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Obituary: Nora Nealis Longtime NCA director, industry beacon, passes

Nora Nealis, the long-time executive director of the National Cleaners Association (NCA) and an indefatigable defender of the drycleaning industry, passed away on Nov. 12 at the age of 70.

In a press release, NCA called Nealis a “beacon” in the drycleaning industry, noting: “Nora’s tenure as executive director was marked by her remarkable acumen and dedication. She passionately advocated for the responsible use of perchloroethylene (perc), masterfully navigating environmental concerns while safeguarding the interests of countless small businesses. Her diplomacy and foresight were instrumental in harmonizing industry and government goals.”

Her skills and expertise were the culmination of a lifetime of experience in the cleaning industry. For Nealis, who was born and raised in the suburbs of New York, that journey began in 1975 when she was hired by Diversitron, a com-



pany just getting started in the on-site drapery cleaning service. For more than the next two decades, she sold and repaired equipment, amassing invaluable insight and expertise while working with various cleaners, manufacturers and distributors.

After 22 years, she left the company to join the NCA staff, enticed by the opportunity to directly work with drycleaners. It was a difficult decision, but she felt it was a good match.

During a profile interview in *National Clothesline* from December of 1997, she

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NEFA’s ProfitFest proves successful in Salem

By Peter Blake

The North East Fabricare Association (NEFA) recently held its 16th Fall Management Conference in November at the Artisan Hotel at Tuscan Village in Salem, NH. By all accounts the program was a tremendous success.

As an added enhancement for all those that came this year, NEFA hired a professional photographer to take professional headshots of all the attendees.

The program began on a somber note with a moment of silence for John Dallas, former NEFA President and industry icon in the Boston area who passed away that week.

Afterwards, the 17 vendor exhibitors introduced themselves and then Mary Scalco of DLI took the spotlight as she delivered a State of the Industry address.

She emphasized the industry must be watchful for the continuing escalation of costs and recognize ways to control those costs and to account for the impact on the business.

She believes the future of the industry remains bright, but cleaners must recognize trends and be willing to adapt and change to take advantage of the opportunities.

Nathaniel Dubasik of Metalprogetti offered a presentation focused on strides his

company has made in automation — like unattended kiosks, locker systems, and automatic baggers. He also explored the need to reduce the labor force for cleaners.

Trudy Adams of LaundryLux led a session on diversification. She discussed a new trend where some cleaners are incorporating smaller laundromats in their drop stores in order to increase business, better utilize staffing and resources and to increase profitability of satellite locations.

She also noted that cleaners should look outside of the traditional drycleaning gar-

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DLI’s Mary Scalco (far right) delivers a State of the Industry address during the North East Fabricare Association’s ProfitFest held recently at the Artisan Hotel at Tuscan Village in Salem, NH.

Capturing a New Yorker’s attention



When Todd Layne Cleaners opened in New York in 2006, it made only \$20 on its first day. Soon, however, owner Todd Layne Ofsink found a way to capture the attention of a busy New Yorker — edgy ads in front of his store. Naturally, business picked up. For the full story on this month’s profile, go to page 6.



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Saying goodbye to an industry legend

The drycleaning industry lost one of its staunchest supporters, someone who will be sorely missed. Nora Nealis, the longtime leader of the National Cleaners Association, spent close to 50 years of her life in the industry before passing away at the age of 70. Her impact on the betterment of all drycleaners during that time was immeasurable.

Born in New York, Nealis grew up in Fresh Meadows, a neighborhood in Queens. When she talked about her formative years in a profile from this publication in December of 1997 she said, "I am the most boring person in the industry."

It's a funny statement from someone who would go on to have such an impact on it.

In 1975, she first began work in the drycleaning industry for Diversitron, an on-site drapery cleaning company. The original plan was to do things like answer phones and keep track of the books, but those weren't Nealis's strengths so she was thrown into the machinery side of things with no experience.

When she told her boss she didn't know anything about machinery, she was told, "Not knowing is not an answer. Find out."

So, she did, and before long she was "knee deep" in machinery. "I found there's a reason things work and reasons things don't work," she said. "I'd try to find out why."

During her 22-year tenure with Diversitron, her knowledge grew to the point that she wrote installation and maintenance manuals and also worked on the advertising with distributors.

All that experience led her to be named to a negotiated rulemaking committee in 1993 on behalf of the industry where she worked directly with others to try to create legislative rules that were amenable on both sides.

"The cleaners are the ones working in that environment, working in that atmosphere," she emphasized. "I can't believe anyone would work in that

environment and put their families at risk. I wouldn't have gone along if I didn't believe the drycleaner was a safe neighbor."

In the latter half of the 1990s, she opted to join the NCA staff where she was now able to assist drycleaners directly on a full-time basis. In time, she would lead the association as its executive director and would use her unique ability to see potential future problems. Her vision of the possible and the probable made her excel at that post.

NCA Board Member Joseph Hallak of Hallak Cleaners in New York perhaps described her approach to the job best. "Nora Nealis was a truly unique individual who took the drycleaning industry very seriously. She carried the industry on her back when it came to legislative issues," he said. "She was always able to see trouble on the horizon when legislators would hide laws from the industry that they were trying to pass. She always had a way to find out and fight it."

"She truly wanted this industry to have a better name and keep succeeding for many generations," he added. "She was loved and will be truly missed by many who didn't even know what she was doing for them."

Nealis was part of a generation of industry leaders who have helped many drycleaners navigate rising environmental concerns, assisting some with making the transition away from perc and toward greater responsibility and sustainability.

Those cleaners and industry representatives who continue to try to raise the professionalism and reputation of the industry are honoring, and continuing, the work of Nealis and many others who have paved the way for future success.

So, it is with profound sorrow that we now say a heartfelt goodbye to a bright beacon for the industry, an indefatigable defender of drycleaning, and a tough New York lady who was very passionate about making this industry better. Rest in peace, Nora. You've certainly earned it.

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Capturing attention

As he passed two empty storefronts on 77th Street in New York back in 2006, Todd Layne Ofsink had an epiphany.

At the time, he had recently left his job at the global consulting firm McKinsey and Company and was seeking to start a business of his own.

