Serving the Commercial Kitchen Exhaust Industry Worldwide

The IKECA Journal is an industry publication for cleaners, fire marshals, insurance professionals, facility managers, vendors and other interested parties in the commercial kitchen exhaust cleaning and inspection industry.

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As 2021 begins, we are approaching the one year anniversary of the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic. Now that vaccines are being distributed, some areas of our world are still experiencing high positivity rates, new variant strains to deal with or with decreasing positive cases and/or the restrictions lifted. Regardless of where you live, or the level of restrictions you are working with, you’re likely still living with social distancing and practicing the guidelines set by the CDC and WHO. Keep up the great work, IKECA members; there are better times on the horizon. Be prepared when some degree of normalcy returns.

Your IKECA Board of Directors was busy throughout the second half of 2020, preparing for significant improvements that you will benefit from in 2021 and beyond. The Board completed its strategic planning sessions at the very end of 2020 and is currently crafting its implementation plan. (I will share details with the Membership, very soon; look for communications from headquarters). Some of the objectives and goals are already underway:

- The Certification Committee is in the process of reviewing the exams for “in field practices,” to ensure IKECA’s certifications continue to reflect the best practices in today’s work environment, and plans to implement around the Fall Technical Conference.
- We implemented an Insurance Committee, which is already working on relationships and education with and for the insurance industry and related industry stakeholders.
- Boosting the value of IKECA membership, and highlighting the value of the IKECA Certification program, is also top on the list of strategic initiatives and also underway. Continue to check in with IKECA social media and our website, for the next educational video or roundtable that your association is providing. You never know what you may learn but I guarantee you will learn something useful!
- The ANSI Technical Committee has been hard at work and will showcase the completed IKECA/ANSI Standards “Trio” and develop marketing and educational material for membership using the standards.

As we all become comfortable with the virtual world, know that your association would rather be meeting in person this spring. While it is not currently practical to meet in person and expect the same IKECA conference experience we are used to (and looking forward to!), we are planning another great virtual experience. We feel that we exceeded your expectations with the 2020 Virtual Fall Technical Conference and have learned from that, so that we can deliver another powerful experience this April. As we look into the future, we hope it will be safe and that we will see you all “in person” in fall 2021 (Minneapolis here we come!), or next spring 2022… in beautiful Scottsdale, Arizona. By then we will all be ready to turn off the computer and make travel arrangements!

Remember that IKECA is the benchmark in the KEC industry and is working hard at improving its valued membership experience. IKECA is also dedicated to improving its position in fire prevention, by building relationships with all stakeholders and upholding best practices for the industry.
A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

In late February 2021, IKECA’s leadership sponsored a live/virtual “roundtable” session focusing on Volunteerism, and specifically, where there are immediate opportunities for individuals in the IKECA community. There’s a broad range of work IKECA needs to accomplish, and expertise from the KEC industry is needed. [The recording of the roundtable session is worth watching and can be found here.]

Dedicating your valuable time as a volunteer contributes to the betterment of the industry overall. Are you familiar with the phrase “a rising tide lifts all boats” often used by President Kennedy in speeches? I think it applies here, in terms of spending time working on IKECA programs and projects: each one shares the overall goal of promoting best practices, increasing technical know-how, and expanding opportunities in the marketplace for all KEC companies.

How to find the right volunteer opportunity

There are numerous volunteer opportunities available. The key is to find something that interests you and perhaps even helps solve a challenge your company is facing. Over the past year, one of IKECA President Randy Conforti’s goals was to streamline the IKECA Committees and ensure they have clear goals and objectives, as well as the staff and volunteer support to move forward. As a result, IKECA has created a Committee information page on its website https://ikeca.site-ym.com/page/IKECACommittees that provides a brief look at the current Committees and what they are tackling. ALL of them are seeking volunteers!

I’d encourage you to reach out to the Chair of the Committee(s) in which you are interested in volunteering. They will be able to talk to you about the Committee’s current activities and where specific help is needed. You can find the current Committee chairs’ contact information at ikeca.org

Getting the most out of volunteering

You’re donating your valuable time, so it’s important that you enjoy and benefit from your volunteering. To make sure that your volunteer position is a good fit:

- **Ask questions.** You want to make sure that the experience is right for your skills, your goals, and the time you want to spend. Ask about the time commitment, who you will be working with, and what to do if you have questions.
- **Make sure you know what’s expected.** You should be comfortable with the organization and understand the time commitment. Consider starting small so that you don’t over commit yourself at first. Give yourself some flexibility to change your focus if needed.
- **Don’t be afraid to make a change.** Don’t force yourself into a bad fit or feel compelled to stick with a volunteer role you dislike. Talk to the organization about changing your focus or look for a different Committee that’s a better fit.
- **Enjoy yourself.** The best volunteer experiences benefit both the volunteer and the organization. Often you will meet new people (peers, industry suppliers, insurance and AHJs…) so leverage those relationships outside of Committee work!

Before I close, I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge the numerous talented individuals who currently volunteer their time as IKECA Officers, Directors, Committee leaders, Committee members, Journal authors, and expert subject matter contributors. IKECA’s value is fueled by volunteer commitment and dedication; without you, we could not continue to move forward.
Update from the Conference Committee
Randy Russo

The start of the new year 2021 has brought many changes for us—we have learned new ways to operate and get things done. We moved to a virtual conference setting last fall with GREAT success and will continue this virtual conference setting again for this Spring Conference: mark your calendar for April 14-16, 2021 and make sure you are registered in order to earn your CEUs for certification renewal!

