

The Southwest Drycleaners Association

Summer 2021

# THE Southwest Press

*Serving the Professional Drycleaners of Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma & Texas*

## Remembering the Legend **Allan Johnson**

Plus...

Employee Benefits

100% Routes - One Year Later

Evaluating Your Next Move

...and More





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*President's Message*

# Rumbling, Stumbling & Bumbling Along

by Danny Bahlman, Bahlman Cleaners



Remember all those essays and research papers from college days? Getting started was always the hardest part for me, and we were usually given a topic or general subject matter to cover. As I begin to write this several thoughts keep competing for space in my mind.

## Thank you

During one of the most difficult times in our business lives, you remained committed to the betterment of your individual business and the industry by maintaining your SDA/DLI membership. I commend you for your perseverance and example to both fellow members and non-members.

## ROI

We all want the maximum return on what we invest. It is easy to sit and watch a golf tournament on TV and marvel at the ability and performance of the greatest golfers in the world. What we do not see is the minimum of 500 range balls they hit as part of their practice every day, an investment leading to an expected return.

Are you maximizing your SDA investment? Need a social media presence, email marketing, or website? DLI can do that for you. Training, stain removal procedures, education and certifications, association with and encouragement from other members, and many other ways to improve your ROI are available with your joint SDA/DLI membership.

Familiarize yourself with all the offerings provided and incorporate them into your daily operation where needed. As an example, there are almost 200 social media posts available for your use on the DLI website [dlionline.org](http://dlionline.org). Log in and learn.

## Saying Goodbye

Each of us can reflect on mentors and leaders that took the opportunity and made time to invest in our personal and business lives. On June 30, Allan Johnson of Corpus Christi, TX passed away. Allan began his journey in the industry in 1985. When he purchased Peerless Cleaners, he immediately began working and serving tirelessly for all of us. In addition to many years of SDA board membership, where he ultimately served as President and Board Chairman of both SDA and DLI, he was also involved in many community activities leaving a legacy of service for each of us to follow.

Everyone who knew Allan personally could tell stories about him for hours. Ultimately, those stories would come back to his investment in your personal life and interest and encouragement of your business success.

## Thank you, again

Like all of us, Allan Johnson received the accolades with the support of many others behind the scenes. Thank you, Susan and family, for sharing the passion, time, foresight, investment, achievements and accolades of Allan in our lives and associations.

Maybe we should reconsider ROI. Maybe it should be Invest for Return.

*Danny Bahlman*

President, Southwest Drycleaners Association



# Remembering the Legend Allan Johnson

Known for his integrity and grit, SDA and DLI Past President Allan Johnson passed away June 30. Allan believed in giving back to the community and industry and many times took a stand for the right thing to do.

Those who know Allan can fully believe he ran his own paper route and was managing a full staff at the age of 11. Allan earned his Business Degree at Virginia Tech and entered the U.S. Air Force in 1961. While in school and in uniform, Allan met the 60-year love of his life Susan Dyer Johnson. Allan attained the rank of Captain, while earning his MBA from Eastern New Mexico University. Allan also became a commercially rated pilot and served his country with honor until 1967.

After a journalism career, the Johnson family fell in love with Corpus Christi and Allan left the corporate world to purchase Peerless Cleaners in 1985. Allan showed great passion and skill for growing the family business. He expanded locations, built a state of the art, environmentally friendly plant, and worked tirelessly for his family, his company and his industry.

Mike Nesbit of Edit TX LLC/Tide Cleaners remembers, "Allan was a passionate person, particularly



Allan Johnson (far left) with team and son Doug Johnson (far right).

about the things he believed in. One of those was SDA and DLI. SDA was always first because of his love for the members in it." To this, Allan was instrumental in creating the Dry Cleaner Remediation Fund in Texas to protect dry cleaners in the event of an environmental clean-up.

Jon Meijer, DLI Director of Membership, remembers, "Allan was a straight shooter and I remember him not only giving his opinions, but also complimenting staff when he thought it was warranted. He worked hard, especially with the transition of our CEO."

"Allan would make observations that everyone was thinking, but didn't want to say," notes DLI CEO Mary Scalco. "If you knew Allan, you knew that he loved his family, DLI and SDA."

SDA President Danny Bahlman remembers, "Passion will be used to describe Allan's zest for life, but personally, I will remember his tenderness and compassion equally. Many times during my own struggles and difficulties, I would pick up my phone and see him calling or open my e-mail to find words of encouragement."

We have all been blessed with the presence of a wonderful servant in Allan. Though we will miss him, he has left this world a much better place by being here.



Allan and Susan enjoyed travel and family.



The entire Johnson family with Allan and Susan seated.



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# Can Dry Cleaning Deliver?



