



Everyone Loves a Parade, but the Real Fun Comes Afterward for Sweeping Companies

Confetti in the hopper and beer cups in a dumpster. Another successful St. Patrick's Day Parade has ended and bringing up the rear is the ultimate clean team – compliments of American Sweeping Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri.

Few sweeping companies can claim a bigger stake in St. Patrick's Day trash than American Sweeping and its sociable owner, Gale Holsman Jr. The day is not only profitable, but is also fun for his team of sweepers, laborers, friends and even fellow contractors.

The day begins when it is just an hour old – at 1 a.m. when his American Sweeping crew begins delivering 20 toilets to service the expected downtown crowd of 250,000 people.

The statistics are impressive and describe a near-Herculean effort required to supply the nation's third largest St. Patrick's Day parade. Aside from the toilets, American Sweeping uses eight sweepers, two roll-off trucks with boxes, and 16 ground people whose primary job is using blowers on sidewalks and emptying trashcans along the parade route.

Before all that happens, though, Holsman and his team have spent weeks getting their equipment ready. Every piece of equipment is gussied up for the parade. Windshields are washed. Painted surfaces are touched up. No detail is left to chance.

By March 16 each year, the equipment is clean and gleaming and parade ready – it has to be. After the marching bands, bagpipers, fire trucks and majorettes go by, the parade ends with Holsman's team cleaning up the mess from the 2 1/2 hour parade that stretched from 31st Street to 43rd Street.

There is a good reason for the clean trucks and equipment. "We're a big part of the parade," Holsman explained. "We are cleaning the streets up, they're opening the blocks back up for the public. Of everything we do, it's definitely my favorite and it's the most challenging thing we do."

No doubt, special event sweeping can be fun. Who doesn't love a parade, or a festival or a concert? The work is profitable, too. Any event that draws hundreds - or hundreds of thousands - of people generates a lot of confetti, food wrappers and trash of all types. The horseback units, a mainstay of most parades, present another cleanup issue altogether. A special event cleanup crew, too, deals with that, quickly and efficiently.

Special events require special skills, said Holsman and others who do a lot of big-event cleanup.

"It can be overwhelming because you need to provide the labor," Holsman said. "We have events that can take up to 100 people."

Alpha Omega Group/Schafers Pink Street Sweepers is based in San Diego, California. The company has performed special event sweeping for the past six years, including the city's Mardi Gras festival, the Gay Pride parade and the Suzuki Rock N Roll Marathon.

The company is owned by Deborah Bravandt, making it the only female owned sweeping contractor in the region. Bravandt not only manages the business's daily operations, but also is responsible for its main marketing tool, the company's extensive website. Company manager Jeff Peterson, who is married to the boss, manages vehicle maintenance, driver training and field operations.

Peterson said Alpha Omega is the only independent sweeping company in San Diego with a website, which he said is responsible for generating about 60 percent of their business.

He agrees with Holsman that special event sweeping expands beyond the typical sweeping services. Alpha Omega works closely with Guerilla Service Industries, a cleaning company that can help provide the manpower for huge events.

Appearances, too, count for a lot because at a big, public venue, thousands of potential customers are in the audience. A sweeping contractor at such an event has special pressure to do a good job and to look good doing it.

"We paint our machines every year," Peterson said. "We look at local regulations and go above and beyond what they require. Our trucks have banners. For the Rock and Roll Marathon we have a speaker on our truck that helps blind runners know where they are on the route."

"We change our brooms once a month because special events require better collection with better maintenance," he said.

Even some of the company's equipment is tweaked. Sweepers have specially designed gutter rails that help trap trash against curbs. Alpha Omega also uses a patented irrigation system on its broom that sprays a fine mist to trap dust. Peterson said the more common sprayers put down too much water and can cause people to slip on pavement at events that have lots of foot traffic.

Holsman started American Sweeping in 1984 as a typical sweeping contractor, but he learned early on that special event sweeping could be a lucrative field. For one thing, it is often a multi-phase process – the area need to be swept before the vendors and others set up at the event, kept clean during it, and then cleaned when everyone leaves. His company offers cleaning of all types, making his company an easy, one-stop shop for event organizers.

Not only does he sweep but also, "I can power wash after the popcorn guy leaves all that grease on the street," Holsman said.

Recently, Holsman has branched into other services, providing staging, lighting and sound services for special events.

Proper equipment for festivals and parade clean up can take years to acquire, he admitted. However, when an event organizer is happy with your work, they are eager to secure future contracts. Remember, unlike a poorly swept parking lot, when a highly publicized event has inadequate cleanup, it becomes a news story that is open to public comment and speculation.

