Car Wash in Torrington, CT, is a great example of reinvention, said Reed Taylor, Senior Vice President of Mergers & Acquisitions for Summit Wash Holdings. Summit is the parent company of Russell Speeder's and operates two brands, Russell Speeder's with washes in Connecticut, Nebraska, New York and Missouri, and Waters Car Wash with locations in Florida.

Russell Speeder's was founded by the Shullman family in 1963 in Norwalk, CT, and currently operates 34 locations. The wash chain partnered with Summit in 2022.

"One of the things we do that differentiates us is our ability to acquire older washes and renovate them. We can take sites with constrained layouts and envision how they can transform into a modern express wash," said Taylor. "We figure out how to do more with less, which has been a key part of how we've been able to grow in the Northeast, in particular."



Renzo Candiotti, President of Northeast Operations for Russell Speeder's and Jeff Lindquist, manager of the Russell Speeder's site in Torrington.



The renovated site on Main Street in Torrington opened in December 2023.



The 60-year-old wash is now an express with nine vacs.

Significant Renovation Investment

The wash, at 163 South Main St. in Torrington, was most recently a full serve and operated under the name of Olympic Car Wash. Russell Speeder's acquired the wash in 2023. It reopened in December of 2023 after extensive retrofitting and equipment replacement and it now operates as an express exterior with nine vacs.

Renovations at an older site, like the Torrington location, can understandably be pricey and extensive. "Renovations like Torrington can run between \$1.5 and \$2.5 million," said Taylor, "in addition to the purchase of the real estate and business that was there. The exact amount depends, of course, on the scope of the renovation."

Taylor said the team typically installs new equipment, guts the tunnel and back room before opening an existing site. "We want our washes to feel brand new for our operations team when they take over. This was on the higher end with a completely new grit separator, addition of express vacs, new pay stations and a facelift for the building. But we knew what we were signing up for. We really believed in this location," said Taylor.

Torrington's Hidden Asset

More than just the obvious metrics used to determine an "A" or "B" location go into determining if a wash will turn a profit and best meet the needs of the community, said Taylor. In addition to the area's population, demographics, car counts, nearby retail footprint, attractiveness to consumers and competition, for example, Taylor said there are other less obvious

tangibles he uses when selecting a site. "Torrington is a smaller town in Connecticut (population 35,000), but it draws from surrounding towns in the area," he said. "And in the Northeast, the town size itself can be a misleading indicator of the true market around you. But, looking beyond the obvious is also critical," said Taylor.

"We do all the typical things when selecting a retail site, but there's also the element of when renovating a carwash you need to look at the art of the possible," he said. "The ability to take a legacy site like Torrington and turn it into an express, the scope and length of that renovation is important. That, in addition to all the other criteria is how we determine site selection."

Training Never Ends

As Taylor noted, making sure the operation's team has a good comfort level at a new site and a clear vision for that wash's future is also key to a location's success. Also important is maintaining and perpetuating the wash's culture and that stems from extensive training and team longevity, according to Renzo Candiotti, President of Northeast Operations for Russell Speeder's. "I have been with Russell Speeder's for 22 years. I have only had two jobs in my life. I wanted to work for a family business and get the opportunity to develop myself and my skills in that environment."

Candiotti started at Russell Speeder's as a manager in training. After two years in that position, he began running other sites and says he "earned" the opportunity to be a regional manager. "Mike (Mike Shullman) taught me to be obsessed with what I do in every single aspect of the operation," said Candiotti. "This includes everything from customer service to production to the customer experience to the mechanical aspect of things, as well as teaching our associates to take care of the customer. He was a good mentor and that brought me up to where I am now."

As Candiotti notes, training is always at the core of a great wash experience. "I believe it never stops. We have an extensive in-house training program that covers all aspects of the business. As we grow, it can become challenging for us to carry on the culture that makes Russell Speeder's what it is, but our excellent training program makes it possible."

Staff longevity helps perpetuate a consistent level of exceptional customer service, added Candiotti. "Many of our associates have many years with us which allows us to bring more people into our business and 'Speederize' them and show them our culture," said Candiotti.

Taylor notes that capitalizing on the longevity of the Russell Speeder's team has also helped streamline new acquisitions. "One of the exciting things about the growth across the region is that it allows the great talent development that the team has built to be leveraged to support the growth of the new locations. We can take wonderful people who have learned the system and legacy and use that talent pool to support the new stores we are opening. I think that is a critical part of what's helped make our new washes in the network so successful and given us the ability to have that talent scale as we grow."

Continued ...

Attitude is Key

But not every manager at Russell Speeder's is grown from within. "What we like about Jeff (Jeff Lindquist, the Torrington manager) is that he came here as a very energetic and engaged individual," said Candiotti. "We have 60 years of carwash experience which has helped us pick the best candidate for every position in the carwash, including GMs."

Lindquist has a background in the c-store segment, as well as in business management. "He moved from Detroit to Connecticut and was craving an opportunity to work with a smaller company and develop himself and make it his own business, which is what we try to do," said Candiotti.



You can find this message on the Russell Speeder's website.

Torrington manager Lindquist is very familiar with culture change, he says. "I was attracted to the position at Russell Speeder's because of their culture and the growth of the company," said Lindquist. "The culture is one of fun, respect and cooperation."

His experience from past positions with developing a strong culture translated well to his new role at Russell Speeder's. To date, he has been involved in three wash openings with the company. "I took part in a massive culture change initiative with General Motors and those skills have really paid off here."

Future Expansion Anticipated

According to Taylor, the site in Torrington fits in very well with Summit's broader footprint and new Northeast acquisitions which included locations in Watertown, Naugatuck, Avon, Bristol and Southington. "What's great is that Russell Speeder's club members can wash across the region in which they work and live, which adds value to the membership," he said.

Summit's growth in the last year has been significant. "We went from the original 25 locations at the end of 2022 to owning and operating 54 today," recounted Taylor. "We have added over 25 washes in the last 18 months. We would love to be at 100 locations by the end of 2025. That is our goal."

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Taylor. "It takes a team to build something of this scale. Not to say it's been stress free, but we lean on each other as a team to get where we are now and to get to where we are going. It takes a village."

About Summit Wash Holdings

Summit Wash Holdings was established in 2022 and is headquartered in Norwalk, CT, and Palm Beach Gardens, FL. It was initially formed through a partnership with Russell Speeder's Car Wash, a family-owned carwash platform with then 21 locations in the Northeast, Nebraska, Missouri and Florida. Summit's CEO is former DRB CEO and President and former Senior Advisor with Amplify Car Wash Advisors, Dan Pittman.

Since its formation Summit Wash Holdings continues to grow its core Northeast footprint while also expanding its Florida presence through the acquisition of Waters Car Wash in 2022. The company currently has 54 locations and anticipates adding additional sites in 2024.

