

Interior Maintenance Company Celebrates Anniversary in 2008;

LOOKS BACK ON 35 YEARS IN THE BUSINESS

Longtime NADCA member Interior Maintenance Company (IMC), of Lansdowne, Pa., celebrated its 35th anniversary in November 2008. Founded in 1973 by Chuck Mongiello, Sr., IMC is now headed by his two sons, Chuck Jr., and Matt, a member of the NADCA Board of Directors.

IMC was able to remain successful throughout the years due to a willingness to expand the company's breadth of services. Originally founded as a carpet and floor cleaning company, IMC expanded to other areas, and began offering HVAC maintenance and restoration services around the early 1990s. Currently, about 85-100 people are employed by IMC.

Interior Maintenance's typical clients include hospitals, schools, colleges and universities, government entities, mechanical and general contractors and nursing homes. Though based in Southeastern Pennsylvania, Interior Maintenance's employees travel throughout the Mid-Atlantic region and have completed projects nationwide. About 95 percent of the company's services are commercial, with the remaining projects in residential markets.



This image shows the early days of IMC's HVAC cleaning & restoration department, circa 1992. Pictured here, from left, are Chuck Mongiello Jr., Matt Mongiello and two technicians.

In the following question & answer section, Chuck Mongiello Sr., founder of IMC and his sons, co-owners Chuck Jr. and Matt, weigh in on the industry, what it's like to work with family, and more.

NADCA: What were some of the biggest challenges during the early years? What types of services were provided by the company at start-up and during the early years?

Chuck Mongiello Sr.: Before my wife and I started the company, I was teaching school and doing carpet cleaning work on the side during the summer. Eventually, I went out on my own and started cleaning carpets at a few local banks. At one of the banks, they asked if we also did janitorial work and I said yes, since I had two children at home. From there, the janitorial work really started to grow by leaps and bounds. My wife and I actually did a lot of the cleaning ourselves and our business grew from banks to schools and to office buildings.

NADCA: How did the company first get into air duct cleaning?

Matt Mongiello: IMC first considered air duct cleaning in the late 1980s, in order to bring new revenue opportunities to the company. IMC's janitorial department was feeling the pinch of tough economic times, as state taxes were increasing and countless competitors began joining the industry with just a mop and bucket.

I really credit my father with having the foresight to diversify our services at that time. As true then as it is now, you really need to offer a full variety of services to keep customers coming back, and to find new customers. He identified air duct cleaning early on as a viable option for our company to pursue.

In order to get started in the air duct cleaning industry, my father contacted Dave Gerhard, a sales representative at Abatement Technologies, an industry supplier of vacuum collection equipment. Dave helped to train our first technicians, market our services and get us through the first few years.

NADCA: Can you think of any particular milestones for the company, or notable accomplishments?

Chuck Mongiello Sr.: In 1995, we moved into a large facility, where the company is now. That move spurred a lot of growth. IMC's first office was in my garage, and from there we moved to a small rental spot and then a converted house – so this was a significant move for the company.

Matt Mongiello: The milestone that stands out to me was when, about 10 years ago we were chosen as a preferred contractor to provide year-round HVAC system cleaning at a large pharmaceutical firm. It was the first time we found a project of that magnitude and it opened our eyes to the opportunities available in the HVAC cleaning industry.

NADCA: What are some of the company's biggest challenges today?

Chuck Mongiello Jr.: From an operations stand point – motivation. It's a challenge to keep the project managers, foreman, and crews happy when the jobs are not 9-5, the work is constantly in "dirt," and the industry is not considered a glamorous career path.

Matt Mongiello: Sales are always the biggest challenge. With a company our size, we have top heavy management costs that become terribly acute when there are gaps in revenue. In this industry, much of the specialty cleaning work we do is reactive and cannot always be planned. Throughout the year there are always cycles of intense activity and then slowdowns. It keeps you on your toes, but can be very stressful trying to balance out the year.

Other challenges include our region's labor pool. It is very difficult keeping turnover rates from escalating out of control in our area. We are able to find many workers in the metropolitan centers we serve, but it is always difficult to keep them.

NADCA: What's the best piece of advice you've received for building a successful business?

Chuck Mongiello Sr.: One word: Perseverance. That word got me through all the down times we had, more than anything else.