We all do look forward to seeing each other in Minneapolis this Fall when all goes well. The Conference Committee has had to make a lot of changes with our booked locations, but we are now booked through 2023:

- Fall 2021: October 20-23 in Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Spring 2022: April 27-30 in Scottsdale, Arizona
- Fall 2022: October 19-22 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Spring 2023: March 29-April 1, 2023 in Charlotte, North Carolina

With the continued 100% commitment from the Conference Committee and with the support from the Board of Directors, we will work to keep our IKECA Conferences the BEST they can be for our GREAT members! With accelerating changes and hope for the future, the Conference Committee will work collaboratively to foster and share new ideas to continue improving IKECA.

We are honored to serve on this Conference Committee.

Update from the Education Committee
Dane Bundy

The IKECA Education Committee is always working on new ways to get educational tools and resources out to the members and KEC professionals here in the states and our international members around the world.

Most recently the committee has finalized the Top 10 list and made it available to all of our members to educate and establish relationships and offer ongoing education to local AHJs. One of the larger tasks the committee is working on is creating a resource manual for membership. A current topic we are working on is solid fuel. The committee is also working on short educational YouTube videos which should be available this spring.

Additionally, the Education Committee is working with the Technical Standards and Development Committee’s liaison to start implementing educational material between the two committees. Now that IKECA has created and launched the Insurance Committee, we will take directives and develop educational material for IKECA membership, including Insurance Industry stakeholders.

Go to the IKECA website or directly to our YouTube channel and learn from our latest videos.

The Education Committee is looking for new members and members for short-term projects. If you have any topics or suggestions you would like to see the committee develop, would like more information, or have interest in joining the Committee, please email info@ikeca.org.

Update from the Membership Committee
Dennis Poulin

This is not a good news/ bad news report, but the reality is that some of our colleagues have had a difficult time dealing with suppressed business, due mostly to the pandemic. We all wish them the best, both in health and economic recovery. At the same time, we are pleased to be welcoming new, first time members. Many of them are joining as seasoned professionals.

What’s really impressive are the attendance numbers we had at our first virtual conference, in the fall of 2020. Over 200 members and non-members participated, which is record-setting attendance for IKECA! Moving forward, membership can expect more opportunities to engage with each other via virtual connections. One of our greatest values has always been the network of diverse expertise, dispersed throughout a broad, international membership base. Our scope of resources as a professional network is as great as ever, and continues to grow.

We are particularly grateful for the Associate Members that support IKECA. We all like researching for best value as we supply our businesses, please don’t forget to give the Associate Members a fair shot at earning our business. They pay for membership just as we
do, and they invest as well when they sponsor our conferences.

The growth in AHJ membership within IKECA speaks to the success of building a positive relationship based on the agenda to improve the Life Safety efforts between the KEC industry and the AHJ Community. We see the development of the newest membership category for Insurance and Risk Management Professionals taking shape and being supported by our newly-established Insurance Committee.

The Restaurant Owners and Facility Management members have added value to IKECA by participating as stakeholders in our efforts to promote improved performance within the KEC industry.

IKECA’s Certification program was a significant step forward for the Association when it was created, and set a standard for the organization moving forward. At that time, a group of members worked hard at creating this program and we applaud their success. As IKECA has matured, we look to the AHJs, insurance companies and others for their acceptance of our certification programs. In order to achieve this level of credibility and acceptance, we have to follow long-established practices and guidelines for the creation and maintenance of meaningful and defensible certification. These established practices are in place to ensure that the certification is relevant to the skills it is testing, has good questions that are clearly written, and that it is fair.

The Certification Committee has started the exam review process. The first step is to define what specific skills and knowledge an individual must possess, for each of the levels of certification. We have defined the CECT certification as the Foreman or Crew Chief, or whatever any firm calls their leader of a crew at a given job. The Committee is completing the draft summary of skills and knowledge that a CECT must have and this draft will go out to all Association members and industry stakeholders for comment in April 2021. The final summary list must be deemed to reflect the skills and knowledgebase required, regardless of geographic region, individual company policies, or proprietary techniques and technology.

Stay tuned, and please be prepared to provide your input during the public comment period. The more input the Committee receives from the KEC community, the stronger and more relevant the program will be.

Update from the Certification Committee

Charlie Cochrane

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Update from the Insurance Committee

Mike Rosenau

It is truly a privilege to serve as the chair of the newly formed Insurance Committee. The purpose of this committee is to expand awareness of IKECA among insurance and risk management professionals. As you all know, having recognition and awareness of IKECA in the insurance industry will be beneficial to all association members.

While our committee is new, we have some good ideas for promoting IKECA. Going forward, we look to have an insurance/AHJ educational track for IKECA Fall and Spring conferences. The inclusion of an insurance track could generate interest by risk management professionals in IKECA membership. We propose making a concerted effort to build awareness of IKECA within various insurance industry trade associations. Last, we plan on recommending future topical educational sessions, which have mutual benefits to IKECA and the insurance industry.

Our committee members look forward to the work ahead. If you have any ideas for us, please send me an email at mrosenau@societyinsurance.com. I welcome any suggestions you may have to further the collaboration between insurance professionals and IKECA.

Update from the Technical Standards Development Committee

James Shea & James Roberts

What can we say? Things are a little bit upside down across the country and the world. We enter a new year with newly elected officials, a pandemic virus unchecked, variances on the existing virus placing further unknown hurdles, and a business economy that despite many shutdowns and revised hours of operation, from the surface appears to be on the mend but remains extremely volatile to all the above pressures.

