

# Doritex: Partnering For Success

Pragmatic management—coupled with outreach to people at all levels—fuels growth

By Jack Morgan

This correspondent has toured dozens of commercial laundries in the past 10 years. But we've never experienced anything quite like the welcome we received at the Doritex Corp. plant in Alden, NY.

Located about 10 miles east of the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, the plant sits on a 12-acre lot in a leafy semirural area. Standing in front is a huge sign with the name of this third-generation family-owned business in blue, black and grey letters on a white background. Below is an electronic message area. As we pulled into the parking lot, we were shocked to see the words: "Welcome Jack Morgan, TRSA" in red. "We do that a lot for customers," says a smiling Jim Doro, president/CEO of Doritex, regarding the message on the sign in front of the company's 80,000-square-foot plant.

We mention the sign because it shines a light on this company's approach to dealing with people. Founded in 1972, Doritex is an independent textile services company that grew out of a family dry-cleaning business. Doritex understands the value of outreach to customers, as well as employees and industry colleagues. Hence it's hardly surprising that this month—as TRSA celebrates its centennial—Jim Doro is taking charge as the association's 61<sup>st</sup> elected chair (see related articles nearby).

Today, as Doritex celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this company that began as an Apparel Master franchisee, is showing the industry what heights a relative newcomer can achieve in a relatively short time frame.

## WASH AISLE—A MEASURED APPROACH

We see more evidence of the focus on engagement—in this case with employees—as we enter the plant, which Doritex refurbished and reopened as an industrial laundry in 2008. Joe Zinni, assistant general manager, leads our tour along with Doro. He points to a large glass-enclosed "suggestion meter" that shows the number of suggestions employees have made and the many ideas that the company has implemented. "We encourage suggestions to improve safety, quality and service," Zinni says. "They turn them in to Paula, the receptionist." An HR manager sifts through the suggestions and forwards them to Doro and other managers for final approval. A short time later, we saw an example of a suggestion that was implemented. Outside the plant, a white line is painted on the blacktop pavement. It runs for one-quarter mile and is designed as a fitness aid for employees who want to walk during their breaks, or before or after their shifts, Doro says. Among other in-house benefits, employees here are encouraged to use a fully equipped on-site weight room and fitness center at no charge, as their schedules allow.

Moving to the wash aisle, Zinni says slings of incoming soil goods are color-coded to simplify processing and reduce the risk of cross-contamination. For example, goods that require HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control



Bonnie Schwab describes Doritex' in-house automated embroidery equipment, shown at right. This Barudan machine, purchased in 2001, eliminated the need for outsourcing of this service. The machine can sew logos, names or other designs for customers in an array of colors. Order sizes range from 3,000–30,000 or more.

Points) protection, such as uniforms worn in food-processing plants, are placed in green slings. Cloth roll towels (CRTs) are in blue; industrial uniforms go in red slings. The color system lets the washman know what he has, Zinni says.

In the wash aisle, we see three 450 lb. Ellis washer/extractors and one 250 lb. Ellis washer/extractor. Opposite from these are two 600 lb. Ellis "Whisper" dryers. An Ellis shuttle moves goods across the aisle from washer to dryer and onto slings that move to the finishing side of the plant," Zinni says.

It's practically a truism among today's laundry managers that, "You can't manage what you can't measure." Doritex takes this message to heart in its wash aisle by using ratiometric and volumetric systems to process

each load of soil goods. The former means that the plant's washer/extractors are designed to match the exact weight of goods in a given load with the amount of wash chemicals used. Slings are weighed in on the soil side and the information is used to adjust the chemicals provided by Ecolab Inc. "If it comes in at 355 lbs., that's the ratio we use," Zinni says. "It improves the quality of the product because it's consistent all the time." The same principle applies to water use. The washers have volumetric controls that adjust the water use to match the poundage in a given load. These systems produce better wash results, while also saving resources, he adds. While the savings are minor on a per-load basis, when you consider that Doritex' staff of 75 employees launder 9 million lbs. per year, including 40,000 uniform pieces and up to

12,500 mats per week, it adds up. The plant's washer/extractors launder at about 1.6 gallons per lb.