Holsman and Peterson agree that finding potential clients requires patience and a willingness to work with a wide variety of elected officials, volunteers on committees and others who do not usually have experience with property maintenance.

Holsman recommends contractors hit the Internet and look for special events in their areas. Put together a high-quality flyer that shows off your services. Better yet, said Peterson, develop a website that showcases equipment, past projects and community affiliations.

Alpha Omega, for example, has a page on its website that promotes The 3 Day

Breast Cancer Walk to benefit the Susan G. Komen cancer research foundation. The company raises money for walkers in San Diego, San Francisco and Arizona, and sets a goal of supporting seven walkers and raising \$15,400.

The company also has a page devoted to tips on hiring a sweeping contractor. It is detailed and full of information for novices and other potential clients.

Holsman's American Sweeping, too, has a great website, with one page highlighting its charitable involvement including Rotary International, the city's Duck Derby to benefit mental health service research, a Trolley Run that helps the Children's Center for the Visually Impaired, and a pet rescue group. Holsman is also a founding member of the North American Power Sweeping Association. He promotes his business in his hometown and has promoted the industry in general on a national platform.

Both men said the affiliations are good not only for the communities they serve but also for developing contacts with potential clients.

"The website is probably the best salesman I can have," Holsman said. "My website presents and my sales staff closes" the deal. "What you have to do is prove you have the financial means to back the

promises I'm about to make to their organization," he said.

When working with public officials and others, Holsman said client education is important. Often it is up to the sweeping contractor to let clients understand the types of services they may need, how often those services should be performed, and reassurance that it will all be done in a timely, professional manner with no surprises.

Patience can be key. "I use examples to show them what I can do," Holsman said. "No one likes a know it all. I explain that our whole goal is to make (the client) look their best and to make this thing run smoothly."

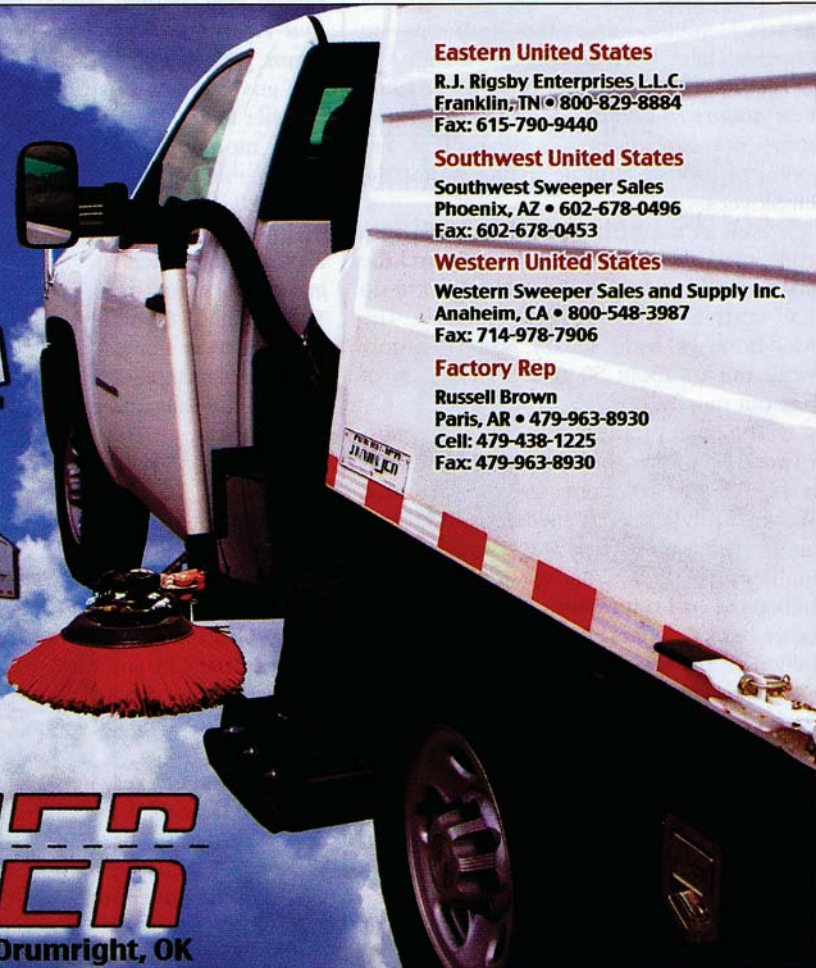
Peterson and Holsman's final pieces of advice for contractors looking to expand into special event sweeping? Promote yourself, especially on the internet, make information about your company easy to get, and develop strong relationships with politicians, civic leaders and community groups.

In the end, the best advertising is the service you provide. Said Holsman, "Do what you say and say what you're going to do."

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