The last time we addressed the membership was in the Fall 2020 Journal. Not much has changed; however, recent unofficial polls of fire equipment companies and service providers indicate doors opening to many of the services that have suffered due to the pandemic.

Continue your quest with the local authorities, insurance companies, and customers to educate them on the need to maintain fire and life safety equipment as essential services provided to essential businesses. Studies show during times of business volatility, the tendency for negligence, unsafe or sloppy human behavior, and even arson, increases.

One major change since our last correspondence is the loss of our Director of Certification & Standards, Sara Duginske. After all she has accomplished in such a short period of time on behalf of the committee, she will be sadly missed as she moves on to explore her new roles and new position outside of Stringfellow and IKECA. A new Director of Certification & Standards will be assigned to IKECA and will be introduced to IKECA in mid-March. In the meantime, for all inquiries, feel free to contact Kathy or myself directly. My email address is james.shea@globetechnologies.com. Phone number: 603.930.2269.

The committee has also engaged the PWNA, Pressure Wash North America, in correspondence regarding its training and marketing of ANSI / IKECA approved standards and its reference to those standards on the PWNA website. We have been greeted with enthusiasm and support for the changes needed to represent IKECA’s Committee Standards appropriately, and will continue to monitor the progress of the suggested changes. The reference to our standards in another trade organization’s communications has helped to strengthen our position as the “leading provider” of Standards and Best Practices to the kitchen exhaust cleaning community, state and national authorities, and insurance carriers across the country. We are pleased with this reference once they have made the appropriate editorial changes.

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) will soon begin activity again to accept proposals for revisions to the I Codes, as well as the NFPA 96 Standard. Our team is committed to gaining reference to our “suite of ANSI Standards” with the necessary code bodies in the standards that matter most. Subcommittee work continues to introduce code language referencing the new innovations in technology in our ANSI / IKECA standards for additional reference within the codes.

As of this writing, the C10 Standard, 2021 revision is being launched to the membership, public, and authorities throughout the country. Those that have not Continue on page 10
Update from the Technical Standards Development Committee, continued
James Shea & James Roberts

purchased the most recent edition of the standards should do so to stay current and up to date.

With the completion of the C10 Standard for 2021, the committee is entering into a stage where we will continue to monitor industry and code changes but will not be in session on standards review until we once again open the standards for public comment. Visit the IKECA website for the latest revision cycle. During the hiatus in cycles, the committee will use our meeting times/dates for training the committee on new technologies, industry, and the markets our membership serves to allow further insight in the development of strong industry-leading “best practices” for adoption.

Be Safe & Well!*

Update from the Marketing Committee
Grant Mogford

The IKECA Marketing Committee is committed to collaborating with, supporting, and encouraging the Board of Directors and the other IKECA Committees to drive compelling brand-building, marketing effectiveness, and efficiency to ensure continued growth in membership, revenue, and sponsorship.

Over the last year, IKECA has seen substantial increases in traffic to our webpages. We have also seen a substantial increase in social and organic traffic. Organic traffic is visitors that find a website after using a search engine like Google or Bing, so they are not “referred” by any other website. Social traffic refers to traffic coming to our website from social networks and social media platforms.

SOCIAL MEDIA SUMMARY
The number of followers across all Social Media accounts continues to see steady growth. We currently have over 1,023 Facebook followers—a 6% increase from last year. IKECA’s LinkedIn page has 871 followers and there are 242 Twitter followers.

ON THE HORIZON
Our committee, along with the Laidlaw Group, is preparing to roll out a Social Media Campaign that members will be able to share to their own social media or websites that should help drive the IKECA message to facility managers, municipalities, restaurant owners, AHJs and potential customers. Messages will include an attention-grabbing picture along with sample statements and hashtags to be customized by members for their own branding.

Update from the Canadian Chapter
Alex Young

Our Canadian Chapter has made great headway in the education and industry awareness through AHJ membership.

We/I have been concentrating on brand awareness here within Canada and have chosen to concentrate on building membership in the AHJ community.

As an active Canadian KEC company owner, I share the frustration with the lack of standardized expectations, with regards to both exhaust cleanings, and certified competitors here in Canada. I chose to pursue our AHJ community through education and brand awareness. Through IKECA, and as our Canadian Chapter President, I was able to obtain training displays and educational material to assist in training present and future AHJs through our Fire Marshal headquarters here in Ontario.

Prior to COVID-19, I had the opportunity to speak on behalf of IKECA and its mission at a number of courses offered on Commercial Cooking Operations. I believe the more education and awareness that can be brought and shared with our industry through those that are our code enforcement colleagues, (AHJs) the faster we will bring legitimacy to our profession and its role in life safety.

IKECA offers free Membership to all AHJs. Having an opportunity to speak and interact with your local AHJs is a valuable tool to aid them in their daily duties. I often think of how many “hats” an AHJ needs to
Association News

wear throughout their daily tasks and inspections—they are expected to be an expert in so many related industries. They deal with fire alarm tech, sprinkler tech, extinguisher systems, emergency exit lighting, evacuation plans, and exhaust and ventilation control! Numerous hats are expected in addition to the need to be familiar and understanding of all of these areas in order to aid in the life safety of the general public. When offering membership I believe we give them a real opportunity to network and educate themselves in our industry. IKECA has a wealth of industry-leading members from KEC companies, to code-specific suppliers, and, most importantly, a network of fellow AHJs to learn from and help educate. The value of a free AHJ IKECA Membership is with the access they gain, they can only improve our industry and its importance. To date, we currently have accepted 130+ Canadian AHJs as IKECA Members.