In 2023, New Mountain Capital, a New York-based investment firm, formed Summit Wash Holdings as a result of the firm's longstanding "deep dive" initiative in automotive after-market services. **NC**

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

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Now that spring is upon us, it's time for "spring cleaning" at your carwash. And I don't mean just cleaning, but really improving upon your wash's curb appeal. In the Northeast, our facilities really take a beating with the harsh winter weather they withstand. Take this opportunity to really take a microscopic look at your facility and be critical about every single detail. A clean facility will attract customers. After all, we are in the business of clean!

Maybe it's time to restripe your parking lot. And while you're at it, make sure all the curbs are clean and clear. Paint any trim on your building. Paint the bollards at the entrance to your bays. Plant flowers throughout the property and make sure to give them plenty of water and get them on your routine maintenance list so they stay alive. If you have signage that needs to be replaced; do it. You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Your wash should also reflect on the pride you take in operating your facility.

Replace weathered and faded banners and flags. Believe that every little bit helps once it's all put together. To the customer, when you care for your facility you care for their car. When your carwash is clean the cars come out "cleaner." After all, perception is everything in this business. So before you get overwhelmed with the pollen season, start making your to-do-list and get it done.



Dino Nicoletta, CWONJ President

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CWONJ Suspends Legislative Efforts To Deem Carwashes “Essential”

After a two-year effort to get legislation passed deeming carwashes in the state “essential” during any future states of emergency or public health emergencies, the Car Wash Operators of New Jersey (CWONJ), in agreement with its lobbying firm, Princeton Public Affairs Group, has suspended the effort to win passage of the bill, according to CWONJ President Dino Nicoletta. “We put everything we had into it and for a long time it appeared that we would be successful, but the climate has changed and COVID-related bills are no longer on the table,” he said. “Our board and lobbying firm worked very hard on our behalf, but it just wasn’t meant to be.”



According to PPAG Lobbyist Al Gaburo, “The longer we get away from the Pandemic, the less interested the legislature is in moving bills pertaining to it,” he said.

Nicoletta noted, however, that the association has been able to educate many legislators on the importance of the industry and its ability to operate in a contactless and essential manner.

The legislation was sponsored by Assemblywoman Aura Dunn and introduced as A 3703 in 2021. **NC**

The CWONJ will continue to follow any legislation that could impact your business. Check our website, cwonj.com, often for updates.

All Decked Out




Magic Wash in Manahawkin really got into the spirit this past holiday and lit up their lot and wash and no doubt entertained customers.

It’s not too early to be thinking about getting your festive decorations together for the next holiday leading up to December 2024! **NC**

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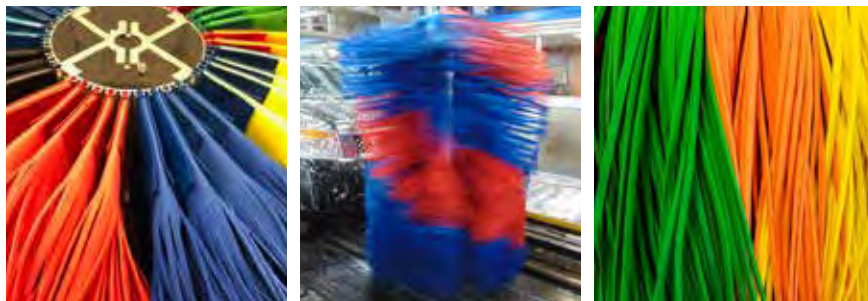
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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

I am delighted to welcome you as we reflect on the remarkable strides and positive developments that have defined the last couple of months in the carwash industry. The Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association (MCA) has been at the forefront of exciting ventures, and I am eager to share the uplifting highlights that showcase the resilience and success of our community. Over the past couple of weeks, our region faced the challenges posed by a couple of snowstorms (in February). While these storms brought about disruptions and changes in our day-to-day operations, they also presented us with a unique set of opportunities in the carwash industry. The aftermath of the snowstorms led to an exceptionally busy period for our carwash businesses.

I am excited to share some upcoming events. In April, we will be hosting a Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association meeting at a local brewery. There is more information on that event on page 72 and on our website, mcacarwash.org.

more specifics. This gathering presents a fantastic opportunity for us to come together, share insights and strengthen our connections. I extend a warm invitation to all members in the Mid-Atlantic region to join us for what promises to be an enjoyable and informative event.

Looking ahead, we are eagerly anticipating The Car Wash Show in Nashville, May 13-15. This event presents a prime opportunity for our association to have a strong presence, exchange ideas, and stay abreast of the latest industry trends. Your participation at this event is crucial in ensuring that the Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association continues to be at the forefront of industry advancements.

As we navigate through the changing seasons and industry dynamics, I want to express my gratitude for your unwavering commitment to the MCA. Your dedication is what propels our association forward, and I am confident that together we will continue to thrive in the evolving carwash landscape.

I look forward to seeing many of you at our upcoming events and at The Car Wash

Show in Nashville. Let's make the most of these opportunities to connect, learn, and strengthen our presence in the carwash industry.



Tom Morris, President, Mid-Atlantic Carwash Association

**Meet our new Executive Director,
Rahel Rosner, in the summer issue!**

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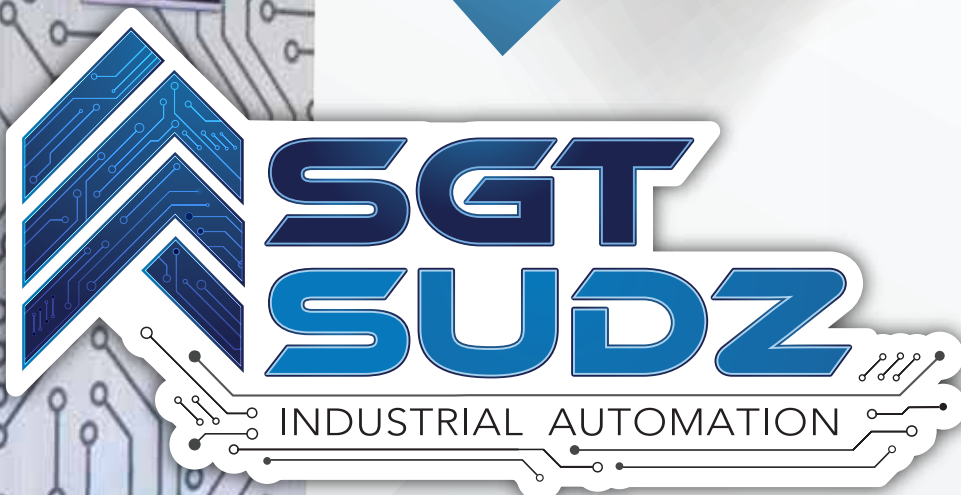
Cost: \$20/person (includes dinner and cash bar) if registering prior to April 2,
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NECA NEWS

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Hello fellow carwashers. I hope this message finds you well. This time of the year is perfect for fresh beginnings, working on your goals, and of course, spring cleaning. I stumbled upon an interesting article online from "Homes & Gardens" of all places, admittedly not a publication that I read very often. The article written by Jennifer Ebert is titled, "Does a clean house make you happier? Here's our definitive answer." It stood out to me as it regarded the psychology and science behind the importance of cleaning your space. My thoughts instantly turned to how much this relates to people, their vehicles, and the benefits of carwashing and detailing.

