



COVER STORY

Dempsey's familiar red, white and blue delivery trucks are really quite "green"

Dempsey Uniform and Linen Supply wins "Best Green Business of the Year"

By Dave Gardner



Kristin Dempsey O'Donnell, vice president of sales and marketing for Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply, says she feels ecstatic.

Her company is the winner of the first Northeast Pennsylvania Business Journal Green Powerhouse Award for business. The honor specifically recognizes green business practices such as leadership and systemic change as important parts of business operation and profitability.

"We're a laundry and not a wind or solar company, so being validated and recognized for being green is great for all of us," says O'Donnell. "We've always felt we were green within our industry, but now we have taken it to the next level. The outside world is finally noticing."

Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply has been in operation since 1959 and recently opened a \$14 million, 132,000-square-foot, high-tech facility within Jessup's Mid-Valley Industrial Park. The building is loaded with green technology and processes.

In conjunction with two other Dempsey locations, the company employs a total workforce of 350 people while processing 600,000 pounds of laundry per week. The overall organization serves 6,000 customers in Pennsylvania, New Jersey New York and Maryland.



From left, U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski congratulates Kristin Dempsey, vice president, Dempsey Uniform and Linen; Patrick Dempsey, chairman; and P.J. Dempsey, president.

Strick compliance

According to O'Donnell, Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply emphasizes a philosophy that the company must operate in compliance with all federal and local environmental regulations. She says, in line with this strict compliance strategy, Dempsey's employees fully recognize the conservation, efficiency and recycling efforts as smart business practices.

"We're not selling a green product, but it's smart for us to be green," says O'Donnell. "It's a fact that we can only put a shirt on the hanger so fast, so other bottom line improvements

must come from reduced water usage and lower energy costs."

P.J. Dempsey, president of Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply, says his father has played a big part in the company's adopting a green visionary role. This vision has included the installation of new water reuse and recycling processes.

"We looked at all the applicable regulations when designing our new facility and then went a few steps farther," says Dempsey. "It would have been shortsighted not to look ahead to be in compliance with future environmental regulations that surely will come into effect."

Dempsey says the company's business plan always maintains a line item for continuous process improvement with dollars reserved for reinvestment. This mandate calls for the company to squeeze out extra efficiency by reducing costs for heat, electricity and hot water.

"My Dad always says a lot of companies eat their seed corn," explains Dempsey. "These types of folks are not out in front with continuous improvement."

Green processes

Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply's continuous improvement program has unleashed the following green technologies:

- The new facility in Throop that uses 30% less water than the old plant in Dunmore;
- A gas boiler with emissions standards that are in line with California's strict limits;
- Tunnel washers that reduce water consumption by 50% over conventional washers;
- A wastewater treatment system that allows water re-use and reduces fresh water consumption by 20%;
- A \$500,000 wastewater treatment system that complies with strict federal and local discharge limits and reduces water consumption through reuse;
- Heat reclamation systems that capture heat from outgoing wastewater and use it to heat the clean incoming water;
- Abundant skylights and windows in the new facility along with white walls;
- Recycling of hangers, plastic and cardboard.

The company's green practices also extend beyond the walls of the Throop facility. Real-time route optimization software complete with a global positioning system, which was made possible after a six-figure investment, allows product deliveries to be accomplished in the most efficient manner possible.

This system helps cut costs by dramatically increasing vehicle efficiency and reducing related carbon emissions.

"We're very good at benchmarking and utilizing ideas from outside of the company," says Dempsey. "We make it a point to tour other facilities and carefully follow Europe's higher environmental standards. We then adopt these workable solutions whenever possible because we want to be the benchmark and the gold standard."

The company is also a charter member of the Laundry Environmental Stewardship Program (ESP). This is promoted as a flexible, cost-effective effort with the goal of improving the environmental performance of textile service and supply companies while improving relations with the company's customers.

The desired environmental protection is to be accomplished through the use of innovative green business practices.

Expert opinion

Jennifer Porter, director of workforce initiatives with Workforce Wayne, served as one of the judges for the first Northeast Pennsylvania Business Journal Green Powerhouse Awards. Before relocating to Northeastern PA, Porter worked in Oregon for almost a decade and care-

fully took note of the sustained green commitment in the Pacific Northwest.

She calls the Green Powerhouse Awards a great thing with which to be associated.

"These awards recognize some of the first organizations in our region taking voluntary action toward green sustainability," says Porter. "This sustainability is about changing behaviors and to do this we need people like those at Dempsey Uniform & Linen Supply to show the way. Companies often are too busy to do needed research, but when others see these positive examples they understand they also can do it."

Porter comments that it can be hard to quantify the importance of a company maintaining a green business operation. She also says it's vital to understand that different definitions exist for green, but that truly green companies take action based on the benefits to its employees, environment and the bottom line.

Another of the great benefits of Dempsey Uniform and Linen Supply winning the award, according to Porter, is that the company is being recognized as a good example of an industry leader that is leading through voluntary action.

"They are having a great impact upon their peers," says Porter. "They're showing the great benefits that can happen while saving water and energy. This type of example can make change happen with others."

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