



## Facilitator — April/May 2011



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### ALL IN THE FAMILY

*Sherleen Mahoney and Megan Weadock*

FOR PANDA RESTAURANT GROUP, PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE IS JUST ONE PART OF A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

CHINESE CULTURE is rich in the traditions of food and family, and when those forces are combined, great things can happen. So it is fitting that Panda Restaurant Group, the largest and fastest-growing Asian restaurant company in the nation, was founded by Andrew Cherng and his father, Master Chef Ming-Tsai Cherng.

The Cherngs opened the first Panda Inn restaurant in 1973 in Pasadena, Calif. Their goal was to introduce gourmet Mandarin and Szechwan cuisine in an upscale, casual-dining atmosphere. Thanks to signature dishes such as Tea Smoked Duck, Honey Walnut Shrimp and Lotus Leaf Rice, the overwhelming success of Panda Inn led the Cherngs to open the first Panda Express in 1983 in Glendale, Calif.

The launch of Panda Express allowed the company to serve authentic Asian cuisine in a quick-service capacity. Panda opened its first drive-through restaurant, a unique feature in the Asian food service industry, in 1997 in Hesperia, Calif.

Today, Panda Restaurant Group offers three restaurant concepts: Panda Inn, Panda Express and Hibachi-San, totaling close to 1,400 units, and it still remains in the family, under the leadership of Andrew Cherng and his wife, Peggy.

Above all, Panda strives to be a leader in “people development,” believing that great people make a great company. The Panda 2020 vision involves the company growing to 2,300 stores and increasing the per-store average sales to \$1.5 million by 2015. In order to do that, the company remains focused on its people. With this rapid growth, there will be an increased demand for hiring more associates on all levels, including facility managers, and their role will be more important than ever before.

#### A YEAR-ROUND COMMITMENT

Panda is committed to delivering unparalleled guest satisfaction. Upon entering a restaurant, customers are greeted with Asian-inspired cultural decor that incorporates red, which signifies luck, granite table tops and the aroma of customer favorites, such as its world famous Orange Chicken, Broccoli Beef and its newest entree, Golden Treasure Shrimp.

One integral piece of executing Panda’s commitment to guest satisfaction lies in the responsibility of the facilities department. Panda facilities managers’ values reflect that of the company. Their mindset is to begin with the end in mind, know what they wish to achieve and then make it happen.

At Panda especially, a facility manager’s job is never done. As at any company, successful restaurant management requires year-long attention, and each change of season requires the skilled know-how of a dedicated professional.

Roger Goldstein, CRFP, Panda’s lead facilities manager for the southern regions, takes pride in his job. “The uniqueness in Panda is based on our personal ownership and the involvement of Andrew and Peggy,” he said. “We’re a company that truly instills and inspires based on our mission statement to live within the Panda Way.”

“The Panda Way is leading a healthy lifestyle, developing others, continuous lifelong learning and acknowledging others,” explained David Porter, CRFP, Panda’s facilities manager of the Northern California and Bay Area

regions. “Those four elements create a culture we live in.”

#### SCHEDULING

Porter said quarterly inspections and preventative maintenance are scheduled for February, May, August and November for his regions. He said May is the optimal time for summer preventative maintenance checks because specific, vital tasks need to be done at that time, before the temperatures rise.

Panda provides its facility managers with broad, overall standards for inspections and preventative maintenance. However, since the company has locations in 38 states and Puerto Rico, the specifics are often customized for each restaurant, depending upon the region and a range of other factors. Panda facility managers consider the environment surrounding every store and the impact it has on equipment. Often nearby construction or the presence of farm land or industrial processing facilities may be a long- or short-term factor in determining the best maintenance schedule for a particular location.

Panda utilizes an automated preventive maintenance software program to pre-schedule the service and dispatch a work order at the proper time to the vendor. This system ensures service is requested as planned and then allows for follow up by the facilities manager to know that it was completed in the time allowed.

“Follow-through is very important in our field of work,” Goldstein said. “You can do all the planning and scheduling of service you want, but if you do not follow up to make sure it is done correctly and when it is supposed to be done, you are wasting your time and money.”