I would like to thank both OMNI and Drip Loc for the educational display units donated on behalf of IKECA to the Ontario Fire Marshal College to aid in the education of Fire Prevention and Life safety; another great example of IKECA and the benefits of our Membership.

Although much of our progress has been made here in Ontario, I recently visited our west coast and offered membership to our AHJs in Vancouver Island via a past member KEC company. I would like to encourage our Canadian members to engage with your local AHJs and talk about certification and the opportunity and education they have available through Membership with IKECA.

Some of my goals this year coming for our Canadian members will be to form a regular committee meeting managed by our management group, and to set goals to bring our brand awareness to more KEC companies and AHJs across Canada.

If you are interested in joining the Canadian committee please contact me at a.young@powerking.ca Thank you and remember you are only as good as your last cleaning! ♦

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IKECA is back in person and excited to see all of you for the 2021 Fall Technical Seminar & Expo! Now is the time to save the date for an event you won’t want to miss. See you October 20-23, 2021 at the Minneapolis Marriott City Center!

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CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE WHO RECENTLY ACHIEVED THEIR DESIGNATIONS AND CERTIFICATIONS!

PECT Professional Exhaust Cleaning Technician
- Dagoberto Amador, Airways Cleaning and Fireproofing
- Elwin Greene, Airways Cleaning and Fireproofing
- Michael Hamilton, Airways Cleaning and Fireproofing
- Kevin Casco, Airways Cleaning and Fireproofing
- Sam Larimer, Derby Pressure Wash
- Wilfredo Mendoza, Vulcan Fire & Safety Systems Ltd.
- Dasmond Johnson, Derby Pressure Wash
- Jaime Rodriguez, Bare Metal Maintenance, Inc.
- Cory Fleming, The Steam Guy Inc.
- Aldo Castillo, Ventilation Technologies
- Manuel Alvarez, Ventilation Technologies
- Kirk Frith, Aqua Pro Inc.
- William Jake Foreman, Aqua Pro Inc.

CECT Certified Exhaust Cleaning Technician
- Jose Melesio, Airways System, Inc.
- Sam Escamilla, Breezy Exhaust Pros
- Julian Lindo, Bare Metal Maintenance
- Carlos Mendoza, US Vents

CECS Certified Exhaust Cleaning Specialist
- Michael Eduarte, Alfonso 8-Hoods Cleaning
- Giovanni Diamato, Provident Service Associates
- Michael Measho, M & R Shine Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning Services
- Sean Plummer, Prevent Life Safety
- Bret Nicol
- Chuck Cooper, Hughes Environmental Inc.
- Matthew Kelley, Otter Commercial Services

BCCS Boston Certified Cleaning Specialist
- Ricardo Romero, CS Ventilation LLC
- Christopher Dozier, Nelbud Services Group
- Sophath Chan, Cochrane Ventilation LLC
- Elvin Ortiz, Cochrane Ventilation LLC
- Geoffrey Charland, Air Cleaning Services
- James Main, CSC Services LLC
- Marcos Rivera, CSC Services LLC
- Luis Rosario, CSC Services LLC

New Members

Active International
- Karthick Vijaya / Blue L.L.C
- Brian McAuley / Boyz N The Hood
- Chang-sik Yoo / CLEANCENTER
- Sumil Francis / Magic Touch Building Cleaning
- Sandeep Pandey / Osoji Kitchen Management Services
- Niña Basmayor / Alfonso-8 Kitchen Hoods Cleaning
- Dave Lohse / Dixon Fire Department
- Daniel Medina / Addison Fire Protection District #1
- Leigh Unger / Norwood Park Fire Protection District
- Cory Bader / Horry County Code Enforcement
- Brian Leverton / St Marys Fire Department
- Randy Normandin / Smiths Falls Fire Department
- Rodney Solis / Buda Fire Department
- Charles Miller / Penn Hills Fire Marshal’s Office
- Tim Solobay / Canonsburg VFD
- Jeremy Davis / Lakeside Fire Protection District
- Kurt Christofel / Mt. Lebanon Fire Department
- Troy Todd / Columbia Fire Department
- Tim Legler / City of Prescott Recreation Services
- Frank Lasaga / Jupiter Island Public Safety
- Jon Pairett / Gallup Fire Department

Active North America
- Jodi Clem / Prevent Life Safety
- Chuck Cooper / Hughes Environmental Inc.

AHJ
- Randy Carroll / Beaver creek Township Fire Department
- Pete Wagner / Plymouth Volunteer Fire Department
- Rodney Kwiatkowski / West Manatee Fire Rescue
- Josh Adkins / West Manatee Fire Rescue

Continues on page 14
New Members

- Tori Jacklin / Campbellsport Volunteer Fire Department
- Jeff Gage / Collingwood Fire Department
- Bob Kleinheinz / Lake Zurich Fire Department
- Steven Dube / Hudson NH Fire Department, Inspectional Services
- Patrick Farrens / Maple Grove Fire Department
- Justin Gilgo / Emerald Isle Fire Department
- Lek Moy / Boston Fire Department
- Michael Burns / Regina Fire and Protective Services
- Frank Rudecoff / Roaring Fork Fire Rescue Authority
- Jose Garcia / Santa Clara County Fire Department
- Erin Collins / Santa Clara County Fire Department
- Dominic Buffolino / Nassau County Fire Marshal Office