"One store was an abandoned laundromat and there was a store next to it that had been a hair salon," Todd recalled. "The landlord was looking to rent both of them out and I just sort of had this vision for getting into the eco-friendly drycleaning movement that was starting at that time."

"New York is a bit of a unique market with laundry because a lot of people don't have washers and dryers — not because they can't afford it, but a lot of the infrastructure in the buildings are very old and they can't have them," he continued.

Todd envisioned a customized approach to laundry so customers could have the option of choosing how they would do it themselves. Essentially, there would be a menu of options.

"They could choose their detergents. They could choose a scent. They could choose a stain fighter, their water temperature, dryer temperature," he explained.

Unfortunately, a lot of people didn't think Todd's vision would work.

"Every person who I told that I wanted to open a business like that told me not to," he laughed. "They said, 'You don't know anything about it.'"

Undaunted, Todd pressed on with his plan. After all, for a first-time entrepreneur, he already had a lot of business experience in his rear view mirror.

Raised in the suburbs of New York, Todd would go on to attend Boston University and Hofstra University, earning an undergraduate degree in business management and an MBA in finance.

After college, he worked for Citibank and an importing company for short stints before he joined McKinsey and Company.

"I worked on a lot of technology projects. My first large-scale project was finding ways to bring down the cost of IT for global organizations," Todd explained. "All the data that we came up with was used for *Fortune 500* clients. At the time, they were trying to get the cost per employee down to \$10,000 or less and it was trending much higher at that time."

He also worked on several projects where he was able to help build tools for companies to better measure key performance metrics. Over time, however, it just made him want to do such work on his own business.

So, in August of 2006, he first opened Todd Layne Cleaners in New York's East side. The graphic designer for his logo pointed out to Todd that the first two parts of his name had a nice flow.

"Since the business is called Todd Layne Cleaners, everybody thinks I'm Mr. Layne and I just started answering to that," he said.

Unfortunately, on the first day of the

business, there weren't many customers to call him that.

"Leading up to the first day, I had rebuilt the whole laundry area. I had to put in a gas line from the street," Todd recalled. "There was so much work involved and it seemed every day there was a new permit that I needed... but on my first day I was expecting to have

Todd also deliberately incorporated the latest technology available in order to offer customers service they could not find anywhere else.

"We were one of the first drycleaning and laundry companies to have a website where you could schedule a pickup and delivery over the Internet," he said. "It was very rudimentary. Peo-

orDash and Uber," he said. "Essentially what we're doing is we're picking up and delivering to areas of New York City that we've never done before. So, at this point, we can cover almost anywhere in Manhattan, whereas before we were just sort of in different zones. It helps to get us more business just broadening our horizons. And, every



Todd Layne Ofsink

Todd Layne Cleaners
New York, NY

a rush of customers. I put out balloons and all kinds of things. We only made \$20 that first day. I came home that night and I said to myself, 'I hope this was not the wrong thing to do.'"

Part of Todd's vision for his business was to do things differently than many of the other cleaners in New York City, including being open on Sundays and extending store hours.

"I didn't want to have neon signs in the window. Every other drycleaner had a neon sign," he said. "I tried to show [that] we're trying to do things in a different way... high level of service, high level of quality, a little bit hip with our marketing. We employed a lot of sexy ads.

"The first thing we came out with said 'Drop your pants here' (see below) with someone with their pants down. We put up a lot of signage outside the store with those kinds of edgy things to capture a New York City person's attention."



Within a few weeks, business picked up. In fact, Todd Layne opened up a second location on the West side of New York in 2007.

His vision had become a success, though it was not without considerable hard work and perseverance.

ple completed their information online, then it generated an email that went to the store so we could schedule it. That was in 2008."

Todd Layne did not even offer pickup and delivery in the very beginning. However, technology has helped into turning the service into a chief component of the business..

"It's turned out to be something that is bringing in 80% of our business at this point," he said. "It's so different the way we're operating now. We're using a state-of-the-art point-of-sale system. Everyone can see everything from an iPhone or a tablet. We have partnered with Uber and DoorDash to do some of our deliveries in a 30-minute window and we also have a courier service separate from that. And, I have staff just do the local stuff by foot."

Not surprisingly, it was during the pandemic that Todd Layne's pickup and delivery service really grew. Todd estimated it shifted from about 45% to 80% of the business during that time.

The business also shifted to more laundry then, as well.

"I put the focus on laundry and just reinforcing the power of cleanliness. Our employees were wearing gloves, masks. We were using sanitizer in the clothing. This would kill germs and people were very interested in that," he said.

Because the laundry is tailored to customer preferences, it has become more popular than drycleaning.

"We're making more money off of laundry now than we are from drycleaning because by customizing it for people exactly how they want it, you're able to charge a premium," Todd noted. "We just try to keep one step ahead of our competition and keep coming up with new ways of doing it."

"I think that we are well positioned now especially because we're using Do-

once in a while, we introduce some kind of new service just to capture people's attention."

Even though technology is a big component of the business, Todd Layne Cleaners still emphasizes the personal touch.

"I always say that it comes down to the counter people you have working for you. You need people who are really, really good and experienced, and you want people who are going to stay with you a long time," Todd noted.

He also wants to keep all of his customers happy — the ones who rely heavily on technology and delivery, as well as others who still like to drop by the store in person. One unique way Todd Layne Cleaners connected with customers was by hosting a 1920s Speakeasy party prior to the pandemic.

"We dressed up in our old-fashioned clothing and we invited the neighborhood to come for drinks and hors d'oeuvre, Todd explained. "We try to do things like that once in a while just to get our neighbors involved. It's actually nice for our neighbors to get to know other people in the neighborhood because even though there's 1.5 million people living here, people still want to branch out and meet new people."

Such events are a good way for customers to have a chance to visit with Todd and make a personal connection. And, as he points out, though, he understands because he is no different.

"It reminds me of myself. I have certain restaurants that I go to where I know the owners. I can come and sit at the bar and the owner will come over and chat with me. They know what I want," he added. "And, in such a big city where things can be so impersonal, I feel like it's nice to go somewhere where people know your name. I feel like that translates into what we're trying to accomplish by operating a small business in a big city."

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NEFA's ProfitFest proves successful in Salem

Continued from page 1

ments and to look into marketing a greater menu of services including household and laundry items.

