



A Weeler Masonry project in Cheyenne, Wyo., showcasing their cleaning work.

# Building a First-Class Masonry Cleaning Operation

BY RANDY WEIL

**S**INCE 1973, UNIQUE INDUSTRIES HAS MANUFACTURED MASONRY CLEANING SYSTEMS. Our patented technology was originally developed by a mason who knew there had to be a better way to clean than a bucket and brush. Based on input from our masonry customers, the machine has been continuously improved during the last 40 years. When considering topics of interest to masons, we consulted with some of the finest people in the industry, our customers, for their thoughts.

## Case Study #1:

### Building a first-class masonry cleaning team

AL SLATTERY STARTED as a mason in 1977 and has owned and managed his masonry company, Al Slattery Masonry Inc., since 1987.



## Belt-Drive Cold Pressure Washers

Al Slattery Masonry is based in the Oklahoma City, Okla., area. As their website states, "Our most valuable asset is our skilled masons and laborers who exhibit a professional attitude and work ethic. We have state-of-the-art equipment and stress safety and training for employees at all levels, which enables us to service our clients in an efficient and safe manner, while providing a quality product at a competitive price." Al is also the principal instructor in the Al Slattery Masonry Training Program, where he develops employees desiring a career in masonry. Al has a long list of professional honors and affiliations.

**Pick the right people.** Al currently has 10 professionals trained in cleaning and four Kem-O-Kleen K-3003 machines. He usually has two people who do the majority of the cleaning for his entire company. The other eight trained washers can jump in during busy times or vacations. His crew moves from job to job, cleaning right behind the masons as they lay up the walls. While Al would say that "laying them one on top of the other is the only thing that pays," he views cleaning as a critical part of delivering quality work.

"Each job has to sparkle," he says. Put another way, because cleaning is important, Al believes it needs to be done by dedicated professionals.

Al looks for people who have specific characteristics. First, he looks for individuals with a *desire* to build a career in masonry. He looks for people who have *aptitude* for both masonry and for cleaning: attention to detail, ability to focus, and the drive to do quality work efficiently. He also looks for *mechanical skills*, so if there is a problem with their equipment, they can troubleshoot and put the equipment back in production expeditiously.

**Know the work/monitor progress.** Like every other task in the field of masonry, Al has cleaned his share of masonry. So, he knows the work. Early on, he purchased his first Kem-O-Kleen and knows the capability of that piece of equipment. As one would expect, he has a firm grip on all the variables, such as how different surfaces clean; chemical performance; and situations on the jobsite that could impact the work. "When you know the capability of the machine, you know how many square feet your crew should do in a given number of hours," Al says. Before the job starts, Al knows the length of time and what the job should cost to clean. As it progresses, he can monitor progress against what was anticipated.

**Train, train, train.** Like any activity, masonry cleaning seems simple on the surface. That is like saying that golf is about putting the little white ball in the hole – very simple! Masonry

cleaning is as complicated as the variety of bricks and blocks, types of mortars, jobsite factors, weather and other variables, all of which can differ from job to job. Succeeding in an activity with that complexity requires active, on-going training and coaching.

Steam Jenny offers four models of belt-drive cold pressure washers. Designed for heavy use, the washers provide a longer pump life than direct-drive units. The extended service life is due to the pulley system, which turns the pump significantly slower than if the pump were coupled with the engine crankshaft. The belt absorbs engine vibration and allows the pump to be located farther away from the engine heat. All models are designed for maximum durability and portability to meet the demands of commercial-duty applications.

The pressure washers are powered by nine- or 13-horsepower Honda GX Series engines, and all models feature a triplex ceramic plunger pump that provides years of service with little maintenance. The units offer a balance between power and volume, and are available with pressure ratings between 3,000 and 4,000 psi, and flow rates that vary between three and four gpm. Furthermore, a customizable option allows customers to choose a unit with pressure and flow ratings based on specific needs.

Standard features include thermal pump protection, an unloader valve and a high-pressure relief valve to prevent damage to the pump. To protect the engine, the unit will shut down automatically, if low oil levels are detected. Furthermore, the chassis is made with powder-coated, seven-gauge steel. Other standard items include a professional-grade insulated trigger gun with safety lock; quick-connect nozzles with nozzle control; a high-capacity, in-line water strainer; a gun/wand holder; a hose reel mounting adapter and dual rubber isolators. The chassis is backed by a seven-year limited warranty, and other components are covered by a one-year limited warranty.

