

The University of Georgia & Athens Janitor Supply:

A SPECIAL TEAM

By Dan Wagner

John Chittom and the sales force at Athens Janitor Supply Co., Inc., Athens, GA, can certainly sell you an automatic scrubber if that's what you want.

They can also sell you cleaning chemicals, high-density liners, safety gloves, and a whole host of other products.

But that's not all they can offer. When the University of Georgia (UGA) Physical Plant-Services Department was looking for a way to streamline its cleaning operation and do more with less, Chittom and his people were there to assist with that as well, enthusiastically welcoming the opportunity to provide service beyond what many normally associate with jansan distribution. Chittom and his group specifically identified the Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS) and its certification program as a unique tool they could use to

provide something more and help their customer—the university—reduce costs. And ultimately, by helping UGA with its business, by understanding the customer's needs, and by providing solutions to real-life operational challenges, Chittom was able to solidify Athens' relationship with the university and truly take it to another level.

"Understanding the customer's needs is not a new idea," notes Chittom, Athens' president. "But CIMS has given us the vehicle to help increase that understanding and be a true partner with our customers."

And UGA's successful pursuit of CIMS certification for its North Campus Green Corridor has proved beneficial beyond anyone's dreams, resulting in healthier facilities and lower maintenance costs and positioning Athens as an indispensable business partner.

Setting the Standard

A family-owned business that has worked with UGA for almost 50 years, Athens Janitor Supply is always looking for new opportunities to provide customers with value-added services that help them run their businesses more effectively. So when the university—the oldest land-grant university in the country, with more than 9.5 million square feet spread out over 615 acres—wanted to implement a comprehensive green cleaning program in 2006, it immediately turned to Athens for support. Implemented campuswide in June 2007, the green cleaning program was an immediate success and found great support among the university's 44,000 students, faculty, and staff.

In successfully implementing a green cleaning program, UGA went beyond traditional environmental purchasing and sought to adopt a truly comprehensive

program that focused on training and education. But a piece still seemed to be missing from the puzzle. Recognizing the crucial importance of documentation and standardization of systems, Athens Janitor Supply approached UGA about pursuing CIMS certification, stressing the benefits of implementing an overall management structure that focuses on quality and customer satisfaction. UGA immediately saw value in effective management and elected to pursue certification for a portion of the campus referred to as the North Campus Green Corridor, hoping to specifically tie CIMS to the newly implemented green cleaning program.

"In order to maintain facilities at a high operational standard, it is essential to ensure that everyone is dedicated to standardized best practices," explains Kimberly Thomas, UGA assistant director, services department. "CIMS was chosen as the method to standardize due to its variety of criteria and focus on customer service."

The university also saw CIMS as an excellent way to validate its existing programs and set UGA apart as a true organization of excellence. "We focused on an effort to improve our overall operations," notes Al Jeffers, UGA interim superintendent, building services. "It is very easy to think that an organization is operating efficiently from within, but an outside and qualified voice helps you see things from a different perspective."

Both Thomas and Dexter Fisher, UGA director of services, agree. Thomas notes that the department already believed its business practices to be top notch, but did not have a way to validate such belief without a third-party certification like CIMS. Fisher takes it one step further and stresses the importance of UGA setting an example for others. "We really wanted to be the standard for other universities to emulate and, at the same time, add a true level of professionalism to our staff," he says.

A Productive Partner

Achieving certification for the North Campus Green Corridor certainly was not easy, involving a total team effort, led by UGA's Thomas and Athens' Chittom.

Chittom, who is one of seven from Athens to achieve CIMS' ISSA Certification Expert (I.C.E.) status, went through the Standard point by point to identify the Green Corridor's areas of strength and those areas where improvement was needed. Ultimately, Chittom found himself positioned as the person who directly assisted in bringing all the pieces together.

"Athens' role as I saw it was to assist and offer information during the process," says Chittom. "We were there to answer questions about the Standard when necessary and offer an additional point of view." Among the services provided by Chittom and the Athens contingent in their capacity as I.C.E.-certified professionals were training, workloading, and helping define scopes of work

and frequencies—all geared toward helping the university justify its budget and staffing requests.

Chittom and Thomas both stress that success did not happen overnight. UGA first put together a group that developed a strategic plan of action. The plan enabled the team to work toward a common goal and handle any challenges that were encountered.

"Being part of a successful CIMS-certification project demands a commitment beyond selling products," says Chittom. "To start such a project requires a commitment to excellence and a dedication to training and management development. It is not easy, but when all is said and done, seeing that the information you have specifically provided is

I.C.E. Hot

While the Athens Janitor Supply team has worked hand-in-hand with the UGA, many other I.C.E.-certified professionals have assisted their customers in achieving CIMS certification. In 2008 alone, certified individuals from Waxie Sanitary Supply led DMS Facility Services down the path toward certification; RoVic, Inc. guided Capitol Cleaning Contractors through the CIMS process; Peter Henson of Henson Sales Group used his I.C.E. status to prepare Crothall Services Group for its CIMS assessment; and numerous other I.C.E. professionals directly assisted customers in their compliance efforts. In fact, as 2008 came to a close, there were a total of 338 I.C.E.-certified professionals, representing 47 U.S. states and Canadian provinces as well as Mexico and the Caribbean.