Glen Gould of Drycleaning Connection in Peachtree City, GA gave a popular keynote address called "Fired! With Enthusiasm."

His presentation struck a chord with everyone in the room as he outlined the need for enthusiasm-based leadership. He explored ways to help build your team – and to understand the dynamics and attitudes of your team members.

Mike Nesbit of Nesbit Consulting presented "Diversify or Die." He provided attendees with a new concept on maximizing underutilized areas of the business.

He showed ways to look outside the industry and develop other revenue-generat-

ing business.

On Sunday morning, Dennis Zaia from FOCUS Associates worked with NEFA Board Member Carlyn Parker of Dependable Cleaners to explore the best ways to communicate with team members and the public.

The presentation explored the use of DISC profiles. Each attendee was given a profile and it was scored on premises so they could see what category they best identified with. Once the category is established, communication strategies can be developed to best reach and work with those team members. Owners can learn the most effective ways of motivating and teaching team members.

Afterwards, NEFA Board Member Rechelle Balanzat of Julliette Technologies brought in Zahra Sahebzada, a global

flagship manager for Dolce & Gabbana, to discuss techniques of making every customer a VIP.

The VIP experience is essential to reach the couture market and the need to understand how and what these consumers value is critical to success.

Overall, this year's program was a tremendous success, but that won't stop NEFA from preparing for 2024.

"We are very proud of what we accomplished and we are already looking ahead how to make ProfitFest '24 unique," said NEFA President Larry Fish. "We are gathering names of speakers, have some suggestions for new additional value-added ideas for the attendees.

This year it was the headshots for everyone, and we will have to find a way to raise our game even higher next year!"



One perk of this year's ProfitFest show from NEFA was a free professional headshot taken on-site. As NEFA President Larry Fish noted, "We always preach professionalism, but how many small business owners have a professional headshot for their website? Business cards? We wanted to have a take-away for everyone they could use. You are the face of your business and your headshot IS your business card."

Longtime NCA director, industry beacon passes

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explained, "NCA wanted to be comfortable with my view of the world to make sure that we all kind of had the same long view... that we had our eye on wanting to see a healthy drycleaning industry 25 years from now — both economically and with neighbors, workers and owners protected."

"I look forward to spending the next 25 years with NCA," she added.

Nealis made good on that promise, spending the next 26 years with the association dedicated to improve the professionalism of all cleaners and fostering a sense of community among them.

As NCA noted, "Her boundless generosity and wisdom touched many lives, particularly those within the drycleaning community. She was a mentor and a guiding light, offering her time and knowledge selflessly, even to those struggling to meet dues. Her compassion and commitment to inclusivity were unparalleled."

She also was a diplomat for the industry, often bridging the gap between regulators and business owners. NCA Board Member Russ Petrozzi noted of her skills: "The drycleaning industry exists

today because of Nora Nealis. She had the unique ability to bring government and industry together to coordinate rules that all parties could agree to — that also made sense."

While she often helped cleaners on a grand scale, Nealis never hesitated to help on a one-on-one basis.

"What I remember most about Nora was that she was always there for any cleaner who would call seeking advice on anything to do with all aspects of running a drycleaning business," said Ken Kinzer, NCA board member and owner of Bridgestone Cleaners. "I came to her when my business was failing, and she got me on the right track to recovery. Nora would always help everyone, even those who may not have been able to pay their dues. She gave her time freely to all and her spirit of generosity will truly be missed."

In lieu of flowers, her family suggest donations be made to Coats for Kids, a charity dear to her heart. Visit online at coatsforkidsusa.com/nora.

Additionally, a celebration of the life of Nora Nealis is scheduled to take place from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Dec. 3. It will be hosted at Meurice Garmet Care at 535 Manida St. in the Bronx, NY.



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KEEP IT LEGAL



BY FRANK KOLLMAN

Say what you mean and stay out of trouble

Let's say John was fired for "inappropriate behavior, not being a team player, and unsatisfactory work performance." It said so in his personnel file. Does anyone know what John did or did not do to be fired? Does anyone know why supervisors and human resources professionals write like that? I suspect lawyers are responsible for the explosion of vague language in disciplinary documents.

Many employers are terrified to give a specific reason for a termination, in most

cases because they are afraid of being sued. They think — *incorrectly* — that being vague or giving no reason will prevent lawsuits. Instead, giving no reason or a vague reason for termination is the worst thing an employer can do.

In most employment discrimination cases, the former employee must show that he belongs to a protected group, that he was qualified for the job, that he was performing satisfactorily (easy enough), that he was disciplined, and that other similarly situated

non-minority employees were not disciplined for similar behavior. The employer then has to articulate a non-discriminatory business reason for the termination.

The employee, however, gets the chance to prove that the stated reason is untrue (the legal term is *pretextual*).

Courts take into account the vagueness of the earlier stated reasons for termination as a factor in deciding the issue of pretext. If the employer has changed the reason (which a good attorney can argue is the case

when specifics are substituted for terms such as *inappropriate* and *unsatisfactory*), that can be used to show pretext. All this demonstrates the need to give reasons, and give **good** reasons for termination.

Let's go back to the first paragraph of this column. It would have been better to have stated: "John got into an argument with his helper over the Middle East and threw his wrench at his helper's head. John has repeatedly gotten into arguments with other employees

over work-related and non-work-related topics, and he frequently uses profanity, calling people who disagree with him 'a%\$ holes' or 'poopyheads.' John also has been warned that his production is less than other production employees, averaging 54 fewer pieces per week than the next lowest producing employee. After several warnings (in January and March), he continues to produce at this low level."

If employers would describe in **detail** what employees did, companies would have fewer problems. Employers are afraid to call employees "thieves" for fear of being sued for defamation; they can get around using the word *thief* by describing what the employee did. For example, "Eric put two mink coats in the truck of his car without authorization or any work-related reason or explanation. Eric is being terminated as a result." Or consider, "Bob's cash register was short \$50 on Monday, \$20 on Tuesday, and \$35 on Wednesday. Bob is being terminated because of these register shortages."