Like homes, cars can be very personal. Many people treat their vehicle as an extension of themselves or their personality. They can become more than just a literal vehicle to get from Point A to Point B.

People can express their care and devotion in a variety of ways. As we all know, some like to decorate their cars with antlers and wreaths around the holidays, some share pictures of their car online (notably usually just after a carwash), and others just enjoy the sense of pride brought from routinely maintaining their assets.

The main points of the article are that keeping a clean home does in fact increase happiness and induce other positive feelings such as accomplishment and calmness. A messy or dirty house could trigger feelings of anxiety, low mood or agitation. A study mentioned in the article states that people who would describe their home as 'cluttered' were more depressed, fatigued and stressed, versus others who would describe their homes as 'restful' and 'restorative.'

While much of this may be expected, a couple surprises to me were that a tidy home can make a person more likely to choose healthy food options vs unhealthy ones, and also more sociable due to the fact that they are more likely to invite someone over as a guest. While these studies were not concluded for cars, I think it is safe to assume that many of these feelings and benefits crossover.

A Clean Car = Higher Trade In

There are not just emotional benefits of keeping a clean car, but it can affect our customers' wallets, too. Autotrader.com's 2023 article, "Should I Clean My Car Before Trading or Selling It?" by Chris Hardesty states the obvious: that a vehicle's condition helps it sell faster and at a higher price. But what maybe you didn't know is that their study, based on the sale of a 2019 Subaru Outback, showed that washing the car increased the trade-in value and private party sale prices from 3 to 12 percent. If increasing happiness doesn't motivate a person to keep their car clean, maybe making an extra hunk of cash would. The article reports that giving the car a comprehensive detail before trading or selling could earn a 200 percent return on investment. It truly does pay off to keep a vehicle in good shape.

First Impressions Matter

A clean car is the epitome of making a good first impression. We wash our cars

before we visit family during the holidays and it is iconic for a high-schooler to take his or her car to the wash before a big date. There is a reason livery or ride-share drivers are some of our best customers. If you stepped into a filthy, messy vehicle, can you imagine giving it a good review? When working with our customers in this industry it is reassuring to know that we are in some way helping encourage good habits and can increase positivity in their lives. We are selling more than a just a service, more than just a clean car. We can aim to provide a sense of peace and a little sliver of calm throughout the day, helping our customers accomplish their goals and getting another shot of a fresh beginning.

We are also providing entertainment for their kids, with fun colors and lights and a five-minute ticket to happiness, or a detail that could put more money back in their pockets. Use the power of clean to your advantage. Of course, providing a clean, dry and shiny car is necessary, but what other features could be beneficial to help drive home that your customers are keeping

clean? Think about appearance, smells, and other signals that could reinforce we are a positive piece in our customers' lives.

Happy washing, and happy spring cleaning! I hope you all have a great pollen season ahead.

Thank you for reading.



Jeffrey Katseff

Jeffrey Katseff, NECA President

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January employee appreciation event a hit!

NECA Supercharges The Night

The NECA Employee Appreciation Night at Supercharged Entertainment in Wrentham, MA, brought 130 operators and suppliers from all over New England for a perfect night of eating, racing and camaraderie. A great time was had by all.

More than 100 of the attendees took to the race-track in five heats, battling for the fastest time in each to meet in the final heat to determine who was the best and a piece of the prize money. In the end, 1st Place was taken by Jake Arimento of Car Wash Pros (\$300), 2nd Place was taken by Oreo Jimenez of Triple Play Car Wash (\$200), and 3rd Place went to Noah Pasquel also of Triple Play Car Wash (\$100). The association also started a tradition last year to acknowledge the Last Place finisher which this year was taken by Bob Katseff of Turnpike Car Wash (\$50).

The association is very thankful for the generous sponsors: Sonny's Northeast, Car Wash Pros, Autowash Maintenance Corp. and Simoniz USA.

NC



Approximately 130 attended the Employee Appreciation Night at Supercharged Entertainment in Wrentham in January.

Craig Wheeler, Ron and Joe Campagna and John Calise catch up.



Bob Bibbo is tearing up the track!



First Place Winner Jake Arimento, Car Wash Pros (center), Second Place Winner Oreo Jimenez, Triple Play (left) and Third Place Winner Noah Pasquel, Triple Play (right).



Racing Musketeers Michael Duchane, Oscar Burks and John Shalbey, Jr.



The Team from ScrubADub was out in full force.



NECA President Jeff Katseff gives all the thumbs up!

Continued ...

NECA Supercharges The Night ... continued



Bob Bibbo, Ann Marie Previte of North Andover Car Wash and John, David and Gianni Calisi of Splash Car Wash.



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Barry Smith, Jose Guzman and Al West stop to pose for the camera.

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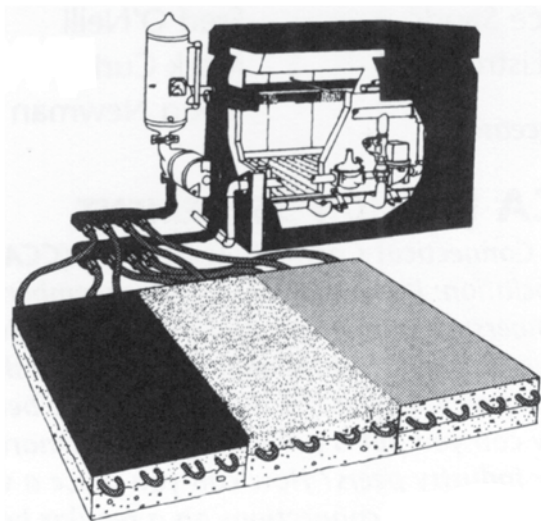
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A Deep Dive Into the Details

The New England Carwash Association's (NECA) Fall Meeting and Special Program started with a networking reception and dinner at Four Points by Sheraton in Norwood, sponsored by GreenEdge Technologies on November 28. Each attendee received a water test kit and test strips in a NECA swag bag for safe keeping (\$100 value sponsored by AutoWash Technologies). During the business portion of the evening, the association announced and approved its 2024 Board of Directors slate.

Additionally, the new NECA logo was rolled out. The graphic prominently highlights water, as well as being environmentally friendly, which worked in well with the theme of the evening.

Moderated by Brian Stanikmas of Simoniz USA, a distinguished panel then took those in attendance through a detailed review of how various water quality issues impact an operator's ability to produce a clean, shiny car. To start, Paul Kalscheur, President of Sonny's Water: Velocity Water Works, discussed water softeners as well as why proper water testing is critical to maintain a quality wash.

Next, Al West, Sales Manager with Simoniz USA provided a detailed explanation of water chemistry and why "This Thing

Called pH" is so important, and included a discussion of "The Challenge: Know Your Soils" that spoke to the benefits of having a solid understanding of the pH of the soil an operator is removing from their customer's vehicles.