#### SPRING CLEANING

One of the most important components of a restaurant is the HVAC and refrigeration systems, especially during the summer months. Of course, customer comfort is vital for every restaurant location. Food safety and quality assurance are top priorities for Panda. Every effort, especially during summer months, is made to properly store and handle perishable food. After all, it only takes a short time for meat, fish, poultry and dairy products to spoil if they are not stored properly. That is why Panda facility managers partner with the company’s operations department to maintain the highest standards of food safety and equipment temperature regulation.

Therefore, months before the heat and humidity hits, facility managers at Panda can be found diligently preparing their venues for the summer months. The various Panda venues include casinos, malls, street drive-thrus, non-street drive-thrus, university locations and food courts, end caps and freestanding locations. Each requires its own particular summer preventative maintenance.

For street locations and end caps, which make up the bulk of Panda locations, the facility managers’ summer focus is to ensure preventative maintenance vendors conduct site visits prior to the hottest months. This pre-summertime visit includes performing a thorough cleaning, inspection and testing of all the HVAC and refrigeration equipment to ensure everything is in optimal operating condition and problems can be identified and fixed early on—before they disrupt operations.

Since a restaurant’s requirements vary depending upon the region of the country, facility managers must maintain a wide range of equipment and supplies. For example, in California and some southwest states, make-up air units have evaporative cooling that must be cleaned and prepped for the hot summer months. The water must be turned on, the pads must be changed and the pumps have to be checked.

Meanwhile, in the southern regions—or anywhere the environment requires, make-up air units with refrigerated air must be readied for the hot months. In both cases, each air conditioning unit must start the season in the best possible condition—a requirement that goes double for rooftop units, which are more susceptible to the elements. That is why, each spring, condensers need to be cleaned, filters must be changed and condenser fan motors need to be oiled and running properly.

That not only goes for air conditioning but also walk-in coolers/freezers and ice machines,” Porter said. “Those condensers need to be in tip-top shape and checked thoroughly so that when the heat does hit, walk-in coolers and freezers don’t break down.”

For Panda facility managers, it is about being proactive and taking an ownership interest in the optimal operation of every store. It takes a team effort between facilities and operations to clearly understand the scope of the preventive maintenance and ensure that it is meeting Panda standards.

#### UNIQUE RESTAURANTS, DIVERSE CHALLENGES

At Panda, drive-thru and freestanding locations undergo the same process as street locations and end caps, with the addition of landscaping and parking lot maintenance.

As summer approaches, facility managers inspect the condition of each store’s parking lots and landscaping and make the necessary improvements. This might include resealing or restriping a parking lot that was hit hard by

winter storms or re-mulching all the landscaping beds, removing dead plants and adding new ones to improve the exterior appearance.

Even landscaping for each region calls for tuned-in attention to detail. In the southwest, landscaping is easier to maintain because plants bloom year-round and restaurants often employ rock and desertscapes to reflect the beauty of the region. In the south, tropical landscaping is utilized to highlight the beauty of the area. And in the north, with its seasonal changes, colorful perennial blooms are Panda's best bet.

From a preventative maintenance perspective, there is little difference between the casino, mall and university/food court venues. Typically at these locations, the scope is much smaller than, for example, street locations. The HVAC equipment and, sometimes, the exhaust and make-up air units are managed by the venue's landlord. Panda pays common area maintenance fees for these locations, which cover the cost of maintaining these systems. In this case, the facility managers' summer focus is mostly on the walk-in coolers/freezers and prep tables for these locations.

However, even though these locations rely on landlords, Panda facility managers still monitor that the work is completed per the lease agreement while meeting company standards.

"We want to strategize our preventative maintenance to best maintain our stores to offer a high level of guest experience and comfort—that's extremely important to us—and [to ensure] cost savings," Goldstein said.

#### STAYING PROACTIVE

Panda facility managers recognize the importance of catching a problem—or a potential problem—before it's too late. That is why proactivity is such a large part of the company's mindset. Emergency service will always be part of a facility manager's job, but preventative maintenance is Panda's No. 1 priority.

