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When is 50 Million Pounds of Dirty Laundry Something to Brag About?



The answer: When you are Handcraft Cleaners & Launderers, Inc. The business, founded by John A. Nichols as a single retail dry cleaning store in Richmond's north side in 1956, has grown from a single store into a multifaceted company comprised of 13 retail locations and several business operations.

HandCraft is a family-owned whose business philosophy has always been going the extra mile for each and every customer—a philosophy that has guided the business for more than 50 years of success. It is no wonder that on quality and customer service, their tag line is “Our Business is Your Image”.

In 1978, Nichols expanded into the laundry business by purchasing Richmond Steam Laundry in south Richmond and within a few years later was approached by several local hospitals including Johnston Willis Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital to handle their hospital's laundry services. To meet the demand, HandCraft then purchased a 90,000 square foot building which focused solely on the healthcare industry. Shortly afterwards, other customers followed suit as they learned of Handcraft's business values and service.

In September, 2008, the company expanded into a second 60,000 square foot \$10 million state-of-the-art facility located in Richmond's south side, enabling them to double their production capacity to more than 50 millions pounds annually. The new state-of-the art equipment that makes this possible was funded, in part, by the SBA's 504 loan program and allows the company to provide healthcare linen services to 40 hospitals and over 400 medical and dental practices, surgery centers, and nursing homes throughout Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia, North Carolina, Delaware and Washington D.C.

The SBA 504 Certified Development Company Loan Program is a long-term financing tool for economic development within a community. The program provides growing businesses with long term low fixed interest rate financing for major fixed assets, such as land and buildings and major equipment with an emphasis on economic development for the community. A Certified Development Company is a nonprofit corporation set up to contribute to the economic development of its community. CDCs work with the SBA and private-sector lenders to provide financing to small businesses. There are about 270 CDCs nationwide. Each CDC covers a specific geographic area.

Typically, a 504 project includes a loan secured with a senior lien from a private-sector lender covering up to 50 percent of the project cost, a loan secured with a junior lien from the CDC (backed by a 100 percent SBA-guaranteed debenture) covering up to 40 percent of the cost, and a contribution of at least 10 percent equity from the small business being helped.

On November 25, 2008, over one hundred staff special guests, dignitaries, and friends of HandCraft Services, Inc. gathered at the new HandCraft Healthcare Linen Services Facility on Cofer Road in south Richmond to dedicate the company's new corporate headquarters and healthcare laundry facility. Lieutenant Governor Bolling, the Commonwealth of Virginia, delivered keynote address.

"The opening of this new, technologically advanced healthcare laundry facility", Lieutenant Governor Bolling said, "is another manifestation of the spirit, innovation and vision that has made Virginia the most pro-business state in the nation. I commend HandCraft Services and the Nichols family for their continued investment in Virginia and the healthcare industry."

The entire plant was designed primarily around three (3) criteria: employee ergonomics and safety; energy efficiency; and high productivity and quality control. A number of "green" practices were incorporated into the building's operations including the capacity to recycle 230,000 pounds of plastic linen bags and 276,000 pounds of worn out hospital linen annually. The increased benefits of the new equipment are the cost cutting and "go green" technology being utilized through the significant greater efficiencies and productivity gains. These gains will provide the capability of more than doubling Handcraft's existing operation and allow them to expand into new markets in the region.

Today, more than fifty years later and with approximately 250 employees, the family business continues to grow with John A. Nichols sons, Keith, Jay and Jeff, all graduates of nearby Benedictine High School, carrying the torch, each having learned the business from the ground up and having held a variety of jobs throughout their careers. Their original location on Patterson Avenue in the West End of Richmond is still in operation, a reminder of their humble beginning.

HandCraft is successful family-run business that is very community-oriented and environmentally conscious. HandCraft participates annually in Earth Day functions, blood drives, children's charities and much more.

For more information about Handcraft Cleaners visit: www.Handcraftservices.com or www.Handcraftdrycleaners.com

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