

# One-Stop Shopping for Maintenance

By John Dunlap, Editor – SSA Globe

There once was a day—and it wasn't too long ago—when self storage owner/operators and managers had to solve maintenance needs on a case-by-case basis, with a Rolodex full of names from which to choose. There might be three candidates for paint jobs, four candidates for lighting needs, two candidates for signage, six for roofing and five more for yard and plant maintenance. Now, thanks to all-purpose maintenance companies like Accent Building Restoration and Waikato Enterprises you can throw that old Rolodex away.

The cold, hard fact is that while self storage has grown as an industry, so has competition for many facilities that might have once had a territory to themselves. Thus, the need to look good has never been greater. Likewise, with the troubled economy having slowed the building of new self storage properties to a crawl, the need to put on a shiny face for those existing facilities has grown by leaps and bounds.

“The best that any self storage facility will ever look is the day that it opens,” says Andy Abreu, president of Accent Building Restoration, Inc. (ABR) from his Cerritos, California, office. “By four or five years later, pretty nearly every facility will need to be refreshed. And as self storage has grown, facilities that were built 20 years ago might now be facing stiffer competition and more of a saturation of their market area. Self storage is still all about confidence for the consumer and they won't store at an unkempt property.”

“One reason that we've had so much success this year is that a lot older properties are distressed and selling at far below the cost of new facilities,” adds Lindsey Hazlehurst, president of Waikato Enterprises, based in Chicago, Illinois. “Therefore, a lot of the bigger players are purchasing rather than building. All those facilities need re-vamping and re-branding. We just completed a four-facility portfolio in Chicago which changed from Metro to Extra Space.”

## From Sherwin Williams to Self Storage

For Abreu and ABR, the move to being an all-encompassing maintenance operation in self storage has been steady and gradual. Abreu was working for Sherwin Williams in Southern California when he was asked to help Public Storage with paint specifications. Following the January 17, 1994 earthquake in Los Angeles that was centered at Northridge, Abreu decided to form his own company to help those affected by the quake with building and remodeling needs. Even as his new company was starting to grow he never lost contact with Public Storage.

“Public Storage kept leaning on me to help them with work in paint specifications, but I told them that instead of just doing that, I also wanted to do the painting for them,” Abreu says. “Around that time (the late '90s) they also had started looking at doing major upgrades to their Southern California properties. So we got caught up in an entire wave of renovating and upgrading.”

“But our evolution to where we are now didn't happen overnight. We got to be friendly with key players in the self storage industry and found out what they were struggling with. What we came to realize was that self storage was growing up, but that most facilities were still using a hodgepodge of contractors to do what they needed. So around 2000 my brothers and I had a meeting and decided to key our focus on self storage—and now it accounts for 75% of our business.”

ABR has gone nationwide and is focusing its efforts on major metropolitan areas around the country. Among the services it provides as a one-stop shop are providing all phases of cosmetic remodeling, construction services, interior and exterior painting, wall covering,

*See One-Stop Maintenance, p. 14*



*Accent Building Restoration (ABR) started as paint specialists but has grown to include a multitude of other maintenance services.*

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drywall repair, wall texturing, floor covering, stucco, siding repair, elastomeric waterproofing, as well as offering customized building and property maintenance programs.

Abreu's advice to any self storage owner/operator who is thinking of improving his or her facility: "Have a friend drive up and come in, noticing everything along the way. They should start from the street and work their way to the office and then give their impressions on what is needed."

Hazlehurst and Waikato echo that concept. Waikato (the name comes from a state in New Zealand that Hazlehurst

grew up in) offers the following services under its umbrella of maintenance: revamping (office remodels, painting, door replacement, etc.); security upgrades (new CCTV and access controls); conversions and add-ons.

"The main reason an all-inclusive operation like ours is so helpful is financial," says Hazlehurst. "If you have work that needs to be done at your site which would normally involve several contractors, we come in and take care of all of it. Maybe you have doors to replace and a roof that needs repair, or you have lights that need installation—we



can take care of all of it. One trip, one travel charge and obviously you only have one person to contact. So it saves you time as well as money."

So, if you are still leaning on that old Rolodex, you might want to think about the value of having one company tend to all your cosmetic maintenance needs.

"Self storage is still basically a neighborhood business," concludes Abreu. "People aren't going to want to drive more than 10 miles to store their goods. So if you look better than anyone within 10 miles of you, you should be ahead of the competition." ♦



Andy Abreu, president of ABR, sees greater growth for his company in metropolitan areas.

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