Food Service Industry
- James Galanis / J&S Restaurant Group LLC
- Dominic Rossman / Roadside Pizza and Grinders
- Mohamed Riyaz / Yalla Fix It
- Jon Lee / Ringgit Resto
- Marc Rubino / Clark Services Group

Insurance and Risk Management Professionals
- Matt Anderson / Society Insurance
- Mark McCullough / Rudick Forensic Engineering
- Georgi Marte / Alpha Waste Solutions LLC
- James Farrow / HoodProzLLC
- Mark Faria / Frank Cowan Company

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A Rescue in Big Sky Country
Kevin Pearson / Grime Stoppers Inc. / Black Eagle, MT

It was a year when phrases like “the new normal,” “the virus,” “cancellations and closures” and more became a part of our everyday vocabulary. Last spring, we sheltered in place and hoped that the warmer weather would bring an end to the economy-shattering pandemic. Unfortunately, for so many, by the end of summer and the beginning of autumn, there were spikes in the number of cases in many areas. Areas where there already been a high rate of infection, as well as areas that had yet to see more than a handful of cases.

As the summer wound down and fall began to change the leaves, leaving early frost and high elevation snow here in Montana, it was time for me to try to salvage a fiscal year, one that would likely be the worst our company had seen in years. Like so many in the KEC business as well as our customers, the shelter in place order locked down our economy, employees were furloughed, and the money just stopped coming in.

The bright spot was that some of our larger hospitality accounts were able to partially open for the summer season. This brought people from across the country to see the beauty in Montana and Northern Wyoming, and to try to escape the harder hit areas of the US where the virus had affected so many Americans.

By this time, our company was down to two teams. I was the lead man on one of those two teams. I dispatched one team to central Montana, and I took the newest of our new employees with me to Glacier National Park. In the first two jobs, everything went very well, but the third job proved disastrous.

Sloped steel roofs should be approached with the highest caution and an emphasis on following safety rules without exception. In the beginning, everything went well. I tied off on the lifting hooks of the nearby air handler and was able to comfortably reach the fan as we had done for years. When I completed the cleaning of the fan, the steel roof was wet and a soft rain had begun to fall.

I plotted what I thought was a safe descent route and unhooked my safety lanyard, just as a gust of wind knocked me off balance. In the instant it took me to fall to the ground, I tried to control the way that I would hit the pavement below. Instead of hitting the balls of my feet and toes (which I did with my left foot), I hit heel first on my right foot, instantly shattering the tibia and fibula on my right leg and tearing out most of the cartilage in that ankle.
The pain was excruciating. I crawled about 200 feet to the truck and was able to get myself into the driver’s seat. I drove basically at idle speed to the rear of the restaurant and got the attention of the inside man, explained what happened, and had him finish the job without me. It was 9 or 10 miles from the job site back to the camper, where my wife Penney was preparing the meal we were to have after completing the job and to strategize the following day’s work in that area. Everything changed.

I drove to the camper without the use of my right leg, using my left foot for the brakes, and the cruise control for the accelerator. Before reaching our base camp, I came into cell range, and called Penney and told her what happened. She was ready to take over the driving as soon as I got there. We were still 40 miles from the nearest hospital.

The x-rays confirmed what I previously stated: the bones in my leg were clearly shattered. I would not even begin walking until after Thanksgiving, the traditional end of our busy season. I was in a tight spot.

The following morning I was sitting in my camper with my leg elevated trying to figure out what I was going to do when the phone rang. It was Neal Iorii—he was calling to discuss a session to be presented at the IKECA 2020 Fall Virtual Tech Conference, on which he and I were collaborating. I told him the story about my fall, and he immediately wanted to help. Within an hour I had calls coming in from fellow IKECA members all over the country.

At this point in the story, I’d like to reflect back on times when other IKECA members were in trouble due to disasters, injuries, and/or sickness… word went out, and help was on the way. That was exactly what happened to me.

I received calls, cards, and flowers from every part of the country: Illinois, New York, New Jersey, Florida, Missouri, California, Washington, Texas, Wisconsin, Nevada, Arizona… and more.

Among the dozens of calls that I received were two calls from close friends that I’ve known for years. They were well aware that this is the time of year when I “make it or break it” to get through the winter. First was the call from Jim Roberts of Derby Pressure Wash, asking what week was the most important week I had coming up, as he’d been out to Montana once before working with me and he knew what a roller coaster our annual schedule is. Within just a few minutes he told me not to worry, he’d have plane tickets and I’d get my vital jobs done. There is no way to express how much that meant to me—there was a glimmer of hope that I just might be able to keep my top accounts and be in business in the spring.

Within 10 minutes of Jim’s call (this is not an exaggeration), Randy Conforti called me and said something to the effect of, “It looks like we’ll be there during parts of the first and second weeks of October.” He then told me that he and Jim had already decided to come out west; he just wanted Jim to find out what dates were most critical. I was speechless and unable to express my gratitude.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that Chris Pearson, CESI (my son), who left the business and started his own chimney service business, completely rescheduled the week that Jim and Randy were coming so that he could be there. He knew the customer locations as well as anyone could, and his presence was critical. This he did without being asked. Like Jim and Randy, he saw the need and stepped up and volunteered. My Dad and his wife came in from Southern Idaho, as they often have in the past, even though the dates were not easy for them to adapt to, and he worked every day with the team.