A full listing of I.C.E.-certified individuals and their contact information is available at http://issa.com/data/File/CIMS/cims_ice_list.pdf.

Eighty-five of these individuals achieved certification during the last four months of 2008 by attending one of three I.C.E. workshops. A general, all-industry workshop was held in September in conjunction with ISSA/INTERCLEAN® North America 2008, while specialized, custom programs were hosted by both Triple S and Procter and Gamble.

2009 promises to be just as exciting, with at least three workshops expected. The first general program has been scheduled for March 6 at Hyatt Regency in Chicago, IL (in conjunction with the BSCAI tradeshow), with an additional workshop to be held October 5-6 in Chicago (in conjunction with ISSA/INTERCLEAN North America 2009; please note that the session will be held on the afternoon of October 5 and the morning of October 6). Triple S will also be holding a member-only custom program on April 17-18 in conjunction with its annual event, and ISSA is considering adding a fourth workshop for June in Philadelphia, PA.

To become a CIMS Expert, professionals must attend a one-day workshop and pass an examination. The CIMS Expert designation is earned by and applies to an individual professional and not to an entire organization. For more information regarding the 2009 schedule or to register, please contact me at 800-225-4772 (North America) or 847-982-0800; e-mail, daniel@issa.com. More information is also available at www.issa.com/standard/ice.

—Dan Wagner

helping the customer achieve its goals is truly rewarding.”

UGA was certainly grateful to have Athens along for the ride. “Athens was our strength in the process,” says Debra Massey, UGA building services training specialist. “They knew how to lead and help us find what was needed. They really helped us understand what was needed in terms of workloading and quality-assurance inspections.”

Jeffers agrees, concluding, “They were a huge part of our completing the process. They were an excellent, efficient, and responsive partner in all aspects.”

A Positive Impact

The UGA North Campus Green Corridor underwent its official CIMS assessment in early October 2008 and, after demonstrating compliance with the required percentage of Standard elements, was awarded Certification With Honors. In doing so, UGA joined the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI), the University of Guelph (Guelph, ON, Canada), and Texas Christian University (Fort Worth, TX) as one of only four universities to achieve CIMS certification. Further, it became the first university to have a comprehensive green-management program CIMS certified.

Thomas and the rest of the UGA squad are quite pleased with the results, pointing to improved overall business practices, better customer service and communication, and improved productivity as among the greatest benefits. Yet it’s the way customers view the work of the services department and the impact that effective cleaning can have on the health and safety of occupants that has stood out the most to Massey. “Customers seem to look at us differently,” she says. “CIMS certification has really given us a sense of pride. Everyone is glowing, and now we can definitively say that we are providing a safer, healthier, and more friendly environment.”

Fisher and Thomas agree and could not be more satisfied with the appreciation of building occupants. Fisher points to the fact that staff is now viewed as industry professionals, and administration recognizes the true value of the services provided. “The administration sees

the department as one that is willing to hold itself to the highest standards and is dedicated to making the university a world-class institution,” he says. Thomas highlights the positive responses from students and staff, noting that they “appear to be as proud of our certification as our employees are.”

As for the tie-in between the university’s green cleaning program and CIMS, there appears to be a perfect fit. In fact, UGA was one of only four universities in the United States to receive an award in the universities category of the 2008 Green Cleaning Award for Schools and Universities (sponsored by *American School & University* magazine, the Green Cleaning Network, and the Healthy Schools Campaign).

UGA’s selection was in part due to its CIMS-certification efforts and the university’s work with Athens.

“CIMS certification certainly played a role in the selection of UGA as an award recipient,” declares Steve Ashkin, executive director of the Green Cleaning Network and a member of the award-evaluation committee. “Every applicant used green products. But by implementing the auditing and quality-control principles that are required by CIMS and by achieving third-party validation of their efforts, UGA demonstrated the kind of exemplary leadership that is truly representative of the award and what we’d like to see all schools and universities doing.”

Thomas, for one, sees CIMS’ role in the university’s green efforts as the No. 1 ben-

efit for the future. “The greatest benefit as we move into the future will be the environmental-sustainability aspects of the green cleaning program and its interplay with CIMS,” Thomas says. “Both programs and the university’s improved daily management and operations promise to have a tremendously positive impact on the campus community as a



Located in UGA’s North Campus Green Corridor, Old College (above) has provided dormitory and boarding-house space, classrooms, administrative offices, dining facilities, and fortification for over 200 years and was the first of the North Campus buildings to go green. The flip was finished in 2006, and the building now uses only three chemicals, compared to the previous 325.

whole, including both department employees and the people who use university facilities.”

