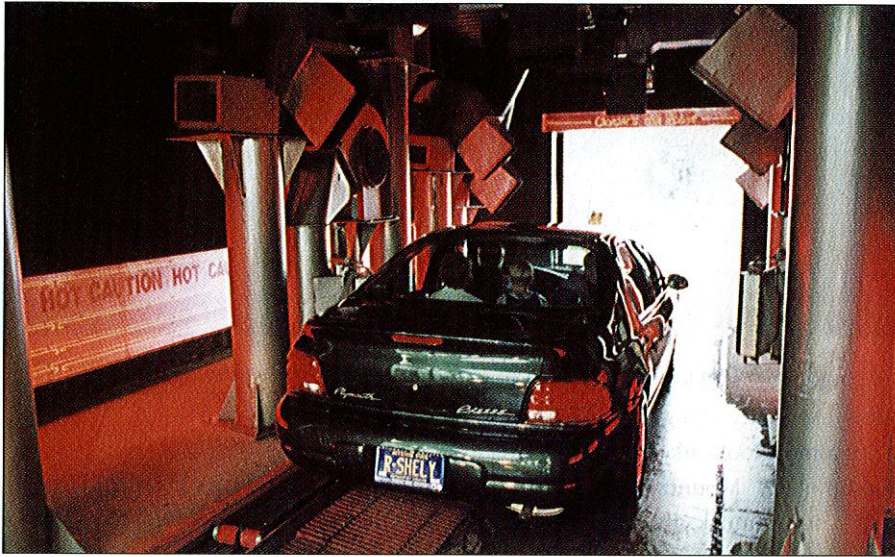


# The world's largest carwash

Mike Mountz's new Cloister facility takes washing cars to a whole new level.



Cloister's "Hot House" reaches up to 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

**By Paul Amos**

Executive Editor

**R**elax. Drive a Cloister Clean Car. This message, which greets customers as they enter either of the twin tunnels at the new Lancaster, PA, Cloister Car Wash, is one reminder this is no ordinary carwash. The sign, complete with the business' signature smiley-face, is indicative of the Cloister mentality: that washing cars should be a positive experience — for consumers and employees.

Sprawling over a 3.7-acre plot of land, the new Cloister facility is carwashing on a grand scale. Consider these numbers: twin 185-foot exterior tunnels

capable of 350 cars per hour, three 114-foot conveyors for interior cleaning capable of 250 cars per hour, an expected volume of 250,000 cars per year.

Cloister is a marvel — massive in scope and loaded with innovations.

## A wash tour

Customers entering the property encounter a greeter building, faced by a massive menu board. Wash packages are displayed on brightly colored backgrounds that are color-coded with coupons offered by the wash.

Mike Mountz, who owns all three Cloister locations with his wife, Rhoda,

says the vibrant colors and large greeter building are a pleasing introduction to the services they offer.

"It's like entering the gates of Disneyworld," he says.

Mountz wanted a menu sign large enough to be read by customers waiting on line, but encountered a dilemma when constructing the giant sign.

The facility's sign was already the maximum size allowed by the township. There were no size restrictions for menu signs, but his wish to position the sign on the roof of the greeter building — making it a "building sign" — violated the township's regulations regarding maximum sign size.

His solution? The menu sign appears to be positioned on the greeter building but actually is supported by columns. The sign is about 1 inch off the front of the building.

Customers entering the greeter building choose the wash package or lube service they want, and then are directed to proceed left to the lube shop, or straight ahead to the carwash tunnel.

## The double tunnel

With twin mouths gaping, the wash tunnel beckons customers to self-load their vehicles via neon and backlit signage. Large overhead mirrors

*(Continued on next page)*



facilitate the process.

The two 185-foot conveyors sit side-by-side in a spacious building illuminated by large skylights imported from Belgium. As with all the facilities at Cloister, there is ample space around the equipment to ensure employees can move safely and to ease maintenance tasks.

As the vehicle finishes the wash process, the conveyor enters a room right out of an amusement park ride. The "Cloister Hot House" — there is one for each of the two conveyors — is 40 feet long, with black, sound-insulated walls and 13 15-horsepower blowers. The air temperature in the room is 180 degrees Fahrenheit in summer, and up to 200 degrees Fahrenheit in winter.