This was a story of rescue, of true friends stepping in to help out in a time of need. I would not be exaggerating to say that my business would look much different in 2021 and beyond without the help and support that I received from so many in the organization.

When contemplating the value of membership, keep in mind that as you forge friendships and allow yourself to get attached, you’re doing more than just having made casual acquaintances. You are becoming part of a community. Maybe you can help out in times of need, maybe not, but all should know that there is a large number among our membership who’ve been selfless in the things that they’ve done for the organization as well as its members. True is the phrase “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.” ♦
If You Want to Grow Your Business… Answer the Phone!
Tom Grandy / Grandy & Associates

Does your company have a marketing program? It likely does. Most companies invest in direct mail, social media, referral networks, billboards, and perhaps even radio and TV. What’s the objective of marketing? Right again, to make the phone ring.

Now let’s make it personal by forgetting about your customers for a couple of minutes. It’s just you. You need service, or perhaps a piece of equipment replaced. Perhaps you Googled a few companies in your area or even asked friends for their recommendations. At last, you have decided who to call. You pick up the phone and one of three situations take place:

1. A real live person answers the phone – The person answering the phone is polite, asks the right questions, and in general gives you a warm fuzzy feeling. After a short, but friendly, conversation an appointment is either set to discuss your situation and/or a service call is scheduled. Bingo. Well done! That’s the way it is “supposed” to happen, right?

2. The phone rings and rings until you get a recorded message – This time it’s a bit different. The phone rings and rings until eventually, you hear a voice message telling you they are sorry they missed your call, with a request to leave a message so they can call you back. Frustrating, right? Why? Because you have a real need but can’t talk to anyone about solving it.

3. The phone rings and rings and no one answers it! – This is the height of frustration.

How persistent are you, as a customer? Will you leave your name and number and wait for a call back? Will you call back in an hour, or perhaps the next day? How long are you willing to wait before you say, “Forget it, I am going to call another company until I find one that answers the phone.” These are questions I am asking YOU. Once you have answered them, then think about customers calling your company. What are they hearing... or not hearing?

That unanswered call is saying a lot to the customer, without anyone having to say it. Is the company too busy to answer the phone (therefore they don’t need my business)? Is it telling me they are a one or two...
man operation since they obviously don’t have a full-time person in the office to answer the phone (perhaps they are too small, or inexperienced, to take care of my situation)? If I can’t get them to answer the phone how likely is it they are going to show up on time if I were to hire them?

Believe me, how YOU answer or don’t answer your phone is making a huge impression on your potential customer.

I don’t have a source to find out what percentage of potential customers never call back when no one answers the phone, or they reach a recording. However, from a consumer’s standpoint, I bet most customers quickly look for someone else if they can’t talk to a real person... the first time they call.

Some of you are saying, “Hey Tom, that’s not really a big deal. Besides, most companies answer the phone, right?” Wrong! I literally just finished calling a whole pile of cards I received at a recent seminar, just to follow up. At least a third of the stack either did not answer the phone, or they had a recording. In my case, I’m pretty persistent. I call, and call, and call until I get in touch with people. This process has now been going on for nearly a week and guess what? Most of that third STILL have not answered the phone. Did I leave a message to call me back? No, I didn’t. Why? Because I want to talk to them when I want to talk to them, not at 7:00 AM or 8:30 PM!

Granted I am a business trainer, with a bit of a different perspective. I call back because I am trying to create business. However, at this point, I am convinced that those I am unable to reach are simply too small to utilize my services or too busy to take a serious look at the business side of their business.

The point is quite clear. If you want to grow your business, answer the phone! I understand the owner is probably out working in the field, or on a sales call. However, if you are really serious about growing your business, transfer the office phone to your cell (and answer it), hire a full-time person to answer the phone, or employ an outside answering service to respond to calls. When people call your business, they want to talk to a real person.

If you aren’t going to answer the phone, stop marketing! You are wasting your money if the phone isn’t going to be answered by a real person. ♦

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Covid 19 Positives and Negatives in the KEC Industry: Observations from a Traveling Troll

Tim Greene / Airways Cleaning and Fireproofing Company / Sunrise, FL

Here we are, over a year later, and for many, the insanity persists. Did your business close? Did you have to furlough employees? Did you have revenues cut by 75%? Did you get a PPP Loan from the Federal Government? Have any of your customers closed permanently? Did you have to ask suppliers for better terms or lower pricing? Did you have customers close down their businesses, owing you substantial amounts that you may never see?

The answer for us is “yes” to every question. We closed completely for three weeks in March 2020, and furloughed 10 employees. Revenues that month were only 22% of revenues in March 2019. Fortunately, we applied for and received a PPP Loan which may have saved us from further reductions in staffing. One downside of the PPP Loan was the requirement to keep staffing levels post-PPP funding. What did you do you when had to keep employees on, with no customers to work for? I couldn’t stomach paying people for not doing anything, so we actually gave away work for free. The customer knew it was required but had no business and couldn’t pay right then. It turned out to be very positive customer relations move, and kept the night crews busy doing something. To date, we still have many large hotels that not only haven’t paid their invoices from last February, but still aren’t even close to reopening.

As we approach the summer 2021, it appears we all may be turning the corner soon. The cases are falling in some areas, and the vaccine is here for “old fogies” like me, and hopefully soon for everyone. It seems like there is a shift in attitude and some of the media-driven fear is subsiding. (I couldn’t resist a little commentary there). I sincerely hope you all made it through.

