

# Window cleaning doesn't have to be such a dirty job

BY BETHANY BROADWELL  
Special to the Record-Eagle

Window cleaning may be a dirty job, but somebody has to do it.

In northwest Lower Michigan, entrepreneurs seem to take pride in the fact they give customers a spotless outlook on their surroundings.

"Everyone with glass is a potential client," said Doug Smith, owner and operations manager of Fish Window Cleaning in Traverse City. With more than 700 clients, his company cleans about 150,000 panes of glass in a year.

Smith has owned his window cleaning franchise for three years since his previous position as an insurance specialist was downsized. Today, he not only has a satellite office of Fish Window Cleaning in Gaylord, but he also employs seven cleaners and two salespeople.

Three full-time window cleaning technicians currently work for C & H Maintenance Service, Inc., in Traverse City. Cyndy Edwards, general manager for the company, which has been in business since 1958, said it serves about 2,800 residential and 1,300 commercial customers.

"Most people hate doing windows because it's so time consuming," Edwards said.

Smith agreed time is a main factor why customers choose to pay to get the task off their to-do list: "They would rather be golfing or boating."

Professionals can complete in a matter of hours jobs that would take those less experienced days to accomplish.

C & H Maintenance began cleaning windows on a broad scale in the early 1980s.

Finding the ideal people to take on window cleaning has been challenging because the employees have to be able to tolerate heights, walk on roofs and exert enough strength to build the sectional ladder. Plus, Edwards reminded, the work is definitely seasonal and workers have to face natural hindrances like bats, bees and birds.

From the first thaw to mid-August, C & H window cleaning technicians are on the job sunup to sundown. Fall cleanings are another busy time, but when the ground freezes and they can no longer position a ladder safely, the cleaners only do commercial jobs they can access from sidewalks.

Some of the gear that window cleaners use is a trade secret, but Edwards said her crews use a water applicator with a mild surfactant to suspend the soil from the glass, a squeegee, several extension poles and ladders

to help with hard-to-reach areas and surgical towels to wipe window edges and sills.

The most challenging window job Edwards said C & H has successfully completed was a case where the technicians needed to go straight up 45 feet in a small corridor. They accomplished this by using a high lift they rented from a local rental company and riding in a bucket to get it done.

Smith remembered a situation where a customer in a three-floor, \$1.5 million home had exotic landscaping and did not want the cleaners to use any ladders. Using a 45-foot telescoping water pole and spot-free water, Smith said of the windows, "They came out spectacular!"

Another point that makes C & H Maintenance proud is its participation in several charitable events where technicians clean windows for people who are unable to do it themselves. They, for example, cleaned all 200 of the windows at the Grand Traverse Heritage Center for the Day of Caring sponsored by Grand Traverse United Way.

"The expression on people's faces and their gratitude for a job well done is extremely satisfying," said Edwards.

The cost of hiring professionals does not have to be shattering, however. Smith



Record-Eagle/Lara Neel

**Cory Luhrs and Marshall Perry clean windows at Grand Traverse Auto. The two work for Fish Window Cleaning, a franchise owned for three years by Doug and Susan Smith.**

estimated his company cleans most residential windows for between \$100 and \$300 per job, depending on the complexity.

For people who want to make the effort on their own, Smith advised using a little soap, a highly absorbent mop with porcupine-like quills for the hard-to-clean glass and a high-quality squeegee.

"The least little nick or bend in the squeegee chan-

nel will cause a window to streak," according to him.

His team usually changes the rubbers once or twice a week to keep their sharpness and they use different types of rubbers depending on the outside temperature.

"Never clean in direct sunlight if the temperature is above 80 degrees," Smith said.

Karl Rylands, owner of Ace Window Cleaning in Traverse City, has been

cleaning windows professionally in northern Michigan for 12 years. He works independently, and according to him, that is what he enjoys.

Rylands is clear, too, on what it takes to come across to customers as a polished and professional window cleaner: "Be neat, and treat their home like you would treat yours."

**Bethany Broadwell is a local freelance writer.**

## Office restoration: Efficient office space can be home's mission control

BY HARRIET SCHECHTER  
Copley News Service

Running a household is

like running a small business. There are all those endless office tasks: dealing with incoming and outgoing

mail, especially bills and correspondence; making phone calls and taking messages; budgeting, banking

and other financial procedures; and, of course, filing.

Having an efficient yet comfortable home office in which to handle these chores can help keep your home organized.

### The right option

If you think there isn't enough room in your home to devote exclusively to an office, consider these possibilities:

- All you really need in terms of space for a barebones, low-tech office setup is a work surface (it doesn't have to be a desk) and something in which to store files (it needn't be a file cabinet). There are even cleverly designed hideaway office armoires (available at retailers such as Crate & Barrel). They open up to provide a desktop, file drawers and cubbies for supplies, and they can be kept closed when not in use.

- You can create a portable home office setup with inexpensive products such as Rubbermaid's file boxes (available at most discount office supply retailers), which have handles for easy carrying. When they are not in use, you can tuck them away underneath a kitchen counter, for example. They can be used in conjunction with the kitchen or dining room table, which in many homes are the most popular places to do paperwork.

- If you have a spare room that's known as the "guest room," consider whether you have guests often enough to justify that designation. You may be better off setting up the space for your office headquarters. (For the occasional guest, consider having a

sofa bed or keeping an inflatable bed on hand.)

### The right stuff

No matter what size it is or where you locate it, an effective home office requires a few key elements. Here is a checklist:

- Good lighting — an adjustable desk lamp is helpful.
- Comfortable chair — on casters, if possible.
- Adequate work surface — at a comfortable height.
- Accessible storage systems — for filing, reference materials and supplies.
- Wastebasket — you should be able to reach it without stretching.
- Clock — within sight.
- Calendar.

### The right size

When setting up your home office, choosing the right furnishings and equipment can help you avoid common problems such as:


- Work surfaces that are

too small, too large, too high or too low — these often get buried in clutter because it becomes easier to dump things on them than to work at them.

- Filing cabinets with drawers that stick or drag instead of gliding open, or they only open halfway — guaranteed to help create piles of paper because it's easier to put stuff on them than put stuff in them.

- High-tech systems that cost a bundle but that may be too complex for your household's needs — these end up creating frustration as well as clutter.

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