MESSAGE FROM CHARLES KENNEDY

A few weeks ago, I met with my fellow senior leaders from the PAC-12 universities in Southern California for our third collaborative workshop, the PAC-12 Facilities Consortium. I developed the idea of forming this group one year ago to open up the dialogue among PAC-12 Conference schools around issues and concerns common to us all. For many, participation in this group represents the first time they have met and interacted with counterparts who share the same set of responsibilities for managing campus built environments and core services.

This year’s consortium host, UCLA, had lush green lawns for all of our group photographs, but the campus tour uncovered a starker reality—large patches of brown and areas being converted to xeriscaping and hardscape. The continuing California drought has radically changed landscape and water-usage practices at UCLA, and was a featured agenda topic at this meeting. Most schools are aggressively looking at all possible water-conservation measures—from irrigation and fountain use, and steam vs. hot-water heat recovery and other technologies, to lab autoclaves and restroom fixtures—every idea is being considered. Many of these link closely to greenhouse-gas reduction and cost reduction too.

Other topics included funding sources and new strategies for projects; the wide variety of approaches to reach carbon neutrality—California and Arizona have aggressive targets to meet by 2025; energy sources and power-plant energy generation and distribution; the variety of ways facilities teams efficiently provide campus service (centralized vs. deployed); and the all-important budget situation—in most states, cuts to higher education have cost universities tens of millions of dollars.

Of note, nearly half the universities are experiencing high-level executive changes: presidents, provosts, boards, and CEOs; this has a ripple effect on long-term decision-making for facilities and operational investment levels.

A few universities gave noteworthy presentations:

- University of Arizona has implemented a very promising—and award-winning—apprenticeship program for skilled trades: electrical, plumbing and HVAC were the core priorities. They anticipate broadening the program to elevator mechanics, controls techs and plant operators.

- Another presentation was about the energy dashboards in use at Arizona State and Stanford. Both are aimed at informing their campus constituents in order to change behavior, which will lead to less consumption. Stanford’s actually is used to bill customer units for energy usage.

Two potential partnering opportunities for the PAC-12 are emerging: cooperative purchasing agreements for common items like consumables and building equipment; and one around common benchmarking-data services (e.g., APPA and Sightlines).

Following the meeting, several members shared supplemental materials with each other, from cost-estimating spreadsheets, to product sources. We will distribute and share these materials to various units in Facilities Services, and with our partner organizations on campus. For our next meeting, consortium members have shown strong interest in learning about Lean here at UW.

The gatherings have been a remarkable success so far, in generating ideas, opportunities to partner, product and service referrals, data gathering and analysis, and strategic insights. All of us are strongly committed to the partnership, and I believe it has been helpful in advocating for Facilities Services here at the University of Washington.
If there’s something strange in your neighborhood, and it’s something weird that doesn't look good, who ya gonna call? For the University of Washington, it’s not Ghostbusters, but the Facilities Operations Maintenance Specialists (FOMS) crew, more commonly known by their radio name, Unit-2.

“Why do we do? Well, why don’t we give you what we don’t do. That’s a much shorter list,” said Specialist Tom Imel. “We help secure campus and make it safer, we reset building systems, elevators... we fix things; we triage calls as they come in. We’re the 24/7 on-call help-with-everything crew.”

“At 3:30 p.m., when all of our elevator technicians, electricians, gardeners and custodians have left, it’s us that’s left to keep campus running,” said Specialist Pat Lauterbach. “Campus is a night-and-day take-no-holidays operation. Servers, labs and other campus facilities need around-the-clock care and support.”

The team has three shifts each day: a day shift, an evening shift and a night shift. Typically two specialists are on each shift.

“It’s either feast or famine with us,” Imel said. “We’re either running around campus with a long list, or we’re performing regular maintenance checks while on-call for anything that might come up.”

“Sometimes we’re running around from job-to-job with a backlog of calls to get to,”
said Bill Sieg, another Facilities Operations Maintenance Specialist. “At the end of the shift, when we pass our phones and trucks to the next person, we might have to fill out dozens of work orders for all of the things we did that night. Other nights, we might have no calls and we go from building-to-building doing regular maintenance checks.”

“If the lights flicker, or if it’s windy outside, then you know it’s going to be a busy night,” added team member Mike Renner.

As the eyes and ears of campus, Unit-2 has developed a reputation among their campus partners as friendly, passionate workers here for the greater good of the University.

“We’re all here for one purpose, and that’s to provide world-class facilities for our faculty and students. We support that by making sure they have safe, quality, reliable spaces to work in,” Sieg said.

WE > ME

They’re beloved by all of campus’ dozens of building coordinators, the entire UWPD force, Seattle Fire Department’s local Engine 17, and all of Housing and Food Services’ Residential Life staff.

“We count on Unit-2 as a partner to help keep our campus safe,” said Sergeant Raymond Wilson, with UWPD. “Whether it’s getting into buildings, fixing up doors and windows that could compromise a building’s security, or helping with alarm systems, they’re always there to help.”

In many cases, local emergency personnel rely on Unit-2 to assist them on campus because they’re more familiar with the intricacies of each campus building and system.

“Seattle Fire Department relies on Unit-2 to access fire panels and boxes, and help to reset them after they go off,” Sergeant Wilson said. “Whenever there’s a call, they’re right there by our side.”

But for Unit-2, whether it’s a fire alarm or just a Husky Card dropped down an elevator, every call the team takes receives just as much attention as the next.

“Calls come first in our workload, and every call is important. It might
be something simple like a clogged toilet, but that might mean that someone can't use the bathroom!” said Specialist Curtis Nilson.