We next ask about safety in this semi-automated wash aisle. Access here is restricted to authorized personnel, Doro says. In addition, the area is equipped with a series of "push bars" that will automatically stop any piece of equipment if the washman discovers a problem. When asked about the plant's overall approach to safety, Zinni and Doro noted that the various departments hold monthly safety meetings to review safety issues. Plant managers also conduct regular "safety toolbox" meetings with small groups of employees on their equipment in areas such as garment hanging, to review safety procedures. In an interview later in Doro's office, he outlined additional steps, such as

advanced safety training for plant managers. “I think the next step for us is to have our managers trained at what procedures need to be changed,” says Doro. “Some plants have mandatory job rotations, or stretching periods, or things of that nature. That’s going to come from us training the first-line supervisors. We’ve already accomplished tightening the awareness of the importance of safety. We as the managers and supervisors need to be more proactive.”

Zinni adds that when an injury does occur, Doritex has implemented a transitional-duty program designed to help employees get back to normal as soon as their injuries heal. “What we’re trying to do is get everyone back on track,” he says. “The faster you can get people back to work, the faster they recover.”

## CLEAN SIDE—AUTOMATION ADVANTAGE

As we enter the finishing area, Zinni notes that the E-Tech overhead rail system operates in a “closed loop” pattern that ensures continu-

goods—after preconditioning in the dryer—onto hangers for movement by overhead rail to a mezzanine level. There they’ll go through a Leonard Automatics tunnel finisher. Electronic monitors mounted on a wall a few

# 25,000

We refurbish hangers,” Doro says. “And we recycle 25,000–30,000 per week.”

ous separation of clean and soiled goods. Clean goods move in yellow slings. Mats go to a 20,000 square foot sorting/storage area; uniforms go to a hanging station. There, about a dozen employees place clean wet

feet away from the hanging system track each employee’s production. The real-time tracking software, provided by Spindle Technologies, is updated every two minutes, and color bars keep track of whether or not each

A wash aisle employee stands by an open-pocket washer in the plant. Garments move through the autosortation system, including RFID scanning equipment at right.



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“We’re active in the community. Our jobs are local. People want to keep the money local. I think there’s always going to be an opportunity for that.”

– Jim Doro, president/CEO, Doritex

employee is meeting their production standards.

Hangers are an item that every industrial laundry has in abundance. Doritex makes a point of conserving as many as possible. “We refurbish hangers,” Doro says. “And we recycle 25,000–30,000 per week.” He adds that the plant also recycles cardboard, metals, wooden pallets and other “disposable” goods. Usable surplus clothing is donated as well. Doro touts his

company’s participation in TRSA’s Clean Green program. “We were one of the first companies to get certified.”

Stepping up to the mezzanine level gives a visitor a panoramic view of the plant. We also see a line of shirts and pants moving up from the hanging stations to the tunnel finisher. A second line of hangered garments emerges from the tunnel and heads down to the plant’s Softrol Systems sortation equipment. Doritex’ entire

inventory of garments and mats is fitted with radio frequency identification (RFID) chips from Datamars Inc. This move to automate sorting required a significant investment. But Doro says it’s worth it because now the company can provide better service—while reducing losses—by keeping better track of goods. “We have over 3,000 customers,” Doro says. “Ten years ago, we had this inventory of uniforms and mats. We had no idea where they were, or what was going on with them.... To have it totally unaccounted for is really shortsighted. Now we know where every shirt is. We know how many times it’s been washed. We know what time it got sorted. What time it came back. The mats, we’re able to quickly turn our mats. Come off the route today; go

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“The other concept is garments get lost. The customer's always saying it got lost in the laundry. But we now have records of all the comings and goings. When they got turned in; when they got delivered back. That's really enabled us to hold a lot of our customers accountable, so we've been able to increase our collection of lost and damaged goods because we know where our garments are.”

The sortation equipment organizes garments by route, day, customer and individual wearer. Each garment has a barcode tag as well for a backup system, should a chip fall out or go bad. As we stood by, white shirts whooshed around on the sorter as if the system had a mind of its own, which in a sense, it does. “This process used to take eight people, and we were never caught up,” Doro says of the manual system they had at their former location a few miles from the current plant. “This is no longer the bottleneck. It starts late and closes early.” The sortation system paid for itself in four years, he says.