"Many are working in their business, not on their business," John Rothrock, CGCP, President/CEO, Yale Cleaners, stated during his presentation "Generation Now: Can Dry Cleaning Deliver," at the SDA meeting, July 10. A fourth generation dry cleaner, Rothrock is no stranger to working in the plant as many have had to do these last few months. Rothrock was quick to remind owners to not lose focus and re-think why they are in business.

Customers want instant gratification and dry cleaners around the world are being held to delivery standards to the likes of Amazon and Starbucks, where they can have food, prescriptions and anything they want delivered immediately. Rothrock emphatically states that same-day service will work in every market.

A secret known by every Oklahoma cleaner is that Yale Cleaners has a plant in every single one of their 11 storefronts. Rothrock explains how this makes efficiency incredibly high and placement of equipment is key for employee movement being a value-added action.



John Rothrock, CGCP, President/CEO of Yale Cleaners in Tulsa, OK, presenting at the July 10 SDA Meeting.

## SEPTEMBER WEBINARS

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*September 22*  
Buying Out Your Competitor

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Yale Cleaners Plus, a membership where their customers receive auto-billing, 20% discount and exclusive offers, was in place before the pandemic ([www.yalecleaners.com/plus](http://www.yalecleaners.com/plus)). When Covid-19 hit, the dry cleaner was perfectly poised to create an 'On My Way' service, so clothes were ready as the customer pulled up to the store.

If you want to know how Yale Cleaners made the jump to same day delivery, how it works, the results and even why Rothrock believes traditional routes don't work, you can see him present at the CCA Fabricare Show, October 3, In Las Vegas ([www.fabricareshow.com](http://www.fabricareshow.com)).



# Tackling Bleeds

By Jeff "The Stain Wizard" Schwarz

## Dear Stain Wizard:

I had a pair of designer pants that had a leather patch sewn onto the back pocket. When processed, the dye from this leather patch bled on 3 pair of khaki pants that were also in the load. I used your EasyGo Soak Method and after a 2 hour soak, all the garments were brand new!!

Thanks for your help!

Sharon, from San Antonio.

Dear Sharon,

Thank you for the feedback. Leather dye bleeds can be difficult to remove, especially on khakis. Even dilute solution of dye stripper could alter the color. That's why I recommended the EasyGo Soak Method.

## EasyGo Soak Method

- In a clean 5 gallon bucket (with no soap residue), add 2 gallons of 125 degree water.
- Add 16 oz. (2 cups) of A.L.Wilson EasyGo Dry-clean Spray Spotter. The water will turn milky white.
- Soak garment for 1 hour or until unwanted dye is removed from fabric.

## Rinse

- In a clean bucket, add 1 gallon of cool water.
- Use 2 oz of A.L.Wilson RiteGo or Laundry TarGo as a rinse agent. (This serves to remove EasyGo from the fabric.)
- Move garment by hand (wearing gloves)
- Then rinse/spin in your homestyle washing machine.



This same method can restore Black/ White garments that have bled, as the example above illustrates.

*Jeff Schwarz is Regional Vice President at A.L. Wilson Chemical Company and can be reached at jeffschwarz@alwilson.com.*



## VENDORS... Get FREE Marketing

SDA allied members can submit educational articles for SDA publications at [staff@sda-dryclean.com](mailto:staff@sda-dryclean.com).

# Think You Can't Afford Employee Benefits...

## Think Again!

By Lisa Buczkowski, US Health Advisors

Most small business owners agree – hiring and retaining quality employees is a challenge, especially if you cannot afford to pay much (if anything) for a benefits package. What if, instead of saying “we don’t offer any benefits”, you could say “we offer pre-tax access to some health benefits, and an insurance advisor to help you”? Would it change the conversation?

The first option business owners typically consider is traditional group health insurance via the small business marketplace. The problem: businesses offering this are required by law to pay at least 50% of the employees’ premiums and have minimum participation. This usually adds up to a high cost, something many small businesses cannot afford.

But there is another option at low or no cost to the business owner. You can offer some benefits to your employees pre-tax through a cafeteria plan, and it is pretty easy to do if you have a payroll system.

Here’s how it works:

- Employees pay some benefit premiums pre-tax; even if your business cannot afford to contribute, the employee is effectively getting a discount on their coverage.
- If you are able to contribute something toward employee benefits, that contribution is tax deductible to your business. The employee can use these funds toward benefits you decide to offer through the plan, including dental, vision, etc.
- Some employers increase their benefit contribution to employees over time to encourage retention (for example: \$50/month after 90 days, \$75 in year two, \$100 in year three).

