Betty Skoutakis came to dry cleaning from the financial sector. After purchasing Metro Cleaners in Toronto, she acquired the big one – the combined business of Sketchley and Cadet, with 80+ stores. For someone with only a few years of experience in the industry, she now had the ultimate challenge.

As an immediate solution she farmed out what she couldn’t handle in her former plant, but started planning a new plant, taking the advice of people she trusted. One of these was Richard Kahrs of Attech Equipment, who designed and installed the new plant’s infrastructure. He describes the result as ‘a dreadnaught’ and ‘a really unbeatable plant’.

As proof, he points to the vacuum system, which is a key component in the production of consistent high-quality finishing. It has 75 inches of vacuum, which, according to Kahrs, is the best in Canada. The oversized vacuum lines are the strongest he has ever seen. The 50-hp boiler produces 2.2 million BTUs. In addition, gas comes in at high pressure at 5 psi and is reduced for use in smaller lines, saving 30% in cost.

Another cost-saving device is the largest FreeLoader ever built. It was specially made by Lorne Tontegode to store the water used in the dry cleaning machines – using the return condensate to heat it and supply the heated water to the washers. If the temperature is not hot enough, it is boosted by steam in the washers. In effect, this means that the dry cleaning machines are using no water at all, as it is fully consumed by the washers, and all of the heat is reused.

**PLANT OPERATION**

With assured utilities, Betty and her team were able to create a truly unique high-production plant that is two-thirds laundry and wet cleaning and one-third dry cleaning, producing twenty thousand garments and fifteen thousand shirts a week.

The secret to processing large volumes of wet-cleaned garments starts with the five wet cleaning machines by Asko and Wascomat. These were modified by George Manakis, who also set up the
processing with Pariser chemicals. They run a 20-minute wash cycle. After drying to a specified percentage of moisture, garments are processed on tensioning equipment including two suzies, two top- pers, two form finishers and a specialized air finisher blouse unit by Barbanti Carlo.

The spotter starts at 6 a.m., working on the backlog of wet cleaning and dry cleaning that was processed by a late shift the night before. The dry cleaning requires more spotting than the wet cleaning, according to Betty Skoutakis.

Other finishing equipment includes six New Yorker utility presses and five New Yorker leggers. These are all equipped with FreeLoader ergonomic rests for the touch-up irons. There are four shirt units, including two YAC units with robot arms, one Unipress, and the Barbanti Carlo unit, which uses air only, no buck. This is for blouses and specialty tops.

The dry cleaning is processed in a 50-lb Italclean, a 35-lb Renzacci and a 45-lb Realstar machine. All units use perc. Shirts are washed in two 100-lb Unimacs, two 60-lb Unimacs and one 60-lb Image washer. In addition, a 40-lb Ipura hydrocarbon machine by Columbia/ILSA was recently installed. Management considers this machine easy to operate because it has no storage tanks and requires no steam. Betty points out that they can continue to clean garments in this machine after the boiler has been turned off.

WIDESPREAD OPERATION
Stores in the Cadet and Sketchley chains are not all in Toronto. They are located as far as Kitchener in the west, Barrie in the north and Bowmanville in the east. Because of the distances involved, the outlying stores have their work processed locally, unless there is a problem.

Betty keeps an eagle eye on the figures coming in from these stores. If there is a dip in sales, and management suspects it is due to quality, the work is brought into the Toronto plant for processing until the problem at the local plant is sorted out.

Speaking of quality, Betty has kept the Three Penguin system, which is three levels of quality that Sketchley offered. Top-priced Three Penguin garments take a special route through the big processing plant, as does the slightly lower-priced Two Penguin service. The plant gives two-day service for the stores, except for Three Penguin, which involves more hand work, and takes three days.

INSPECTION AND SORTING
All garments are fed into a main conveyor, which brings them to the Garment Sorting Conveyor featured on our cover. Without this Canadian-made auto-sorter and SRS Conveyors’ complete garment processing layout, the large number of garments processed...
When asked how accurate the system is, Betty declared it was excellent. The only glitches were experienced before Canadian Cleaners Supply Corp. (formerly GBA) was able to source hangers with longer necks.

PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS

This large, well-lit plant gives the impression of a well-oiled piece of machinery. Everyone is working steadily, using the tools at his or her disposal (new equipment, sufficient steam and vacuum, and good lighting) to keep the garments flowing smoothly to the sorting conveyor.

Not visible from the production floor, but vital to the success of the operation, are immaculate and very adequate areas behind each row of equipment for maintenance, as well as a major air handling system with large roof fans controlling the amount of air going through the plant.

Betty Skoutakis with her nephews Chris and Taso, plus the suppliers on whose advice she relied, Richard Kahrs, Lorne Tontegode, George Manikis and Gilbert Strassguertl, have created a dream plant. Not only is it efficient with backup equipment and a supply of basic parts, but it is using less hydro and water than the previous plant.

Although Betty Skoutakis is the spark plug of the organization, she says emphatically, “I cannot be more thankful for the people who work with us.”

In the opinion of this writer she has created a truly dream plant, and in the process has proved that wet cleaning can be practical in a production operation.

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