Doro and Zinni showed us a similar system for mats. On the way there, we saw two employees folding green “detailing” towels used by car dealerships. Nearby stood several pony washers for small lots of goods. We see a 55 lb. and a 135 lb. Milnor washer/extractor and a 120 lb. Huebsch dryer. Doro takes pride in his service to car dealers, and it plays into the company's brand image as a locally owned business. “We have 80% of the car dealers in the Buffalo area,” Doro says of the textile business these firms generate,



(Clockwise from top) A garment-hanging productivity monitor; employees process towels for auto detailing; Doritex managers: (l/r) Joe Zinni, Bernard Kaukus, Pauline Hayes, Donald Pickens, Christina Mault and Jim Doro (missing is Patrick Bleekman); workwear items move via rail for processing in the tunnel finisher.

including shop and detailing towels; plus garments for salespeople, service desk staff and mechanics. Being locally based helps independents thrive in an age of consolidation, he says. “We’re active in the community. Our jobs are local. People want to keep the money local. I think there’s always going to be an opportunity for that.”

## PRAGMATIC INNOVATOR

As we continue our walk-through, we see two employees hand folding shop towels. Some customers prefer bundles of 50 towels, but an increasing number like them in bags. This leads us to ask whether Doro might invest in automated shop towel bagging equipment. “That’s on our list to consider for next year,” he says. A few feet away another employee places clean CRTs on a vintage rolling machine. She then places them into a cart for distribution to customers. While CRT use has declined over the years, “Customers are coming around on the disposables issue,” he says. Doro has reviewed the literature for an automated CRT laundering/rolling system from Kannegiesser, but he’s wary of moving forward too quickly in today’s market. “We’re right in between,” he says. “There may not be enough volume to justify automating.”

Doro is similarly intrigued—though cautious—about using alternative fuels for the company’s fleet of 28 trucks, which currently run on gasoline and diesel fuel. The issue is the lack of fueling stations available to power up alternative-fuel vehicles, he says. There’s plenty of incentives for companies to establish fueling stations on their property, but they must be open to the public. Doro thinks that could be “problematic” for his operation. Nonetheless, natural gas offers huge

potential, and he expects Doritex will move forward soon. “I definitely think that fuel conversion to natural gas in the future is something we’re going to keep our eye on,” he says. “At the present time, I don’t know that it’s appropriate for us. But we know our friends at Iron City (Uniform Rental) in Pittsburgh, they’ve already started. It’s definitely in our future.”

Other innovations are already in place. For example, Zinni points out that Doritex operates a 400-kilowatt generator that guarantees customers a temporary source of electricity in the event of a power outage. In an emergency, the generator, powered by an 850-gallon tank of diesel fuel, could provide electricity for the entire plant for several days, he says.

Doritex’ boiler area is similarly well equipped. It has an energy-efficient Miura boiler and a heat-reclamation system from Ludell. On each of the company’s 20 routes, Doritex’ Alliant Systems route-accounting software is in the process of moving to faster, more efficient “Android” communications technology.

## PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS

Doro credits much of his company’s growth over four decades to his team of veteran employees. The average Doritex employee has nearly 10 years’ experience. “We have very little turnover,” he says. “Very little turnover on the routes; very little turnover in the plant. We try to treat our people well and they find a home here.” On that point, it’s worth noting that the plant floor—the employees’ “home away from home”—is clean and well lit—and built with room for growth. Office areas are as modern and spacious as any we’ve seen in a plant this size.

Promoting from within is another Doritex strength. One such example is Don Pickens. “Thirty-seven years with us and now he’s general manager,” Doro says. “He started out as a route sales rep. He’s had positions as supervisor, service group leader, sales group leader and director of safety. We definitely promote from within.”

Doro is open to recruiting outside talent too. And of course, he’s adept at maintaining collegial relationships with operators in other textile service sectors, as well as business rivals. He’s done this as a Board member for both UTSA and TRSA. After showing off a high-tech training classroom with seats for some 50 people, he notes that Cintas Corp. managers recently borrowed the space for a meeting as part of a plant tour led by Softrol Systems.

Some might describe Doro’s approach as “partnering for success.” Others might say it’s just shrewd management by a CEO with a results-oriented approach to technology. But Doro also clearly values ties with employees, customers, colleagues, industry groups like TRSA, political leaders and others.

Whatever the strategy is, it’s hard to argue with success. Incorporated in 1978, Doritex today is an \$10 million business, according to the company’s website at [www.doritex.com](http://www.doritex.com). Its sales didn’t reach the \$1 million mark until 1985. Four years later they hit \$2 million. By 2007, they topped \$8 million. Today, as Doritex celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this company that began as an Apparel Master franchisee, is showing the industry what heights a relative newcomer can achieve in a relatively short time frame. **TS**

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