

CASE STUDY



POST-SANDY, COMMUNAL LAUNDRY ROOMS ARE NOT TAKEN FOR GRANTED

Laundry is a tedious chore for most, but more than two years after Hurricane Sandy stormed through the East Coast, residents of a Queens, New York housing cooperative are happy to have their communal laundry facilities back and better than ever.

Jennifer Grady, a resident of Dayton Beach Park housing cooperative and president of the housing co-op's board, remembers October 29, 2012 and the rising water and flooding that inundated the lower levels of each of Dayton's five 12-story buildings. The ground level and first floor of each building houses a lobby area, communal laundry room, and up to 150 resident apartments.

"Only a few hundred yards separate us from the beach and boardwalk. When the boardwalk was uprooted from the support columns, water inevitably surged onto our property," Grady explains. "Water damaged everything on the lower levels, and remained there, stagnant, for about 10 days."

Dayton Beach Park, located in the Far Rockaway neighborhood of Queens, is a middle-income, Mitchell-Lama housing cooperative supervised by the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Dayton's nearly 5,000 residents had been evacuated the night of the storm, under a mandatory order from the City of New York. According to the National Weather Service, water levels exceeded eight feet above ground level in locations most affected by Sandy – which includes New York City and the south-facing shores of Long Island.

"The storm caused tens of millions of dollars in damage to the buildings and grounds," adds Grady.

In fact, the entirety of Far Rockaway was consumed by water and fire that night, while the boardwalk washed away completely. It has yet to be rebuilt, and homes and businesses in the blue-collar beach community remain condemned.

At Dayton Beach Park, residents living on higher levels were able to return home to assess damage, but not until three weeks later. Those in the lower levels, however, could not. Work then began to renovate and restore apartments and amenities at the co-op. This includes the lobby areas, administrative offices and five communal laundry rooms.

Lenny Orner is president of Metered Appliances, the company that services Dayton Beach's laundry rooms and approximately 100 card-operated washing machines and dryers. While tasked with repairing the machines that had been saturated with salt water, Orner also came across asbestos damage and mold.

"We could have repaired them, but machines were never going to perform 100 percent or stand up to the residents' needs," says Orner. "After Sandy, I was performing maintenance on the machines every few days to keep them in working order."

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Orner wasn't the only one displeased with the condition of the washers and dryers.

"Communal laundry facilities were meant to be an amenity for our residents," Grady explains. "The older machines were in need of constant repair, which was costly to the co-op and frustrating to our residents."

After Sandy, Grady and the board decided to close the laundry rooms until major improvements could be made and damaged equipment could be replaced with new Speed Queen® machines. Meanwhile, residents used area laundromats or a drop-off service.

"We knew we had to first deal with the asbestos and other cosmetic damage of the laundry rooms. After completing that work, we recognized it was the right time for the board to invest in Dayton's laundry services, and for Metered Appliances to install quality machines – even if it was under unfortunate circumstances and created a temporary inconvenience for residents," says Grady.

Utilizing Metered Appliances' design services, Grady and the board's vision to give Dayton residents a more pleasant space to do laundry came to life over the course of nine months. New tile and paint made a huge difference in brightening the rooms and a new strategic layout maximized space in the 700- to 1,000 square foot rooms to allow for comfortable use of the 70 new washing machines and 30 stacked dryers. The rooms opened for resident use in August 2014, almost two years after Sandy hit.

"Our tenants enjoy using the laundry rooms more than they ever did before," says Grady. "Laundry isn't the most fun chore – and most of us aren't exempt from it – but having a great laundry room with reliable equipment is a wonderful amenity we are now proud to provide to our residents."

Aside from the amenities and aesthetic changes that make the space more pleasant to be in – including cable television – Orner says it's the foundation of the laundry room that really makes the difference: the machines.

"Every time I stop by the laundry rooms at Dayton, residents tell me how happy they are with the new facilities and the more durable machines," he says. "They also say their laundry is cleaner, brighter, and crisper. They get in and out faster than before."

While the residents of Dayton and Far Rockaway continue to deal with the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy, Grady has advice for other cooperative boards and apartment managers considering whether or not to invest in upgrading laundry facilities.

"It's one of the most significant things you can do in your development to immediately improve quality of life for residents," she says. "With Metered Appliance's assistance every step of the way, this was a nice gift to provide our residents after the trauma of Sandy."

To learn how commercial-grade laundry equipment can transform your common laundry room into an amenity, visit SpeedQueenCommercial.com/ApartmentRFP.