



Mike 'Stucky' Szczotka
New Wave Laundromat
Sterling Heights, Mich. **First Profiled: July 2003**

Since being profiled, I've replaced three of my stack dryers with three additional 75-pound dryers. I found that customers wanted more larger dryers to go along with my big washers.

I also brought in a flatwork ironer, which has made my commercial business extremely profitable. These days, we do anywhere from 2,500 to 3,000 pounds of commercial work per week.

One of the biggest changes I've seen is the exodus from Detroit proper. We've had a lot of people who used to live in the lower-income areas of the city who now can afford to move into apartments in my area, which is more lower-middle income. So, more people who were in depressed area have entered my marketplace. It's really helped my walk-in business.

With that said, the commercial accounts business is where we've really grown. When we first opened, the self-service aspect of the business was tough to penetrate, because of the other stores that were

already here. The walk-in business wasn't evolving the way we wanted it to, so my youngest son, Darin, came up with the idea of going out to look for commercial work. And that has made a dramatic difference.

For example, I have a 40-pound washer that vends for \$4.60 – every time that washer turns, I generate \$4.60. However, if I have some commercial work, and let's say I'm getting \$1 a pound and I put 20 pounds in there, I'm generating \$20 to turn that wheel.

And the flatwork ironer enables me to go after catering businesses and some party rental shops. Although they don't have a tremendous amount of flatwork, they do have some, and the ironer has allowed us to be able to capture those entire accounts.

As far as the medical side, we also service some cosmetic surgery accounts. We have a large washer behind the counter that has a small residential hot water heater hooked to it, which is at 165 degrees – so I can meet and exceed any regulations for doing medical laundry.

I think the biggest change to the business, since we appeared in the magazine, is the attitude of the staff understanding who they are there to serve; empowering the people who are on my payrolls to understand that they are there to serve and take care of the customers, and they have the latitude to make it right.

There is no "they" – it's "we" and "us." No one throws anyone under the bus. No one is out to try to cover their backend. They understand that the true boss is the customer, not me. Without them, my signature on their paychecks means nothing.

I'm more optimistic about the self-service laundry side of my business than I am about the drycleaning side. "Casual Friday" has turned into "Flip-Flop Friday," and the entire week is casual for corporate America.

However, with what's happening in our economy – so many people losing residency who now have to rent – I honestly believe, especially here in the tri-county area of Michigan, that we have more laundromat customers. Unless things change dramatically in this country, I think there are going to be more people displaced, struggling and who have to rent. And that increases our demographics number-wise.