Companies cannot be afraid to state in clear language why an employee is being disciplined. The more they try to write like lawyers, the more likely that they will have to deal with lawyers. Describe the behavior, and the conclusions logically follow. Firing someone for a "bad attitude" is not helpful; firing someone for telling a customer to "kiss his butt" leads to the conclusion, without saying it, that the employee had a "bad attitude."

Finally, do not be afraid to tell the employee the reasons for his or her termination in the same direct manner. If he is not a team player, tell him what he has done that made you reach that conclusion. If he has a bad attitude, explain what he has said and done. If he is not doing a good job, tell him what he did that did not meet your reasonable expectations. In the long run, you will not regret it.

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THE SPOTTING BOARD



BY DAN EISEN

How to achieve 98% stain removal

The easiest way to evaluate a drycleaner's stain removal rate is to check the amount of "sorry" tags used. Drycleaners use *sorry* tags to explain to customers why they cannot remove a stain.

In most cases this does not sit right with a customer and they are dissatisfied no matter what explanation is given. Many drycleaners with standard chemicals achieve only 80-85% stain removal but lack the skills to go a step higher into the 98% bracket. Achieving 98%

stain removal means that "sorry" tags are used infrequently and only on very delicate garments or stained garments with color problems possible during stain removal.

Yellow Stains

A major area of difficult stains is yellow stains on colored fabrics including silks. These stains include perspiration and other oxidized protein and tannin stains. On colored fabrics including silks, stain removal must be accomplished by safe bleaching

processes, not by strong alkalis or aggressive mechanical action.

Safe Bleaching

We formulated a series of mild oxidizing agents that could be sprayed on yellow stains and then neutralized. Although the time for these bleaches to work entailed about a half hour, the spotter could do other work while the bleach was working.

The good thing about safe bleaching is that garments brought back for re-do's could be bleached, neutralized and sent back without

re-cleaning.

Ink Stain

We formulated non-ionic detergents for ink stain removal that worked better than using oily type paint removers. The last traces of the ink stains require stripping agents and a knowledge of localized bleaching without affecting the color of the fabric.

The bleaches involved were titanium sulphate and sodium hydrosulphite. Some stains required strong oxidizing bleaches such as sodium hypochlorite and

potassium permanganate.

Dye Bleeding

Some fabrics may need correction due to poor dye fastness. Stripping agents can be formulated to affect the bleed dye but not the base dye. The success of this requires knowledge of the bleaching agent, concentration, the time the garment is immersed and proper neutralizing.

White Fabrics

We set up a restoration process using plastic pails. This means any garment with a yellowing and discoloration could be immersed in a proper bleach bath.

Fabrics, such as silk and wools might be immersed in sodium hydrosulphite with a brightening agent while other fabrics were immersed in sodium percarbonate.

Soil Removal

The soil on necklines and hemlines can be problems on many garments. We increased the soil removal by increasing the alkalinity of the lubricants used. We also used non-ionic detergents with an alkali due to the greasy nature of the staining.

Mechanical Action

Many oxidized oil stains, paint stains, nail polish and other similar stains require using proper mechanical action. Spatulas and brushing a stain is not as effective as tamping action for stain removal.

Wetcleaning

The wetcleaning process in Bates Troy of Binghamton, NY, was changed so the garments came out soft and supple. This means that the garment did not have to be drycleaned in order for it to have a proper feel.

Packaging

Doing a good job requires that you enhance a job by proper packaging. If your spotting and cleaning skills are good, be proud of it and display it with proper packaging. Bates Troy improved their packaging by implementing different colored packaging depending on the garment.

Dan Eisen, former chief garment analyst for the National Cleaners Association, can be reached at (772) 579-5044, or by e-mail at cleandan@comcast.net or through his website at www.garmentanalysis.com.



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SHIRT TALES



BY DON DESROSIERS

Better packaging tops the 2023 Holiday Wishlist

So here we are, once again, at the end of the year holiday season and time for my annual wishlist. I work on this column throughout the year because I am always looking for new and better ways to do things. It helps to keep my mind open.

When I expanded my business into India, I was quite impressed with the focus on presentation of finished goods — the packaging. I have said this before when I wrote about my experiences in India; I was so enthralled with how great my clothes looked that I didn't unwrap the last shirt for over a year. It literally looked better than new.

I have at least one client who is a boutique cleaner, and they could teach all of us a whole lot about packaging. Many garments are returned to the customer in decorator boxes. "Better than new" is an understatement. But, this isn't what

I'm asking Santa for this year. This sort of packaging already exists. What I'm thinking of is a line packaging that raises our level of professionalism to new heights.

The folded shirts from India were folded over a cardboard that was much larger than what we see here. I'd guess about 9" wide and 15 or 16" tall.

This was covered by a crystal-clear wrap that was somewhere in between cellophane and poly. And the cello-wrap fit snugly over the shirt, resulting in a package that was durable.

You can't toss around a folded shirt that's been packaged here. It would easily fall out of the loose bag and fall apart. Not so with a shirt that's been securely packaged. You could toss it around a room, for sure, but more importantly, such a package could travel in a suitcase around the world and still look better than

new. I know because I've done it.

As a bonus, the image enhancement would be unparalleled. This industry needs a full line of affordable but effective new ways to present our hard work. Let's get out of the box!

For the next item — I've tried hard, but I cannot warm up to the way blown-sleeve shirt units deal with short-sleeve shirts.

The answer isn't that far away. The built-in short sleeve devices aren't quite right. Some of them deform the sleeve, some of them snap out of the device during pressing, some are simply ignored and the sleeves are finished with an iron in the touch-up area.

There is a compromise, but the cost is considerable. If you want to do a quality short sleeve shirt, follow these steps:

- 1) Press the collar in the usual manner.
- 2) Lay one of the sleeves



on the collar buck carefully, making certain that the fabric is flat and aligned and that the seam is straight.

3) Lower the steam chest for exactly five seconds. That's about as long as it will take to prepare the other sleeve.

4) Release the press head, remove the first sleeve and place the other one.

5) Press that sleeve for exactly five seconds.

6) Release the press head and the shirt is ready to be finished on the body press.

