

Facility Manager Project Profile

Tony Elrod

Keep Your Cool

What is your official title, and how long have you been with Zax LLC (Zaxby's)? My title is equipment and facilities manager, and I have been with Zaxby's for more than four years. However, when I was with a KES back in 2005-2010, I worked on the Zaxby's account as one of its two authorized KES vendors, so I was very familiar with Zaxby's when I was hired in 2014.

The Zaxby's facility department is relatively young. When was it formed and why? Back in 2014 the VP of Operations for Zax LLC wanted to start a facilities department to try and figure out a realistic budget for R&M.

Please provide a brief history of your work experience in the restaurant industry. I have been in the restaurant business since 1979. I started by partnering with some friends who owned a sports bar. From there I have been with some of the largest restaurant groups in the country (Longhorns, Cracker Barrel, Darden). I've been a bartender, GM, regional manager, franchisee of Woody's BBQ (I was Franchisee of the Year my first year when I opened three restaurants in a 13-month span), director of operations and purchasing at a KES and director of purchasing for SMS—which involved doing all the purchasing for Popeye's worldwide. I finally landed at Zaxby's, where I could not be any happier.

Were you involved with facilities-related issues and/or projects when you worked in operations? Being in this business as long as I have been, you always learn something on a daily basis.

What is the total number of Zaxby's and how many stores are you responsible for at Zax LLC? In what states are they located? Currently we have a total of 899 Zaxby's in 17 states, of which 141 are Zax LLC locations in eight states. My colleague and I oversee facilities for all Zax LLC locations.

What equipment, including the number and size of units, make up the A/C package at your stores? We use Carrier for all of our groundup and replacement units. They are very dependable and energy efficient. Each of our locations will have four strategically placed 5-6 ton units—two for the BOH and two for the FOH.

How do you currently replace HVAC units? We have a number of older locations. When the HVAC unit goes down or needs a very expensive repair, we will make the decision to repair or replace. I look at age and repair history to make an educated decision. Any unit over 12 years old is replaced.

Having completed a few test restaurants that replaced all A/C units, what are the early energy savings? We've been monitoring the restaurants for efficiency, but since they are still fairly new, we will not see a true ROI until we get through the cold weather months.

Was a ROI analysis completed? Not until the middle of 2019.

What additional benefits are anticipated after upgrading the units? The biggest benefit is the improved comfort of our team members and guests. We'll have happier and more productive team members, and our guests experience will be more positive and they will visit more often knowing that the dining room will be a very comfortable temperature.

Do you have a national contract with an A/C equipment provider? How are new units purchased? We have a national contract with our HVAC provider, but I also allow our HVAC vendors that service our locations to shop around for better pricing on our specified HVAC units. After all, they are the ones who actually purchase the HVAC units, have it shipped to their office and then schedule the installation.

What possible changes were needed in the replacement process (e.g., curb adapters, new circuitry, gas piping or ductwork changes)? We have run into very few changes, and when we do, it is usually a curb adaptor. Fortunately, we have not had to change the ductwork. However, there have been times when we needed to go with a mini split due to the design of a building. Mini splits are great for additional cooling or heating needs because of their ease of installation and use. The indoor cassettes can be mounted on an existing wall or ceiling to cool or heat a specific space. No additional ductwork is needed, and no controls are required as the thermostat is a wireless remote control. The loss of energy through the ductwork runs is eliminated because the air handler is located directly in the space requiring heating or cooling. The efficient outdoor unit is powered by an inverter that ramps up or down based on the cooling/heating needs.

How many units are replaced in a normal year? Usually anywhere from 25 to 30 HVAC units.

What is Zax LLC's HVAC replacement plan for 2019? We will take a look at the older locations. Since I've inventoried every HVAC unit in our system, it is easier for me to go back and choose what

locations are a priority. We will most likely replace between 30 to 40 units in 2019.

For energy-management purposes, what other programs are you considering to help save utility dollars? In 2019, we will explore equipment energy efficiency. We don't have the manpower to take on too many projects so we cherry pick what we feel is the most beneficial.

Have all the interior and exterior lighting been changed over to LED? As of a few years ago, our new builds are all LED. We have started to replace the parking lot lights with LED and will switch out the interior lighting in the coming year.

In hindsight, what have you learned about streamlining the A/C replacement process? Identifying the oldest units helps us change them out quicker. Installing new energy-efficient HVAC units is great for our team members and guests. There is nothing worse than an uncomfortable environment. Happy team members and guests mean less turnover and more sales. So in a sense, there is an instant ROI on using new energy-efficient HVAC units.

Tony Elrod is Equipment and Facilities Manager at Zax LLC. He has been in the restaurant business for 39 years and has been directly over facilities at Zax LLC for the past four and a half years.