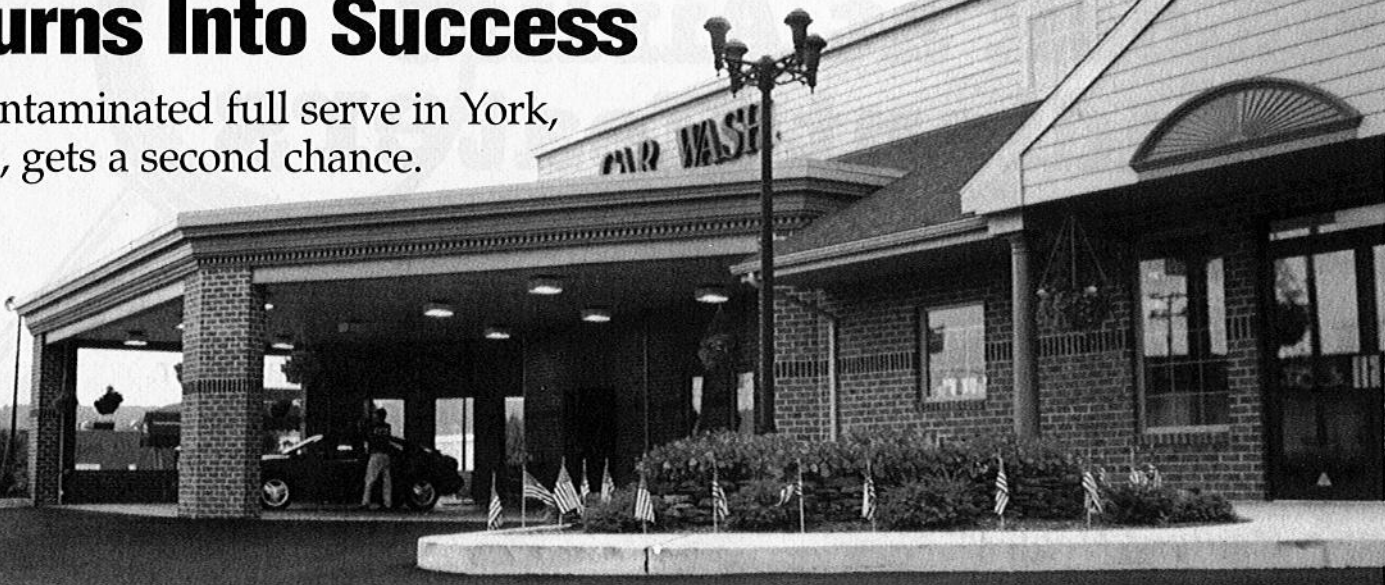


# Risky Venture Turns Into Success

Contaminated full serve in York, PA, gets a second chance.



*Cloister Car Wash offers three vacuuming lanes.*

**W**hen Mike Mountz purchased his latest wash in September 1994, he wasn't smelling roses. He was smelling gasoline.

The preexisting version of what is now Cloister Car Wash in York, PA, had gone bankrupt and was contaminated with gasoline and kerosene. Mountz, however, saw potential.

"We purchased the wash with proper understanding of the contamination," he says. "I felt like we could clean up the soil at a reasonable price."

After purchasing the land at what he says was a good price, Mountz spent about \$140,000 to clean up 1,400 tons of soil.

"We leveled the preexisting exterior tunnel and four wand bays and started over," he says. "We built a 280-foot full-serve wash which now has a clean bill of health."

Nine months after he purchased the contaminated site and six months after the cleanup began, Cloister Car Wash opened in June 1995.

No stranger to the carwashing business, Mountz bought his first wash in 1984.

"I was looking to purchase a small business and the opportunity to buy

a carwash came about," he says. "After analyzing the business, I found it a fascinating business with a lot of potential."

Since 1984, Mountz has purchased three locations across Pennsylvania — two full-service locations and one self-serve location.

## It's Show Time

Mountz employs about 134 employees throughout his three locations.

