



**The Living Center -
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CASE STUDY

BENEFITS OF NEW EQUIPMENT ARE FAR-REACHING FOR LONG-TERM CARE FACILITY

In a long-term care facility, providing thoroughly cleaned linens is only one aspect of providing quality care. Nevertheless, it can have a large impact on the facility as a whole. Residents enjoy a more comfortable and safe environment when a facility has the ability to provide sanitary bedding, clothing and other garments. Efficient laundry processes can also save a facility thousands of dollars annually. Since replacing older equipment with more efficient UniMac® machines in 2014, The Living Center, a long-term care facility located on the Fitzgibbon Hospital Campus in Marshall, Missouri, has experienced these benefits firsthand.

THE VALUE OF LINENS

To maintain the health and safety of 99 full-time residents, The Living Center's on-premises laundry (OPL) runs for a significant part of the day. In addition to caring for residents' laundry, the OPL also processes linens for the other healthcare facilities on the 72-acre Fitzgibbon Hospital Campus — a 60-bed hospital, a surgery center, a cancer center, a medical office building, and three medical clinics. In order to provide a high quality of care for all patients on campus and to ensure health regulations are being met, the machines in the OPL typically run up to 20 hours each day.

“Our laundry operation is unique because volume is affected by the many other patients on campus any given day,” says Theresa Metz, the administrator of The Living Center. “Having clean linens on-hand and the ability to process dirty linens quickly is critical.”

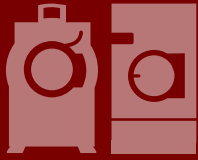
Unfortunately, for several years, older Milnor® machines with frequent maintenance issues had hindered the OPL's productivity and throughput. Along with the frustrations of breakdowns and repairs, Metz was also displeased with the wash quality these machines provided.

“Linens never smelled clean and stains always remained after washing. We were constantly throwing away linens that were nearly brand new,” she explains.

While aiming to provide quality care and linens under typically tight budgets, long-term care facilities must also comply with regulatory bodies, such as health departments, to continue to operate. Frequent inspections ensure that regulations are being met and a high quality of care is being maintained in all parts of a facility. Guidelines vary by state, but most include the same basic regulations. One such regulation is that water must be heated to at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit to ensure that bacteria are being killed as the garments are washed. Laundry rooms must also comply with certain design regulations to prevent the cross-contamination of clean and soiled linens. While these regulations may present an added challenge, they are necessary to ensuring the health and safety of residents.

In an industry that serves patients who are often in poor health and more susceptible to illness, properly sanitized and disinfected linens are one of the most important aspects of providing optimal care. While many factors play into a patient's health status, he or she may be put at greater risk of catching potentially life-threatening infections, such as bed





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— AND —
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sores, if linens are not processed to meet regulations. Furthermore, treating a patient with these types of preventable infections puts a financial burden on both the patient and the healthcare provider that can add up to up to thousands of dollars per case. Laundry equipment that enables staff to easily process linens correctly can eliminate doubts that linens are negatively impacting patient health.

NEW DISTRIBUTOR, NEW SYSTEM

With hopes of eliminating the challenges related to using older machines and to prevent future problems, Metz wanted to find a new distributor that could offer new, more advanced equipment at a better value. In 2013, The Living Center partnered with RJ Kool Company, the region's certified UniMac distributor. With over twenty years of experience, RJ Kool has helped hundreds of customers in the long-term care industry improve patient care and boost their bottom lines. Metz was attracted to the company's history and its commitment to providing quality service and training for customers. A selling point that Metz found particularly impressive was that the company offered a free training program for basic troubleshooting and maintenance — a service her previous distributor did not provide.

“When we assist a long-term care OPL with replacing old equipment, it is not long before a multitude of positive differences begin to surface,” says Bill Kimmel, president of RJ Kool. “For The Living Center, these improvements have had a domino effect on the entire facility and campus.”

Kimmel explains that many long-term care facilities are still using older washer-extractors that offer as few as four cycle options, are equipped with manual timers, and have relatively low extraction speeds. Machines such as these are not designed to withstand the heavy usage required by a long-term care facility. With limited control options, producing high-quality wash results for various types of garments is very difficult, and there is an increased potential for user error. Low G-Force extraction speeds allow linens to retain more moisture at the end of a cycle. This adds to the time needed to dry the load, and ultimately decreases throughput and increases utility costs.

Older tumble dryers, most often controlled by manual timers, can cause their own set of efficiency issues. With manual timers, OPL employees must estimate the time it takes for a load to dry. To avoid having to re-run the machines, operators often over-estimate the time needed to dry a load. Over-estimating dry times not only decreases laundry room productivity, but it also increases the risk of overheating, scorching, and damaging linens.

A UniMac study even found that over-drying by just eight minutes per load on a 75-pound tumble dryer can cost a facility \$883 in utilities and \$4,866 in labor annually.

