



Mike Oetting, owner of Summit Sweeping

Sweeping Changes

Hundreds of businesses in virtually all industries look to Summit Sweeping to take on important cleaning projects of all shapes and sizes.

article by Ann C. Smith
photos by Steve Vorderman

At the start of business each day at Glenbrook Square, Indiana's largest shopping mall complex, the giant parking lot is clean and spotless.

It was, however, strikingly different the night before. The transformation is the result of the skilled efforts of Summit Sweeping, a Fort Wayne company that meets the needs of retail and industrial businesses that care about presenting a fresh and orderly image to their customers.

Owner and general manager Mike Oetting started his involvement with the business 10 years ago after leaving a secure job with a local highway construction contractor. He wanted more time with his family, yet he also wanted to be part of an enterprise that would keep him

busy enough for his energetic personality.

The company is located in about 30 percent of the former Waynedale Lumber Company facility on Lower Huntington Road and stretching north on Ideal Avenue. From here, Oetting directs a crew of 12 employees in a round-the-clock effort to meet his customers' needs. Projects range from daily services to one time emergency situations that call for a responsive, dependable and creative approach — the kind that Summit Sweeping regularly delivers.

Though the company has developed a steady pattern of growth based on a solid reputation of reliability and attention to detail, the first four years of Oetting's ownership were not particularly promising.

"We generated debt for the first four years," Oetting remembers. "At one point I seriously considered giving up, but two weeks after that moment the phone started ringing and hasn't stopped since." He doesn't have a reason for the dramatic turnaround; he just concludes that those early years of working hard finally began to pay off.

Oetting, a skilled mechanic by trade, took over what was at the time a fledgling and struggling business. He added equipment and established a three-division focus to direct his company's development. Those three areas — parking lot cleaning, industrial floor cleaning and construction site cleaning — still comprise Summit Sweeping's major services today.

Parking lot cleaning is an important



Summit Sweeping's heavy duty cleaners have been instrumental in keeping the I-69 expansion work moving smoothly.

element in retail business concerns. Customers inevitably form some impression of a company by the condition of its lot. Summit Sweeping provides this service for shopping malls, retail outlets, parking garages and restaurants. "It's amazing how much trash accumulates in one day," Oetting says. "Seven days a week, we take care of this problem for Glenbrook and other businesses. What separates us from our competition is our attention to detail. We concentrate on sidewalks, the corners of the lot and curb lines. When the detail work is set up, the truck-mounted vacuum drives across the lot and takes up all the debris. Sweeping a parking lot without doing the detail work is like mowing a lawn and not doing the trimming." Oetting knows retailers put heavy stock in eye appeal, and Summit Sweeping helps them put their best face forward. Glenbrook's operations manager, Duke Ropp, marvels at the way Summit Sweeping performs this important daily function for the mall. "I can't say enough about the job they do," Ropp says. "They're efficient and reliable, and we know the lot will look good every day."

The skills Summit Sweeping uses in parking lot maintenance were needed on a much larger scale when the company was hired to clean 50 miles of road at

Grissom Air Force Base in north central Indiana. The road surface hadn't been attended to for more than seven years, since the base had been deactivated for that long. When a private entity took over the facility, accumulated debris needed to be removed quickly. The road was covered with sand, rocks and dirt over the entire 50-mile stretch. Summit Sweeping used four trucks with equipment that could handle both the large materials and the small dust particles to complete the entire project in five days.

The second prime area of Summit Sweeping's expertise is the cleaning and maintenance of industrial flooring. Companies using the service include manufacturing facilities, industrial warehouses, food storage warehouses and oil saturated machining facilities.

New standards and employees both dictate that floors in an industrial facility be as clean as possible. These environments have improved substantially over the years. Summit Sweeping excels in providing services to industrial clients that want to maintain clean flooring. In most cases, companies have purchased complicated and expensive cleaning machinery for in-house use, only to discover that operating and maintaining the equipment is difficult and more costly than they had

anticipated. In these situations, not only does the floor not get adequate cleaning, but the machinery needs to be replaced soon as well because it has not been operated properly. Summit Sweeping eliminates these headaches for plant managers.

"In virtually any type of environment, we can put a machine into the facility, provide the materials and manpower, and complete the cleaning more efficiently while saving the customer money," Oetting says.

