

BUSINESS

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Dust Busters

► From a modest start in her Burholme home, Dawn Hibbs and her cleaning service, Executive Maids, fill a vacuum for homeowners who don't want to do it themselves.

By Diane Prokop
Times Staff Writer

Dawn Hibbs was exhausted from running a day care and looking for an interim career. A friend suggested she try cleaning houses.

Hibbs started cleaning one house a day. Before long it was two. Fifteen years later, Hibbs sends out seven teams of cleaners in her signature Executive Maids pink vehicles, cleaning five to six houses a day within a 20-to-25-mile radius.

"In the beginning, it was a struggle. Now I enjoy my job," she said.

While most of her employees — many have been with her from eight to 10 years —

are out in the field cleaning, Hibbs manages the business from her desk at 7511 Oxford Ave. in Burholme.

At a client's home, the team follows Hibbs' cleaning model — splitting up to thoroughly dust, vacuum, and clean bathrooms or the kitchen. The driver is the supervisor. She leaves a pink thank-you note and checklist to let clients know she has inspected each room after the cleaning.

"We really pride ourselves on the quality of our work," Hibbs said.

The 43-year-old entrepreneur started the business out of her Burholme basement.

"I'd clean all day, make dinner, do homework and after the kids were in bed I'd do the books," she said.

Hibbs' operation soon outgrew her basement; she spent 10 years on Bingham Street before moving to the Oxford Avenue location in 2006.

The Executive Maids executive not only learned the ins and outs of the cleaning business but learned to embrace technology as well. She found that a ServiceCEO software program could coordinate calendars, billing and payroll, as well as other bookkeeping facets.

A GPS unit has also saved the day on more than one occasion while trying to find locations. And before online mapping software was available, she'd hand-write directions for her drivers.

"It saves so much time in the office," Hibbs said.

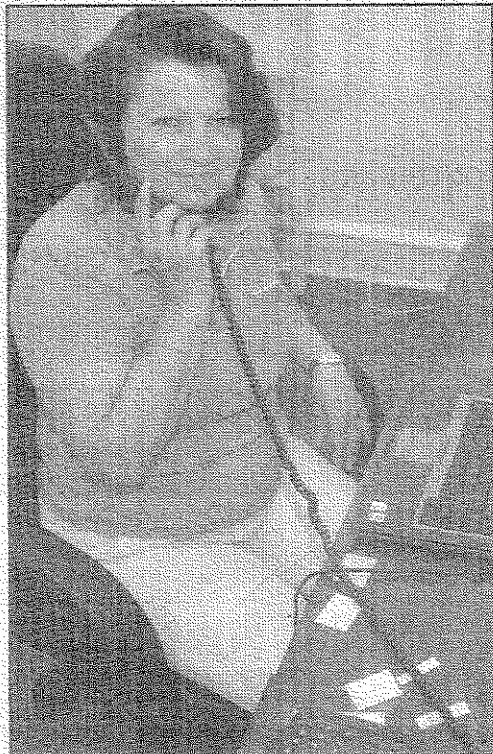


JENNY SWIGODA / TIMES PHOTOS

Vernice Marshall and Dorca Vargas load their equipment and supplies before heading to the next assignment.

Executive Maids' typical customer is between 35 and 55, and couples are commonly dual-income professionals.

Some clients request the cleaning service every other week; others make arrangements periodically. Executive Maids has been summoned for a housecleaning when new buyers



Dawn Hibbs supervises the operation of her business, Executive Maids.

MAIDS

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go to settlement; Hibbs also gets calls from people who want to schedule cleanings that will assist their aging parents.

"Most of our clients are too busy to keep up with their own homes. Let alone their parents' home. Or they live in another state and it's just impossible to help their parents to keep their home clean," Hibbs explained.

Executive Maids also counts celebrities among its clientele. The company has cleaned the homes of news and sports personalities, including members of the Eagles, Sixers and Phillies.

Hibbs says her customers like that they don't have to worry about finding someone they can trust to clean their homes. Executive Maids cleaning teams bring their own equipment and products; they also are bonded and insured.

One client in particular—in fact, a client with a secret—appreciates that the Executive Maids team makes sure to arrive at his home after 9 a.m.

"He doesn't want his wife to know that Executive Maids cleans their home," Hibbs explained. "He has her convinced that their teenage daughter cleans the



JENNY SWIGODA / TIMES PHOTO
Gwen Colton, Dorca Vargas and Vernice Marshall stand next to one of Executive Maids' signature pink vehicles.

home."

Initial cleaning fees are \$120 an hour for three cleaners and \$160 an hour for four cleaners, charged in five-minute increments.

While all cleaning jobs are personalized, the average single home (four bedrooms and two and a half baths) takes between 90 minutes and two and a half hours for an initial thorough cleaning.

For biweekly service, the charge for an average single home is \$100 to \$120.

Fees are determined by the size of the home, the number of occupants and pets, and how the home has been maintained between cleanings.

Executive Maids services homes in Bucks County, Philadelphia, and Camden and Burlington counties in New Jersey on weekly, biweekly, monthly, periodic and one-time appointments. The business operates weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

If homes are outside the service area of Executive Maids, Hibbs will try to point the owners in the right direction.

"If we can't help, we'll tell you who can," Hibbs said.

She also offers tips on how to hire a maid service, including asking for proof of insurance, a list of everything that maids clean, forms of payment, and whether they work with keys or unlocked doors. Leaving your door unlocked could result in an insurance company not paying a claim if your home is robbed. ♦♦

For more information about Executive Maids, call 215-342-7300 or visit www.executivemaids.com

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