



Everything's covered: The decision to rent or buy your linen depends on budget and manpower. Above, is the main dining room at the Valparaiso (Ind.) Country Club.

A Linen Plan Without A Wrinkle

by Bruce Johnson
Linen Supply Association of America

A frequent decision facing club managers is whether to call in a linen supply service, buy their own linens and send them to a commercial laundry or install their own laundry equipment.

An increasing number of country clubs, as well as industries and institutions, are taking advantage of the benefits of a linen supply and rental service. Factors governing this decision to use a linen supply house, have little or nothing to do with the size or location of the operation. One of the great advantages of linen supply is its flexibility. Suppliers provide anything from hand towels for a one man business office to uniforms for 3,000 employees, in the world's largest bakery.

Here is how linen service works.

When a linen supply house is called in, an expert consultant arrives to discuss the entire linen problem. The consultant is experienced in every phase of the business; from

proper handling and sorting procedures to selection of the most economical and attractive uniforms and linen. He will work closely with the club manager to set up his service and to prove that linen supply is the most economical way of doing business.

One of the prime reasons club managers use linen supply services is to obtain better appearing linen. A frequently heard comment of those who have operated their own laundries, but have changed to linen supply is, "when we owned our linen, we just weren't able to resist the temptation to get a little too much wear out of it. This meant that we were putting out shabby and wornout linen. This degraded our service in the eyes of our members."

Linen suppliers have a flexible policy in working with clubs; special uniforms or linens can be provided, to harmonize with the club decor. If an organization already

has a stock of linens on hand, the linen supplier will often purchase the inventory, including laundering equipment.

Suppliers take all responsibility for supplying clean linens of the proper quality when and where they are needed. Employers no longer have the job of sorting, maintenance, inspection and inventory control, consequently, they are able to devote their time to their primary responsibility.

No matter what the method of handling linen, some will be lost, stolen or damaged. Linen suppliers have a reasonable policy toward such losses. When you operate your own laundry you have to continuously purchase linen to maintain your supply. Often this means frequent buying at high prices and in small quantities, which cuts profits sharply.

Renting linen provides an accur-

Linen continued

ate system of cost control. The manager knows exactly what linen service costs every month when it becomes an operating expense. Capital that would be tied up in linen inventory is free for other uses.

Supply services use different laundry methods for different linens, insuring maximum life for material and lower overall costs for the club. Further, you get top quality linens because they are more satisfactory and have longer life. Remember—the laundering methods which are cheapest and easiest are also the most destructive.

There are two peculiarities of the club business — the seasonal fluctuation of business and the wide variety of laundered articles used in the clubs — towels, napkins, sheets, uniforms, aprons, etc. The first problem, that of seasonal fluctuation, means that if you do your own laundry, capital and labor used in storage facilities, linen inventory, and laundry equipment is tied up all year round. A linen supplier can provide you with flexible service to fit the season. Stated another way — you pay only for what you use. The second problem, that of the wide variety of articles used by country clubs, dictates that the club manager attempt to become an expert in linen and fabrics or else put the problem squarely in the hands of his linen supplier. Only a linen supply house has the knowledge and experience to purchase the most suitable articles and to handle them with maximum efficiency.

Probably the most important consideration is that of managerial efficiency. Managerial duties of the club manager today are many and complex. The installation and operation of your own laundry requires that you take on many new duties and headaches and in an area of operation where you may have little prior knowledge.

You must then consider such items as the hiring, training and supervising of laundry personnel; decisions about buying machinery, textiles, and chemicals; repairing and replacing parts. Even a minor breakdown of equipment, aside from causing you delay — can be extremely costly. Have you planned for the spare washer or dryer you may need so that a breakdown

won't completely close down your laundry? What about your efficient use of your most reliable asset — your time?

You will have to deal with washing machinery, soap and textile goods sales representatives as well as your own laundry personnel. Then make time to see service repairmen and salesmen. This may constitute a small army of extra people for you to deal with, in addition to the many persons you see in your present duties. All of these factors can add up to a major administrative headache. This is likely to mean that you will have to neglect many of your major responsibilities to run your operation.

Consider linen supply service as economical and time saving. Of course, you should consider if you might benefit from purchasing your own linen and installing an on-premise laundry to process no-iron linen. At first glance, this proposition appears to promise the owner or manager automatic costs savings. However, many of these installations are more expensive in the long run than a linen rental charge. Many others cost as much as twice as much to operate then generally believed. At best, and only when optimum conditions prevail, actual savings will run only from 8 to 10 percent and then only when certain conditions are present; Such as:

1. Superb laundry management personnel
2. Favorable energy cost rates/to heat water and dry linens
3. Efficient laundry layout designed with proper equipment and no mechanical breakdown.
4. Low cost investment and internal costs
5. Superb control of linen inventory with few losses

Let one factor be negative and these small cost savings change overnight to a severe profit drain.

Only rarely does a club manager have a complete picture of all the costs involved in operating a laundry. He may be aware of his direct labor and linen costs; however, many hidden costs are difficult to ascertain. These include indirect labor costs, such as social security, employee insurance, utility costs, maintenance costs, administrative costs, rent for laundry space, depre-

ciation, higher real estate taxes, etc. The list of hidden costs is endless and includes general and administrative expense allocations such as cost of purchasing, payroll, preparation, telephone services, etc.

Sales claims made by laundry equipment manufacturers and their salesmen sometime approach the unbelievable. Two areas are often suspect and require your close consideration.

1. Claims made about laundry worker productivity (pounds processed per operator per hour) are often unrealistic and
2. the actual life of the linen is also highly exaggerated

Most no-iron laundry brochures overstate the productivity and capacity of their equipment. Although some brochures claim worker productivity as "100 pounds per hour" actual measured no-iron laundry productivity has ranged from a low of 21.09 lbs per operator per hour to a high of 42.2 lbs per operator per hour. A good general guideline is 30 lbs per labor operator per hour.

Textile life is a function of consistent proper laundry processing. Recent surveys show that cleanliness and neat appearance of the linens rank high in the consideration of customers.

Clean linen is an item of major importance for any club and no-iron linen after it is used for awhile generally looks similar to fluff dry linen. Neither no-iron bed nor table linen approaches the quality of fresh crisp ironed linen. Frequently it appears wrinkled and stained as though the linen had not been changed. No-iron linen does not have the appeal or absorbency of cotton fabrics. In addition stain presents serious handling problems.

Do it yourself processing of linen is not adequate to meet health and hygienic standards. Only professional laundry methods using adequate commercial equipment, proper supply and sufficient utilities can produce hygienic linen — a significant factor in club operations.

Handling your own laundry is a problem. Even if you have space, equipment, a good linen inventory, and an experienced labor force. More and more club managers are finding it saves money in the long run to turn linen supply over to those in the business. □