Jay Dayak, Vice President Of Engineering at Sonny's Water: Velocity Water Works discussed the multiple ways to reclaim water, and included the important aspect of odor management.

Matt Unger, Account Manager

NECA President Jeff Katseff led the meeting by introducing a panel of industry experts.



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& Fluids Specialist at AutoWash Technologies followed with an expert review of reverse osmosis.

Finally, Anthony Ciampi, with Minit Car Wash, spoke about his own experience as an operator managing his wash's water issues.

Special thanks to Brian Stanikmas, Jeffrey Katseff, Chris Vercollone and Matt Unger for organizing this information-packed program. **NC**



The NECA's Fall Meeting and Special Program at the Four Points by Sheraton in Norwood took a "Deep Dive Into Water."



Event panelists (L to R): Paul Kaischeur, Sonny's Water: Velocity Water Works; Al West, Simoniz USA; Jay Dayak, Sonny's Water: Velocity Water Works; Matt Unger, AutoWash Technologies and Anthony Ciampi, Minit Car Wash educated the group and answered their questions on all aspects of water. The event was sponsored by GreenEdge Technologies and moderated by Brian Stanikmas of Simoniz USA.



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Briteway Car Wash Donates to Marshfield Boys & Girls Club



A generous donation was made to the Marshfield Boys & Girls club by Briteway Car Wash. Pictured are (L to R): Mark Free, Keagan Marcella, Colleen Benedict, Nick and Chris Vercollone, Boys & Girls Club CEO Jim Bunnell with DEZI, the new "Community Comfort Dog" of the Boys & Girls Club of Marshfield, Liz Bell and Michael Roosevelt.

Briteway Car Wash's Haunted Car Wash does more than scare and entertain its South Shore customers, the effort helps raise money for the Boys & Girls Club of Marshfield in support of their scholarship program which helps families in needs, according to a company press release. More than 420 cars enjoyed the Haunted Car Wash and helped to raise more than \$10,500. Briteway generously matched the amount and then some by donating \$21,668 to the Club.

Scholarships are granted for the Club's Before School and After School programs which offer homework help, mentoring, guidance, club activities, sports and recreational activities, breakfast and snacks, said the release. Transportation from Marshfield elementary schools to the Club is also included as part of the After School program. "Briteway and the Vercollone family have been tremendous long-time supporters of the Boys & Girls Club of Marshfield," said Jim Bunnell, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Marshfield. "We're incredibly grateful for their generous

donation which provides essential funding for scholarships for families in need."

The 2023 Haunted Car Wash theme was a haunted campground known as "Camp Scream" which had an elaborately decorated set based on old-fashioned horror films complete with ghouls and other costumed characters approaching the vehicles. The event was held October 27-28 and was sponsored by Tiny & Sons Glass.

Briteway Carwash has two state-of-the-art locations in Marshfield and Norwell. The wash offers express carwash tunnels and full-service detailing through Bottoms Up Detail at the Norwell location. The washes are owned by the Vercollone family with third-generation operators Nick and Chris Vercollone at the helm.

NC

To learn more visit britewaycarwash.com and bgcmarshfield.org

A Great Use of Street Signage

Brian Messina and his team at Royal T Car Wash in Derry, NH, use their street signage to make a statement, promote neighboring businesses and spread positivity, according to Messina, who has owned the wash since 2012. "We use both sides of the sign and on one side we encourage motorists to visit area businesses, but we also share statements I've come across, like this one. Our customers just love it."

The signage is changed out at least every other week, keeping the thoughts and messages fresh. Great job, Royal T!

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ScrubaDub Opens New Flagship in Worcester



ScrubaDub, a leading carwash chain since 1966, has opened its newest flagship site in Worcester, MA, on Park Avenue, according to a company press release. The site features an eco-friendly design with state-of-the-art robotics, fast pass technology and a belt conveyor for entry to the express tunnel. Each customer will continue to receive the company's signature perks of free pretzels, stickers for kids, dog treats and a Satisfaction Center with courtesy towels and window cleaner, said the release. The company's Unlimited customers receive complimentary access to self-service vacs, mat cleaning and unlimited washing at all locations.

To celebrate the site's grand opening, the company provided 15,000 complimentary Ultra Car Wash coupons which were mailed to Worcester neighbors.

The company is also partnering with the Boys & Girls Club of Worcester and asking customers to donate hygiene and baby products or \$5 in-store to receive a free UltraShine with any carwash purchase during the month of February. "We're thrilled to bring the Worcester community a new flagship ScrubaDub Car Wash," said Mathew Paisner, Director of Business Development. "As a third-generation family business, we look forward to growing our long-standing partnership with the City of Worcester." **NC**



ScrubaDub's new flagship location in Worcester on Park Avenue opened in February.



A third generation of Paisners is now involved in running the family chain that opened its first wash in 1966.



The Worcester site features a belt conveyor.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The New York State Car Wash Association (NYSCWA) has been busy keeping tabs on the events at the Capital. Governor Hochul recently held the State of the State Address as well as unveiled the 2024 NYS budget. Along with our lobbyist Bill Crowell, we are currently watching more than 30 bills in various stages in the legislative process. Some of these proposals are amended versions of proposed legislation from previous years, some have been sitting in committees for years and some are brand new. We watch the movement of these pieces of legislation very closely to ensure we keep the best interests of the NYSCWA members in mind.

Recently, we were contacted by the DEC looking for information on the use of PFOAs, commonly referred to as "forever chemicals" in the carwash industry. This is the first time in my memory that any NYS department has reached out to request information prior to implementing a regulation or a rule. With the help of some of our manufacturer and supplier members we responded to their request and offered space in this publication to help educate our membership as to the impact of PFOAs on the environment. We received notification of new regulations regarding the use of PFOAs and have shared that with our member manufacturers and suppliers. I am hopeful that this type of communication between state departments and agencies and the NYSCWA will become more commonplace.

An Eye on Predictive Scheduling

Other items we continue to watch are the predictive scheduling legislation proposals, which have been modified since members of the NYSCWA along with other weather-dependent businesses testified before the committee. These members educated lawmakers on the challenges of scheduling for a business that is so dependent on the weather. Ultimately, the measure was not adopted, due in great part to the testimony of carwash operators.

The Governor continues to press forward with a "green agenda" and we are monitoring the "All Electric Building Law" and the proposed regulations around the electrification of New York.

In other NYSCWA news, I'd like to congratulate NYSCWA board member Chris Kubarek from K & S Car Wash who has agreed to represent the NYSCWA and join the Northeast Regional Carwash Convention (NRCC) planning board and will be acting as co-treasurer for the 2024 show. We are hard at work planning the 2024 show, which is shaping up to be the best one yet (until 2025 when the NYS hosts the show!). We have added additional space on the show floor to accommodate our ever-growing vendor footprint of suppliers and manufacturers. We have secured world-class speakers and developed educational programs to help elevate your business regardless of if you have one location or 100. And, we have been working hard to enhance the overall experience for attendees and exhibitors alike.