One client in a town near Fort Wayne called Oetting to take over a previously poorly maintained aluminum casting and machining facility. "They had worked at it 18 hours a day for an unknown length of time," Oetting says. "The machine they were using was not large enough and the chemical they were using is what we clean our trucks with. There was a thick coat of grease, oil and rubber on the floor. We finally found the concrete surface, and now maintain the same area on a three-times-a-week basis for a total of eight hours."

One of Summit Sweeping's largest industrial clients is Guardian Automotive in Ligonier. Guardian assembles windshields and windows for the automotive industry, and Summit Sweeping cleans their floors every day. In order to supply auto manufacturers, companies like



Industrial floor cleaning is a service offered by Summit Sweeping

Guardian must meet both QS 9000 standards which indicate compliance with quality and safety measurements and ISO 14001 standards which relate to environmental requirements. To do business with Guardian means that Summit Sweeping must be certain that its practices and operations in the plant meet these qualifying standards, as well. Every aspect of servicing Guardian is carefully analyzed, from the discharge from the sweepers to the chemicals used in cleaning.

Not only does Guardian facilities engineer and manager Bill Troutman praise Summit Sweeping's performance in meeting the standards, but he also appreciates the way the equipment is gingerly operated throughout the plant. "We have glass mounted in every area of the facility and avoiding breakage is a big concern for us. Moving big machinery around here can be like a bull in a china shop," Troutman says. "Summit Sweeping handles their equipment so that we don't have a problem losing valuable inventory. They do an exemplary job for us."

Summit Sweeping's third specialty is sweeping at highway construction jobs. Before a major project can be started, as well as in between the applications of various overlays that comprise the rehabilitation of roads, the surfaces must be free of extraneous debris that might compromise

the integrity of the road when the project is completed. Summit Sweeping provides this service to contractors. This work requires tremendous attention to detail.

"In order to minimize disruption to drivers, road construction is being done more and more 'under traffic,'" Oetting says. "We must be cautious because this work is extremely dangerous to our people, as well as the road crews. Some drivers pay attention to all the signs and warnings about slowing down, but many don't. There is no room for error, breakdown, or the weak of heart."

Recent projects include the I-69 expansion. Summit Sweeping was charged with keeping the new surface clean during on going paving, as well as the temporary retaining walls that protect workers from traffic. Working under these conditions requires coordination and watchfulness, and Summit Sweeping has developed an approach that gets the job done efficiently and safely.

In addition to operating the business, Oetting is ready to join his crew of 12 persons when needed. "I won't ask them to do anything I won't do," he says. He is grateful for their hard work and ingenuity when it comes to problem solving in various job sites. He pays attention to their well being on the job, and maintains the trucks and equipment in their best condi-

tion. The vehicles have amenities so that operating them is not an uncomfortable experience. He communicates with the staff regularly by radio and personally checks each job at least once every two weeks. In addition to his intense emphasis on minding the details, Oetting is equally committed to dependability for his customers. "We want them to know we will be there when we are scheduled to be there," Oetting says. "We have trucks rolling seven days per week and someone is always available to help finish the job or cover for another driver on a day off."

Oetting is also grateful for the early investors who continue to support him to this day. "I did not bring the company to its present success alone," he says. Oetting attributes much of his drive to the fact that he survived a rapidly aggressive form of cancer in 1990. "I hear the clock ticking very loudly," he says. Part of his appreciation is expressed in his commitment to church and community organizations including a recent pilot program he started with Anthony Wayne Services to employ helpers for his drivers.

Summit Sweeping's consistent approach has yielded steady growth. The company, in solving problems for businesses that need reliable and conscientious service, has expanded rapidly. Oetting, a self-confessed workaholic, intends to maintain the momentum. After coming close to giving up on the company six years ago, Oetting has positioned Summit Sweeping for a solid future. Apparently, everyone can appreciate a clean sweep. •

for your information

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YEARS IN OPERATION:

10

NO. OF EMPLOYEES:

12

PRODUCTS/SERVICES:

Parking lot power sweeping, industrial facility floor sweeping, construction site cleaning for road improvement projects, housing developments and roadways in large manufacturing facilities.