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# Who Made a Difference

Leaders, Innovators and Pioneers Who Have Shaped the Self-Service Laundry Industry

As the Coin Laundry Association closes out its 50th year of serving the needs of the self-service laundry industry, we felt the best way to cap this milestone was with a very special anniversary feature article, saluting the men and women whose creative thinking, leadership and dedication have guided the laundry business from its early days to the \$5 billion industry it has become.

So, here (in alphabetical order) are the 50 who have made a difference:

## Chris Balestracci



As a former stockbroker with a bachelor's degree in finance from Penn State University, Chris Balestracci represents the epitome of today's professional, progressive, tech-savvy laundry owner. Balestracci – president of Super Wash Laundry, a mega-store located in Connecticut – is a forward-thinking, aggressive promoter who has switched his store to card technology and has been among the first

to embrace online marketing for his business. In addition, the affable Balestracci is always willing to help fellow operators. The former member of the Coin Laundry Association's Board of Directors remains a popular and engaging speaker as many CLA-hosted educational events. Balestracci was named CLA Member of the Year in 2003 and also received the association's Outstanding Director Award last year at the Clean Show in New Orleans.

## Lionel Bogut



With more than 50 years in the industry, Lionel Bogut's list of industry credentials is an impressive one, and his experience has run the gamut from multi-store ownership to owning his own commercial distributorship. Additionally, Bogut, who received the CLA's Founder's Award in 1997, has always given freely of his time and talent to the industry's associations at the local, state and national levels.

He has served as president of the now-defunct San Diego County Coin Laundry Association, as well as having been an active member of the CLA's Board of Directors. Also, as publisher of the regionally distributed *Coin Laundry News*, Bogut continues to distribute timely industry information and business-building ideas to laundry owners in the western region of the U.S.

## Bernard Milch



In 1956, a young Bernard Milch, with an engineering background and experience in laundry equipment sales, was hired to assess damage to the laundry equipment aboard the Swedish American Line's *M/S Stockholm* after the ship collided with another just off Nantucket. This was Milch's first introduction to Swedish-made Wascator frontload stainless steel washers, and he was extremely impressed; so much so, in fact, that he obtained the sales and marketing rights for Wascator machines in North America – and Wascomat was born. Today, Wascomat-equipped coin laundries can be found throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Although Milch retired in 2007, his son Neal took the reins as CEO and long-time Wascomat employee Howard Herman was named president. In 2009, the company, now doing business as Laundrylux, introduced the Electrolux Professional Laundry brand to the North American market.

## Norvin Pellerin



Relying upon his experience building industrial laundry machinery, Norvin Pellerin introduced the Milnor Tripleloader in 1959 as his young company – Pellerin Milnor Corp. – entered the vended laundry marketplace. At that time, coin laundry operations were primarily stocked with appliance-style topload washers. By contrast, Pellerin's industrial-grade Tripleloader model was based upon the company's existing product for high-volume, in-house laundries in hospitality and healthcare settings. The Tripleloader quickly became a fixture in coin laundries across the country, and the basic design of that machine remains in production today. And Pellerin, who founded the company with his father and uncle in 1947 and served as president until the early 1980s, remained active in research and development with the company until his retirement in 1996.

## James Mitchell

James Mitchell assured himself a place in coin laundry industry history in 1960, while the laundromat business was still in its relative infancy. An executive with the Philco Corp., Mitchell was unanimously elected as the first chairman of the National Automatic Laundry and Cleaning Council, based in Chicago. The NALCC was organized when the need was recognized for “combined effort to oppose restrictive legislation, to help increase volume and profits, and to generally work for the promotion and growth of the self-service laundry and drycleaning industry,” according to the original NALCC press release. Today, 50 years later, the Coin Laundry Association has grown and evolved, but it continues to strive to meet the lofty goals that Mitchell initially set forth in 1960.

## Mort Pollack



Mort Pollack has been a key player in the laundry business for more than 40 years. In 1968, he – along with John Wickham, the exclusive distributor of Speed Queen laundry equipment in southern California and southern Nevada, and Bernie Steinberg, the originator of Launderland “turnkey” laundries – established PWS in southern California. Well known in the industry as a pioneer of coin laundry resale, Pollack is responsible for growing the number of store owners by acquiring existing laundry chains for the sole purpose of selling each store separately to individual operators. He introduced more than 200 entrepreneurs to the business with the acquisition and resale of the Lucy's Laundry Mart and Spin Cycle chains alone. Today, PWS is active in all facets of the industry, and the company continues to set the bar for other distributors around the world.

*Wherever you see a successful business,  
someone once made a courageous decision.*

*Peter F. Drucker*

## Mary Peet

Owning laundries in the mid-1950s and finding it difficult to locate detergent because of limited distribution, Mary Peet began purchasing large quantities packed in tubes. When other laundry owners heard of Peet's “stockpile” and asked to purchase some, her garage became her first headquarters, and in 1959, Sudsy Automatic Vending Supplies was born. As she grew the business, soap manufacturers took notice and asked Peet to carry their products. She eventually added delivery trucks and expanded her product line to include everything a laundry would need – making Sudsy the national one-stop-shop distributor it is today. However, Peet is perhaps best known for her dedication to her customers. Sudsy remains a family-run business, and Mary Peet is still just as active in day-to-day activities as ever.

## Rea and Rick Rawlins



There are few self-service laundries that don't have at least a couple of laundry carts from R&B Wire Products. And that's thanks to Rea Rawlins, who founded R&B Wire in 1946. Rawlins' vision was to make doing laundry simpler and more convenient for both store owners and customers alike. Over the years, he also served the laundry industry as chairman of the National Automatic Laundry and Cleaning Council, which later became the Coin Laundry Association. Of course, Rea's son, Rick, has long since taken over as CEO of R&B. Under his leadership, R&B Wire Products has remained a leader and innovator, with such offerings as the company's popular “Clean Wheel System.” Like his father, Rick also served as chairman of the coin laundry industry's national trade association.