For maximum maneuverability, the pressure washers feature ball-bearing wheels on a solid axle. The flat-free pneumatic tires can move over any terrain. Jenny offers multiple guns, lances, extensions and spray tips to accommodate any job. Hoses are available in various lengths and pressure ratings, and optional quick-connect kits allow components to be switched easily. Turbo (rotating) nozzles and chemical injection systems also are offered as options to provide superior cleaning performance. Belt-drive pressure washers are available with a factory-installed electric start kit.

For more information, visit the website at [www.steamjenny.com](http://www.steamjenny.com).



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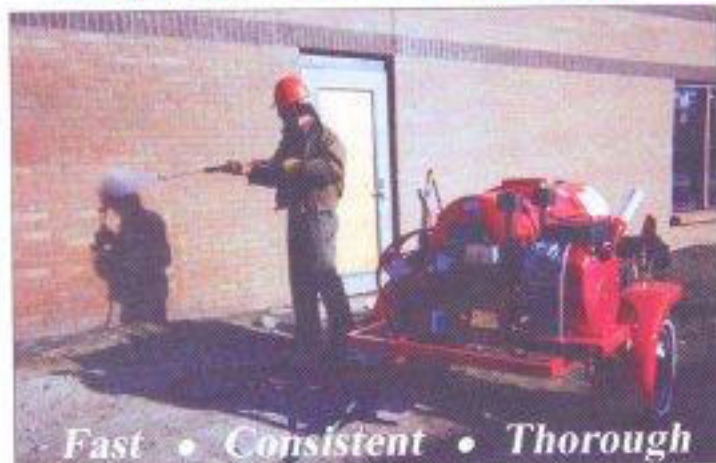


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## CLEANING

next guy, the masonry cleaner. That understanding contributes to the overall efficiency of the crew as a whole.

### Case Study #2: Different tactics for different mortars

MARK WHEELER'S DAD was a mason contractor, so Mark was working in the trade as early as his junior high school years. He started his own company in 1985, in Cheyenne, Wyo. In those days his work was split 50/50, commercial and residential. Over the years, the business has shifted toward residential work. In addition to his masonry company, Mark also cleans new masonry for three other local contractors.

Like Al Slattery, Mark has built a first-class crew. He estimates that, over the years, he has employed 250 to 300 masons and has managed to hang on to many of the great ones as members of his team. Mark views cleaning as a key part of every masonry project. Cleaning quality is critical, referring to some other people's work, "You can drive around town and see all sorts of buildings where a poor job of cleaning was done originally and it still looks bad," he says.

Cleaning also is important to job profitability in a market where prices are lower than they used to be. "A masonry job that used to go for \$12.50/square foot now goes for about a dollar less, and the price of cleaning can be \$0.45 to \$0.50 of the total."

Mark sees cleaning as being so important that he still is directly involved in and very knowledgeable about cleaning.

Not all that long ago, Mark and his peers mixed mortar from scratch. The recipe yielded Type N mortar with a strength of 1,100 to 1,500 psi. It was a hassle keeping piles of sand warm in the Wyoming winters. For that and other reasons, Mark and other local masons moved to premixed mortars years ago. His experience is that those premixed mortars are significantly stronger than the mortar he used to mix. A contractor testing Type N premixed mortar on a recent job found strength results of 2,400 psi, supporting Mark's belief.

Premixed mortars have caused Mark to change his cleaning approach. "Speed is more important than ever," Mark says. "Get to it fast and clean it fast!"

To counter the hardening, he tries to wash the next day after the wall has been laid up. On smooth-faced brick only, he will also "carpet" the brick to rub off globs and smears. He adjusts his Kem-O-Kleen down to 1,200 psi at the pump and increases his nozzle-to-wall distance to about three feet, often requiring little or no cleaning chemical.



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"We clean as we go," says Mark. He is able to achieve a fast and complete cleaning of his work. If he ends up cleaning two or more days after the wall was built, he just turns the pump pressure up to 2,500 to 3,000 psi and increases the mix of chemical in the hot water stream. He achieves the same great results and cleaning speed.