- Any pre-tax fringe benefits the employees elect to utilize lower their taxable salary, which lowers the small business’s taxable payroll. This in turn lowers the employer’s payroll taxes, saving the business money overall.
- Some licensed agents are willing to be your small business insurance specialist at no cost, working directly with current or prospective employees regarding the fringe benefit options to take something off your very full plate (in corporate America you call HR; now you can call your insurance specialist!)
- Licensed agents may also be willing to coordinate with your accountant / payroll company in setting up your plan.

These benefits will help your small business stand out, enabling you to grow your business through attracting and retaining quality employees. And we all know that happy and healthy employees result in lower turnover and improved productivity – and happy business owners!

*Lisa has over 20 years of healthcare administration experience (insurance companies, hospitals and physician groups), and has started two small businesses. She is now using her experience to help small business owners grow their businesses. You can reach Lisa at [HealthHelpLisa@gmail.com](mailto:HealthHelpLisa@gmail.com), [www.HealthHelpLisa.com](http://www.HealthHelpLisa.com) (coming soon).*





# 100% Routes - One Year Later

## Fox Cleaners reveals their progress after changing their business model one year ago

By May 2020, as Covid-19 was in full swing, Maggie Fox of Fox Cleaners in Tulsa, announced "We are going 100% routes and servicing our clients through pick-up and delivery only." (See article in Spring 2021 Southwest Press Magazine.) Fox reinvented the cleaners and changed their business model to focus on what they do best, which is top-service clothes cleaning.

Fox closed all four store fronts and kept the one plant running. She reports that routes had always performed better for them, so the conversion was smooth. "I've gained control over the business again. We've already increased efficiencies and decreased waste, especially since I can't be in five places at once. The extra managing was getting in the way of what we're about."

### Cross-Trained Employees

After attrition and closing storefronts, Fox Cleaners is armed with half the employees, a core group who have been with Fox for years and enthusiastic new additions to the team. Fox admits that her favorite part about the business has always been her employees. "We've been able to foster a culture where employees have a broader understanding about the business. They are cross-trained and can cover for one another. The outflow from this has been the ideas generated from our staff. Overall, our employees are happier with the change in our business model," states Fox.

### Finances

After last year, Fox exclaims she is thankful they are still alive and kicking. With the employee and store

decrease, they have saved on insurance and taxes, as well as rent. There is still rent from one storefront, which is an expense. The overall business numbers are trending up. During the first half of 2021, they were down only 27% compared to 2019. This is solely with revenue from routes.

### The Real Benefit

By focusing on routes, Fox is able to work on systems and processes and is more easily able to forecast revenue. "The cost savings," Fox explains, "is my sanity. There are clearer goals and objectives and less to manage. I'm happier as a person and business owner."

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# DOCUMENTATION

By Frank Kollman, Kollman & Saucier, P.A.

Many employers believe that written documentation is legally required to take disciplinary action against an employee. Technically, it is not. Nevertheless, government agencies, courts, and juries have come to expect written rules in the workplace and written documentation of performance and disciplinary problems leading to discharge.

While written rules of conduct do not have to cover every situation, they should be general enough to cover acts of violence and dishonesty, failure to perform, drug and alcohol use, and so forth. Written documentation of performance and disciplinary problems, on the other hand, should contain specifics and details. Describe the facts, avoiding whenever possible vague, conclusory language. "John kicked a coworker in the shin" is so much better than "John inappropriately made physical contact with another employee."

While documentation is desirable, you do not want to manage a workforce where "writing up" employees is a regular occurrence. If you have to talk to an employee about a problem, either in the form of counseling or an oral warning, you do not have to generate documentation of the discussion. If it gets to the point that oral warnings and counseling are not getting results, a written warning is a prudent next step, beginning with the words "as we have discussed in the past . . ." Again, the written warning should be specific, such as "you have been late three times this week" or "you are expected to iron 435 shirts an hour, and your average for the past week has been 16.

Failure to meet the 435 shirt per hour goal will result in termination if there is no immediate improvement."

Poorly written documentation gives lawyers an opportunity later to challenge the fairness of the discipline. A particularly dangerous written employment document is the employee evaluation. It is not unusual for an employee to have good evaluations and be terminated for poor performance. Employers do not want a written employee evaluation to create awkwardness, so many times, they give better evaluations than are warranted.

It is better not to have written evaluations than to do them badly. In fact, I recommend that most evaluations be narratives without the use of ratings, stars, or other comparators that suggest that the employee is the best performer in the world. Good ratings in employee evaluations must be disproven if a former employee sues. Amazon is not the only place where notoriously inaccurate ratings can be found.

*Frank Kollman of Kollman & Saucier, P.A. is the DLI "Ask the Legal Expert." DLI/SDA members can enter the member's only section at [www.dlionline.org](http://www.dlionline.org) to access this member benefit.*



# SDA Austin Meeting

Highlights from the SDA July Membership & Board Meeting July 9-10, in Austin, TX.