"We want to make sure we take a proactive approach so we're not fixing breakdowns in July because we didn't do our work in May," Goldstein said.

Porter said the quarterly inspection schedule also gives him time to follow up on repair and maintenance work.

"I schedule the bulk of my store inspections around this time so I can spot-check how my contractors are performing," Porter said. "I also use the time to take the store's general manager to the roof to inspect and train them on what to look for after a preventative maintenance visit, how the equipment works, how to spot problems and what to do when something goes wrong."

#### WEATHER MATTERS

When facing diverse weather patterns, facility managers also must be knowledgeable about their regions and adaptable when the unexpected hits.

"We have to be keyed in to the unique conditions that each area presents, be flexible and utilize local vendor resources that understand the area to best maintain the stores," Goldstein said. "Unique to the southwest is high heat. From Texas to Florida, there's humidity. In Phoenix or southern California, those restaurants don't know what 90-percent humidity will do inside of a store or to an air conditioner. Differences in humidity levels and temperature patterns across the southern United States is vast, so we have to be tuned in to what that means."

Northern restaurant locations often require an exceptional amount of flexibility from facility managers. Consider the amount of snow and ice that impacted New England this winter. Such extreme temperatures and moisture can have a lasting impact on a facility's equipment, even into the spring and summer. That is why Tom Lykins, CRFP, the lead facilities manager at Panda, said adaptability is a key component of any facility manager's work philosophy.

Across the country, Porter, who is responsible for preventative maintenance at upwards of 130 Panda locations at any given time, said California presents its own unique challenges when it comes to weather. For him, adaptability and knowledge about the region is a must—both for himself and for every vendor he works with.

"The interesting part of northern California is we cover every temperature range there is," Porter said. "We just had 4 feet of snow at one of my stores, while other stores were dealing with 90-degree temperatures. Each store, depending on its area, is unique. So, one challenge is to ensure each vendor is adaptable."

#### A WIN-WIN RELATIONSHIP

Based on the mission and values of Panda's company culture, facility managers approach the relationship with vendors with trust and the vision of a shared path of success.

"The facility managers at Panda are the liaison to the vendor and contractor, and we diligently work to keep those strong relations," Goldstein said. "And as a result, we have partners who are willing to work through the

night to get stores up the next day in the most efficient and cost-conscious way.”

Many of these partnerships have lasted for years, which helps solidify trust and understanding.

“A lot of companies outsource everything they do, and there’s no relationship there,” Goldstein said. “But Panda keeps a one-on-one relationship with the contractor and have long-standing relationships. In Phoenix, we work with a vendor who has been with us for 23 years.”

Porter has experienced similar success with his vendors.

“My refrigeration vendor has been with Panda for 16 years,” he said. “He’s grown with us, from a one-man shop to servicing a handful of Panda Expresses with four trucks and four employees. He’s been able to expand along with us. I look at most of my vendor relationships as win-win: I’m hoping they grow as we grow so they can continue to do business with us.”

For restaurants in rural or remote locations, this manner of conducting business proves to be priceless.

“I also have a lot of remote stores,” Porter said. “This is where relationship building is really key. Thanks to established relationships, we have vendors who will drop everything and drive three hours to help a store.”

A good facility manager also is aware of all the time and effort that goes into preventative maintenance. And that is why the end result is only as good as the facility manager’s attention and follow-up.

“In order to maintain that win-win relationship, we have to do our part by following up and spot checking and seeing that the standard we expect is being met,” Goldstein said. “And I think we do a good job of that.”

#### FAMILY VALUES

Today, Panda’s family consists of almost 18,000 associates, yet the organization retains those family values that launched the first father-and-son restaurant almost 40 years ago. Panda Restaurant Group invests in great people because they know great people run great operations.

“If you ask Andrew Cherng what sets Panda apart, he’ll say one thing: the people aspect of our company, from outside the four walls—how we treat our guests—and inside—how we treat our associates and the people we partner with,” said Thien Ho, media relations for Panda Restaurant Group. “It’s about developing the people and inspiring them to better their lives.”

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