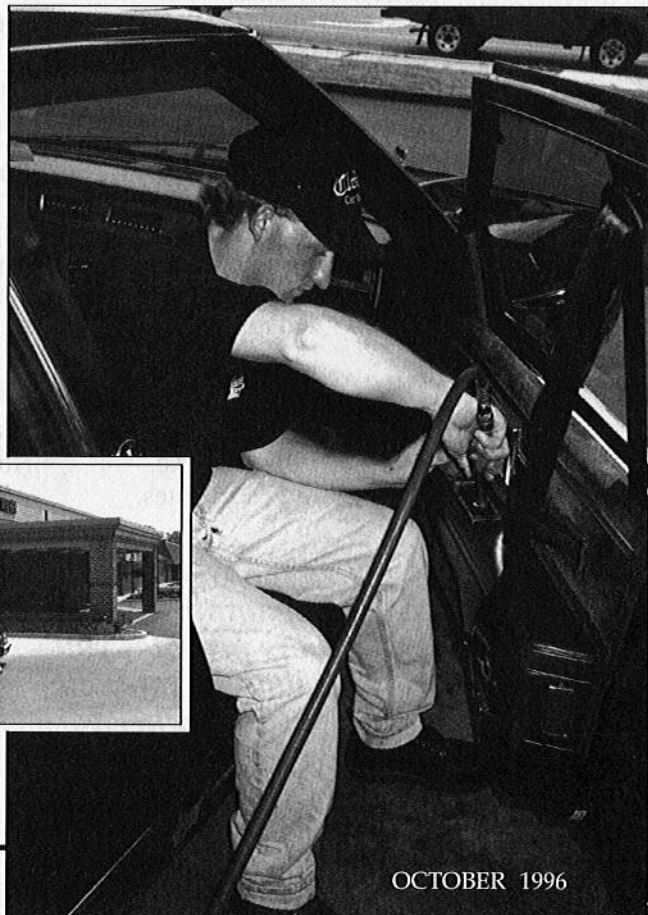
"We employ a lot of young people and rotate them," he says.

At the York location, employees run the show. A greeter greets the customers as they approach

the wash and informs them of the available packages and specials.

Customers are then directed to the vacuuming lanes where they exit their cars before the wash.

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*Cloister Car Wash offers express services and features high pressure equipment and cloth.*

clean also removes dust and debris from air vents and crevices.

All three express packages take 15 minutes to complete and come with a 90-day guarantee.

"If you don't like the results, you can get a refund or have the job redone within 90 days," says Mountz. "We have yet to give a refund."

As far as marketing goes, Mountz implements several strategies.

"We do a lot of different marketing strategies, from fund-raising programs with local charities to couponing."

Mountz attributes much of his success, however, to other carwash operators.

"I give credit for my success to the support we've received from other major operators throughout the country," he says. "I feel as though it is extremely important for carwash operators to share good and bad experiences so we all



*Customers can shop at the gift shop while they wait.*

may improve the image and profitability of our own businesses and the industry as a whole."

In addition, Mountz recommends computer systems to operators struggling with management duties.

"You have to have some kind of computer system to be successful," he says. "Our system has been a great help to us, giving us management controls on a minute-to-minute basis instead of six-month statements." □

According to Mountz, the wash can run up to 140 cars per hour. He attributes much of this success to the layout of the wash.

"We have three vacuuming lanes and a good layout which I think are crucial to establish that per-hour basis," he says.

After customers exit their cars,

they walk through a six-foot wide hallway canopied by a cathedral ceiling. Glass bubbles along the side of the hallway allow customers to step out into the tunnel while their cars are washed.

"The kids and people seem to like it," he says. "It puts on a nice show."

At the exit area of the wash,

employees dry off the cars.

Mountz installed ground heating at the exit to prevent employees and customers from slipping.

"It is very expensive," he says. "But if properly managed, it is the only way to run cold climate washing."

In addition to his employees, Mountz's wife and three kids help out at the washes. His son, Elton, is the assistant manager at the York location.

### Behind Door #1...

At Cloister Car Wash, customers can choose from four washes.

The number-one wash is \$19.95 and includes a full-service wash, undercarriage blast, air freshener, triple coat polish and wheel cleaner. The number-two wash is \$15 and eliminates the wheel cleaner and undercarriage blast from the first wash package. The number-three wash is \$12 and includes only the full-service wash, while wash number-four offers an exterior-only wash for \$7.

According to Mountz, more cus-



*Mountz credits other major carwash operators for much of his success.*

tomers are choosing the higher priced washes.

"The percentage of usage for the exterior-only wash is dropping every month," he says. "Between 33 and 34 percent choose the number-one wash."

In addition to the wash packages, Mountz offers express services.

For \$29.95, customers can choose among an express wax, express shampoo or interior super clean. The express shampoo includes cleaning the vehicle's carpets and floor mats, while the interior super



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