This is an interesting time in our industry. I believe we are in a great position to leverage technological advancements while not losing the personal touch that keeps customers coming back. If you're reading this and you are not a member of our association, I would encourage you to join us and take advantage of the years of experience on our board and at

our events. We have limitless different perspectives and networking opportunities that can lead to lifelong friendships.

Hope to see you all soon at a NYSCWA event!



Walter Hartl, NYSCWA President

The Crucial Role of Incident Reporting At The Wash

By Meeghan Sheckler



While carwashes are generally safe environments, as any operator knows, accidents and incidents can occur. To ensure the safety of customers, employees, and the smooth operation of your carwash, incident reporting is of paramount importance. In this article, I will delve into the significance of incident reporting at carwashes and why it should be a top priority.

Ensuring Safety

Safety should be a top priority at any carwash, and incident reporting plays a crucial role in maintaining it. Carwashes can be hazardous environments due to the use of heavy machinery, chemicals and various moving parts. Accidents or malfunctions can lead to injuries or damage, making it essential to promptly report incidents for immediate resolution and prevention.

Preventing Recurrence

Incident reporting is not just about addressing the immediate issue; it is also about preventing similar incidents from happening in the future. By documenting and analyzing incidents, carwash owners and managers can identify root causes and implement necessary changes to prevent recurrence. This proactive approach helps in continuously improving safety measures.

Legal and Insurance Obligations

Carwash businesses have legal and insurance obligations to fulfill. Proper incident reporting helps in meeting these requirements. Failing to report incidents can lead to legal consequences, while accurate reporting can facilitate insurance claims, potentially reducing financial burdens for the business.

Employee Accountability

Incident reporting also holds employees accountable for their actions. When incidents occur, it is crucial to determine whether they resulted from employee negligence, equipment failure or other factors. Employees should be aware that incidents need to be reported, encouraging responsible behavior and adherence to safety protocols.

Customer Trust and Satisfaction

Customers choose carwashes that prioritize safety and professionalism. By reporting and resolving incidents promptly, carwash businesses can maintain the trust and satisfaction of their customers. Transparency in incident

reporting shows a commitment to safety and customer well being, which can lead to increased loyalty and repeat business.

Regulatory Compliance

Carwashes are subject to various regulatory requirements that ensure safety standards are met. Incident reporting is often a mandatory part of compliance. Failure to adhere to these regulations can result in fines and penalties. Keeping accurate incident records helps carwashes remain in compliance with the law.

Business Reputation

A good reputation is crucial for the success of any business. Incident reporting is closely tied to reputation management. Promptly addressing and resolving incidents demonstrates responsibility and a commitment to safety which can enhance the reputation of a carwash and attract more customers.

Incident reporting is an integral part of ensuring the safety and success of a carwash business. By promptly reporting and addressing incidents, carwash owners and managers can enhance safety, prevent future problems, meet legal and insurance obligations, and maintain the trust of their customers. In a competitive market, a strong reputation built on transparency and safety can make all the difference. Carwash owner/operators should prioritize incident reporting as a cornerstone of their operations.

NC

If you would like more information on incident reports, please reach out to me.

Meeghan Sheckler runs the Car Wash Solutions program based out of Wiczorek Insurance Agency. The program focuses on commercial insurance, safety planning and training, whether you have one site or multi sites. For more information, call 207/347-1903 or send an email to Meeghan at Meeghan@wizinsurance.com



Meeghan Sheckler

Curiosity, Writing & Becoming a Creative Genius

By Ray Justice

Writing becomes magical as you get into it. Start with anything you see, feel, touch, etc. It doesn't matter what you know. Anything to get your pen or keyboard moving finds you writing something wonderful you did not know you knew. Be patient with yourself as you begin; stay with it for a few minutes each day.

- There is often the beginning of magic when we Start to Wonder.
- We open up to our Intuition with writing instead of repetitive thinking.
- Intuition opens our door to Creativity.
- It all begins when our Curiosity awakens.

Change is a given and is a commonly known fact in today's world. It will be occurring in more areas and at a much faster rate than we have ever seen before. The universe functions through change, growth and creativity.

How can we be prepared for change and with speed that we have not experienced YET? Many unknowns will arise that we will need to adjust to. We should remember that in the past, change and creative thinking have also led to many new opportunities and possibilities.

A.I., Artificial Intelligence, is one of the factors leading to change and speed. We need to be ready with an adjusting awareness. We won't have many of the answers until the change is happening. Personal Preparation may not be known ahead of time, and we will need to get our bodies, our minds, our attitudes, and our intuitive, creative selves as prepared as we can and then some.

We will need to help each other in new areas, maybe without the tools or knowledge we will need.

Areas like the weather, or better said, our environment, are areas that are already on the move, rapidly.

Tapping into our available creativity may be the best tool we can find.

Here are some of my factually-unproven beliefs.

We should all be practicing awareness and connection to our Intuition.

Many people will say they are not intuitive, but I believe that we all are tuned in.

We are all born and built the same way; our intuition and our creativity are there but hidden behind the clouds of our repetitive thoughts, doubts and fears. Focusing on what we want versus what we do not want is an insight worth studying.

Creativity is naturally aroused when we start with our Curiosity by asking sincere, wondering questions. Adding a true feeling of Gratitude and Appreciation helps us set the stage and be more connected.

Curiosity leads to using our Imagination and Visualization, and that is where Creativity naturally opens and flows. Stop occasionally and ask yourself what you were just thinking and whether those thoughts were some of the same thoughts yesterday.

Another natural tool we are born with is our Intuition. It's always there, yet we are seldom aware of its constant communication with our inner self. Our minds are very busy with thoughts about what we don't like or want. Along with the constant distractions of today's world, for one, our mobile phones offer many distractions. This all becomes a habit, and we believe it is OK.

I am bringing this up because many do not believe in or understand our inner intuitive connection. That may just be that we are not listening or aware due to our own chattering mind.

The doubt and uncertainty we all have is not easy to deal with. Much of our thoughts are doubting and repeating. Our busy chatter becomes a distraction for practicing tuning into our intuition.

We need to turn down or turn off the noise of our mind through the practice of breathing awareness and meditation. This will create a habit of calm, and our mind and body will be more aware.

An example would be to turn off the television so you can hear the radio. Focus on how to practice tapping into your intuition. It is wonderful, but like many of our other habits, we have to want it but don't want to change. Always remember that Change guides toward Opportunity.

Intuition awareness starts showing up with daily writing. When we are busy with the pen or keyboard as a second choice, we start noticing we are writing about something we were not aware we knew.

Writing can change your life in ways that will amaze you. Take me, as an example. I am a terrible speller and not good with punctuation, but I have published a book that shows what I have written mostly with my intuition. If interested, it is on Amazon.com titled *Spiritual Arousal, a Journey into Connection*, by Ray Justice.

ChatGPT, artificial intelligence chatbot developed by OpenAI, used to produce this next section of the article, posts the following on every page used.