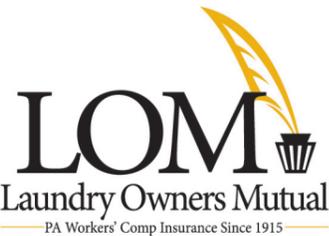
The sleeves will be ready to press, but not ready to

wear. The fabric still has substantial moisture remaining in it, but that moisture is trapped inside the interior of the individual fabric fibers.

Only the outsides of the fabric are truly dry. If this sleeve were left like this for some time, the dry parts of the fabric would wick out the moisture and spoil the appearance of the garment. But that's hardly the plan. The crease that you made is subtle, and the two halves of the sleeve are **not** stuck together. If they are, they were

Continued on page 18

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Don Desrosiers

Better packaging tops the 2023 Holiday Wishlist

Continued from page 14
pressed for too long.

Now the shirt is finished on the body press, but the short sleeve attachment is not used. Hot air is forced through the sleeve, drying the fabric from the inside out and the sleeve crease is dulled. You will have a well-pressed sleeve that is not misshapen.

So, the wish is to make this all much easier and doable in one step. We need a completely redesigned collar/cuff press. To make this happen, the following is required:

1) The steam chests that press the collar must be separate from the cuff heads.

2) The press must be designed in such a way that the

cuff bucks are large enough and suitable for pressing a short sleeve.

3) It must be possible to press the collar and the short sleeve simultaneously, so the press needs to be compact, and I imagine that the steam chests for the cuffs need to be on top of the collar chests. This design is not new; some manufacturers have units like this.

4) This press, however, will require a short sleeve cycle that will release the steam chests from the sleeves after five seconds.

So, the short sleeve shirts will be handled routinely. Just like the long-sleeved counterparts, the shirts will start at the collar/cuff machine. Long sleeves will be

done in the usual manner using the default long sleeve cycle, but the short-sleeved shirts will be done differently.

The presser will lay the collar on the buck and lower the press head. Then, the presser will prepare the sleeves, and lay them on the press and lower the head, but this time using the short-sleeve cycle, which **presses the collar for 30 seconds but the sleeves for only five seconds.**

Afterwards, this shirt is simply queued up for pressing on the body press, and you can do them quite quickly because there is no sleeves or cuffs to deal with. This is a big present, but I really want this.

Now, most of you have a button sewing machine, but there is a big problem. The hole in the needle is about one-tenth the size that it used to be when I was 20 years younger. Damn those needle-makers!

If you get a cheap travel sewing kit, oftentimes you will find a needle-threading gadget in that kit. It's just a small piece of metal with a very thin but stiff metal hook attached.

This thin wire is easy to snake through a needle hole, allowing you to then place the thread into the protruding end. Pulling the device out of the needle hole pulls the thread along with it.

Wawak Sewing Supply sells these for 35 cents. I

should buy a few hundred dozen of these to carry with me so that I don't show my age so readily whenever I am near a sewing machine. But, my Christmas wish is a bit different — an extension of this simple but effective idea.

Sewing machines need to have a similar device built in. Sure, it can be this device, somehow tethered to the machine (gee, you don't need to wait for Santa Claus for that!), but suppose the sewing machine had a gadget that performed the same task, probably somewhere behind the needle.

Perhaps when a needle needs threading, you would simply reach behind the needle, slip this device into the needle, then the thread into it and, voila!

(By the way, Cleaner's Supply has it, as well. Go to www.cleanersupply.com and under the "Tailoring" menu option find the subhead "Sewing" and click on "Needles & Threaders." It is in the "Needle Threader" section.)

Honestly, this can be the single highest return on investment of any labor saving device or idea that I have ever come up with.

It takes seven minutes to fight with a sewing machine in an attempt to get that super-slim thread into that microscopic hole. At \$12 per hour, that means it costs you \$1.40 every time that machine gets unthreaded.

This happens 300 times per year, so we are talking about \$420 a year to thread a needle! The ROI is less than two hours!

Now Santa, quit jerking me around — I didn't get a mini-bike, a train set or that wristwatch packed in water. Give me this stuff, will ya? I made it easy this year!

"If you do what you've always done, you'll get what you always got."

Don Desrosiers has been in the drycleaning and shirt laundering business since 1978. He is a work-flow engineer and a management consultant who provides services to shirt launderers and drycleaners through Tailwind Systems. He is a member of the Society of Professional Consultants and winner of DLI's Commitment to Professionalism award. He can be reached by cell phone (508) 965-3163, or email to: tailwind.don@me.com. The Tailwind web site is at www.tailwindsystems.com.

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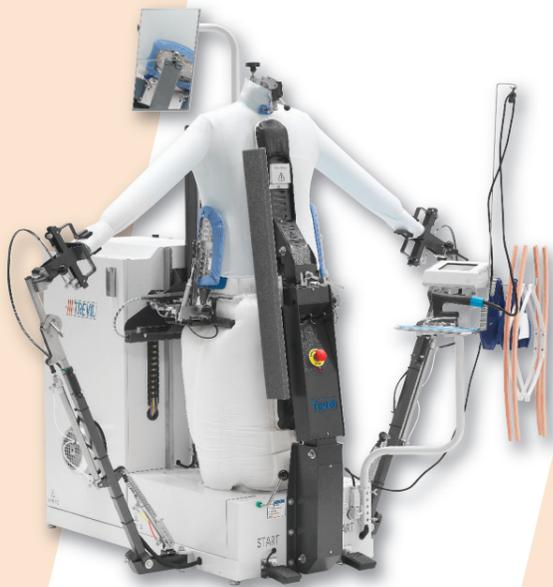


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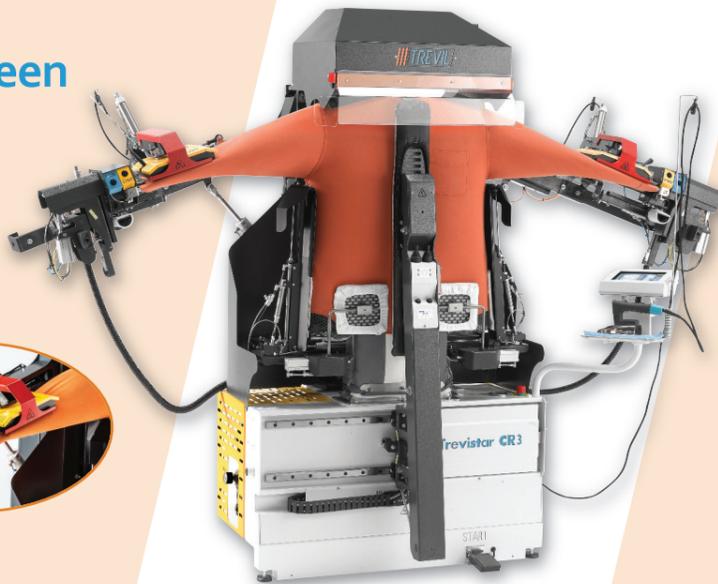
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/// NEW MODEL

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WRENCH WORKS



BY BRUCE GROSSMAN

Controlling your boiler water level

Last month we took the necessary components and cobbled them together into a configuration that resembled a boiler. In this installment, we'll learn how the different components are organized into a system that maintains the proper water level inside the pressure vessel of your boiler.

