

# Casino, water plant, schools: Cleaning couple's bet pays off



Walter and Kelle Cox, owners of Cox Building Services, hold their 2013 Sands Suppliers Award from Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem. The casino has been a customer of the Allentown commercial cleaning service for eight years.

By JENNIFER TROXELL WOODWARD

A Lehigh Valley couple took a gamble more than a decade ago and opened a commercial cleaning company that can name the Sands Casino Resort Bethlehem as a client.

“We clean almost all of the restaurants at the casino, the bathrooms and hallways, the outside parking lot after an event, the bus depot and event center kitchen,” said Walter Cox, vice president of Cox Building Services, Allentown. “We do not do the actual casino or public access area. You need a special license for that, but we have been hired when needed at the hotel and event center.”

The Sands property is just one of many recognizable sites for which Cox Building Services provides cleaning and property maintenance in the Lehigh Valley. The company, run by Cox and his wife Kelle, has built a name for itself by word-of-mouth referrals, hiring the right people and by maintaining a spotless reputation.

In times of instability, the company kept going by taking on landscaping, snow removal and handyman jobs – all services it still performs today.

Walter Cox said the Sands became a client eight years ago after the husband-wife duo bid on the job during the casino’s open house. At the time, the Sands chose another service, but came back to Cox to offer the opportunity.

“We have a tremendous relationship with them,” he said. “They know we are there when they need us.”

### SMALL TO LARGE JOBS

Cox Building Services was established in 2005 and is headquartered on Lehigh Street in Allentown. It employs 45-55 people at any given time and can handle cleaning and maintenance at locations from 100 square feet to 1 million square feet.

Ninety percent of its business is the Lehigh Valley, although the company handles construction cleanup within two hours of Allentown, areas such as Harrisburg, Philadelphia and Scranton.

“Our gross receipts will be over \$2 million this year,” Kelle Cox said.

Kelle, who is president and handles human resources, said the company started with two employees: Her husband had two years with a commercial cleaning service and before then worked 10 years in the restaurant business. She had been working for Johnson & Johnson.

### VARIETY OF CLIENTS

The Coxes landed a job cleaning several bank branches for Commerce Bank in the Lehigh Valley, a lucrative venture until Commerce was acquired by another bank.

The husband-wife team moved on and began acquiring other commercial clients.

It now works for schools, doctor offices, warehouses and government sites. Clientele includes Lehigh County offices, West End Associates and Pepsi.

The company has “grown each year we have been in existence,” said Kelle Cox, attributing success to finding the best staff and “aggressively going after new business.”

### PROMPT TO RESPOND

Patricia Walck, purchasing agent for Lehigh County Authority, recently helped to hire Cox Building Services for cleanup and maintenance at several county facilities, including a wastewater treatment plant and collection and distribution buildings.

“They respond promptly, and they are a great choice for the authority,” Walck said. “I have not had any complaints about their work, and I am used to getting a lot of complaints.”

Walck added that Cox uses the same team for all county facilities that it services, its prices are competitive and it can effectively schedule every facility for cleaning when necessary.

### ADDING SERVICES TO SURVIVE

While business is flourishing, the Coxes said 2008-2011 was difficult, when some clients halted services. A number made budget cuts, eliminating funding for cleaning and maintenance or doling out jobs to the lowest bidder.

The couple then decided to take on handyman services, landscaping and snow removal.

“When our customers came to us asking if we can handle these types of services, we ... did an analysis and determined we could provide those services,” Kelle Cox said. “As with our main business, these additional services have grown with the company.”

Walter Cox said he really saw a change for the better in 2013.

“It can be tough, but we are finally seeing a turnaround as far as having clients who say things like, ‘You need to charge more because we expect more,’” he said.

### EYEING A NEW MARKET

Walter Cox cited the importance of social media in his industry, and the privately held company is expected to unveil a new website.

He said the continued growth of the company has him contemplating one day opening an office in Philadelphia, especially as the company gets more contracts with government offices.

“We have the correct management in place now,” he said. “Our biggest thing is taking the best care of our customers.”

### COX BUILDING SERVICES

- **What:** Commercial cleaning company.
- **Location:** Lehigh Street, Allentown.
- **No. of employees:** 45-55.
- **Website:** www.coxbuildingservices.com.