

# Janitorial/Housekeeping Company Adds Laundry Services; Doubles Business



The addition of this F32 flatwork ironer into Mountain Fresh's offered services has enabled them to enter new markets and process more than a million pounds of laundry since 2003. Since the ironers installation 18 months ago, Mountain Fresh has doubled laundry production and sales.

**By Haley Jorgensen**

Sales at Mountain Fresh Hospitality Services Inc. in Sevierville, Tenn., have skyrocketed in four years thanks to a strategic decision in 1999 to add commercial laundry services to the company's growing, eight-year-old janitorial/housekeeping business.

Today, Mountain Fresh's commercial laundry business generates 45 to 50 percent of total company sales, according to owners Angie and Rodger Smith. That success, they maintain, is a direct result of quality service and a larger facility equipped with new, industrial laundry equipment designed to increase production.

The most critical piece of that equipment mix—a Continental Industrial Flatwork Ironer—enabled Mountain Fresh to enter new markets and process more than a million pounds of laundry in 2003. Since the ironer's installation 18 months ago, Mountain Fresh has doubled laundry production and sales, with no labor increase.

## **Combining Laundry and Janitorial/Housekeeping**

By expanding the company to include laundry processing, Mountain Fresh has opened up new markets and grown exponentially since 1991, when the Smiths first entered the janitorial/housekeeping business. The two services—janitorial and laundry processing—go hand in hand, according to Angie.

"Our customers like the flexibility, convenience and stability of dealing with one company," she says. "It sets us apart." It makes sense, she says, for customers who use Mountain Fresh for housekeeping services to also use the company for laundry services. "If we're already doing the housekeeping for a rental company, we understand better than anyone when customers need a quick turn around on laundry."

That's critical since Mountain Fresh serves a community dependent on tourism. Sevierville's nearby Smoky Mountains draw 10 million visitors annually, says Angie. A full-service company, Mountain Fresh also offers a rental linen service to customers

hoping to avoid the hassles associated with tracking, laundering and maintaining linens. By offering both housekeeping and laundry, the company brings one-stop shopping to property management companies, resorts, businesses and rental property owners throughout the area.

## **Laundry—Headache Turned Prosperous Business Venture**

What used to be a headache for the Smiths—laundry—has since become the silver lining of their business. Laundry became an issue early on for the couple's janitorial company. From the start, several customers wanted them to handle both their cleaning and laundry. "I did all the laundry from my garage with two top-load washers and two dryers," says Angie. Still, laundry wasn't the focus of her business.

But by 1998, the demand for clean linens had grown so much, Angie's garage laundry ran around the clock. "We knew we either needed to expand officially into the laundry market or cut customers," she says.

Mountain Fresh expanded to include laundry in 1999, and in doing so, moved



Mountain Fresh's owners Angie and Rodger Smith.

into a 2,400 square-foot building. "It was tiny," recalls Angie. "It was divided in half with a front office and rear laundry." The facility was equipped with Continental industrial laundry equipment, including two Continental 55-pound capacity Pro-Series washer-extractors, two 75-pound drying tumblers and a 20-inch roll diameter flatwork ironer.

Business thrived and Mountain Fresh expanded again two years later into a new 10,000-square-foot building, from which it still operates. The facility, specifically designed to handle the company's growing laundry volume, also serves as headquarters for housekeeping operations as well as customer relations and sales activities. The laundry features a 130-, two 55- and two 90-pound capacity Continental Pro-Series washer-extractors; and a 125-, 175- and two 75-pound capacity drying tumblers. In July of 2002, the Smiths invested in a larger and faster, 32-inch, steam-heated, double-roll Continental Industrial Flatwork Ironer. The company's reliable 20-inch ironer still worked well, according to Rodger, but just couldn't keep pace with Mountain Fresh's increasing linen volume.

### Laundry Equipment Investment Doubles Production

Since the new ironer's installation—less than 18 months ago—linen production and sales have doubled, says Rodger. It not only eliminated the need to run additional shifts to keep up with linen volume, the new ironer opened the doors to markets Angie and Rodger had only dreamed of pursuing before.

Now confident Mountain Fresh could efficiently process large volumes of linens, Angie went after hotel and resort business. "For years I shied away from sheet-only customers and big hotels and resorts because of the labor expense," she says. "We could not have handled that kind of volume on the small press without running it 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The new press opened the door for us to tackle any job. Now it doesn't matter if a client has 50 rooms or 1,500. I know we can do it."

More than 40 percent of Mountain Fresh's laundry business now comes from clientele who operate on-premise laundries, but don't have the desire, staff or equipment to press linens. The new ironer allows the company to handle the volume and provide high-quality

finishing results, without suffering an increase in labor. During the peak summer season, the press only runs 12 hours per day, according to Rodger.

### New Flatwork Ironer Increases Production; Not Labor

"We don't even fire up the big press until we have nine or 10 buggies of linen waiting," he says. Linens go through the press faster than they go through the washers—at a pace of 78 feet per minute, according to Rodger. "It takes my two best people feeding the linens into the machine to keep up. We finish several thousands of pounds of linens in a shift."

Continental flatwork ironers automatically remove the proper amount of moisture from linens as they pass through the rollers, according to Rodger. In doing so, costly and time-consuming dryer conditioning can be eliminated. Linens can be fed directly from washer-extractors into the ironer—boosting production dramatically. The more rollers on the ironer, the faster moisture is removed and linens are pressed and finished, according to Jeff Large of East Tennessee Equipment Co. in Sevierville. A Continental distributor, Large worked with Angie and Rodger to select and install the ironer.

"Designed to cut maintenance and improve finishing quality, Continental heated

chest flatwork ironers are available with one, two or three rolls," says Large. Automatic feeders and rolls can also be added at any time to meet growing production requirements, he said.

In order to further reduce labor, Mountain Fresh's two-roll Continental ironing system is equipped with an automatic Silver Line Folder and Max Stack stacker. Soon, Rodger hopes to increase processing speeds to 103 feet per minute by adding a third roll and an automatic feeder.

"We started out with nothing compared to what we have now," says Angie of her business. In 1999, Mountain Fresh served around 25 private customers. Each private customer owned one to three chalets, according to Angie, and generated 15-20 pounds of laundry. "Now, in addition to our list of private customers, we have 30 clients who each generate 100-1,500 pounds of laundry per day during the busy season," she says.

Mountain Fresh has grown to employ a housekeeping/janitorial staff of 35 and commercial laundry staff of 12-15. All are committed to providing top-quality services. "We went out on a limb when we started the laundry," says Angie. "It was a big investment for equipment. It's amazing even to me how we've grown in four-and-a-half years." ■



Mountain Fresh's growing business now features a 130-, two 55- and two 90-pound capacity Pro-Series washer-extractors.