Orange neon tubes that look like heat coils reflect off the stainless equipment



— giving the Hot House a bright orange glow, especially at night.

"It almost looks like you're entering a toaster oven," Mountz says.

It's no gimmick, though. This setup

**Skylights brighten the tunnels.**

turns out cars that are clean and dry — without the need for towel drying and its accompanying labor.

## A team effort

Though Cloister owner Mike Mountz is responsible for the idea and design of this grand-scale wash, he is quick to point out he couldn't have done it alone.

"I want to give credit to my employees. If it wasn't for them, this could never have worked," he says.

A tour of the new Cloister facility shows Mountz is as dedicated to his workers as they are to him. In every one of the four main buildings, there are climate-controlled rooms for employees. The lube shop features an employee lunchroom with appliances for their use.

Every building is spotless, and walkways are wide and unobstructed. Mountz made every effort to create a work environment his employees would enjoy.

All Cloister locations are free from the staffing woes afflicting many full-service washes. Mountz attributes the low turnover and good employees to Cloister's hiring practices. A former human resources executive, Mountz is very selective about who can work for

his company.

A detailed employee manual outlines appearance and dress codes. Mountz believes an unkempt employee doesn't convey the right image to his customers.

"We're in the business of selling clean here," he says.

The detailed requirements include no long hair or earrings for males and they must shave before work. No employee may have a hair color that deviates from standard. Uniforms are provided for all workers.

Cloister supports its high school employees' participation in sports, and looks to hire athletes. Mountz finds such individuals are better-versed in teamwork, and are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.

He allows there is really no secret to Cloister's success hiring good people. Pay a fair wage, provide opportunities, create a nice working atmosphere, he says, and people will want to work for you.

—P.A.

## Interior services

Perhaps the most unique feature of the new Cloister wash is the interior cleaning/express detailing facility. Customers exiting the tunnel have the option to leave the property or, if they purchased a package that includes additional services, to proceed to a large building with three tunnel openings.

*(Continued on page 48)*

## By the numbers

**Lot size:** 3.7 acres

**Interior size:** 40,000 square feet

**Conveyor length (carwash):**  
185 feet, two conveyors

**Conveyor length (interior services):**  
114 feet, three conveyors

**Pricing:** \$6.60 exterior, \$13.20 full service, \$37.74 express wax

**Cars per hour:** 350 capacity

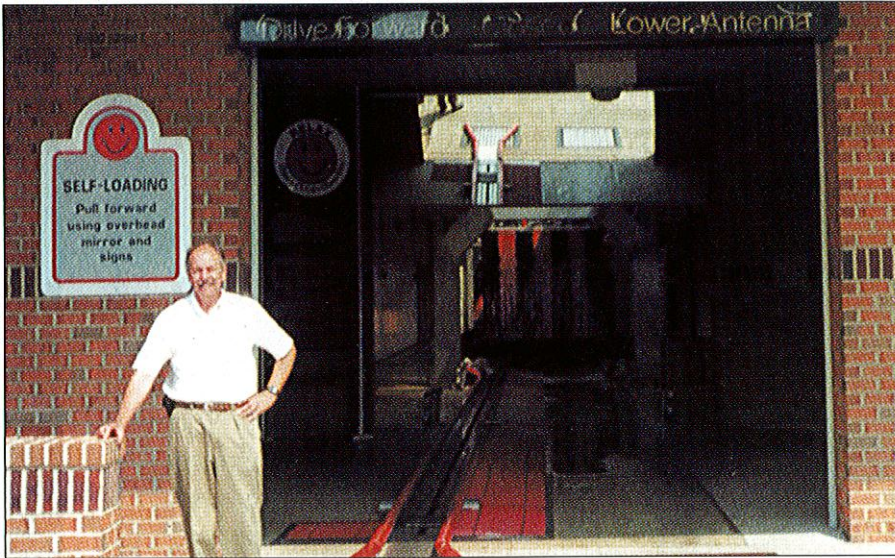
**Expected annual volume:**  
250,000 vehicles

**Traffic count:**  
42,000 vehicles per day

**Cost:** \$5 million

**Opened:** April 15, 1999

—P.A.



