

to be a successful show for most people – whether you were selling or buying, the time was well spent.

The breadth of what was offered at this show was amazing. In one booth, you could try out the latest arcade games for your coin laundry, while in the next you could look at tanning booths. One booth had the latest stain-removal agent and the next aisle over had a tunnel washer that can wash hundreds of pounds per hour.

If you missed this show, you had better start planning for New Orleans in 2009. I can hardly wait. ■

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by Ron Eckroth

Coming events

September 6

CLATA GOLF TOURNAMENT
Bay of Quinte Golf Club
Belleville, ON
416-622-7442

September 19-21

TEXCARE ASIA 2007
Shanghai New International Expo Centre
www.texcare.messefrankfurt.com

September 28-29

ATLANTIC FABRICARE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION
Westin Hotel
Halifax, NS
1-877-993-7846

October 18-21

INTERNATIONAL DRYCLEANERS CONGRESS ANNUAL CONVENTION
San Francisco Hilton International
San Francisco, California
1-800-334-4982

October 19-20

ONTARIO FABRICARE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION
Hilton Niagara Falls
Niagara Falls, ON
905-354-7887

October 20-21

NATIONAL CLEANERS ASSOCIATION TEXCARE 2007
Meadowlands Convention Center
Secaucus, N.J.
212-987-3002

Restoration is hot and Esporta is right there

Restoration is the reclaiming and restoring of fire- and flood-damaged goods. The number of dry cleaning firms that have taken on this diversification has grown greatly in recent years – bringing new profits to those dry cleaners. This growth is due to increased industry sophistication in knowing how to deal with the insurance companies who refer this work to subcontractors, and in new techniques for removing soil. In many instances that knowledge has been spread through specialized associations.

It is said there may be as many as 18,000 restoration companies active in North America. This number clearly indicates the scope of a growing and lucrative market. Prior to dry cleaners acquiring the skills to recover damaged clothing and other belongings, insurance companies were discarding water-damaged and bacteria-infected items.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Esporta, with head office and production facilities in Kelowna, B.C., has developed an innovative machine for washing, cleansing and restoring smoke-impregnated, as well as water- and fire-damaged, items. The unit has 99 possible programs, using detergents and chemicals. In many cases it provides the user with a cost-effective way to process everything from shoes to teddy bears to luggage because it replaces tedious, time-consuming hand work.

It also makes handling the soiled work easier. For example, a dripping-wet load from a flooded basement can be placed directly into different compartments of the Esporta washer without any need for counting or tag-

ging. The operator makes a note of the compartments (numbered 1 to 8) in which a certain order is being processed. Listing and identification can be done when the items are clean.

According to vice-president Howard Sures, the patented process can restore at least 85% of the soft contents of a home, much of which was considered unrecoverable. In addition, insurance companies can save up to 80% by paying for cleaning instead of replacing the items. Claimants can recover possessions faster, often within 72 hours.

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Esporta machine was developed when hockey mom Margie Rhode and her husband Randy took their son Jay to a three-day tournament. During the trip home, the odours from Jay's equipment became too much for Margie. "There has to be way to deal with this," she said. And the idea of an athletic equipment washing machine was born.

Randall Rhode (Esporta's CEO) designed the original machine in 1998. Three years and eight prototypes later, the first unit was sold. Today Esporta technology has successfully cleaned and disinfected all types of sports equipment, as well as firemen's bunker gear. Rhode said the

Above: (L-R) Chris Barrington (production manager), Chris, Margie and Jay Rhode



Margie Rhode, owner



Howard Sures, v-p sales

company has dominated the sport cleaning industry in North America and has penetrated overseas markets with over 150 machines supplied to cleaners in Canada, USA, Switzerland, Sweden and Russia.

During the past year the company shifted its focus to the restoration market, where the process is proving to be a cost-saving tool. Since entering the new market, more than 35 machines have been shipped to restoration and traditional dry cleaning companies.

INSIDE THE BOX

"Technology behind the machine is basically simple," explained Jay Rhode, Esporta's coordinator for chemical R&D programs. The patented process is housed in a 7x7x4-ft. enclosure. The stainless steel drum has eight compartments and the machine is soft mount, with no bolting down needed.

It can hold 20 lbs. in each

compartment. As one user described the size, "You can put two goalie pads in one compartment." Because the load doesn't shift, the water is forced through the items. There is no agitation; on a teddy bear, for instance, the paint on the eyes does not need to be touched up.

