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## Dublin husband, wife team help companies clean up

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Cleanliness may be next to godliness, but it also can affect a company's bottom line.

In fact, having an efficient cleaning and janitorial service can save a company thousands of dollars per year, and to ensure that they do indeed have an efficient service many Central Ohio companies have hired Dublin-based HLH Systems Business & Industry Cleaning Consultants to monitor their janitorial work.

HLH Systems evaluates a company's custodial service to make sure the firm is paying a fair price for the service, is using the proper equipment and getting quality work.

"One of the things not put in place when put out to bid is 'How do I know I'm getting good service?' and 'How do we measure how this company's going to do?'" said Pat McClure, who, along with husband Harry, owns the business. "We help our customers understand what they're asking for and teach them to measure how it's going."

For instance, HLH Systems will send people to the customers' sites and inspect their buildings for the cleanliness and shininess of the floors. That information is then recorded into a personal digital assistant.

HLH Systems acts as a consultant and does none of the cleaning. Sometimes it will work with a company for a one-time project and other times it has long-term agreements with firms.

HLH will help companies enter into contracts with cleaning services or, if the company does its own janitorial work, will evaluate the efficiency of the cleaning to make sure there is the proper number of custodial staff, the right equipment and supplies, and determine whether the work is being completed properly.

"We make their lives easier," McClure said.

HLH Systems is one of about two dozen companies throughout the country that provides similar services, though there are other companies that do both consultant and cleaning work.

"We have a list of inspection items to make sure that everything that should be done is getting done. Someone will walk through the (building) with a PDA and do the inspections," said McClure.

Implementing such technology into the custodial industry is a natural fit for McClure, who worked as an internal technology consultant for SBC Communications before retiring from the company.

"My job was to make organizations run better," she said.

Climbing the ladder of a mammoth communications company and eventually owning a business that this year is expected to double its revenues is no small feat for someone who started her career as a telephone operator.

Born in Starkville, Miss., McClure's family moved to Dayton while she was a youngster.

She began working as an operator with Ohio Bell, which was eventually gobbled up by At&T, which eventually became SBC Communications. McClure eventually took an interest in technology and started doing computer work for the company, learning along the way.

"They taught me. You name it, I learned it," she said. "I was about the only woman in that end of the industry in Ohio at the time."

Soon she was teaching others about technology and became a project manager in Columbus.

After 31 years with the company, however, she decided to retire in 1998 to care for a son, Brian, who was battling lymphoma. Later that year, at the age of 31, Brian died. The McClures also have three daughters.

"That's what I retired for, to take care of him," she said.

Meanwhile, her husband, who at one point was working as a civil rights investigator for Ohio, was offered an opportunity to become an owner of a janitorial supplies company: In 1990 HLH Systems was formed.

It was quite a career change, but one he enjoyed, McClure said.

After Brian's death, McClure looked for a new challenge and six years ago, realizing she could utilize her technology skills, she joined her husband in the janitorial consulting business.

"I went in with both feet ... we took a leap," she said.

It didn't take long for her to implement some of her technological ideas, either.

"Using what I had done in my 'first life,' the first thing we did was start re-engineering everything. Simple things from doing a Web site to re-evaluating who are customers should be," McClure said.

Since then the client list has greatly grown to include the likes of Battelle Memorial Institute and Sinclair Community College to a wide range of commercial and manufacturing companies, many of which have several locations.

"Sometimes our clients have multiple locations and they simply need to get their arms around the cost," McClure said.

Except for the McClures, all of the work for the company, such as the inspections, is completed on a contract basis.

The transition from just spouse to spouse and business partner has gone well, also.

"I used to travel a lot with my old job, so now we've gone from seeing each other on the weekends to seeing each other every day, but it's been great," she said.

The bulk of their client base is in Ohio, but they do have some out-of-state clients. Friday McClure was in Philadelphia hoping to drum up new business at a business match-making event that included American Airlines, United Parcel Service, Time Warner and Comcast.

Generally, most of the new business comes from word-of-mouth.

If the past few years are any indication, that business should continue to multiply, keeping McClure busy in her "retirement."

"Right now, it's using a lot of my time. We've still got a lot of systems we're putting in place ... (but) I am loving it," she said.