Mike Mountz stands at the entrance to one of the two 185-foot tunnels.

The interior facility houses three 114-foot conveyors. Two are for five-minute interior cleaning, the third conveyor offers a 15-minute interior cleaning and

hand wax (pictured, front cover).

The conveyors are set to move the car through the building in the time allotted for the service, whether five or 15 min-

utes. Employees performing the services stand on conveyor belts that move alongside the car.

According to Mountz, this system has a number of advantages. It keeps employees working at a steady pace — there is no time for slacking with the conveyor moving steadily toward its destination.

Customers can wait in the lobby, which features floor to ceiling glass allowing them to view the status of their vehicle at all times.

A quality control person ensures vehicles exiting the conveyors are clean to Cloister standards. Mountz says, "If you do quality, quantity will take care of itself."

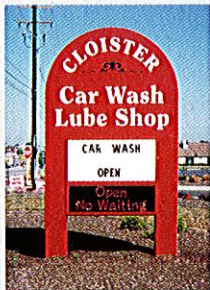
About half of all customers are choosing the full-service experience at this new facility.

This production concept of cleaning cars has been successful for Cloister and

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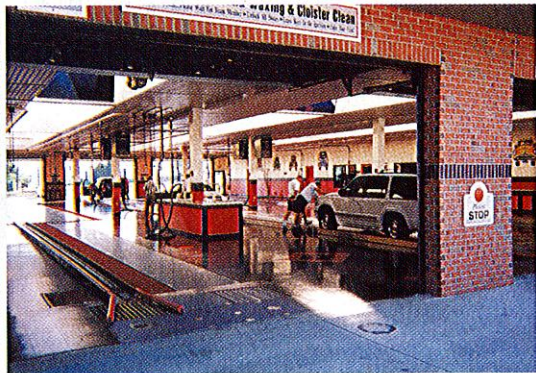
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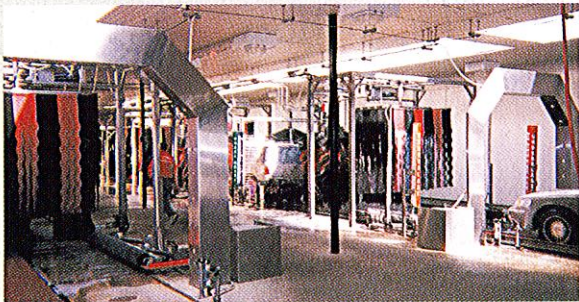


Location:  
**Cloister Car Wash**


Operator:  
**Mike Mountz**



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it's something with which Mountz is very familiar.

"I cut my teeth in a manufacturing facility building truck bodies," he says. "I know that working on an assembly line ensures the highest quality and quantity."

Indeed, productivity-through-design is a theme that permeates the entire carwash. The clean lines and open spaces denote a facility with one purpose: to wash a lot of cars — about a quarter million a year.

"I've seen fancier carwashes," Mountz says. "I wanted this to be a real workhorse, but yet giving employees the very best working conditions." □

## **Green means 'Go!'**

An integral component of the Cloister facility is its three-bay lube shop. The commitment to production line-like efficiency that is a hallmark of Cloister's washes also is evident in its oil changes.

Cloister guarantees its customers a 12-minute oil change. To achieve this, a traffic signal fronts each lube bay. When a car enters the bay, a photo-eye turns the light green. The light stays green for 10 minutes.

After 10 minutes, the light turns yellow, informing the technicians they have only two minutes left to complete the service. If the car has not left the bay after two minutes of yellow, the light turns red — signaling the technicians, shop manager and the customer that the service has exceeded the 12-minute guaranteed time.

Owner Mike Mountz finds the lights to be an effective motivator, and says there is little problem with services exceeding the allotted time.

Cloister offers an oil/filter change plus 12-point inspection and free exterior carwash for \$27.99. Mountz says the shop averages \$37 per car.

—P.A.