

'HARNESSING THE PASSION': SUPERIOR HEALTH LINENS CHIEF OUTLINES STRATEGY

WE RECENTLY JOURNEYED to the Chicago suburb of St. Charles, IL, to interview Joseph LaPorta, president and CEO of Healthcare Linen Services Group (HLSG), on issues related to healthcare laundering—as well as the challenges/opportunities facing HLSG as LaPorta completes his first year of leading several laundry operators. The HLSG has four divisions and 10 facilities in four states. They process roughly 185 million lbs. (83.9 million kg) annually.



Not unlike the HLSG's corporate headquarters, LaPorta himself is a relative newcomer to the textile service side of healthcare. However, he emphasizes that he's a "healthcare professional," with many years of experience in leadership roles associated with hospitals and clinics. This summer, LaPorta was honored among "100 Top Healthcare Leaders" by the International Forum for Advancements in Healthcare. "My 28 years in healthcare really is a culmination of three disciplines," he said. "It's healthcare manufacturing, healthcare distribution and healthcare services. So, I've played on the periphery of laundry and linen services in the past. But I didn't consider myself a linen guy, per se. In my opinion, those three disciplines, we pretty much do every day."

The four divisions of the HLSG include; Superior Health Linens, which operates plants in Batavia and Joliet, IL; and Cudahy, Madison and Plover, WI; Textile Care Services (TCS),

BELOW: HLSG President Joseph LaPorta, who oversees a group of Midwestern laundries, recently discussed industry issues at his suburban Chicago office.



Rochester, MN; and two divisions of the Logan's company in Shelbyville, KY: Logan's Linens, a healthcare launderer; and Logan's Uniforms, an industrial and healthcare uniform and related products/services provider. The HLSG is backed by Thompson Street Capital Partners, St. Louis, which has strategically increased its investments since October 2009, when it partnered with Logan's Healthcare Linen Services. In 2016, Thompson completed a merger with Logan's uniform division and recapitalized Superior Health Linens. In September 2017, the firm acquired TCS, long known as Mayo Clinic's linen supplier.

As the CEO overseeing these laundries, LaPorta's mission is to boost quality, efficiency and growth groupwide by implementing best practices, investing in technology and leveraging a growing scale. At the same time, this model lets members keep their unique brands and teams. "We certainly want to give our GMs (general managers) the autonomy to make decisions," LaPorta said. "However, with additional oversight, resources and infrastructure expertise that I think a corporate structure brings, we want to take away some of the distractions that these GMs have to deal with. We feel like we have the right model."

When asked how this approach could impact operations, LaPorta said that, "HLSG's culture and process is a collaborative one in which we take our GMs' requests seriously, while balancing them with the needs of the broader organization. The team that we have in place today is diverse in tenure. However, they are some of the most committed professionals I have ever worked with. This process is ongoing as we leverage our expertise within our executives, such as Paul Jewison (TCS), as part of the decision-making process. I consider Paul to be an industry icon."

As LaPorta assembles his leadership team, he expects faster growth. "We've got people here who are committed and passionate about what we do," he said. "So, we're harnessing that passion and that commitment. I see us continuing to build on our regional footprint. It's about growth; it allows us more flexibility to invest in our people, our plants and expansion plans"

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