**Case Study #3:****Cleaning approach improves productivity of non-cleaning equipment**

MARK WHEELER also was quick to point out that cleaning can impact the productivity of other assets. Like many mason contractors, Wheeler Masonry owns its scaffolding. Mark points out, "For traditional bucket-and-brush cleaning, you have to leave the scaffolding up."

His approach to cleaning uses only his 45-foot man-lift, his Kem-O-Kleen and two people to wash. In fact, on some jobsites, he has access to lifts that will raise him up to 80 feet off the ground. The person on the lift can control water and chemical. The person on the ground can replenish chemical and fuel, and reposition the lift. By shifting the cleaning from scaffold to man-lift, the scaffolding is freed much earlier for use on other jobs.

**Case Study #4:****How one person became an independent masonry cleaner**

ODILON SANCHEZ owns Oris Services, a company focused entirely on masonry cleaning in the Denver, Colo., metropolitan area. His journey actually started in architectural precast etching at Denver Architectural Precast (DAP). In 1988, Odilon became familiar with Kem-O-Kleen at DAP, which used their machines to acid etch precast concrete panels. He had the good fortune to have a company owner, John Long, who took an interest in him.

John helped him start his cleaning business with some lessons in the basics of business. He showed him how one determines the size of a job; how to build up cost estimates; and then how to price a job. He also helped make a few initial connections with prospective customers. That was 13 years ago. Since then, Odilon has learned all the nuances of how to wash different mortars, colored and not colored; different types of brick and block; and how to deal with all the complexities of specific jobsite situations. His reputation has grown and he receives referrals. He has enjoyed a healthy, well-regarded, profitable and growing business for more than a decade.

The key ingredients: desire and drive, knowledge of how to cost and price work, efficient methods, and quality work done on time.

Rust, efflorescence, and mold and mildew stains can ruin the beauty of natural hardscapes. Worse, these stains often require heavy solvents to remove. Two new water-based cleaners from the DuPont Paver Armor Pro line of hardscapes products are specially formulated to make these cleaning jobs easier.

Paver Armor Pro Ultra Strength Efflorescence & Rust Remover's maximum strength acidic formula cleans and removes efflorescence salts, rust, hard water deposits, grout haze, and cement residue to help pavers and masonry surfaces look new longer. This acidic cleaner can be used to remove efflorescence before sealing or re-sealing, and can be used for cleaning masonry surfaces including walkways, slabs, patios, and retaining walls. The formula is low odor, non-flammable, and does not contain muriatic acid. Paver Armor Pro Ultra Strength Efflorescence & Rust Remover is concentrated and available in quart and gallon sizes. (Product is not suitable for dyed or red pavers as it will cause discoloration.)

Paver Armor Pro Ultra Strength Mold, Mildew & Algae Stain Remover cleans and removes mold, mildew and algae

stains without scratching surfaces. The water-based formula will not degrade pavers or other masonry surfaces and can be used on driveways, walkways and patios. Just apply, scrub if needed, and follow with a water rinse. Paver Armor Pro Ultra Strength Mold, Mildew & Algae Stain Remover is ready-to-use in a 24-ounce spray bottle or gallon size.

DuPont Paver Armor Pro, from the makers of DuPont StoneTech Professional, is an advanced line of outdoor after-care products for masonry contractors. With three product categories - Color Enriching Sealers, Natural Look Sealers, and Cleaners - DuPont Paver Armor Pro makes it easier to choose the right product for every commercial or residential hardscape job.

For more information, visit [www.paverarmorpro.com](http://www.paverarmorpro.com).

**Summary**

SUCCESSFUL MASONS do not view cleaning as a chore; they see it as an opportunity. They view it as a critical part of the job they deliver to their customers. Initial customer satisfaction and longer term customer satisfaction come with great masonry that is well cleaned. Cleaning is also an important part of job cost and the speed of completion.

By automating, labor and chemical costs can be reduced substantially, and other equipment, such as scaffolding, can be more productive. That improves profitability and cost competitiveness in a challenging construction environment. Speed helps complete the job as fast as possible, satisfying customers, and moving resources and attention on to the next project. **IMAS**

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