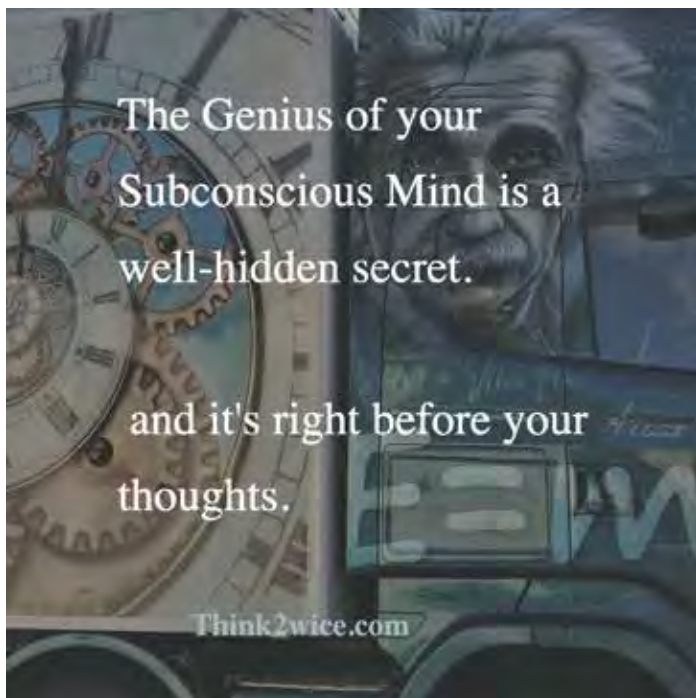
"ChatGPT can make mistakes. Consider checking important information."

I will tag onto that by saying the same thing; many of the comments I make in my articles and contributions to his magazine are not proven by other means; they are my experiences.

This was my request to ChatGPT:

Describe the personal usefulness of each of these three inner functions and how they link together, at 150 words or less for each. 1. Intuition. 2. Curiosity. 3. Imagination

1. Intuition: Intuition serves as a rapid decision-making tool,



drawing upon one's subconscious knowledge and experiences. It aids in quick assessments, often without explicit reasoning. Personally, intuition provides a valuable gut feeling that guides choices when faced with uncertainty, enabling swift and sometimes instinctive responses to complex situations.

II. Curiosity: Curiosity is the driving force behind learning and exploration. It fuels a desire to understand the world, asking questions and seeking new information. On a personal level, curiosity cultivates a continuous thirst for knowledge, driving intellectual growth and adaptability. It encourages the exploration of diverse ideas and perspectives, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of various subjects.

III. Imagination: Imagination is the creative engine that transforms concepts into innovative ideas. Personally, it allows for the visualization of possibilities, fostering problem-solving and innovation. Imagination connects intuition and curiosity by envisioning potential outcomes and stimulating further exploration. It turns curiosity-driven inquiries into tangible, imaginative solutions, enhancing adaptability and creative thinking. Together, these functions create a dynamic synergy, promoting holistic and insightful decision-making.

To review, Start with Curiosity, which leads to Intuition, Awareness, and Imagination. Practice Writing as a tool for your Depth and Creativity ideas.

Over time, you will amaze yourself, be patient and write. It is also good for meditative calming.

NC



Ray Justice

Ray Justice is an Entrepreneur, Poet & Creativity Explorer. He is a former carwash operator and past president of the NYSCWA. You can follow him on Instagram at RayJusticeQuotes for ideas to create your writing topics.

Refreshing, Effective Signage

Sometimes carwash signage is just too wordy.

Being succinct and stating only that which needs to be stated is the best and most effective form of signage. Take, for example, the “Thank You” signage on the first arch at upstate New York’s Spritz Car Wash. It showcases the company’s colorful logo and conveys a genuine customer appreciation, succinctly.



Their Unlimited program signage also uses the wash’s logo in a whimsical way, but most importantly, it states the benefits of being an Unlimited member in an easy-to-read, concise manner.



Great job, Spritz team!

NC

The Reinvention of a Wash And Its Owner

By Tiffany Kjos

John Olert spent 22 years with the prestigious Fitch Ratings (one of the big three credit ratings agencies) on Wall Street where he had great success. Three months into his retirement, however, he knew it was a really bad idea. “It’s hard to go from getting up at 5 in the morning and not getting home until 8 at night to just thinking you’re going to put your feet up,” he said.

Olert believed that he still had a lot to offer, and he wanted to figure out what that would look like. He began working with a franchise coach, which he enjoyed. “I was looking at some other franchises, so as an analyst I had the side-by-side comparisons. What are the return dynamics between one business versus the other? And I just liked what I saw in the carwash business better than the other franchises I was looking at. So, with much reservation, I pulled the trigger, and I certainly had buyer’s remorse after

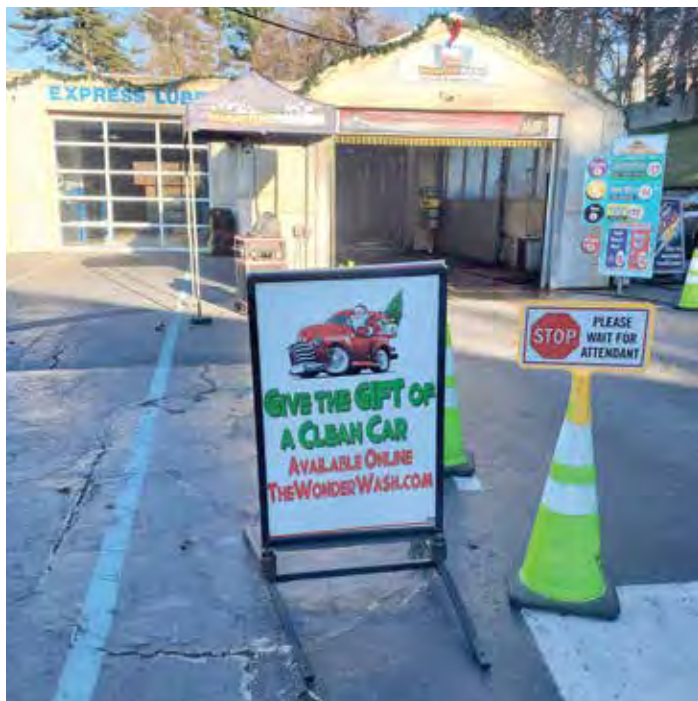
it was mine, but the fundamental premise was it was a really good market.”

The former analyst started working at age 12. “My first two jobs were a gas station and a restaurant, and I would say the restaurant was how I learned how to make money. His experience working with his hands, working with people,

WonderWash Manager Conor Heine and owner John Olert participated in the Yorktown Police Benevolent Association Golf Tournament.



The team at WonderWash proudly displays its “Best of Yorktown Auto Service Award.”



WonderWash in Yorktown Heights, NY, now under the ownership of John Olert, is a little wash that packs a big punch! Much of the wash's increase in volume can be attributed to a strong social media presence thanks to CBT Marketing.

and being an analyst all led him to buying WonderWash in Yorktown Heights, NY, with the blessing and support of his wife, Laura. "She was instrumental in the decision to actually move forward on it and close on it. The funny part about it is that she's a career coach. So as I'm sitting here interviewing for board jobs and other corporate jobs she was like, 'I just think this is a good fit for you. I think you should do it.'"