The V-shaped compartments can hold shoes, leather items, stuffed animals, luggage, linens and clothing. Water and specially formulated environmentally friendly detergents are forced through the contents, removing contaminants with a 99.99% kill rate of all bacteria, moulds and fungi, according to the manufacturer. Contents are not damaged by the hydraulic action. The pH of chemicals has no adverse effect on the properties of garments, and shrinkage is avoided by low water temperatures.

Rhode explained that all four chemicals used in the process

are biodegradable and can be safely washed down the drain. Chemicals are proprietary to the company and include an enzyme-based detergent, a blend of surfactants and detergents, an organic disinfectant and a signature fragrance.

The machine has a computerized system with 20 factory settings of basic formulas. It is capable of keeping 99 different programs in memory. Chemical mix and machine wash times vary considerably depending on contents. Shoes (up to 160 pairs per load) may only require 35 minutes wash time, whereas bulky sports equipment may take up to 2 hours. "To our knowledge we are the only manufacturer in the world supplying a total system of equipment and tested chemical formulas that offer guaranteed results," added Rhode.

The process has been tested and endorsed by such companies as Dupont, 3M, and WL Gore. Its effectiveness in washing firemen's bunker gear is recognized by Bullard, a manufacturer of fire and rescue equipment. Also by HydroQual environmental engineering laboratories. And lastly, it is approved by the testing laboratory of the University of Alberta.

OWNERS HAVE THEIR SAY

Browns Cleaners of Ottawa, Ont. is a traditional dry cleaner servicing clients within 150 km of Canada's capital city. When they became a franchisee with Certified Restoration Drycleaning Network (CRDN), their business changed. Now restoration work has become a major division of the company. Owner Mac MacGregor said they purchased their first Esporta in 2001, using it for cleaning mostly sports equipment.

Since joining CRDN, a second machine has been purchased for restoration work. "We're cleaning all kinds of things – especially flood-soaked articles and even kids' stuffed animals." He said the machine is very different from anything they have ever used and it "works beautifully." He explained that insurance companies are saving up to 84% when fire- and flood-damaged goods are properly cleaned.

"You would be surprised how many people want their possessions back instead of buying new ones. Cleaning stuffed animals in the Esporta machine is particularly satisfying. We do lots of them and they come out perfect."

Winmar Property Restoration Specialists, a London, Ont. based company with 30 years' experience in restoration work, has 37 branches in Canada. John White, Winmar president, said they have 14 Esporta units in place and their game plan is "to arm every facility with a machine, to add to our arsenal of equipment." He admitted being a 'disbeliever' when first approached, but after seeing a demonstration in Esporta's Kelowna plant, he was impressed.

White said 80% to 90% of Winmar's business is dealing with insurance-related problems. The company presents seminars to provide adjusters with technical information and an understanding of the Esporta process.

"Talk about green! We used to fill dumps by throwing out tons of damaged household contents, but now we average 85% recovery. This system is paying off in a huge way for our business."

Established in 1985, Canstar Restorations of Port Coquitlam, B.C. is a full-scope restoration company. Operations manager Art Johnson said they purchased their first Esporta system in 2005. "It is very efficient. An insurance company sent in a batch of shoes for restoration. They turned out like new. Using the pre-programmed chemical mix, stain removal is effective and easy. Esporta's spotting agents are the best we have ever used. We're really pleased with the whole process and are thinking seriously of securing another machine."

As populations increase and more people experience fires and floods, the restoration market in North America is a growth industry and one that dry cleaners should consider as a profitable diversification opportunity. ■

Howard Sures can be contacted at 1-800-881-7781 ext. 104.

PEOPLE



DAWN NAGLE

CONGRATS!

WASCOMAT announces the appointment of Dawn Nagle as Marketing Communications Director. She brings over 20 years' experience to her new position, which is to enhance the Wascomat line with new graphics and promotional material and work with dealers to enhance sales.

OBITUARY

Jim Fletcher, former owner of Fletcher's Cleaners in Vancouver, B.C., passed away April 26. He was an industry leader both in his own province and internationally as a member of the International Drycleaners Congress. He served as provincial and international president. He leaves his wife Helen and daughter Pat Bond as well as two grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.



JIM FLETCHER