So, here are the positives going forward. We are certainly a smaller company, but we are now leaner as we learned how to watch every penny and double bid every product and service we purchase. We sold older trucks that were sitting around “just in case” and saved substantially on auto insurance. We rebid phone contracts, uniform service contracts, and truck GPS contracts. Our business is picking up and we actually got revenues back to 69% of 2019 at the end of the year. I enjoyed the virtual Fall Technical Seminar and commend the IKECA Board of Directors and Administrative Staff for an amazing effort in pulling that off. I must admit, though, that no matter how informative it was it will never replace the hours at dinners and the bars with some of the best friends I have. Finally, I want to review what I believe to be the greatest positive of all. Thanks to the efforts of our original founders (I will single out Barney again) my phone is ringing with customers asking for appointments just because they want to stay in compliance with NFPA Standards. They know they don’t need it because they have only been doing take out for a year but they call anyway. How about that for a change in attitude in the short time IKECA has been around?

Here’s hoping we have seen the worst and we are coming back strong. I look forward to seeing all of your smiling faces very soon."
Celebrating 50 Issues of the IKECA Journal
Forward-thinking KEC business owners have learned that social media and a professional website are essential for attracting new customers, keeping current ones engaged, and driving traffic. Recognizing the importance of engagement is the key to gaining momentum.

According to Forbes, “The pandemic changed the customer experience. The restraints and limitations in place to protect our health and well-being mean that companies must find new and innovative ways to deliver on their brand promise to remain connected to their customer base. Although a daunting scenario, it’s also a unique opportunity to reframe their customer delivery model.

By rising above the concept of traditional customer service, investing in digital solutions, and updating your website, you can strengthen your connection you’re your customers. Don’t disappoint them in an age when
change is everywhere, and being the “go-to” guy or gal is a must.”

KEC business owners’ first step is to identify your voice and choose the most interesting and useful topics to feature on social media platforms, email campaigns, and your website that will communicate your competitive advantage. Your brand “voice” is your tone, style, and personality of your communications, online and offline.

Where should you start?

Ask your in-house sales team or the folks who deal directly with your customers on the phone what questions they’re most often asked. (Hint: When you’re discussing this with your in-house folks, ask them about their voice). Prioritize the importance of those questions. Start asking and answering them on social media. You may also want to add a popular Q+A section to your website. Once you have some answers, post the questions and connect your followers to your social media and website for the answers. Remember, Google Analytics tracks where your visitors come from, and social media is a popular segment that Google tracks.

Consistency is key.

Successful KEC business owners post multiple times a week on all social media platforms. Remember, each post is another opportunity to grow your audience, educate them and engage your followers in conversations that can lead to sales. Retaining your current customers and keeping them engaged will ensure your company’s long-term health and vitality. 80% of social marketers said their key strategy is to increase engagement across social channels and drive traffic to their websites.

Put the Wheels In Motion.

It’s time to become a leading influential voice on topics that impact the KEC industry. Topics that are meaningful to your customers and designed to produce sales.

Be bold. Speak directly to your audience. Have a constant dialogue. Use action verbs and short phrases. Less is more in the digital age. Make every word and image count. You will undoubtedly be amazed at how far it will take you.

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Lack of Due Diligence in Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning Endangers Texas Restaurants
Jamie Reeder / Guardian Services

Roughly 11,000 commercial kitchens are damaged by fire annually, per data shared by the International Kitchen Exhaust Cleaners Association (IKECA). Many of these fires can be prevented through proper maintenance and cleaning. Simply conducting an internet search for “kitchen exhaust cleaning companies” and clicking on the top one in the search results doesn’t guarantee top-tier service that meets local standards.

In fact, there are currently no licensing requirements or laws that govern who can start a kitchen exhaust cleaning company in many states. That means anyone can secure a truck and a power washer, print off some business cards, and get started. These small cleaners may offer their prices for a steal, which means savings for restaurants, at first. That is, until a customer comes inside to let the owner know there’s a fire on the roof. In the end, restaurants can pay more through thousands in damage.

It’s Up to the Owner to Conduct Due Diligence

A burden to conduct in-depth due diligence falls on restaurant owners in states without licensing or laws regarding commercial kitchen exhaust cleaning. When that due diligence is not conducted, it endangers the safety of restaurant customers and employees.

For example, in Utah, kitchen exhaust system cleaning concerns and inspections must be licensed by the Office of the State Fire Marshal (SFM). “No person or concern shall engage in the business of selling, installing, servicing, repairing, testing, or modifying any kitchen exhaust system without obtaining a license from the SFM, pursuant to these rules expressly authorizing such concern to perform such acts.” Having the SFM’s seal of approval puts clients at ease. But what about states without such licensing?

By failing to do their due diligence or by cutting corners, restaurant owners risk not only the loss of their building...
and insurance claim exclusion but also serious liability and litigation for the fires created by kitchen exhaust systems cleaned in an irresponsible manner. This kind of negligence can put a company out of business.

Three Tips for Screening Kitchen Cleaning Companies

What should restaurant owners look for when vetting kitchen cleaning companies? Here are three tips to tighten your screening process:

1. Require a Certified Cleaning Company

The National Fire Protection Association’s NFPA 96 standard states, “The entire exhaust system shall be cleaned by a properly trained, qualified and certified company or persons.”

IKECA members represent the best in the kitchen exhaust cleaning industry. They are proud to have made significant contributions to the decrease in commercial kitchen fires. The current membership is approximately 500 worldwide. Guardian Services was a founding member of IKECA and has been a proud member since it was founded in 1989.

