

Building a Facilities Team: A 'Family-Like' Atmosphere is Key





By Facilities Engineering Journal Staff

Three different facilities directors at three very different facilities have one thing in common: they agree that when it comes to leading a facilities team, building a family-like atmosphere is the most important element.

"We spend so much time here that most people start to get comfortable and think of it as a second home—and that presents some interesting challenges," said Dennis M. Hydrick, CFM, CPMM, facilities operations manager at Lockheed Martin IS&GS Division in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. "Many of our employees spend so much time here that little things begin to bother them, just like they might if they were at home."

Good communication ensures that minor issues don't erupt into major challenges, according to Hydrick, who is responsible for 2 million square feet of facilities at the King of Prussia location. "Because we spend so much time together, sometimes one person will get upset about something that might otherwise seem very minor," said Hydrick, who has been in facilities management roles for 22 years. "But if you really take the time, listen and communicate with the people



Above: "I like to say that I get paid to talk with people," said Nancy Bechtol, speaking with Security Officer Howard. Bechtol manages a staff of facilities professionals who operate and maintain Smithsonian museum and research facilities both inside the United States and internationally. *Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.* Left: The University of the South Facilities Director John Vineyard stands in front of the university's All Saints' Chapel, modeled after medieval cathedrals and completed in 1957. *Photo courtesy of The University of the South.*



The Castle is one of the Smithsonian Institution's many famous buildings, but represents only a portion of the 12 million square feet of facilities space that The Office of Facilities Management and Reliability maintains. *Photo courtesy of Eric Long, photographer for the Smithsonian.*



Bechtol noted that staff recognition is important in building a strong facilities team. Bechtol is pictured here with the facility management staff at the OFMR Holiday Recognition Event at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C. *Photo courtesy Photographer for the Smithsonian Institution.*

you work with — if you let them know your reason for doing something a certain way — they'll usually end up saying, 'Now I understand. That's fine.' It's just like a family," he added. "If the communication is good within a facilities team, you can solve a lot of problems very easily."

Flexibility is another important ingredient for building both families and facilities teams, Hydrick noted. "You have to have processes in place, and each person has to know those processes very well. But if there is an emergency roof leak, your team structure has to be flexible enough to handle the crisis in the best way possible."

Nancy Bechtol, director of the Office of Facilities Management and Reliability at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, agrees that forming good communication is a key ingredient in building a strong facilities 'family.'

"As far as I'm concerned, I can't be out on the floor enough," said Bechtol, who manages 12 million square feet of exhibition and research space both inside and outside the United States. "I often like to say that I get paid to talk to people. Many of the 850 full-time people on my staff see me 'on the floor' of our museums and research facilities all the

time. For the people who work outside of the DC area, I use every means of communication I can think of: phones, tons of emails, conference calls and web telecasts.”

Since Bechtol believes face-to-face communication is the most effective, she travels at least once a month from her office in Washington, DC to Smithsonian facilities in Maryland, Virginia, Florida, Massachusetts, New York and Panama.

“It’s true we all have cots here our offices for emergencies,” she said, “but we do our best not to use them. We generally only have to use them a few times a year, such as when we had two back-to-back blizzards and had to stay here four days in a row last winter. It’s just something we have to do in certain situations, since we have zero tolerance for any problems with what we call the ‘biggies’: water, temperature and humidity. We are super-intense about doing whatever we have to do to control those variations. And if that means keeping people around the clock until the situation is corrected, then that is what we do.”

At The University of the South — often referred to familiarly as ‘Sewanee’ — Facilities Director John Vineyard only oversees a fraction of the facility space that Bechtol is responsible for at the Smithsonian. But Vineyard’s commitment to developing a family-like team of facilities professionals is just as strong as it is for the Smithsonian’s Bechtol.

“AFTER ALL, THERE IS ONLY ONE HOPE DIAMOND AND ONE PAIR OF RUBY SLIPPERS” — NANCY BECHTOL, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

“Things don’t always happen by plan—they happen when they happen,” said Vineyard, who oversees a 13,000 acre campus (known as the “Domain”) atop the Cumberland Plateau, rural area between Nashville and Chattanooga, Tenn. Many of the school’s historic buildings at the 1,400-student college date back to the turn of the last century. As a result, knowledge of how to maintain historic structures is critical. In addition, however, the campus has many newer buildings that require knowledge of the latest advances in electrical, plumbing and heating systems. With so many different varied eras of architecture and systems, “training becomes critical,” according to Vineyard, “but not necessarily the formal kind of training, more the kind of training that you get when a trades person teaches another how to do something they’ve personally been doing for years.”

For Vineyard, building a facilities team that resembles a family may be a little easier than for some other facilities directors, since many of the 92 people on his staff — including groundskeepers, custodial services, painters, carpenters, electricians, mechanical systems workers and furniture movers — have worked together for decades. “They know each other and trust each other,” he said. “Some of them may even have parents or family members who have worked here.”