His tenure at Fitch Ratings made owning a carwash easier in some respects, but that doesn't mean Olert hasn't faced some hurdles since buying the flex-serve with an oil change three years ago.

Simply put, he said, things break down, and as a carwasher you have to be prepared to deal with that. You also need to stay up to date with customer and industry demands, such as starting an Unlimited Program. Basically, you need to be prepared for almost anything 24/7. "There's not a 24-hour electrician/HVAC (person) you can call when things go wrong. So you'd better have a friend or you'd better learn something very quickly or have friends that are tangentially involved," said Olert. "I had that at my disposal, and thank God, because there were times where we would have been out for days without those relationships."

Luckily for Olert the industry is welcoming and willing to share knowledge with new operators. "It's a very collegial industry," he said. "As long as you're not in somebody's backyard, people can be tremendously helpful. And there's so much nuanced knowledge, between equipment and systems and fittings and everything else, it's really helpful when you have people to turn to, and I would say the industry is great about that."

In addition to running the wash, Olert is a senior adviser for several companies and teaches Fordham University's Masters of Science in Real Estate program. He also serves on two not-for-profit boards.

Serendipitous Meeting

Olert found the perfect wash for him by accident. He had used a local carwash over the years whose employees impressed him. The property, though, needed some love. "I did think the staff was excellent. They were just very personable, friendly, but the place had been underinvested, so I reached out through a friend to the owner and I was really just interested in talking to him more about the business, thinking about building one." It turned out that the owners were thinking of selling, so it was a "right place at the right time" kind of moment, Olert said. "For somebody who likes to fix things, this was a perfect opportunity. It needed a lot of fixing. I got to learn a lot along the way, and I love learning. So, I guess my theme is when I touch stuff I want it to be better than when I started, and I think we're there."

He basically rebuilt the 105-foot tunnel in the first year and a half and made other significant improvements. It helped employees to see that he was putting in new equipment instead of "fixing things with Band-Aids," and also seeing the response from people who use the wash. "The feedback from the customers was just amazing, and we started to see it in volume very quickly," Olert said. "I knew many people who were around and used the place, and I thought with proper reinvestment, proper training of the staff, that it had real potential. And in reality, that's played out."

The small multi-profit center site in Westchester County is on an unobtrusive piece of land in an out-of-the-way part of town, population 1884. It's not exactly an "A" location, but its customers love it so much that they travel to care for their cars, said Olert. "We're a very different beast than the model of today. We're like a destination spot. We're on an isolated back road of a small town and we have people coming from 30 minutes away because of the quality of what we do."

Continued ...

The “Fix It” Guy

Olert started as an analyst at Fitch Ratings when it was under \$100 million and around 300 employees. “I thought I was going to be there for two years and then move on to something else, but we got into a mode of acquiring companies and growing, and that provided opportunities, Olert said. “I was the fix-it guy. So whenever there was a problem I typically had a new job and I got known for being able to figure things out and get them fixed. I am, yes, very analytical, but I’m also a very good people person. And I would say part of that is how I grew up.”

Challenges to Overcome

And, of course, there have been challenges to overcome at WonderWash. The month after he bought the site, a hydraulic motor broke after hours. “I was making phone calls, connected with a buddy who basically was the mechanic for my cars. He was like, ‘I have a great machinist.’ I took an hour ride at 6 o’clock in the morning because he was nice enough to pick up the phone at 7 the night before, and he said, ‘Yeah, I’ll give it a shot if you can get here early in the morning before I have to start working on my engines.’

“And I got up there and sure enough, he knew exactly what to do to free this fitting up and get me going,” recounted Olert.

“We had that thing installed by 9 am. That’s the type of commitment you need to be willing to make if you’re going to do well.”

And that’s even with fighting through the town installing a new water line on the street in front of the wash. “It was tough to get to the place, but you know what, people kept coming, and our numbers are still up year over year.”

One thing that has helped sales is Olert’s significant re-investment in the location’s equipment. “We have chosen to partner with American Car Wash Supply for our new conveyor and parts for other wash equipment. Early on we went with G & G Industrial Lighting for the tunnel (lighting). As we upgraded equipment we went with Hydra-Flex for chemical distribution, Washify for our POS, and Laguna for our new controller,” Olert shared. “We recently added Sonny’s Mammoth blowers. And for chemicals we use T & E and Simoniz.”

The wash manager, Conor Heine, summed it up, according to Olert, “We’re sitting there one day and now two people can do many more cars than four people used to do, and Conor looks at me and he’s like, ‘I can’t believe how barbaric we used to operate.’”

Going Unlimited

Another revenue driver is the wash’s new Unlimited Program, which WonderWash rolled out a year and a half ago.



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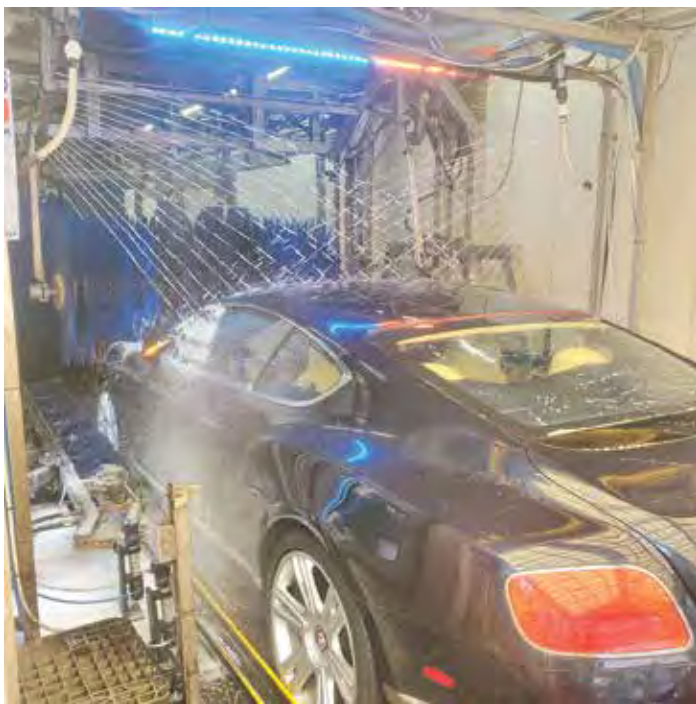


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The Flex Serve boasts a new rack of American Car Wash Supply equipment.

Olert hired Chris Brown of Myrrh Consulting to train the staff to promote the program. “Once we introduced the Unlimited Program that’s when things really started to grow,” recounts Olert. “So in three years we’re doing double the cars from when I bought it — I bought it the year of COVID — so it was down, but we’re up that much. The patterns have been great.”

The Unlimited sales approach at WonderWash is low key, but effective, according to Olert. “They’ve (our employees) aligned with our philosophy, where we don’t want to be sitting there hard-selling people into doing something they don’t want to do. We just let them know what the program’s about, and what the benefits are for them, and if they’re interested they sign up, and if they don’t that’s fine.”

