

TEXTILE SERVICES ASSOCIATION

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IN THIS ISSUE

- 02 PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE
- 10 TSA KNOWLEDGE NETWORK
- 12 GOLD PARTNER SERIES
- 19 DRY CLEANING REPORTS



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WCL TRAVELING SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

As the group met at the hotel lobby in Barcelona on the 9th April evening, most of us meeting for the first time, it was evident this was going to be two days well-spent. Over dinner, we were at ease and made brief introductions. Jo of Girbau was ever so helpful throughout the program and we were able to benefit greatly from her expertise and the genuineness of her person.

On the 10th April morning, we visited Girbau in Vic (Barcelona). After an hour's drive from the vibrant and the ever-busy City Centre, we reached Girbau's manufacturing facility. We were given a warm welcome by the senior executives in Girbau and the day's program was explained.

The Girbau Experience Centre

Our visit coincided with another customer visit which helped us understand (in a limited sense) the customer requirements when it comes to their purchasing decisions. Then, we were given the taste of what is called Girbau Experience Centre with a remarkable multimedia display of Girbau's values, its products and principles.

As the video ended, the screen on which we were watching the video, opened to reveal a spacious, well-lit room with high ceiling, displaying rows of Girbau machines waiting for us to experience the good quality engineering. So we did. Jo gave us the tour of each machine with hands-on experience of the washers, dryers and folders of different sizes. The HS series machines with different capacities were

lined up as we went through its features and technical specifications.

As we walked down to the other half of the room that held retail machines along with a Girbau PB Series Ironer. Lee Burton of National Dry Cleaners and Phillip Kalli of Ideal Manufacturing were able to demonstrate some of the key indicators when it comes to handling problem garments and making better sense of wet cleaning procedures. By now, we have easily spent a couple of hours at the Experience Centre discussing best cleaning tips and optimal machine settings for different textile volumes.

Meeting the Standards Development Team As the participants were being finalised for the Traveling Scholarship, Girbau was keen to comprehend what each one of us wanted to achieve from this visit. One of my interests was to understand how Girbau approached standards development in light of the upcoming changes in laundry machinery manufacturing. Phillip and I were given exclusive access to Girbau's standards development team on the first day of our visit. It was encouraging to see

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a skillful and extensively experienced team handling research and development for Girbau. Girbau's team works with several other manufacturers (covering the 80% of the market) for the development of these standards. My questions were mostly around the newly introduced performance labeling and safety standards. As the manufacturer caters to both commercial and industrial laundry machines, the team is actively involved with the development of a number of standards. They seemed to have a clear understanding of the future of these standards and their research numbers do tally with what has been tabled in these committees. Although domestic and commercial machines have been subject to eco performance labeling, there is a growing concern from UK's perspective in relation to the industrial machines. The logistics involved in testing and performance-labeling an industrial machine is not anywhere near to what is currently in place for smaller machines. Unlike commercial machines, the installation of every industrial machine involves significant cost, infrastructure and man-hours. Unlike domestic machines, most of the industrial machines are tailor-made for the customer requirements. There are so many variances that needs to be taken into account when testing a base module and benchmarking those results against other builds. As of now, it is not a mandatory requirement for all the industrial machines to be eco-labelled. An end-user in near future will have the option available at the time of purchasing to specify if they would want a machine that is tested and labeled in terms of its energy efficiency and performance. However, the TSA has already raised the concern to these committees that if it ever to be made mandatory in the form of a legislative instrument, that might add significant levels of cost to the textile servicing sector as the manufacturers themselves may not want to bear all the cost involved in testing and labeling.

We had a very productive time with the standards development team and headed back down to the rest of the group waiting for us after their virtual reality laundry experience. We were treated to incredibly delicious lunch, the Spanish style.

A Special Laundry

That afternoon, we visited a site very special indeed and nothing like any laundry I have visited before.

The principle and the spirit of this laundry was very close to my own heart - a laundry fully run by staff with special needs. Happy faces, lovely smiles, well-managed boiler house and clean laundry. We had the opportunity to look through and see how the processes compared with the laundries in the UK. Even though we couldn't speak much with anyone in the laundry due to language barriers, it is encouraging that we are all connected by the same pulse, same processes, and a same goal. As we drew the day to a close at Girbau later on, it was a day well-spent learning and discussing subjects that mattered to each one of us.

That evening as we drove back to the hotel, we could not wait to put our feet up and enjoy some time together. It seemed like we all had lost track of time or was it to do with the late Spanish dinners, we certainly did enjoy the hospitality in Girbau style.

Visits to Friendly Neighborhood Launderettes

On the second and last day of the trip, we were scheduled to visit some of the launderettes and a laundry in the centre of the city. As we met at the hotel lobby to get our transport for the day, we all were looking forward to seeing Spanish launderettes; one in particular, the launderette where it also served as a musical venue.

We were able to visit a number of launderettes; thanks to Girbau for preparing all the plan and meeting all the logistics requirements. Most of the launderettes could function on coin operated system and someone was needed at the premise only if there was a problem that needed attention. Mostly, all the machines and payment systems were being monitored remotely and if the customer needed help, they could contact the helpdesk. However, at one of the franchised shops, the owner of the branch was available; she was ever so kind to show us around. A wife and mother who left her day job to start her own launderette owned this very well-kept and

maintained premise with Girbau machines. She explained to us her journey, inspiration. The challenges and plenty of help received from the franchise to set up the launderette business.

Then, we headed down town to visit the laundry at the City Centre. The narrow road leading to what looked like a shop entrance door welcomed us to a series of washer extractors and an ironer. The space in the shop was used very well to receive the soiled linen at one end and the cleaned items ironed and packed at the other end. It was intriguing to hear about their challenges operating in a predominantly residential area and all that comes with collection and delivery. We were thrilled to get hands on and 'help' the operatives a bit with ironing and folding.

Last but not the least - we arrived at the Splash launderette. As we walked in to the premise, one of the Spanish bands were getting ready to set up their music live streaming. Envisioned by a man who shares his passion for music and laundry had set it up several years ago providing great platform for several local artists. The room lit in amber was made alive by the reflection on matt finished Girbau HS series machines. As we conversed with the manager of the launderette, it was evident that challenges they faced were very much similar to that of home. However, we were impressed by the cleanliness and management of the launderette sites compared to those in the UK.

As we enjoyed another lovely dinner together after a visit to the city, we were very pleased about the things we experienced, learned and for the friendships that were formed during this trip. We have learned and gained a platform to understand challenges faced by each other as laundry operatives, suppliers and project managers.

Thanks to Worshipful Company of Launderers and Girbau for their initiative and commitment for education and continuous improvement.