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Meet the Winners of APPA's 2014 Award for Excellence

By Mark Crawford

We all know how challenging facilities management can be—that's why it is such an honor to receive APPA's 2014 Award for Excellence in Facilities Management. Established in 1988, the award recognizes educational institutions for their outstanding achievements in facilities management.

The four-stage Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) and application for the Award for Excellence (AFE) are modeled after the Malcolm Baldrige National Excellence Award. The comprehensive FMEP/AFE process evaluates facilities management performance in seven major categories: leadership, strategic and operational planning, customer focus, information and analysis, development and management of human resources, process management, and performance results. Fifty-seven criteria are designed to critically evaluate all aspects of facilities management.

The 2014 winners are Philadelphia University, Soka University of America, University of Michigan, University of New Mexico, and University of North Carolina Charlotte.

These universities (and past winners) have proven they are highly effective in managing their facilities: evaluating all systems and processes without bias, identifying and improving areas of weakness, and creating a culture of continuous improvement with the ultimate goal of always adding value to the student experience.

Undertaking the FMEP/AFE is an educational, eye-opening process that requires time, commitment, and resources—but the payoff is huge. Don't miss out—the application deadline for the next award is November 30, 2014.



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Founded in 1884, Philadelphia University is a private institution with 3,500 students located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The physical plant department is responsible for the basic operation and managed care of 50 buildings on the 100-acre main campus. Buildings total about 1.2 million square feet, with some dating back to 1779. “Our goal for comprehensive stewardship allows our historic 100-plus-year-old mansions to be enjoyed alongside more recently constructed modern and architecturally award-winning academic buildings,” says J. Thomas Becker, associate vice president for operations at the university.

Philadelphia University first underwent an FMEP in 2002; the action plan for that FMEP culminated with the award of its first AFE in 2009. “It was highly gratifying to receive, but that was not our end goal,” says Becker. “Since then we have leveraged our resources, lowered our energy dependence, improved our reliability, and repurposed those resources.” Other improvements include staff development, improved energy efficiency, and the construction of two LEED-certified buildings. “We have also invested heavily in our historic structures and our infrastructure, as well as audited and digitized space utilization as part of our strategic facilities planning,” he continues.

The ultimate purpose in undertaking FMEPs and pursuing AFEs is to sustain excellence. “The AFE is a five-year distinction of which the department was quite proud. To be considered for that distinction again in 2014, we knew we could not maintain excellence by just doing the same thing,” says Becker. “Instead, we utilized internal and external partnerships with faculty, students, and corporations to foster continual improvement.”

Becker urges educational institutions not to let the lack of resources interfere with getting started on making improvements. “Of the 40 things that we began working on in 2002, the largest impacts required little additional cost,” he says. “Once you demonstrate the commitment to change, gain customer support, and increase efficiency, the resources will become more available.” ☛



SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA


Soka University of America (SUA) is a private, four-year, liberal-arts college that was founded in 1997 on the Buddhist principles of peace, human rights, and the sanctity of life. The Facilities Services Department (SUFB) provides building maintenance and custodial, landscape, and mail services for the university campus in Aliso Viejo, California. SUFB maintains 19 buildings and 817,000 square feet of space, as well as 60 acres of landscaped area. Because the only SUFB individuals employed by the university are the chief of operations and mailroom staff, much of the work is outsourced to maintenance and landscaping services organizations.

Benchmarking performance indicators and customer satisfaction surveys are some of the tools used to track performance. The university's senior administrators are aware of these indicators "because they always keep a 'seat at the table' for the inclusion of facilities management leadership staff to participate in key discussions and decisions regarding the strategic development of campus facilities and emerging academic programs," says Tom Harkenrider, chief of operations for SUA.

A major highlight for Harkenrider during the on-campus visit by AFE examiners actually had nothing to do with the evaluation criteria that were being scored.

"The application process has two distinctive elements—a self-assessment with respect to Baldrige-based categories, supported with FMEP-based operational criteria," says

Harkenrider. "The site visit, which is intended to verify and clarify the responses in the application, was even more revealing in the sense that the APPA AFE examiners discovered something highly significant and beyond the scope of the application. They commented on the clear continuity of the Soka (Japanese word for "creating value") culture among everyone they met—a commitment to academic achievement, open dialogue, and an appreciation for human diversity."

Soka University of America won the AFE with its first application for the award, without the benefit of previous FMEP program efforts. "This demonstrates to this newly established institution that its mission and vision of performance excellence carries beyond academics to the culture of its service organizations," Harkenrider adds. 





UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Plant Operations at the University of Michigan is a department within the Business and Finance Department. These employees provide building and grounds maintenance, construction, plant engineering, waste management, utilities, custodial services, and operations for the 15 million square feet of general fund space on the Ann Arbor campus. They also provide these services on a fee basis for the university's hospitals, housing, athletic complexes, student services, and other auxiliary units in and around the campus—comprising a total of more than 35 million square feet, one of the largest campuses in North America.

High-priority programs initiated by the plant operations department over the past five years include total cost of ownership reduction, facilities management restructuring, and implementing a reliability-centered maintenance (RCM) system—a method of identifying what equipment is required to be maintained on a preventive maintenance mode, rather than a run-to-failure mode.

