

# Facility Manager Project Profile

With Nikki Hale

## Road Repair

How a facility manager resolved a major plumbing issue that involved a six-lane state road

What is your official title and how long have you been at Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen and in the restaurant facilities industry? Nikki Hale, CRFP, Facility Manager. I have been with the Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen facilities team for three months; however, I have been with Darden for 23 years.

A state road near one of your restaurants experienced a drainage issue. What was the problem? The restaurant was notified by the city on a Sunday evening in August of a potential issue at the six-lane state road that runs behind the restaurant. Water, grease and more were bubbling up from the median. The city concluded it was our issue when the official dropped dye into our grease trap and found it in the median. The restaurant was shut down that evening, and our local plumber was contacted for emergency service.

We thought there was a blockage in the line and they were going to free it; however, they could not get their equipment down the line. We needed to dig up a section of the six-lane road to discover what was preventing the equipment from moving further down the line. The plumber was able to get the Department of Transportation to agree to let us shut down three lanes of the roadway that evening to explore.

We cut a section of asphalt out and found what appeared to be an old cleanout and only fragments of a plumbing line. It was apparent that this line had been gone for many years, and water and sewage had been seeping into the ground for quite some time. We were able to move the camera further down the line through a tunnel that had been created by the run-off water. We found the entire sanitary sewer line that ran under the roadway was in similar condition. The DOT said we would have to cut the roadway in sections for replacement (one lane per evening). This would cause the restaurant to be closed down for an additional six nights.

After on-site meetings with the DOT, they allowed us to bore a new passageway under the roadway to run a new line. This was completed on Sept. 1 with the final tie-in was the next day. This work was completed at night, and we had to hire a third-party company to set highway-grade traffic control items (road closure signage, detour signs, barriers, cones, lighting, etc). We were only permitted to work between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., with the roadway being fully drivable at 6 a.m. for morning traffic. There were water, gas, electric and phone

lines that ran very close to our plumbing lines, so most of the areas that were dug out had to be hand dug to ensure there was no damage to other utilities.

What day and time were you contacted about this issue? I was contacted on Sunday, Aug. 29, close to 8 p.m. while the city inspector was on site. He walked me through what he thought the issue was, which I then passed along to the plumber.

Were you aware of any previous line issues? This was an older conversion restaurant. It was a Darden concept for more than 30 years, but the building was there for 20-plus years before we acquired it. Needless to say, they had the typical issues of an older location. The grease trap had deteriorated to the point that it was leaking underground, so it had to be replaced. We lined the culinary lines because only 45 percent of the lines were intact. The supply lines that were originally run underground were abandoned and run overhead due to leaks. All of these projects took place within a four-year timeframe.

Did you go directly to the store Sunday night? I went out to the restaurant on Monday morning; however, I wasn't able to sleep a wink knowing there was potentially a major issue brewing at the restaurant.

What contractors did you call immediately after finding out about the sewer line issue? How soon were they at the location? I contacted the local plumber on Sunday evening, and they were out within the hour.

Were drawings available for line location, or did the plumber simply start digging? The drawings of the existing lines were available and provided to the plumber. After the clay line was found, everyone's interest was piqued. It was determined that the restaurant's sanitary sewer line system from the back of the building to the city main was terracotta clay, which dated back to 1958 per drawings on file at the city.

Was a camera used on the line and, if so, what was the result? The plumber attempted to use a camera but was unsuccessful because there was no line left.

What was the initial plan for the line repairs/replacement? What was the estimated timeframe to complete this plan? We were originally going to complete the project with a traditional dig and line replacement. Because the DOT was involved and would only allow one lane of the state road to be shut down each evening, the project would have taken at least six nights to complete.

Were permits required to begin the project? Yes, permits were required for the job. Our local plumber was part of a larger plumbing outfit in the area, which had been in the community for

more than 25 years. They had also completed extensive work for the DOT, city and county agencies, so they knew the inspectors and how to move through departments quickly to get permits and final approvals secured to minimize the restaurant down time.

What was needed to secure the area on the street, and was the highway shutdown during construction? DOT required us to use highway-grade traffic control and barriers. Unfortunately, there was only one company in the area that was large enough to handle a job of that size. We had to utilize electronic message boards, traffic signs, detour signs, road barrels and cones in accordance with DOT regulations.

What was the verdict on the initial finding of the terracotta line? When was the plan shifted to push a new line under the road rather than replacing the existing? Although we were initially planning a traditional dig and replacement, after the first evening, and upon finding out that DOT would only allow us to close one lane each evening for repairs, we had to put our heads together for a plan B. We knew that if we could bore a new line, it not only would save us time, but also allow us to create a more direct path to the city main.

How long did it take to push a new line under the six-lane road? This process happened quicker than I anticipated. We were able to bore a new line the full 210 feet in one evening. We made the final tie-in the next morning prior to the restaurant resuming morning food prep.

Did the terracotta line extend into your lot and, if so, was that part of the line replaced? The section after our grease trap and to the beginning of the state road was also terracotta. We were able to replace that section about a week later, after the restaurant was back up and running.

How long was the restaurant shut down? The restaurant was shut down from Sunday evening until Tuesday evening. They opened for lunch on Wednesday. Considering the size of the scope of work, the impact to operations was minimal; they were closed for two full days.

What was the estimated cost for the line replacement? Believe it or not, the cost to bore the new line was minimal (under \$20,000). The majority of the costs were in traffic control (more than \$25,000) and in a sink hole that was discovered due to the failed plumbing, which the city required us to repair (\$52,000).

In hindsight, what did you learn from this ordeal and what, if anything, would you have done differently? I learned that your choice in vendor partners is key. I was fortunate that the restaurant's plumber was well connected with the city and DOT to help push the project through permitting and the review/approval process quickly.

Nikki Hale, CRFP is a Facility Manager for Cheddar's Scratch Kitchen and manages restaurant repair and maintenance for approximately 80 locations across 16 states. Hale has been with Darden for more than 23 years.

