



**Above:** Three new tunnels installed earlier this year at Textile Care Services' healthcare/hospitality laundry in Rochester, MN, have increased efficiency with faster throughput, while providing more effective cleaning of textiles, according to GM Paul Jewison.

# Productivity Plus! TCS' Plant Upgrade Boosts Throughput & More

\$10 million in new equipment is already exceeding Textile Care Services' expectations

By Jack Morgan

**T**extile Care Services recently completed a wash aisle makeover of its healthcare/hospitality plant in Rochester, MN. The new machinery and systems have fueled faster production and better quality (fewer rejects), while saving energy and labor. Bonus effects include improved staff morale/retention, along with enhanced "curb appeal" to prospects of the company's laundry services.

"We just took a potential customer through the plant," said General Manager Paul Jewison. "I mean they were blown away. That's pretty impressive to walk into an operation like this, and see that it's all brand-new equipment." Prospects notice when a company is investing for the future, he says. "It tells the story that we're going to be around a long time."

Jewison, who's also vice president of the parent company, Healthcare Laundry Services Group, St. Charles, IL, added that the new equipment, including an upgrade of TCS' **ETECH** rail system, three new **Kannegiesser** tunnel washers, 16 new dryers, plus a new roof and other improvements, are already delivering return on investment. "It's really been astonishing," Jewison says of the 96,000-square-foot



**Above:** (Clockwise, top/left) overviews of the plant's new dryers. These machines process goods washed in the tunnels; staff were sad to see their old equipment scrapped. But TCS' management, engineering and production teams—plus the **Kannegiesser ETECH** installers and Carlson Construction crew members shown here—are pleased with the plant's improved performance.

(8,918-square meter) plant he helped establish in 1993. "Everything's worked much better than I thought it would. Maybe I was a little critical. I've been in the business so long."

He noted productivity/efficiency gains, including faster tunnel transfers. "We're getting at least 36-to-40 transfers per hour," he added. Our average is probably 37 or 38 (up from 31). Dryer productivity is up as well. "The dryers are really impressive too," he says. "You know, we're kicking out a couple of hundred pounds of laundry every 11-to-15 minutes (down from 18 minutes). That's much better than we thought."

One challenge for staff is programming the newer, faster equipment so that there are no production bottlenecks between the soil and clean sides. "It's really about understanding how to program it," Jewison says. If goods are cycling through the tunnels faster, you have adjust the time on the front end so that incoming slings match the cycle times. "It's a little bit of a learning curve," he added, but TCS's engineering staff don't mind because they're happy to have retired the old tunnels and other aging equipment. "It's absolute magic," Jewison says of the \$10 million wash aisle makeover that began in March. "I'm just so amazed that we got it done. That's healthy for our business. We have the younger guys coming in

maintenance, and they're on the new equipment."

The older machinery was proving difficult to service, Jewison says. Parts were difficult to find. "You know, I couldn't pick the phone up and call anybody anymore to get help with my equipment because everybody had retired, and they had discontinued the parts and everything that's obsolete."

With the new equipment, the plant is churning out 660,000 lbs. (299,370 kg.) a week. With recent new business, Jewison anticipates a yearly throughput of roughly 34 million lbs. (15.4 million kg.).

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**Kannegiesser ETECH** installation team to a hot lunch on most days. “We cooked for all the crew almost every day on a barbecue outside,” Jewison says. “We kept the morale high and it kept people on the job!”

Additional highlights of the plant upgrade include:

- **3 tunnels:** each has 16, 130 lb. (59 kg.) modules. In addition to faster transfer times, Jewison says the tunnels clean more effectively than the older machines. “We think that the tunnels clean better,” Jewison says. “In fact, our customers track their reject rate. Internally, and across the scale, everybody’s reported improved linen quality. Our quality certainly wasn’t bad before, but it’s better. Pounds per operator hour (PPOH) is up 5% to 180-190 lbs. (81-86 kg.) for flatwork and it’s up to 230 lbs. (104 kg.) for goods processed in the tumble-dry area. Jewison formerly had two full-time staff overseeing the wash aisle. He now has one.
- **Gurtler Vis Tex UV on all three tunnels:** These units are placed on the tunnels to treat tunnel rinse water with UV light and advanced oxidation that allows for greater water reuse, cleaner goods and enhanced hygiene. The plant’s water use is down to

0.33 gallons per lb., slightly lower than with the older equipment, Jewison says.


- **Six new elevators** (hoists) that are used to lift slings to the overhead rail system. This improves efficiency and reliability, Jewison says. They’re part of an upgrade to the **ETECH** rail system that’s now able to move goods more efficiently to the wash aisle, while simplifying maintenance.
- **Soil Sort area:** Employees sorting textiles into chutes now have new 60-by-60-inch (152-by-152 cm.) LED screens to identify which item they’re to place in that chute.
- **Finishing side:** While the finishing equipment wasn’t replaced during this project, significant improvements were made to the building. These include a new exhaust stack for the water heater, plumbing upgrades, a fresh coat of interior and exterior paint, plus \$1 million roof project.
- **On-site parts inventory:** The plant has roughly \$350,000 worth of equipment spares, including motors and all the parts needed for the dryers. “We invested a pretty big chunk of money just to get stuff on the shelf,” Jewison says.

A small number of the older dryers were still in good condition; TCS sent them to another HLSG plant. The bulk of the old machinery was scrapped (see photo on pg. 35). The parting was bittersweet for long-term staff like Jewison to see these machines dismantled after 31 years’ service. “We got we got pictures of it in the scrapyards,” Jewison says. “For full-time guys like us, it kind of hurts to see them lying there.”

With that said, the future looks bright for an investment that’s already earning ROI, says Jewison, noting that to equip an all-new plant to a similar level in 2024 would cost roughly five times what HLSG paid for its upgrade to several aging systems.

In addition, the improvements show that the company values its employees, Jewison says. They like to see these kinds of investments that make their jobs easier and more efficient, he says. “It kind of gives them a morale boost to get new equipment like this that’s bright and shiny.”

What’s next for TCS? With the holidays just around the corner, Jewison quipped that the only thing on his shopping list at the moment is a new blanket folder. TCS needs one because the efficiencies and productivity gains of the new equipment are so robust that more blankets are coming through from the wash aisle, and this could soon outstrip capacity on the finishing side. “The only thing I really want now for Christmas is the new blanket folder,” he says. “And that’s really because the new equipment is much faster.” **TS**

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