IKECA members live up to the challenge of providing qualified and certified professionals that are committed to cleaning to the highest standards in the industry. They are passionate about doing the job right the first time and providing the restaurant and insurance industries an integral component of their fire protection and public safety programs.

Many companies tout themselves as highly qualified cleaning companies, but some are little more than small one- to two-man operations that don’t have the specialized equipment, tools, and expertise to adequately clean the entire system. Many times, they lack the responsible insurance coverage as well. The dangers of such an approach can be costly in terms of risk of fire, loss, as well as potential liability, and litigation.

2. Locate Experienced Cleaning Specialists and Verify References

You must protect the safety of your employees and customers. Steer clear of code violations and catastrophic damage incurred as a result of a serious fire in your restaurant. Stay away from fly-by-night cleaning firms with no documented track record of cleaning kitchen exhaust systems to code.

It is important to verify the company has been in business for a credible amount of time and that they have provided services to multiple customers such as yourself.

3. Ensure That the Cleaning Company Is Insured

Is the company insured? An owner who invests in their company and its protection is serious about the service they provide.

In 2016, the legendary Goff’s Charcoal Hamburgers of Dallas, TX suffered a vent hood fire that could have been prevented with a proper cleaning by a certified and insured company. Unfortunately, businesses nearby also endured major water damage and had to close as a result. An insured cleaning company will have no issue with providing photo documentation of the cleaning process from start to finish to prevent such disasters.

Until state licensing and laws are established regarding commercial kitchen exhaust cleaning in Texas, it is up to restaurant owners to conduct due diligence in screening and vetting experienced and insured cleaners. Don’t cut corners. Instead, come out on top with the reputation as a restaurant owner who prioritizes the health and safety of your customers and employees. ♦
Leak Testing: Safety Requirements Plus Value Add for Your Customers
Mark Eckert, CESI, Enviromatic Corporation of America

Leak testing is a non-negotiable requirement for Type I grease duct systems installed in commercial kitchens. These tests are meant to ensure the “liquid-tight” integrity of the ducts, as required by the International Mechanical Code (IMC) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).

However, extensive anecdotal evidence as well as post-fire investigations suggest that commonly administered leak tests (light, smoke or pressure) do not adequately detect leaks. Growing concern over the effectiveness of these and other procedures prompted The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the International Kitchen Exhaust Cleaners Association (IKECA) to develop and maintain cleaning, inspection and maintenance standards for commercial kitchen exhaust systems. These voluntary, recommended standards support the exclusive use of water testing to ensure liquid-tight ducts.

KEC owners/operators may face challenges when it comes to confirming the integrity of Type I exhaust systems, and in explaining why facility owners and engineers should embrace the latest ANSI/IKECA recommendations for water testing. However, for code compliance and good customer relations, here are some approaches to take when talking to customers and other stakeholders.

Build Relationships

Demonstrate to your customer the proven value of your water leak test service, when most likely, significant leaks from inferior welding show themselves. “We did leaks in about 90% of ducts we service” says James Roberts, owner of Derby Pressure Wash in Louisville, KY. Don Pfleiderer of Enviromatic Corporation of America cited tests data showing that 89.3 percent of systems failed the pressurized water test. You are helping to avoid a disaster, and your customer’s respect for you should increase.

Expand Opportunity

Many grease exhaust cleaning companies possess the tools to spin jet both vertical and horizontal ducts. So, there is no additional investment needed to properly water test for leaks. Are there any drawbacks? Yes, one is that you may need to work with schedulers, to allow crews the additional time needed to perform the water test work.

Help Avoid That Disaster

How many grease exhaust system cleaners have come to a new customer (either new construction or existing) and within a few minutes into spraying, the “disaster” reveals itself as ceiling tiles begin to fall!

Typical implications when this occurs are:

(a) The project may need to stop altogether if the leaks are not in a manageable area. This results in a non-compliant exhaust system in which a hood certification must be a “work-in-progress” and not labeled as completely cleaned/compliant and safe.

(b) The system typically needs all of the fire wrap material removed for a scheduled re-weld. This can be
very costly and disruptive. I personally have two such projects we are in the middle of resolving, neither of which are cost-effective – a hospital and a high end restaurant. Both are new construction. The hospital has two separate leaking systems, with one 55’ horizontal runs over the carpeted “check-in” cubicles and the other 50’ horizontal runs over a robust rehabilitation equipment clinic. Fortunately for the restaurant, the 35’ horizontal runs above the cook line walkway.

Too often, the construction debris fills in pinholes so much so that the smoke or light test doesn’t reveal holes, or the welding slag simply covers up parts of the holes in the corners, blocking light during the light tests. In many existing restaurants, much of the grease exhaust system isn’t washed thoroughly until a certified KEC company (who knows to clean all of the ductwork) performs the cleaning.

Please re-consider if you believe this is not a viable option for your company. The restaurant industry has to face many construction challenges due to poor quality. A leaking duct system shouldn’t be one of them. We can provide a valuable service that will be very apparent to customers in the long run.

Keep in mind that trying to sell this to contractors is very hard due to them working on small margins and them believing in their light or smoke testing. However, what many of the contractors we deal with finally realize is that the water leak testing is a superior method for compliance, and that they may never have to come back to fix leaks that could be found months or years down the line.

It is far easier to repair a leaking duct during construction than after the duct is wrapped and full of grease, and along with the ceiling and surrounding mechanicals installed. Plus, the resulting grease and water leak damages can largely be avoided with proactive water leak testing ♦

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