WonderWash is already at about 70 percent of its goal for the number of subscriptions. “That makes me very happy. Having an outside consultant in actually solidified that our goal seemed appropriate, so that was helpful too, and now we’re just busy working toward it.”

One of the reasons he launched the program is that he knew plenty of people in the area and some were going to other washes because they liked their Unlimited Programs. “And they’re like, ‘We would love to come to you but we want you to offer that program,’ so once we started to offer it I would say the first 40 percent of our subscriptions were all word of mouth.”

WonderWash’s Unlimited starts at \$20.95. A Regular Wash is \$11 and the Super Wonder Car Wash, with interior cleaning, tops out at \$41. The wash employs eight, typically, with 14 on staff.

Great Employees Key

Getting good people is obviously one of the biggest challenges at a wash. “We’ve been really lucky,” said Olert. “Conor,

our manager, is a great story. He started there when he was about 16 years old, coming after practice from high school. He just turned 25. We’ve been together for three years and whenever we’re there together everybody’s asking me if he’s my son. So I just say, ‘I love him like one, but he’s not.’”

Heine’s brother, who is now going for his Master’s Degree and is a student teacher, still sometimes works at WonderWash. A father and son work there, too, and so have some employees who are cousins. “I learned that from another friend who is years ahead in the business but had also come from Wall Street. He talked about how he has a number of women who are sisters that work at his places and it just works out great because if there are family scheduling issues they cover for each other. We’ve been really lucky. We’ve kept our people, added a few.”

Olert is pleased with the wash’s progress on all fronts. “I think we do make a difference in the community, making people happy and seeing people with these nice, clean cars. It really is about pleasing people.”

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Tiffany Kjos

Tiffany Kjos is a freelance writer and editor based in Tucson, AZ.



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Several Bills Could Impact the Industry

By William Y. Crowell, III

The New York State Legislature began its annual session on January 3. With a June primary scheduled, the legislative calendar for 2024 contemplates a June 6 adjournment with 61 session days scheduled. The Governor has submitted her budget for 2024-25.

There are several bills pending this session that will impact the carwash industry that merit attention.

S.5459 sponsored by Senator Jackson would establish good cause termination for employers. This bill is referred to as the Safeguarding Employees and Accountability for Termination (SEAT) Act. The bill limits an employer's right to discharge an employee to specific good cause grounds such as failure to satisfactorily perform duties or the material and repeated violation of employer's written policy. This good cause termination is in stark contrast to the ability to terminate employees based on the "at will" relationship, which currently is the standard in New York.

The bill does allow for at will discharge of an employee during the probationary period which cannot exceed six months. The bill creates a private right of action for an employee to sue their employer for wrongful discharge. There is a six-year statute of limitations within which to bring an action after the wrongful discharge. A wrongful discharge after exhaustion of internal remedies may be punishable by lost wages and benefits not to exceed four years from the date of discharge. There is mitigation of this penalty based on benefits such as workers compensation related to the award of damages for wrongful discharge.

The sponsor's memorandum in support as a justification for good cause termination states in part, "Good cause

termination may be a tool to balance the power dynamic of private-sector labor. By requiring good cause to terminate employees, New York can prevent senseless job loss and provide workers with more secure employment."

Tracking Employee Proposals

The Governor's budget contains several proposals which are of note. In 2020 the COVID-19 Sick Leave Law was enacted, which required employers to pay sick leave benefits, paid family leave and benefits due to disability for employees subject to quarantine due to COVID-19. The Governor proposes sunsetting the COVID-19 sick leave provisions as of July 31, 2024. The COVID-19 emergency on the federal level ended on May 11, 2023. This change eliminates the questions surrounding the continued applicability of the sick leave benefits particularly as it relates to the quarantine requirements.

The budget also includes a proposed amendment to the General Business Law which currently protects consumers from deceptive practices. This proposal expands the current law to also authorize the Attorney General to investigate and bring an action for unfair and abusive practices. The definition of unfair practice is that it causes or is likely to cause substantial injury that is not reasonably avoidable, and the injury is not outweighed by countervailing benefits to consumers or competition. An abusive practice occurs when it materially interferes with the ability of a person to understand a term or condition of a product or service or a person's inability to protect their interests in selecting or using a product or service. This expansion to cover unfair and abusive practices is

open to a broad interpretation and application. An action may be brought by any person injured pursuant to the statute not just the Attorney General. This proposal mandates payment of attorney fees and costs to the prevailing party and increases penalties. The scope of this expansion is open ended and is not directed at specific problems that have arisen for consumers. Courts are not given any definitive guidance in this legislation to interpret what constitutes unfair and abusive practices. Substantial litigation will result from this statute.

Monitoring Predictive Scheduling

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, there was discussion in the legislature about providing employees with definitive schedules. There are several bills that require employers to provide notice to employees of at least seven days of their schedule to work. Businesses whose staffing needs are driven by weather are particularly concerned about the efficacy of this requirement. The bills, which are currently pending, do not appear to apply to carwash operations. This situation needs to be monitored to ensure that the bills are not amended to include carwash operations.

Regulatory requirements for businesses in New York continue to expand. The NYSCWA continues to alert the carwash industry as to potential challenges.

NC

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William Y. Crowell, III

The new express exterior opened on February 13 in Halfmoon.



Hoffman Car Wash Opens 31st Site In Halfmoon

Hoffman Car Wash has just opened another state-of-the-art express exterior wash in Halfmoon. The new site marks the family-owned business' expansion to its 27th conveyorized tunnel location and its 31st facility overall, according to a company press release. To mark the occasion, the company offered free carwashes to all customers for its first week of operation. The site opened on February 13. "We're thrilled to open our doors in Halfmoon, offering Capital Region residents another convenient location to keep their vehicles clean and protected," said CEO Tom Hoffman, Jr. "Our recent growth continues to deepen our commitment to the communities we serve and create more opportunities for our Team Members to develop in their careers."

The Halfmoon location is the company's 10th new wash built since 2020. It is equipped with cutting-edge technology from Hoffman innovateIT, the company's own equipment manufacturing division based in Albany, and features Simoniz chemicals and Micrologic controls and AVW equipment.

All of the company's new locations are express exterior sites

featuring free Vacutech vacs. You can find Hoffman Car Wash locations throughout the Capital District, Binghamton, Hudson Valley, Mohawk Valley and Southern Adirondacks of New York State with a new site slated to open in Bennington, VT, in 2024.

To learn more visit hoffmacarwash.com

There is certainly at least one very happy customer at the new Hoffman carwash!





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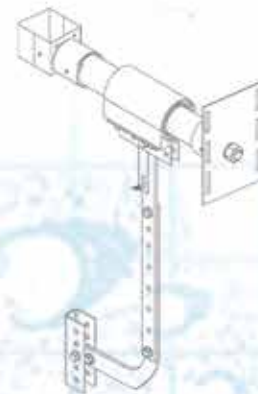
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