Denny Hydrick Photo courtesy of Lockheed Martin.



The Sewanee campus blends modern and late 19th century architecture. As a result, campus facilities professionals must be versed in the operation and maintenance of both modern and historic structures and systems. Photo courtesy of Facilities Engineering Journal Staff.

"Since we're one of the largest employers in the area," he continued. "it's fairly easy for us to get people to come here to work. But being one of the larger employers in the area also means that if we didn't treat our people with respect and dignity, word would spread fast and we would have more trouble attracting good, skilled workers."

While it can be challenging at times, Vineyard believes that building his team is the best part of his job. "For me, team building is a joy," he said. "It's about taking care of people so they can take care of our customers — the students, facility and visitors to the university. A lot of times, alumni will come back here and they want to remember what it was like when they were students here. So we take pride in making sure that the buildings, both historic and more modern, are maintained in the same good condition as when those alumni were students here."

While many large organizations out-source their facilities operations and maintenance to outside companies, Bechtol believes that would be a mistake to do so at the Smithsonian Institution because the stakes are so high. "After all, there is only one Hope Diamond and one pair of Ruby Slippers," she said. "As a result, I prefer to have in-house staff. When you hire people directly, they become dedicated to their buildings and know them like the back of their hands. Someone who has been part of our team for many years can sense something is wrong before it happens. They are sensitive to any changes in the building environment before they occur — and take corrective action quickly to minimize any potential damage."

Vineyard agrees on the preference for in-house staff — largely for the same reasons Bechtol mentioned. But for him, there is another reason why an in-house staff is important. "With all of our employees located nearby, we can quickly respond to anything that happens here," he said. "Without that self-sufficiency, there might be a delay having people come here from Chattanooga or Nashville to respond to an emergency."

Bechtol calls her long-term employees — who work in three shifts protecting and preserving the Smithsonian priceless artifacts 24 hours a day, seven days a week — "the Smithsonian's most important asset... Without their care and dedication, we might not have all of the other priceless treasures we have here."

In addition to protecting the Smithsonian's physical assets, facilities personnel — including security officers, custodial staff, trades workers and building engineers — "are often the first people visitors to the Smithsonian come into contact with." As a result, facilities personnel receive intensive customer-care training, as well as in their specific trades.

Recognizing the importance of building a skilled, knowledgeable team, the Smithsonian has developed comprehensive programs for the "hiring, care and feeding" of their facili-



Several of the Smithsonian Institution's 12 million visitors a year arrive at the Castle, one of the Smithsonian's many well-known and highly-regarded buildings. Photo courtesy of Facilities Engineering Journal Staff.

ties employees. "We put a lot of time into developing our employees from the time they are hired to what we hope will be their entire 30-year Federal career." Among other things, the program includes:

- Comprehensive training, both in-house and through universities, such as George Mason in nearby suburban Virginia
- Nationally-recognized certification programs
- Employee recognition programs throughout the year

"We are very into employee recognition here at the Smithsonian," Bechtol noted. "Our programs revolve around excellence in the workforce in every line of work. We recognize special acts as a way to reinforce to the staff the things we want to see, or showing initiative to come up with a special solution to a problem — such as developing a better inventory program or finding a way to make our carts quieter, so the noise doesn't bother our 30 million visitors per year. The awards can be cash or time off for any of the special acts that move us forward."

According to Vineyard, respect is another essential element both in facilities teams — as it is in families. "The people who work on our team are valued not just by me, but by the university community as a whole," he said. "We always try to remember that no matter how big their task is, it's still about a group of individuals. And just as generations of students have attended school here, generations of people have also worked here. Part of the legacy of the university is wrapped up in making sure

that our facilities are well maintained through those generations. As a result, students, faculty and alumni all treat our facilities workers with the greatest respect and appreciation."

Respect, Vineyard added, does not just run one way at The University of the South. "We do everything we can for our customers — students, faculty and administrators," he said. "We are always looking for ways to make the college experience a good one, whether it is a simple thing like changing a light bulb in a classroom, or replacing the hot water heater in a dormitory."

Lockheed Martin's Hydrick summed it up when he said that the three most important elements for building a good family — open communication, recognizing and appreciating differences in people, and having a process in place while being flexible to any unforeseen situations — are the same elements for building a strong facilities team.

Hydrick's current role has him constantly writing, updating and fine-tuning the planning, processes and budget tracking that help things operate smoothly at their 60-year-old facility. But as sophisticated as those processes may be, one simple trick seems to do more than any of the sophisticated plans to keep workers motivated and operations running smoothly.

"One of the best ways to build a team," Hydrick observed, "is to recognize and reward your employees. Even something as simple as bringing in a platter of sandwiches and cookies can do wonders for team morale and camaraderie." **FEJ**