

GRAND



PRIZE



(Photos: Peerless Cleaners)

## 55<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL Best Plant Design

**Peerless Cleaners • 4121 Hillegas Rd., Fort Wayne, Ind.**

# When a Plan(t) Comes Together

In nominating his Peerless Cleaners, Fort Wayne, Ind., for a Plant Design Award, co-owner Steve Grashoff wrote, "We offer just about everything you can think of."

Full-service dry cleaning, laundry, household items, draperies, wedding dresses, leather, suede, commercial linens, restoration work, even car mats—you name it, Peerless cleans it.

With the company occupying five floors of a downtown building built in the early 1900s, constantly moving product up and down ramps using a forklift or a trailer pulled by a golf cart became a daily

challenge to maintaining productivity, according to Grashoff.

So, about two years ago, with the September 2015 expiration of Peerless' lease on the horizon, he went in search of a new site.

Today, after a total investment that Grashoff pegs at \$1.4 million, the result is a 32,800-square-foot, L-shaped, single-story plant that earned the Grand Prize for Best Plant Design in *American Drycleaner's* 55<sup>th</sup> Annual Plant Design

**(Above) Exterior of Peerless Cleaners and its signage signaling its presence to major-interstate traffic.**

Awards competition.

### FLYING FOUR BANNERS

Not only does Peerless offer a variety of services, it does so under four different banners: three different drycleaning businesses plus the Certified Restoration Drycleaning Network (CRDN).

Peerless Cleaners has been in business since 1915—it just celebrated its 100th anniversary—and Grashoff and his wife, Laurie, became the owners in 2000. The next year, Peerless acquired a competitor, F&B Cleaners. Proximity of certain F&B stores (continued)

**55<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL PLANT DESIGN AWARDS GRAND PRIZE WINNER**

# CONGRATULATIONS!



Congratulations to Peerless Cleaners  
for winning the 2016 American Drycleaner  
Plant Design Award Grand Prize!



Our reputation is built on customer satisfaction.

**2329 Alger Drive • Troy, MI 48083 • 1-800-482-3400**



to Peerless stores—“some of them are located across the street from our stores,” Grashoff explains—prompted the parent company to continuing operating those stores under the second brand.

In 2005, Peerless Cleaners acquired a successful family-owned business, Kirt's Cleaners, with stores in Goshen and Elkhart, Ind., about 60 miles from Fort Wayne.

Kirt's had been around since the 1950s and was well established, Grashoff says, so the name remained.

All together, the plant employs 68 FTEs in serving 14 drop stores. The full Peerless workforce numbers around 100, Grashoff says.

Peerless Cleaners also owns and operates three CRDN franchises that provide smoke, fire and water restoration services to clients throughout northern and western Indiana.

#### DIVERSIFICATION DESTINATION

Peerless Cleaners'

**(From top) The 100-hp boiler; laundry equipment; drycleaning machines; a portion of the finishing room, including equipment painted white for a “clean look,” as described by owner Steve Grashoff.**

new drycleaning plant is located in a former Goodyear Tire distribution center, centrally located at the heart of four major thoroughfares.

“We just fell in love with the layout, because it has a great location, we can access all the major highways and throughways through Fort Wayne, (and) we have visibility on a major interstate for signage and recognition,” Grashoff says.

Peerless' level of diversification made the former distribution center an optimal choice for segmenting its production to achieve the greatest efficiency possible, he adds.

He described it best in his nomination form: “One of the great appeals of the building is that it is divided into four areas. We start with the sorting and washing room. Everything is marked in at the store level. Once it is put onto our truck and shipped to the plant, it is unloaded in the sorting and washing room.

“From there, it moves to the finishing room, where all the pressing is completed. After pressing and moving to our autobagger, it is then moved to our distribution and loading area.”

In the past, workers would have to sort on racks and then load trucks outside. Now, each banner has its own inside loading bay.

“The trucks back in and can load for each banner under perfect conditions,” Grashoff wrote. “On the other side of our loading area is our CRDN warehouse. It is a 10,000-square-foot storage warehouse for our finished goods for our CRDN franchise. Our home and office delivery service has two designated bay areas for their routes.”

*(continued)*

## Homegrown Design

After Peerless purchased the building and took possession in December 2014, Grashoff, armed with a full set of original blueprints, began designing the drycleaning plant he and his staff wanted. Meanwhile, work began to thoroughly clean the building of tire residue that had accumulated throughout over the years.

Before he became involved in drycleaning, Grashoff spent 20-plus years in the grocery business. The last five were spent developing supermarkets and remodeling and building new store locations, he says, so he had a good idea of what needed to be done to convert the former warehouse into a production facility.

"We had remodeled our existing facility several times and were achieving very good pieces per labor hour in our core business. I really wanted to take what we were doing in our Main Street plant and insert it in the Hillegas plant to maintain that productivity and not confuse our employees by totally changing the ship."

Because of their familiarity with Peerless' unique operations, Grashoff believed he and his management staff were best qualified to determine plant design. After taping off the desired layout and equipment placements, he brought in distributor Eagle Star Equipment to take measurements and fine-tune the design.

Peerless repainted the entire interior, ceiling, walls and production-area floors before moving in brand-new equipment: a boiler, drycleaning machines, washers, dryers and a conveyor system.

Before any existing equipment was moved from the original plant,

it was rebuilt and painted white for a "clean look." Inspiration for the latter came from seeing photos of Wooven's Grand Prize-winning plant last year, Grashoff says.

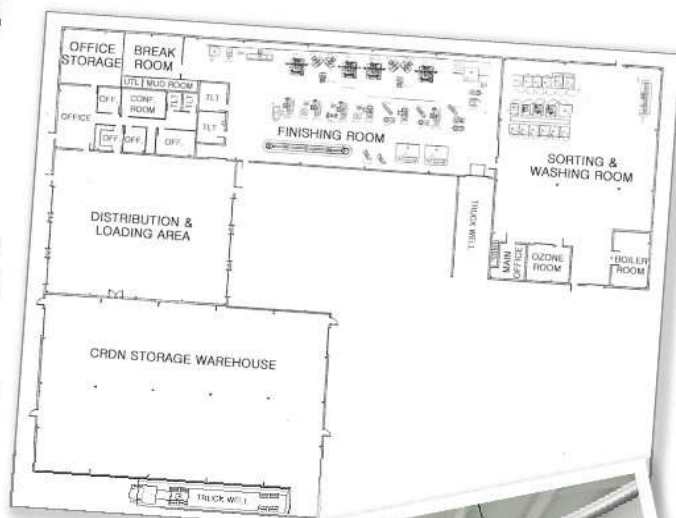
Peerless began transitioning to its new plant in July 2015 and was fully operational there by the third week of the month.

Major production equipment includes a 100-hp Fulton boiler, two 90-pound Union K4 drycleaning machines, 10 Continental Girbau washers, eight Continental dryers, a Metalprogetti assembly system with autobagger, four Sankosha shirt units, a Railex garment conveyor, and a variety of drycleaning presses from Forenta, Unipress and Ajax.

Peerless uses Compassmax POS from Mainline Computer Systems. Chemicals and packaging supplies come from Tri Supply and Cleaner's Supply.

What's next for Peerless? "Volume," Grashoff says.

"We want to be open to look at new opportunities and new markets. ... This building can handle quite a bit more volume. We're only



**The layout Grashoff developed to make the most of Peerless Cleaners' L-shaped production facility; a broader perspective of the finishing room; each banner within the Peerless family of companies has its own inside loading bay.**

a five-day-a-week operation, Monday through Friday. We know that we could work longer and more days if we can find more business."

ADC