To begin, keep in mind that all the controls on your boiler serve only two functions:

1) To turn a pump on or off.

2) To turn the fire on or off.

That's it! Simple, just like a light switch toggling on or off.

Controlling the condensate return pump

Look at your boiler. Hanging somewhere off the side is a cylinder with a sight glass in it. This is the **water column** which provides a convenient place to monitor the water level in the **pressure vessel**.

It is attached to the pressure vessel at two points: above the desired water level in the steam storage area, and well below the desired water level in the water storage area of the pressure vessel so that the water level in the column is the same as the water level

in the pressure vessel.

Screwed into the top of this cylinder are three probes that look like spark plugs. They are called **water level probes** or **water level sensors**. These "spark plugs" have metal rods at the opposite ends called electrodes (metal rods that easily allow an electric current to pass through them), which extend down into the water column.

To begin, keep in mind that all the controls on your boiler serve only two functions: to turn a pump on or off and to turn the fire on or off.

When water touches the electrode, an electric current passes from the rod, through the water, to the metal of the water column, signaling that the water is at the level of that probe.

The opposite holds true when the water level drops below the rod; the current flow is interrupted, sending a signal that there is no water at the level of that probe.

There are two probes controlling level operations

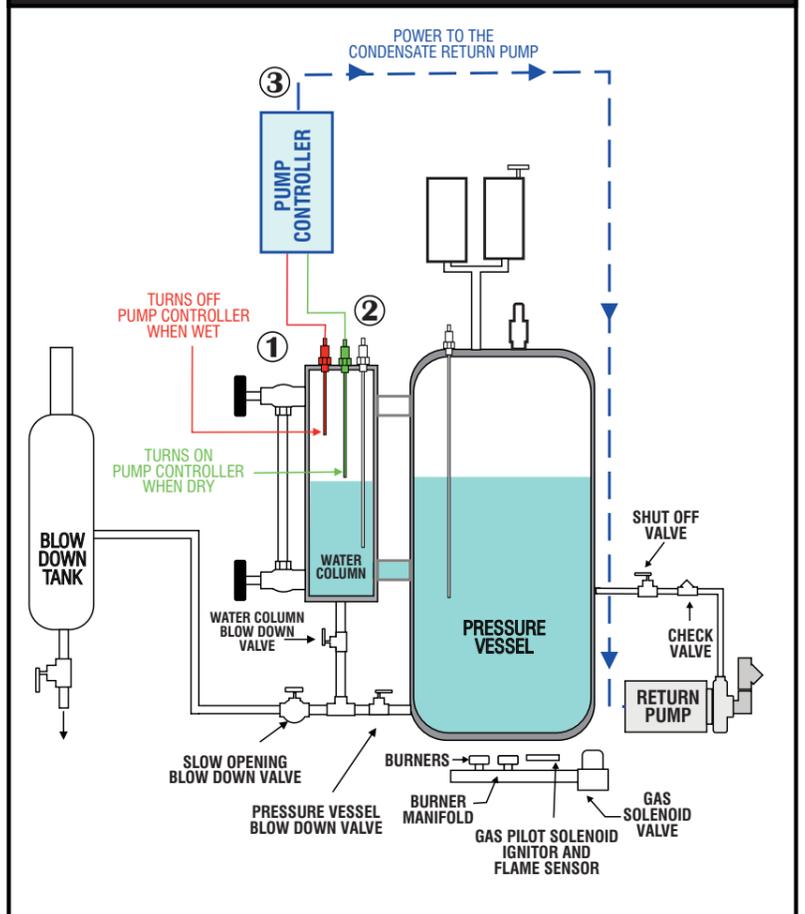
(Pump Off #1 & Pump On #2 pictured in the illustration). These probes are used to toggle the **pump controller** (#3 in the illustration) on and off. When the water level drops below the electrode on the Pump On probe (#2 in the illustration), it signals the pump controller to send power to the condensate return pump, turning the pump on.

The pump will remain on until the water level rises to contact the Pump Off probe (#1 on the illustration), signaling the pump controller that the proper water level has been reached, thereby shutting the condensate return pump off.

Pretty straightforward stuff, right? Believe it or not, that's it for controlling the pump. However, controlling the fire is another story that we will explore in next month's issue.

Here are a couple of ideas to ruminate over. On almost all controls for water level, indicator lights tell you whether the probe is in con-

BUILDING A BOILER 3 CONDENSATE RETURN PUMP CONTROLS



tact with water. Open the boiler control panel access door (on some doors, there is an interlock switch that must be depressed or pulled out when the door is opened for the boiler to operate) and observe the operation of the indicator lights on a properly running boiler. Shoot a video or

make a chart showing the location of water level control and note whether the light is on or off during proper boiler operations. That way, you will know if a level sensor detects a problem when the boiler fails to fire.

Also, most ignition controllers will have visible indicator lights, so make the same kind of observations to enable you to troubleshoot water level operations, perhaps saving an expensive, unnecessary service call.

Nothing in life is sweeter than fixing something yourself... without making it worse.

Bruce Grossman is the Chief of R&D for EZtimers Manufacturing. EZtimers manufactures machines that make your machines run better. For those needing to replace Zero-Waste or Galaxy misters, see our SAHARA 2 model. For those with boiler problems, check out our EZ-Level and EZ-Dose machines. For more information on EZtimers products, visit www.eztimers.com. Please address any questions or comments for Bruce to bruce@eztimers.com or call (702) 376-6693.