Money Saved, Safety Improved

The UGA Physical Plant-Services Department has always prided itself on providing a professional service to improve the health and safety of employees and customers, while assisting in the recruitment of students. As Fisher puts it, the department has a commitment to taking care of customers with a smile and a “can-do attitude.” But even the department has been impressed with the real-world budgetary and workplace health and safety impact that

has resulted from the university's commitment to green cleaning and effective management through CIMS. Specifically, Thomas attributes annual cost savings of US\$414,000 to UGA's implementation of the programs.

Moreover, UGA has enjoyed a reduction in lost time due to workplace injuries and recordable workers'-compensation claims. In fact, from 2007 to 2008, lost time decreased from 981.5 to 858 hours, resulting in employees being available for active work for 123.5 more hours than the year before.

Brenda Gresham, UGA building service worker II, is not surprised, as she has noticed an improvement in operational consistency and is impressed with its effect on maintaining a safe and healthy work environment. "Everything is now consistent in terms of keeping all areas safe, clean, and healthy for ourselves and our customers. This helps us do a much better job satisfying the customers, which is most important."

"I Feel We Are Family"

Both UGA and Athens Janitor Supply are extremely excited about the future and the possibilities presented by CIMS. "I believe CIMS will help us continue to standardize overall business practices and present a positive image for physical-plant operations and UGA as a whole," says Thomas. "I expect to move the green cleaning program forward and implement CIMS throughout the rest of the campus community."

For his part, Chittom believes that CIMS and his I.C.E. status will present a wealth of new opportunities. "CIMS offers a level of professionalism that the industry needs and allows for focus on the real needs of the customer," he says. "I believe it helps increase the level of communication with our customers, and our commitment to the program will open doors and future opportunities to assist others. My father told me 22 years ago to go out and try and help someone every day. CIMS gives me the opportunity to

help not only our customers, but our industry as well."

Most importantly, both organizations could not be happier with the growth in their relationship as a result of CIMS and look forward to working together in an even closer fashion in the future. "The relationship between UGA and Athens has only improved since the certification process," says Thomas. "And the relationship was certainly extremely important in the university's successful completion of CIMS certification."

Perhaps Massey says it best: "We can't say 'thank you' enough. I feel we are family." **IT**



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Standard Bearers

In addition to UGA's North Campus Green Corridor, a number of other cleaning organizations successfully passed a CIMS assessment and achieved certification in 2008. Those organizations include:

- BEE LINE, Inc.**, Schaumburg, IL
- Capitol Cleaning Contractors, Inc.**, Hartford, CT
- DMS Facility Services**, Monrovia, CA
- Grosvenor Building Services, Inc.**, Orlando, FL
- Guardian Services Industries**, New York, NY
- Janitronics Facility Services**, Albany, NY
- KleenMark**, Madison, WI
- Matrix Integrated Facility Management**, Johnson City, NY
- Shellville Services, A Division of Matrix**, Philadelphia, PA
- Texas Christian University Facilities Services/ Physical Plant**, Fort Worth, TX
- Wellington Building Maintenance Ltd.**, Guelph, ON, Canada

By all indications, the organizations that went through the process in 2008 are more than pleased with the results. DMS Facility Services owner and president Richard E. Dotts points to improved business practices and derived benefits that are both internal and external. "Each DMS region now has a roadmap to ensure the implementation of successful business practices," states Dotts. "Internally, our ability to communicate and sustain quality business practices will increase as a result of CIMS, while we also expect to gain more external business as our reputation grows."

Bob Symolon, president and CEO of Capitol Cleaning Contractors, agrees: "What began as a quest for a certificate to display and include in marketing material has now morphed into a better understanding of our company's strengths and shortcomings. Such strengths and shortcomings were highlighted during the certification process and will help us deal with demands for ever-higher levels of productivity."

Symolon also expects customers to increasingly appreciate Capitol's certification efforts. "We believe certification will assist in our being recognized as a professional organization," he says.

Mike Eisenberg of Guardian Service Industries notes that Guardian has already been rewarded for its CIMS efforts. He points to over \$5 million worth of contracts that have been awarded in part due to the organization's CIMS certification. Eisenberg specifically mentions the extension of Guardian's contract with Morgan Stanley and a financial-incentive bonus the company enjoys as a direct result of its CIMS certification.

And Morgan Stanley is not the only end-user customer relying on CIMS certification. More and more facility managers, building owners, and procurement professionals are citing CIMS in their RFPs and cleaning specifications, including the State of Washington Department of General Administration and State Farm Insurance, which recently announced that it would require that all new cleaning vendors achieve CIMS certification.

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