

PRATT ABBOTT GARMENT CARE: THE EVOLUTION OF AN ENTERPRISE



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If you live in Maine, you're likely a customer of Pratt Abbott Garment Care (Pratt Abbott) — the state's largest provider of dry cleaning, vended laundry and linen/uniform rental services. David Machesney and his father, Jim, purchased the company in 1991. It's since grown fivefold — capturing market share through acquisitions, new development and continual improvement.



Pratt Abbott Garment Care serves 60-70 percent of Maine's dry cleaning market. The company has three main sectors of business — dry cleaning, vended laundry and uniform and linen rental.

Today, Pratt Abbott umbrellas 12 dry cleaning facilities, eight vended laundries and a 50,000-square-foot linen and uniform rental plant. By design, multiple revenue streams feed the Pratt Abbott enterprise.

“One of the reasons we have all three business sectors is to provide volume to afford a management infrastructure which allows our employees growth opportunities,” said David Machesney. The other, he maintains, is because providing “everything clean” simplifies life for customers.

A Family Owned History

Always family owned, Pratt Abbott was founded as a solitary dry cleaning store

in 1944, in Portland, Maine, according to Machesney. “Elliott Abbott led the business for 14 years, often waiting on customers and pressing shirts himself,” he said. “In the 1940s, he combated unemployment by hiring veterans through the GI Bill.” Among those hires was WWII veteran Roderick Lowell, who worked his way from the shirt presses to ownership in 1958. Lowell and his daughters staffed the counters, while Lowell's father repaired and maintained machinery, according to Machesney. During the 1960s, he opened additional dry cleaning locations and expanded into uniform rental.

Since acquiring Pratt Abbott in 1991, the

Machesney family — children and grandchildren — have worked the counters as well. After Jim passed away in 2015, David took the lead. He's since significantly grown each of Pratt Abbott's business segments — dry cleaning, vended laundry and linen/uniform rental — benefiting employees and customers alike.

Dry Cleaning

Today, Pratt Abbott's dry cleaning business makes up 60-70 percent of Maine's retail dry cleaning market and generates 38 percent of total company revenue. Twelve dry cleaning facilities bring multiple services to customers, including dry cleaning, shirt laundry and household laundry services. Other perks include



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Pratt Abbott's Express Laundry Center in Yarmouth, Maine, provides a 60-minute self-service wash/dry/fold to customers. Most of Pratt Abbott's vended laundries and retail dry cleaning stores are located side-by-side, which brings customers one-stop convenience.



Working the counter is a family affair. Emily Machesney, center, greets customers alongside Customer Service Representatives Kelly Roussell, left, and Kelly Knowlton-Randall, right.

free pickup and delivery, as well as off-season garment storage. Efficient equipment and processes ensure high-quality, eco-friendly results.

Vended Laundry — Express Laundry Centers®

Pratt Abbott's vended laundry sector significantly contributes to the success of the company as a whole, contributing more profit than dry cleaning, according to Machesney. In many ways, the two intertwine. This is partly because most Pratt Abbott vended laundries and dry cleaning stores are located side-by-side. This configuration draws revenue from a broader demographic, creates shared operational savings and encourages consumer crossover. "We look at it as a convenience to the customer and a way to serve more customers," said Machesney. "Comingling also allows

us to run fully attended laundries and offset some of the labor cost from dry cleaning revenue."

Thus, the vended laundries tend to make the dry cleaning stores more profitable — and vice versa. Even better? The pairing creates "one-stop-shop" customer convenience. That's important, according to Machesney, because Pratt Abbott "is in the business of selling time."

Uniform & Linen Rental

Uniform and linen rental — the most profitable Pratt Abbott business sector — began in the 1970s, but only recently ballooned into a super-performer. "Back in 2000, we bet the uniform and linen rental business had more potential for growth than dry cleaning based on the demographics of our area and the lack of population growth," he said. "We broke the uniform and linen rental sector away from dry cleaning and formed a separate company to focus on it. We knew we needed to develop separate production plants and teams for both." That's when Pratt Abbott Uniform & Linen became a standalone business.

Today, operating from a new, state-of-the-art commercial laundry plant, Pratt Abbott Uniform & Linen serves healthcare and hospitality clients within a 250-mile area. Making up a robust 58 percent of total company revenue, Pratt Abbott Uniform & Linen provides pickup and delivery of cleaned and leased garments and linens. During the last 12 months, it has realized double-digit growth, according to Machesney. Thanks to



A Pratt Abbott dry cleaning plant bustles with business.





Pictured, from left, are Pratt Abbott owner David Machesney and Tom Gridley, general manager of the Uniform and Linen Rental Group.

the new plant's size and equipment mix, he expects that growth rate to continue for the next 2 to 5 years.

Continual Improvement & ROI

Committed to continual improvement, Machesney ensures his plants, dry cleaning locations and vended laundries operate at peak performance. He reinvests for big returns. "We continuously improve all our processes to provide innovative services that increase satisfaction, quality and value for our customers, and create profitable growth for our company," he said.