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TURNAROUND TIME



BY JOHN ROTHROCK

Customer focused: Speeding up service

In this chapter of our ongoing exploration into **The Focus Method**, we look deeper into its practical applications and influence within the drycleaning industry.

For those just joining our series, I encourage you to read the other articles from the preceding months [Editor's Note: See our back issue archives at www.nationalclothesline.com.] These pieces lay the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the transformative framework that The Focus Method offers.

Now, let's tackle the third rail of drycleaning: **Speed of Service**. I've hesitated to dive into this topic for months because it's one of the most divisive issues in our industry. But, I promised readers unfiltered advice, so here we go.

Turnaround time, specifically **Same Day Service**, significantly impacts industry piece counts more than many experts realize. Recently, I conducted an on-

line poll of drycleaners, and the results weren't surprising. Cleaners were asked, "What is your *standard* speed of service?" (Note: Your normal promise to customers, not a time special.)

Not surprisingly, a whopping 57% of the more than 100 responders *make their customers wait two or more days* for drycleaning services. Wow! Let that sink in for a moment. The majority of our industry makes customers wait multiple days for professionally cleaned and finished clothes.

In today's marketplace, where Amazon delivers within a day, fine dining arrives in 30 minutes, and even Home Depot provides same-day delivery, it leaves me wondering, what gives with drycleaning?

Just for a moment, I want to engage in a thought exercise. Forget everything you know about operations, staffing, and cleaning processes. Imagine you're a potential customer on the weekend, sorting laundry at

home. You consider taking some items to the cleaners for a polished look but dismiss the idea because *it'll take too long. You decide to wash them yourself, thinking it will only take a couple of hours.*

after 5." The customer was noticeably shocked and briefly paused. The quick-witted CSR seized the opportunity, saying, "Would Monday work better?" The customer, still uncertain, reluctantly left the order to be

one day or less.

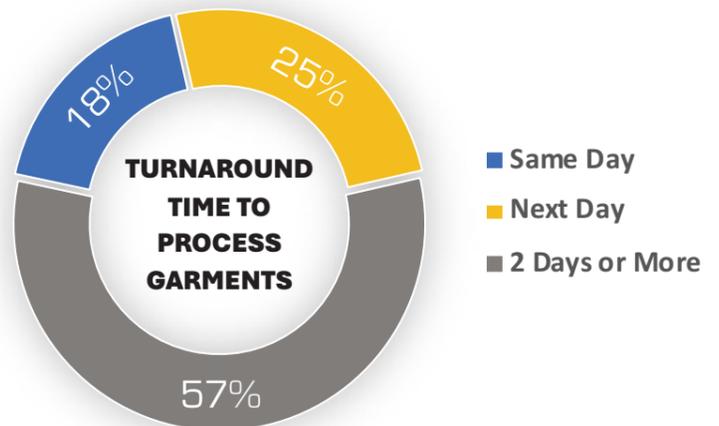
There is one last myth that must be addressed before we continue. "We offer same day on request."

This is possibly the worst position. The market is judging your company

66%

Of consumers waiting 2 days or more for cleaning would likely bring in more clothes if it didn't take as long.

(Courtesy Cleaners Supply)



During a visit to a large Midwest drycleaning operation, I spent over two hours observing customer interactions on your typical Saturday morning. The first customer walked in to drop off clothes. The CSR was well trained and quickly stated, "Ready Tuesday

cleaned.

I watched many more customer interactions, and one thing became very apparent. Every customer who dropped off an order was expecting a quicker speed of service. Nobody accepted the Tuesday due date, yet that's the first thing the CSR continued to offer.

With our industry's average speed of service exceeding two days, we push customers to seek alternatives that better meet their needs. If we collectively want increased piece counts, we must be more responsive to our customers' needs and expectations.

Critics may offer the usual excuses. *I've heard them all: It's impossible, customers don't want same day service, we prioritize quality cleaning.* If you want to hide behind excuses, this isn't the article for you. Any excuse can be disputed or resolved with time, systems, and resources, but only if you're willing to change.

Let me be clear, drycleaning customers not only want same day service, they demand it. My belief is not only backed by personal experiences, it's now backed by Cleaners Supply's new consumer sentiment survey.

The 2023 Cleaners Supply report found that 66% of consumers would "bring in more clothes" if the turnaround time was faster. Moreover, 50% of the more than 1,000 respondents indicated they would like to have their clothes back in

harshly for this policy. Making the customer beg for same day service and, even worse, charging them extra, builds resentment.

To make matters worse, on the operations side, it takes twice the management effort to produce time specials as they must supersede your normal workflow (Read: "Protecting Focus: systems and workflows" published in October, 2023).

Market reputations are hard to earn and easy to lose. Offering same day service by request is the same as *not offering it at all*. Remember, the market judges your company based on your average speed of service, not exceptions. So, **be exceptional every day.**

Everyone is discussing how our industry can increase piece counts. There are a lot of new ideas flying around.

Consider implementing same day service as it is the proven and enduring way to increase sales.

John Rothrock is the president and CEO of Yale Cleaners, a family drycleaning business in Broken Arrow, OK, that is focused on providing high quality, same day drycleaning with exceptional customer service. He earned a degree in Business Administration in 2005 from the University of Oklahoma. He is a graduate of the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute, and is a Certified Garment Care Professional (CGCP).

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BUILDING VALUE



BY KERMIT ENGH

Core values can be a great growth catalyst

This month, I want to bring to you a case study that I recently read about. It shows the importance of having and practicing a company's core values. I hope you find it interesting and applicable to your own business.

In the competitive third-party logistics (3PL) sector, Jay B. Saucedo turned Saucedo Industries into a standout business, ultimately reaching \$14 million in sales before being acquired by Cart.com.

What was his secret weapon? His core values: "Yes, And," "Explore More," and "Give a Sh!t."

Talent Recruitment

Saucedo found his first significant opportunity with Howler Brothers, the digitally native purveyor of stylish and rugged outdoor gear whose leadership related to Saucedo's own core values.

