



- FEATURES
- RED ALL OVER
- FARM REPORT
- News
- Sports
- PLANET CARDINAL
- CLASS NOTES
- SHOWCASE
- DEPARTMENTS
- ONLINE ONLY
- CLASSIFIEDS
- CONTACT US
- ADVERTISE
- MAKE A GIFT
- BACK ISSUES

What You Don't Know About Campus Maintenance

BY MARIE C. BACA

LOOKING AFTER the largest contiguous college campus in America isn't easy. Maintaining 7 million square feet of academic buildings on 8,180 acres requires a veritable army of custodians, landscapers and plumbers—not to mention arborists, glaziers and locksmiths. While more than 500 individuals work to keep the campus in shape, their efforts often are invisible to the casual observer. "People see maintenance as simply making sure things don't go wrong, but it's actually much more creative than that," says Robert



CLAW CREW: Carpenter, right, with operations staffers Spiros Vasilakos, Marc Conway and Mitch Bousson.

Linda A. Cicero

Carpenter, director of the buildings operations group. "It's all about finding new ways to create an effective environment for the students and staff."

THEY'RE SERIOUS ORGANIZERS. With so many tasks that need to be completed on a regular basis, routine maintenance must be highly organized to be efficient. Thus, every job from trash removal to restocking chalk in the classrooms follows a strict schedule that indicates how and when that task can be executed. Dusting in a library, for example, takes place once a week on Wednesdays, and includes open, flat, unobstructed surfaces and ledges, but not chairs or anything over 8 feet high. If there's a dusty 9-foot chair in Green Library, a special work order must be filed. Each year about 120,000 work orders ask for help with matters ranging from unclogging a toilet to eliminating "weird flying ants" in Margaret Jacks Hall.

SAY WHAT? It wouldn't be Stanford without the distinctive lingo. Landscapers use the term "showy spot" to refer to high-traffic and photogenic locations like the Oval or Memorial Court that require extra attention. FAMIS—pronounced "famous"—is the database system that processes work orders. A "dog key"? That's an Allen wrench used to lock doors that open by pushing a bar.

THERE'S NO DISGRACE LIKE FOAM. Caring for the fountains on campus is usually pretty straightforward: Fill with the appropriate amount of potable water; add chemicals to ensure that they don't become hotbeds for microorganisms; enjoy. But occasionally a bottle of dish soap finds its way into a fountain—usually around Big Game—creating massive amounts of foam and an equally massive headache for the maintenance crew. Carpenter takes this in stride. "Those are the types of things that come with being a college campus. We have to remember that people are here to live and play, not just work."

ORANGE YOU GLAD ABOUT ORGANICS? Buildings and Grounds Maintenance loves sustainable practices. Contracted custodians dust with microfiber cloths instead of paper towels and use "green" chemicals to clean surfaces. The landscaping crew uses drought-tolerant plants. Pest management includes organic alternatives, which means the fruit on Stanford's 95 citrus trees can be eaten safely right off the branch.

THEY KNOW THE CAMPUS AS BEES KNOW BLOSSOMS. Maintenance crews can answer questions about the campus that would make most students shrug. Why was the Angel of Grief statue built? To memorialize Jane Stanford's brother, Henry Clay Lathrop. Where's a good place to buy used office furniture, electronics, table linen or lab equipment? ("DNA analyzer. \$25,777.78 OBO.") The weekly Surplus Property Sales at 340 Bonair Siding Road. And the best spring blooms? In the Thomas Church Courtyard in April, when the Chinese fringe trees create a breathtaking canopy of white flowers.

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