“By analyzing the operation and old equipment, we helped The Living Center pinpoint the specific time- and money-eating issues that were getting in the way of maximum productivity and efficiency,” adds Kimmel. “We then provided the facility with the tools to help solve them.”



**EXPERIENCED
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CASE STUDY

As of January 2014, The Living Center's OPL is now equipped with four UniMac UW65 65-pound high-performance washer-extractors and five UT075 75-pound heavy-duty tumble dryers. All machines are equipped with UniMac's revolutionary UniLinc™ controls, and the exclusive technologies that come with the system. These include an industry-leading 400 G-Force extraction speed, ECO Cycles, OPTispray™ Rinsing Technology, and OPTidry™ Over-dry Prevention Technology. UniLinc also collects machine performance and maintenance data that can be used to further increase efficiency, analyze and reduce operating costs, and even prove to health inspectors that regulations are being met.

FAVORITE FEATURES

Since upgrading its OPL with UniMac machines, The Living Center has eliminated many of the problems related to using older equipment. There has been a significant increase in productivity with a notable reduction in utility, linen, and labor costs. Metz says that one of the most significant attributors to these improvements is that employees now have access to up to 41 pre-programmed cycles at their fingertips. When installing the machines, the laundry equipment and process specialists at RJ Kool worked alongside the laundry room staff at Fitzgibbon to create specialized cycles based on common stains and load types. Several cycles were even created to cater to the special needs of the laundry coming from different parts of the campus. Metz appreciated the attention to detail and believes it has certainly paid off.

“Every cycle is matched perfectly with the proper type and amount of wash formula to address the stain that needs to be removed,” Metz explains. “Now, employees simply select the correct cycle and let machines do the rest. Very little error takes place.”

With a very culturally diverse staff, Metz particularly values the multiple language settings available with UniLinc. And pre-programmed controls, which can be read by each employee in his or her primary language, have made it easy for staff to select the proper wash and dry programs. In fact, UniLinc has made the process so easy that the facility has been able to decrease its number of full-time OPL employees. The decrease in labor hours needed to run the laundry has allowed The Living Center to transition former OPL positions to focus on other important housekeeping tasks around campus, causing an increase in housekeeping productivity overall. With UniLinc reports, Metz is able to view machine metrics, such as cycle times, machine usage and utility consumption, to confirm and monitor the increase in productivity and throughput. With wireless networking capabilities, this information is conveniently accessible from any Internet-connected computer.

Metz has also been able to measure success by reviewing par levels — the number of available linens at any given time. The ability to measure par levels is not only an important metric for keeping costs low, but Metz sees it as a tangible benchmark for quality of care. Before replacing equipment, the OPL's par loss was significant. This was due to linens not being cleaned thoroughly and stains not being fully removed.





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Today, after upgrading equipment, nearly all linens go back on the shelf after processing. Linens are only thrown away when they are visibly worn, and the facility's linen loss is attributed to normal wear and tear.

“Our linens have improved in appearance. They're softer and smell fresher,” adds Metz. “We are providing better customer service and better quality linens than before, all while saving money.”

By maintaining adequate par without having to purchase new linens, The Living Center saw significant savings in 2014. Meanwhile, utility bills have also improved thanks to the machines' tailored cycles, programmable water levels, and energy-efficient technologies. The most notable decrease came in the area of fuel costs. Washer-extractors' 400 G-Force extraction speeds, which extract maximum moisture from linens, coupled with tumble dryers' OPTidry technology, which pinpoints exactly when a load is dry, may have contributed to a decrease in gas costs for The Living Center in 2014.

Aside from the quantifiable savings, Metz has seen other improvements since making the decision to upgrade the equipment in the OPL. She has noticed a distinct change in the atmosphere in the laundry room.

“Not only does the laundry room look and smell cleaner,” says Metz, “But now that the staff has access to better equipment and wash results have improved, laundry workers seem to be taking more pride in their work — employee morale has improved.”

The addition of the new UniMac equipment has helped The Living Center show its commitment to quality of care. Current residents are enjoying the physical improvements in linen quality, and The Living Center can now provide tangible evidence to assure residents and their families that they are providing a safe and sanitary environment.

WELL-CARED FOR

As The Living Center demonstrates, a more efficient OPL has far-reaching effects on every aspect of a long-term care facility and, in this case, the Fitzgibbon Hospital Campus as a whole. Dealing with unique financial situations and strict health regulations may provide an added challenge in this industry, but finding the right distributor can make all the difference in getting the tools to help overcome these obstacles. The savings The Living Center and Fitzgibbon Medical Campus have been enjoying since replacing laundry equipment are certainly quantifiable but, according to Metz, the peace of mind that comes with providing superior care and accommodations is immeasurable.

“If these savings continue, we project that we will have our UniMac system paid for sooner than expected,” she says. “The investment in new equipment was a small price to pay to have the ability to provide a more comfortable, safe environment for our residents and patients.”

For more information on UniMac equipment and technologies, visit UniMac.com or call 1-800-587-5458.