Saucedo's values weren't mere posters on a wall, but

embedded into job descriptions, ensuring that new hires were aligned with the company ethos. "Yes, And" fostered constructive dialogue; "Explore More" encouraged initiative; and "Give a Sh!t" signaled a commitment to quality.

In the fiercely competitive landscape for hourly workers, Saucedo utilized job ads as both a magnet and a filter.

His distinctive ads read: "We're looking for someone who gives a sh!t about their work, gets annoyed with co-workers who don't pull their weight, wants to level themselves up in a big way, and cares about being somewhere long enough that people remember their name."

Such postings instantly distinguished Saucedo Industries from the mundane listings of competitors, drawing talent aligned with the company's dynamic culture. We have discussed

how to hire and the difficulty in doing so. His postings sum up very clearly what he is looking for.

metrics, but also the embodiment of Saucedo's core principles. Employees who exemplified "Yes, And,"

business, achieving \$14 million in sales before it was acquired by Cart.com in 2021. Values really do matter.

If you have not gone through the exercise of determining your core values, I highly recommend that you prioritize it. There are numerous guides and resources available that will guide you through the process.

With this in mind, I would highly suggest you review your job postings. Do they convey who and what you are looking for?

Employee Training & Metrics

New hires were introduced to Saucedo's values through dedicated training programs.

This onboarding significantly reduced the average of 33% of new hires leaving in the first 90 days.

Performance evaluations considered not just revenue

"Explore More," and "Give a Sh!t" found themselves rewarded and recognized.

Their Slack channel was full of praise for team members embodying their core values.

Creating a distinctive culture was crucial for Saucedo.

He recalls, "Our values lived in our daily interactions, whether it was an employee going above and beyond for a client or in our collaborations."

Client Relationships

The core values extended to client interactions, offering criteria for long-term partnerships. A cornerstone example was Howler Brothers, whose alignment with these values set the stage for both parties' success.

Saucedo emphasized, "When a client fits naturally with our core values, the collaboration is far more likely to be fruitful."

A Valuable Company

Leveraging this values-centric model, Saucedo Industries grew from a 3,000 sq. ft. office in 2013 to a sprawling 126,000 sq. ft. facility with 150 employees by 2020.

"We bootstrapped all the way to the top," Saucedo asserted, attributing the company's fast, self-funded growth to its value-driven framework.

In the competitive 3PL landscape, Saucedo Industries didn't just serve clients; it built relationships based on shared values.

Through strategic recruitment, impactful training, and a vibrant work culture, these core values helped pave the way for a thriving

If you have not gone through the exercise of determining your core values, I highly recommend you prioritize it.

There are numerous guides and resources available that will guide you through the process.

These core values must match the owner's values, and you and your management team must follow them wholeheartedly. Otherwise, they will not have any meaning.

A Personal Thank You

Finally, on a personal note, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation for all the well wishes we received with my father Charlie's passing. He had a pretty good day that day, but during that night, he went quickly.

His sudden passing has left a void in the house and our family. He will be interred at Fort Snelling Military Cemetery in the Twin Cities.

Again, thank you for your thoughts and prayers. They have meant a lot to me during this time.

Kermit Engh has been an owner/operator in the drycleaning industry for over 30 years and has been a Methods for Management member for over 27 years. His positions as managing partner of MfM and as a Certified Value Builders Coach allow him to share his extensive background in strategic planning, finance, process improvement, packaging and branding, employee training programs, profitability, cost analysis, acquisition analysis and succession planning. To find out more about how Kermit can help you maximize the value of your business, contact him at kengh@mfm.com.

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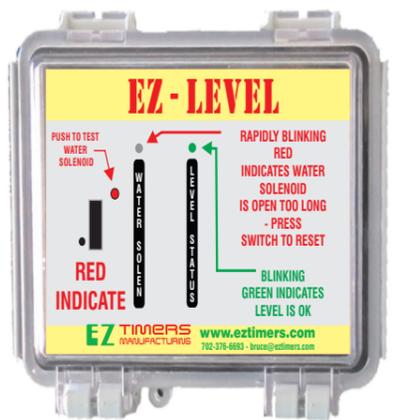
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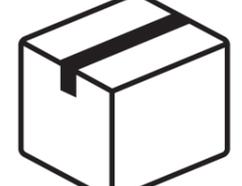


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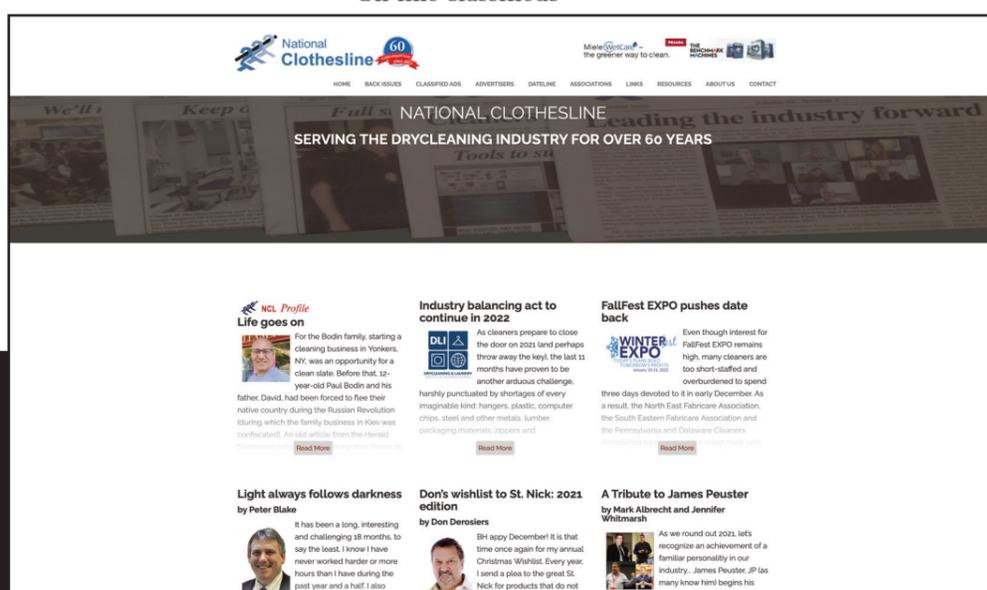
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