Chuck Mongiello Jr.: Don't give up. No matter how bad it gets, how ugly it gets, or how many times you want to just sell flowers on the corner, you just have to keep going and get through it.

Matt Mongiello: A few pieces of advice that have always stuck with me include to always keep an eye on cash flow and to always know who your market is. Even in bad times, a company can weather a storm by managing cash flow as efficiently as possible.

In regards to knowing your market, if you want to market quality to high end users, never advertise discount pricing. There are plenty of customers out there willing to pay for quality; you just have to find them.

NADCA: What is your worst project horror story (the project you would most like to forget)?

Matt Mongiello: There are so many projects we would like to forget, but one of the most frustrating included a large HVAC system cleaning project at a college. My on-site foreman neglected to teach a new employee how to cut access holes into fiberboard ductwork. Instead of cutting the holes at an angle so that the fiberboard could be re-inserted securely into the ductwork, the technician cut hundreds of holes straight in. Even taping the fiberboard securely was not enough to keep the fiberboard from blowing out from the force of the air conveyance system. We had to find every hole to re-patch and secure with staples and tape, and we still get calls every once in awhile to replace a blown out patch.

NADCA: What is the coolest project you've done?

Matt Mongiello: One of the coolest projects we ever completed was cleaning the air conveyance systems at the Tropical Rain Forest of the Baltimore National Aquarium in the early 1990s. Beside the stress of ensuring that everything went right at a nationally known facility, the Aquarium presented some unique and unusual challenges in regards to containment, access and wildlife sensitivities. One of my fondest

memories is climbing up to the top of the Rain Forest structure (hanging out with the birds) to inspect the access to a very remote diffuser.

NADCA: What is it like to work in a family business?

Chuck Mongiello Sr.: When he was 13, my oldest son Chuck started working with the company during the summers. By the time he was 16, Chuck was running a carpet cleaning crew. Chuck went to college and worked part-time at the company the whole way through, and then came right into the business after school. Matt started working for the company toward the end of his college career, and he's stayed with it ever since. The two of them are really the ones responsible for growing the business. I had some ideas and looked into air duct cleaning fairly early, but they were the ones who made it pop. I was blessed to have the two of them.

I was fortunate to have two boys who were great, and my wife was also terrific in helping out. She ran our office for years and did all of the accounting. I think in a family business, when the kids and the spouse are great workers, you can't beat that situation for the trust that is involved.

Chuck Mongiello Jr.: My experience has been a positive one. I hear horror stories about families that have been ripped apart by the family business, but I have not had that experience at all. My brother and I have gotten along great with my father and mother through the early years and it has kept the family very close. Each party has to respect the other and the bottom line is the company has to prosper as a unit. If you take care of the company, the company will take care of you.

NADCA: Matt and Chuck Jr., what are the pros/cons of working with a sibling?

Chuck Mongiello Jr.: A pro of working with a sibling is that you can scream and yell and throw things at your brother when you disagree. Chances are he will not sue me, just throw something bigger at me. It is also a mental relief knowing someone else has the same vested interest that you do in the company who also thinks about it 24/7. Working with a sibling for me means there is complete trust and loyalty. I can't think of any cons of working with a sibling.

Matt Mongiello: One major pro of working with a sibling is that many of our business decisions are made together and we are able to use each other as sounding boards to vet out potential issues. A con is that a lot of yelling and screaming may occur during this process. I guess that wouldn't happen as much with a non-relative partner—we kind of know what we can get away with. Chuck and I have a great working relationship in that he handles the operations of the business and I handle the sales. For the most part this division of responsibility works really well and we are able to focus our attention.

NADCA: Do you have problems with low-quality service providers in your area? How do you deal with this issue?

Matt Mongiello: We will always have low quality service providers. Our prices are constantly undercut by companies that just don't know what it takes to clean large and complicated commercial HVAC systems. We deal with this issue by educating our customers on what they should expect from an air duct cleaning project. In many cases, this education process helps to solidify our relationship with our customers.

NADCA: The Association has grown tremendously and has set many standards since its start in 1989. How would you like to see NADCA grow over the next 10 years?

Matt Mongiello: I would love to see NADCA continue to grow because there is a lot of room in the industry for contractors providing quality work. More quality contractors will continue to educate the end users on the energy efficiency and indoor air quality benefits of a clean air conveyance system. As the marketplace continues to learn, they will drive the demand for HVAC system cleaning. ●