Cooperative offers operation cost reduction and opportunity to compete for work on a national scale

James Luebke is the founder and owner of Liberty Services, Inc. He has a 22-year history in the commercial kitchen hood exhaust cleaning industry. He began in the industry working for a family member and later worked with both American Steam Cleaning and Commercial Services. James has been operating his own business for 12 years.

James noticed a couple of developments in the exhaust cleaning industry that, as a business owner, he felt he needed to address. Customers were asking for exhaust cleaning certification, and he was finding it difficult to compete with the low bids that national companies were submitting for jobs.

To achieve certification for Liberty Services, James chose to have his technicians certified through the industry’s leading certification program, the International Kitchen Exhaust Cleaning Association (IKECA). IKECA is dedicated to certifying members in leading processes, application of codes and standards, and evidence of liability and workers’ comp insurance. Luebke said, “IKECA has been a great resource.”

To help his company become more competitive in the bidding process, James decided to look into forming a cooperative with other exhaust cleaning companies as a possible solution. The primary purpose of a cooperative business model is to work together to benefit the member businesses with shared purchasing, marketing, resources, and networking opportunities.

James met with Tom Snyder, Program Manager of the Ohio Cooperative Development Center at The Ohio State University South Centers. After a number of discussions, they came to the conclusion that a cooperative business model made sense. James and Tom pulled together a group of seven privately-owned commercial exhaust cleaning companies across the United States and began developing the framework for the new cooperative, Uni-Serve USA, Inc.

According to Luebke, “Like IKECA, Ohio State University has been a source and a great partner for our owner/members. They taught me how to manage this great company. First, we developed a board of directors and the board started to work on our preferred vendors list and potential owner/members. After months of meetings, we ended up with 20-plus companies as cooperative owner/members and a preferred vendors list that reduces the cost of doing business by acting as one company instead of several small companies.”

As a cooperative-among-cooperatives, Uni-Serve USA can offer additional benefits and services to its owner/members such as the ability to participate in benefits offered through the United Regional Purchasing Cooperative (URPC) along with BizUnite and Employee Perk allows Uni-Serve USA owner/members to get deep discounts from national vendors such as Sprint, Grainger, ADP, and many more. Luebke declares, “Uni-Serve has reduced the cost of doing business for our owner/members. Therefore, our marketing plan will soon be able to compete with the National Subcontractors.” Luebke continues, “I feel that by applying this model, we have basically changed the landscape of companies.
across the country for the best interest of our industry. It has given us the ability to reduce costs without eliminating our quality customer service.”

Uni-Serve USA was developed with help and guidance from Ohio State University. It is a network of hood cleaning companies across the nation with the ability to compete with the national subcontractors in the field. The national subcontracting companies, in James’ opinion, have little to offer compared to Uni-Serve USA. According to James, “We have the best hood cleaning company in your area, not the cheapest. We stand behind our work, not behind a corporate blanket if there is a problem. Instead of simply being subcontractors, Uni-Serve members are owners of Uni-Serve. “

Uni-Serve USA is a cooperative hood cleaning company, which allows a restaurant group to have the convenience of centralized billing and reporting - that comes along with the national coverage as well as the customer service and immediate response that you get from a local service provider.

For more information on Uni-Serve USA, check out the website at www.uni-serveusa.com, email info@uni-serveusa.com, or call 877-631-9288. If you would like your commercial exhaust hood cleaning business to join Uni-Serve USA, contact James Luebke, President and CEO, Uni-Serve, Inc. at 937-698-3322.

For information on free cooperative development counseling, check out the Ohio Cooperative Development Center website at http://ocdc.osu.edu, email Snyder.11@osu.edu, or call 740-289-2071 ext. 220.