During the last decade, for example, he's renovated several vended laundries, which resulted in a per store revenue bump of 10-30 percent and utility cost savings of 50 percent. He enhances two stores per year and starts by replacing hard-mount machines for

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*- David Machesney, Owner
Pratt Abbott*

higher performing soft-mount Continental ExpressWash® Washers and ExpressDry® Dryers.

"At many of our acquired stores, utility costs consumed 40 percent of revenue," Machesney said. "Now, thanks to the new equipment, we've got that down to 18 to 20 percent."

As stores are renovated, they are rebranded as Express Laundry Centers® and equipped with Continental ExpressWash® machines. This consistency simplifies employee training, store management and routine maintenance, he said.

Future Expansion & Development

Following the current path, Machesney will continue to look for opportunities in acquisition, improvement and development. "We like to diversify our assets and control our destiny," he said, "so in addition to having the three different segments of garment care industry, we invest in commercial real estate to control our locations and further diversify our assets. We absolutely want to continue to grow and solidify our market. If you can do something you like and be profitable along the way, that's the ticket."

Machesney is ever on the hunt for new opportunities. His most recent project includes

the development of two new Express Laundry Centers, which recently opened in North Windham and Yarmouth, Maine.

It's a journey, according to Machesney. "I didn't look to get into the business to clean clothes. I wanted to run a business and I knew we needed enough size and infrastructure to do it right. I have 160 employees and five direct reports," he said, "and we try to make it a fun environment."

Community Caring

Grateful for the company's success, Machesney and the Pratt Abbott team make a point to give back to the community. "We are active volunteers of Junior Achievement," he said. Additionally, Pratt Abbott cleans 40,000 Coats for Kids each year and supports Camp Susan Curtis summer camp for underprivileged kids. "These kids are in tough situations and summer camp gives them a chance to breathe and plan for their future," said Machesney. "It helps them break the cycle of poverty."

To discover more about Pratt Abbott, Express Laundry Centers or Continental, visit prattabbott.com, expresslaundry.com and cgilaundry.com, respectively.



Pratt Abbott Uniform & Linen became a standalone business in 2000. Operating from a new industrial laundry plant — outfitted with the latest equipment — the company has enjoyed double-digit growth over the last year.

Zooming in on Pratt Abbott's Vended Laundry Business

David Machesney, owner of Pratt Abbott, is heavily invested in the vended laundry industry, having acquired and developed eight laundries since 1991. About 10 years ago he embarked on a major overhaul of underperforming stores, acquired through the years, to make them more profitable. Key to that endeavor was Ralph Daniels, of Daniels Equipment Co. Inc., a full-service laundry equipment distributor based in Auburn, N.H.

Daniels recommended Machesney replace his laundries' equipment to improve revenue and reduce overhead costs. His suggestion? Swap out all hard-mount washers with Continental ExpressWash® freestanding washers. "I knew this would improve efficiency and create shorter wash/dry times for customers," said Daniels. To prove his point, he installed the first few washers on a free-trial basis. "I told David if they didn't save him money in utilities and make the stores more profitable, we'd pull them out," said Daniels. "The change would also allow the laundries to serve more customers per day."

Machesney went forward with the recommendation. "Maine utility costs are high – between 1.25 and 1.5 times the national average," he said. "We wanted to significantly lower those costs."

The ExpressWash machines, which are engineered to save water and electricity, also cut natural gas costs. This is because they produce extract speeds reaching 400 G-force, whereas traditional hard-mount washers typically only generate extract speeds between 75 and 200 G-force. Spinning at a higher G-force, the ExpressWash machines remove more moisture from every load, which shortens resulting dry time. "Because dry times are nearly cut in half, dryers use less gas and

customers can finish laundry in less than an hour," said Daniels. "This makes for happy customers and allows for more paying customers per day."

Along with the new equipment, Machesney gave the stores a facelift for impressive gains in revenue and profit.

As they are renovated, they are rebranded as Express Laundry Centers®. "We have two done and six to go," said Machesney. "We will do two more this year."

Express Laundry Center is a turnkey vended laundry package that combines high-speed ExpressWash and ExpressDry equipment and multiple services with local marketing and management support. It's available only through Continental distributors. All Express Laundry Centers offer a 60-minute wash/dry/fold, lower utility costs and higher profit potential, according to Daniels.

Fully attended, Machesney's Express Laundry Centers offer drop-off wash/dry/fold and dry cleaning, in addition to their 60-minute self-service promise. "The high spin speed of our washers makes a huge difference in moving customers through the stores," he said. "People say our dryers are fantastic, but the reason their laundry dries so fast is because the washers work so well."

In terms of equipment mix, Machesney keeps it simple. He relies on a combination of 90-, 40- and 20-pound capacity washers in all of his stores. This mix works well for customers and simplifies training processes for employees, according to Machesney.

Ever expanding and improving, Machesney juggles multiple businesses and projects. Most recently, he completed the development of two new Express Laundry Centers. They are located next to Pratt Abbott dry cleaning outlets in Yarmouth and Windham, Maine.



As Pratt Abbott vended laundries are renovated, they are rebranded as Express Laundry Centers®. All Express Laundry Centers offer high-speed Continental ExpressWash® Washers and ExpressDry® Dryers.