Ian Noble (left) and Bill Stocker (right).



SDA President Danny Bahlman (right) presenting gift to past president Craig Campbell (left).



Canessa and Trevor Hericks.



Mike Nesbit (left) with Fran Stone Beale and Paul Beale.



Brian Athens (left), Toran Brown (middle) and Nicole Kirby (right).



Matthew James (left), Brett McLeod (middle) and John Rothrock (right).



# Evaluating Your Next Move

By James Peuster, The Route Pros

Our world changed and we did everything in our mind, power and limited budget to adjust. Piece counts were already down then boom.... Whomever has read *Who Moved My Cheese* sat down and looked at 2020 as the end. Dry cleaners reinvented themselves, pivoted, stepped back or any other cliche we can apply to last year. Now normal conversations either include "the new normal" or "the way it used to be."

Now the forums exploded with best practices, ideas and why not's. As a consultant, I was on the phone more the past 15 months than I probably was in the last 15 years. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't that I am complaining; it was just challenging to watch those fight to survive as others dropped off. Yes, the dust has settled but now the number one question I hear is, "should we (*fill in the blank*)."

Here are my top 10 questions you should seriously ask yourself or evaluate your current situation before exploring other avenues.

1. Is it truly scalable: Not everyone's demographics are conducive to certain operational changes. Scalable simply means can you grow while your operational percentages decrease.
2. Is it truly profitable: One thing Al Robson preached is that "The Bottom Line Is The Bottom."
3. Is it sustainable: Too often things take off but don't stick. The newness and true customer expe-

rience wears off.

4. Is it going to take away my focus on what is working: Many of you have rebounded nicely.
5. Do my customers truly want this service: Remember, every market is different.
6. Will we have to adjust our brand: Ask yourself if this changes your mission statement or vision.
7. Can we project the ROI of the new or additional endeavor: This is often overlooked.
8. Does this truly give me a competitive edge: Will your customers leave if you don't do this?
9. Do you have the right team on board to support the changes: This can make or break the addition.
10. Do you have the right leaders in place to launch: One of the biggest mistakes owners make is delegating to other departments who are already overloaded.

The bottom line is this. What works for some doesn't work for others. The easiest way to grow your business is to see what is working in other industries and see if there is a fit in ours. If you answered I don't know to some of the questions above; don't worry, you are not the only one.

*James Peuster is CEO of the Route Pro, a consultancy firm specializing in working with dry cleaners to increase revenue by establishing a route service. James@theroutepro.com*



**SDA Board Meeting**  
October 2 / 12:00 - 1:30 pm / Las Vegas

Join us at the CCA Fabricare Show

# Texas Wins!

## Dry Cleaner Remediation Fund Extended another 20 years

**By Frank J Corte Jr. and Harvey Hinderbran  
of Capitol Chairman's Alliance**

It was an extremely rewarding experience to meet and work with dedicated small businessmen and women who are committed to their profession and business interests. SB 872 successfully passed with the Governor's signature, extending the Dry Cleaner Remediation Fund to full operation for another 20 years.

We are sure you heard the news of the "political meltdown" at the end of the legislative session. Democratic members left the House floor to break the quorum required to take up legislation on Election Security. This shows how fortunate the DCRP Task Force is by getting the legislation through the session before this took place.

Looking back over the last 18 months, the leadership team of the DCRP Extension Task Force was instrumental in getting this through the legislative process early to avoid the legislative massacre. The sacrifices of time and resources to meet with legislators and staff provide testimony, and write to legislators set the stage for success for an early passage. It was one of the first bills to get to the Governor's desk dur-



SDA President Danny Bahlman (left) with Texas Representative Drew Darby (right).

ing the regular session. So, the "early bird" does get the worm!

The Legislature will be meeting in at least two or three special sessions to pass legislation that did not make it to the finish line, including redistricting. This effects every Texan in so many ways, including who will represent you. Texas will gain two more congressional seats, which is good; however, it also means there will be new faces in the Congressional delegation, as well as the Texas House and Senate. These new faces need to know the importance of the issues facing dry-cleaning operators. It is highly recommended that the dry-cleaning operators frequently meet with their legislators yearly to keep them abreast of issues you face in your operations.

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Texas dry cleaners independently fought this issue. If your state is facing the a similar issue where a remediation fund could be dissolved, we encourage you to contact SDA at 512-873-8195 or [staff@sda-dryclean.com](mailto:staff@sda-dryclean.com) so we can connect you with cleaners who fought this and won.



(Left to right) Frank Corte, Paul Hoodless, Ron Caffey, Allan Cripe, Richard Thum, Marty Moore, Doug Lipsey, Jess Culpepper, Danny Bahlman, Ian Noble, Harvey Hilderbran.



SDA 2nd Vice President Erika Paine (left).

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