“Over the past four years we have moved from a mildly reactive facilities management system to one that is highly proactive,” states Richard W. Robben, executive director of plant operations for the University of Michigan. “This includes a fully planned and scheduled maintenance and custodial workforce, transparent work order system for our customers, dramatic energy savings program, and aggressive code and standards advocacy.”

Robben indicates that winning the award is a source of deep pride for the workforce and a reason for celebration.

“The entire business and finance department has a strategic goal to demonstrate deep expertise,” he says. “The AFE is the preeminent recognition in the higher education facilities arena for deep expertise in our field.” ☞





PHOTO COURTESY OF RACHEL STONE, UNM.



UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Located in Albuquerque, the University of New Mexico (UNM) serves over 27,000 students with more than 12 million square feet of facilities on 680 total acres. The Physical Plant Department (PPD) employs 450 staff, has an annual operating budget of \$70 million, and maintains the physical campus environment. PPD has made impressive achievements in the areas of energy management and conservation, alternative energy and fuel sources, water conservation and water safety, sustainability and recycling, employee professional development, technological advances, and facilities portfolio management.

For example, recently completed energy conservation projects are expected to save over \$100,000 annually in utility costs, providing an overall 29 percent return on investment. Maintenance has also been reduced due to system renewals being integrated with energy conservation projects. Ongoing energy savings attributed to engineering and energy services projects now exceed \$1.1 million per year.

“Winning this award is a validation and confirmation that the physical plant department at the University of New Mexico recognizes the importance of its role in the mission of higher education and research,” comments Mary Vosevich, former director of UNM’s Physical Plant Department. “This award is for every person in the physical plant department. Beyond that, it also says that UNM is a safe, well-run, aesthetically pleasing place to be that provides students with an outstanding academic experience.”

Vosevich stresses that, after winning the award, the PPD will not “rest on its laurels.” “We are a cohesive operation that is comprehensive in our approach to facilities,” she says. “We consider all our stakeholders and the university’s mission while setting our direction. There are always changes in technology and [in] how education is delivered, how students learn, and how research is conducted. Facilities people must stay on top of these changes if we are truly supporting our educational institutions.” ☞



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA CHARLOTTE


With more than 26,500 students, the University of North Carolina Charlotte is the fourth-largest institution in the UNC system. The Facilities Management Department within the Business Affairs Division employs more than 420 staff and operates on an annual budget of \$25 million.

The department consists of dedicated teams in the areas of planning and construction, building operations, grounds and landscaping, custodial and waste reduction, energy management, real estate services, business services, and facilities information systems. Since 1999, facilities management has led and supported several campus sustainability initiatives. Accomplishments include the development of a comprehensive sustainability plan in 2010, a climate action plan in 2012, and the provision of leadership for student-led initiatives.

Philip M. Jones, associate vice chancellor for facilities management at UNC Charlotte, is especially proud of the way his department has managed the university's dramatic growth and expansion over the past decade. UNC Charlotte's total student enrollment has increased from 16,995 in 2000 to 26,571 in fall 2013—a 13-year enrollment growth of 56.3 percent. The institution's total building square footage increased by 51.9 percent over the same period. During this time, facilities management successfully led the planning, design, and construction management for over \$1.1 billion in construction.

"The way our organization has been able to manage the phenomenal growth of our university has been most rewarding," says Jones. "This includes managing a huge capital construction program while ensuring that campus standards and aesthetics were maintained. The result is that the campus has been transformed into a unified whole. Equally impressive has been the way our facilities organization has been able to grow, change, and adapt as the campus has grown—staying true to our key business drivers of teamwork, customer service, and continuous improvement."

Where will facilities management go from here, now that UNC Charlotte has won an AFE award?

"The AFE has given us a 'mark on the wall,'" says Jones. "We know this is where we stand today. It also shows us where we need to work to get better in the future. The award gives us the information we need to prioritize our improvement efforts going forward—not just focusing on our weaknesses, but also reinforcing our successes." 

GO FOR IT!

Going through the Facilities Management Evaluation Program (FMEP) and applying for the APFA Award for Excellence in Facilities Management (AFE) is not just about winning the award—it is also about the journey. There is no better way to learn about your facilities management program at the deepest levels—what you do well, what needs improving, and how to move forward to create the best possible student experience. Here are a few words from the 2014 winners:

"Facilities organizations that intend to be responsive and responsible stewards for their institution's capital assets need a process for assessing their level of performance in areas of importance to the institution. Competing for the award helps maintain an institution's strengths, as well as creates focus for improvement."—*Tom Harkenrider*

"Facility managers should continually challenge their knowledge base and be on the outlook for better processes or technologies that can improve efficiency and effectiveness. The FMEP process provides invaluable insights into strengths and weaknesses of the FM department."—*Richard W. Robben*

"I would encourage organizations to use the FMEP standards and the FMEP process, but to be very honest with themselves about their performance related to those standards before applying for consideration of the AFE—these are difficult standards to achieve."—*J. Thomas Becker*

"The application process is very thorough and comprehensive. I don't think it really matters where you are on the spectrum in each area assessed, because no organization can be good in everything. What's important is establishing a culture of continuous improvement where everyone in the organization is committed to getting better every day."—*Philip M. Jones*

"The process starts with the strategic planning, goal setting, and direction that were laid out by our department and stakeholders years ago. Through that effort we evaluated our department at every level and implemented strategies that have served our institution extremely well. I would definitely recommend this process."—*Mary Vosevich*

Next deadline: November 30, 2014

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