



WHIZ-A-TOP streamlines its laundry

Robert Grbavac, owner of Whiz-a-Top Linen, told *Fabricare Canada*: "Gilbert Strassguertl of SRS Conveyors opened my eyes to the fact that processing linen requires a focus on managing the way we handle our material. My success and profit depends on being able to move material through the building. We used to have people walking around all the time, pushing carts here and there. Now we are organized to handle our 125,000 lbs of weekly volume efficiently. It has made a big difference."

START OF THE SYSTEM

The material handling starts with a vacuum-operated sorting system, which sucks up restaurant items faster than the camera can catch them. These then go into different slings, which are raised by a three-stage guided hoist to a rail system. They are dispatched to one of 12 rails for storage, then to one of 10 washer/extractors. Some work, such as medical accounts, goes directly to a sling. There is also a special zip rail for slings off-loaded from trucks holding work that needs immediate attention.

The 10 washers include different sizes and types. Their lack of uniformity is explained by the fact that Whiz-a-Top handles a wide variety of items, including restaurant and long-term care linens. In addition, there is a large linen rental division.

CLEARING THE FLOOR

With 400 different items coming into the Hamilton, Ont. plant from their nine trucks, which cover a territory from Orangeville to Fort Erie, it is essential that sorting be quick and accurate. The vacuum sorter dispatches each item to its proper sling. When the weight reaches 250 lbs, the sling is hoisted to the ceiling. No more carts filled with soiled goods are cluttering up the floor. When a washer is ready, the sling is positioned over it, ready for loading. A computer controls the coordination of the wash formula with the contents of the sling.

UNUSUAL UPGRADE

Such a system is usually found in brand new, high-tech laundries, but the installation at Whiz-a-Top shows that it can be effective in a traditional laundry, too. In fact, this 36-year-old operation, founded by Robert Grbavac's father, has the usual mix of sturdy, dependable equipment – from the 10 washers to the four flat-work ironers. There are two 500-lb tilting dryers and three 170-lb dryers for smaller loads. In addition, a steam tunnel and small-piece folders finish mountains of work from the 560 accounts serviced by the company.

Not only must hospitality and medical items be kept separate, but also the linen rented by Whiz-a-Top must be controlled and returned to inventory. This includes a total of 17 items in 27 different colours.

FAMILY SUCCESS STORY

When the business was founded in 1972, it was a part-time project for Grbavac senior. He built it into a successful company by personal drive and hard work. In 1999, Robert bought

out his father and embarked on a new aggressive drive to increase business.

Robert moved the company into a 20,000-sq.-ft. building in 2001, and worked to upgrade and improve the operation. These measures resulted in steady growth. In 2006, an addition with a taller ceiling was added to the existing premises to incorporate automated processes for handling material.

The firm is a family affair, with Robert's wife, Debbie as office manager, daughter Briana as receptionist and customer relations manager. Daughter Jennie works in production and is supervisor of the medical division.

All members of the staff and management team are looked upon as family, according to Grbavac, and treated as such. "It has been the dedication of key staff that has enabled me to continue building on my father's vision." The business may seem too full of details for any one person to control, but ask Robert Grbavac about any aspect of it, and he'll give you facts and figures. ■



1. Sling is weighed and raised to ceiling height. **2.** Slings are positioned in front of washers. **3.** Robert Grbavac and Gilbert Strassguertl pose by a sling. **4.** Small-piece folders handle medical items. **5.** Sorter lifts items, which are sucked away by vacuum faster than the camera can record. **TOP:** Family business: Briana, Debbie, Robert and Jennie.