With roughly 8,000 people living on campus during the school year, campus residence halls are sometimes a hot spot for Unit-2 in the evenings when many other campus buildings empty out for the night. “We're so lucky to have such highly-skilled professionals on-call for whatever might come up,” said McCarty Hall Resident Director Mariam Yaqub. “But no matter what it is, any number of strange things like door issues, trash chutes, plumbing or elevator jams, Unit-2 swoops in and saves the day. Even if it's at 2 a.m., they always make it work for the rest of the night, no matter what might be happening.”

Unit-2 team members know that their work can have huge impacts for every department on campus. “We have to check on temperatures and systems, for example, ensuring that an ice core drilled from the Arctic stays at a specific temperature,” Sieg said. “They can't just go and drill up another one. We're here to help support all of the amazing things going on here at the University.”

For many Unit-2 team members, they're happy to be in a position to help people. “Sometimes I feel like a counselor,” said Darryl Milus, a member of the FOMS team. “Whatever that call might be, whatever we end up doing to triage the situation, we always end up helping to calm folks down. It's important that we're calm, personable, and help the people we serve on campus make sure they know they're in good hands.”

“We COUNT ON UNIT-2 TO HELP KEEP CAMPUS SAFE”

– SERGEANT RAYMOND WILSON, UWPD
ON THE JOB

Facilities Operations Maintenance Specialists aren't just handy; they must be journeyman certified in at least two different trades before they can even be considered for the position.

“Each one of us have different trade backgrounds and skillsets,” Sieg said. “We're all multitrade, but a lot of this stuff you learn as you go. It's a common-sense thing, and it's an experience thing.”

Many FOMS team members have been at the University for decades. They've committed building numbers, electrical panel locations, and other details to memory.

“There's no job out there that can prepare you for this,” Nilson added, chuckling. “It's all up here [in your head]. In one recent call, Bill [Sieg] was told about some electrical panel issues in a server room. He remembered which switch in that panel had the same issues four or five years ago.”

“I think, like a lot of Facilities Services employees, we're pretty much self-starters. We're very independent,” Sieg said. “It doesn't matter what the job is, you give it to us and we'll go and do it. We just want to get the job done.”

This dedicated team has no designated break or lunch time, often bouncing from one call to the next.

“We're unusual from a lot of teams in that we don't have set break times for meals. And if the next person doesn't come to relieve me, well, I'm stuck here until they arrive,” Sieg said. “Pat [Lauterbach] and Lee [Hand] were once stuck here for three days straight because nobody else could make it in during a severe winter storm.”

Like many Facilities Services employees, it's clear that Facilities Operations Maintenance Specialists feel responsible for everything on campus.

“Between us and UWPD, we're responsible for keeping this place going at night,” said Sieg. “But a lot of what we do is filling out work orders for FS' daytime crews to look at more permanent solutions to our sometimes quick, band-aid fixes to get something through the night. Every shop in Facilities Services is our ally, our resource.”

“It's comforting to know we're in such good hands,” said Sargeant Wilson. “Without them this campus would surely go haywire.”
On Monday, June 8, Building Services’ Physics and Astronomy Building Custodial Team hosted Finance and Facilities Senior Vice President V’Ella Warren at their morning team huddle.

The team, including Lucille Velasco, Cang Le, Azeb Gerensae, Hidat Neguse, William Garl, George Ceratto and their supervisor, Mark Hash, walked V’Ella through their progress over the last few months and some of the most impactful ideas they’ve had:

January: The run assignments in PA Complex are not fair. The group is currently reviewing their runs and, with their supervisors help, re-assigning work so it’s more equitable and fair.

February: Using a desktop calendar in their huddle room, the crew has been able to write down vacation days, special projects and appointments. Having a communal calendar has helped the crew understand each other’s schedules better, and has helped in planning workloads.

March: The team came up with a map to help the custodian covering the open run. The map is color-coded and helps show sensitive or special-concern areas in the run.

April: The team put together a map showing basement additions and edits. This helps the team better cover open runs, and improves safety-related no-access-area identification.

Clayton Brainerd: I am a human resources analyst and I help to coordinate a number of ongoing projects, including training, safety and public records requests. I help serve as an administrative and technology assistant for my department, Facilities Employee Services. It’s a fun challenge to get to learn and help coordinate all of these different systems and groups; I feel like I play a little part in almost everything that my department does.

FSEN: What are some of your big projects right now?

Safety training is a huge, very complicated project I’m working on. There’s a lot of fingers in that pie, and so it’s really important to have every piece of the project well documented. It can sometimes take more than four or five years for these projects to get to the point where they become routine and predictable standard operating procedures for all of Facilities Services.

What are some of your work duties that you’re really passionate about?

Facilities Employee Services has accomplished some really extraordinary things in my time here. I’m unique in that I get to work daily with each workgroup in FES.

I think we’re looking hard at what comes next for FES, and what is left to be done. Our department’s idea board has really transformed how we identify items to look at and keep track of the progress that we make. It’s especially nice to come together during huddles and talk about those ideas, and celebrate our accomplishments together. I’m really looking forward to seeing lean and balanced scorecard maturing in our organization; as Charles Kennedy says, it’s the journey, not the destination. These lean concepts and ideas, even though a lot of times they’re common sense, they remain abstract. We need to take those ideas and bring them into a space where they’re touching and interacting with our daily work life.

How did you get into this field of work?

Just lucky I suppose! I was an opera singer on the road for 20 years. I needed to step away from the stage and wanted a more traditional career path. I have a lot of analytical process improvement skills that I was able to apply to this position, and I was lucky enough to get hired! I feel like you have to be pretty multifaceted and talented. When you’re running your own business, which is how it is in the arts, you have to prioritize, schedule, analyze; it’s really applicable to everything.
CLAYTON BRAINERD, CONT’D

It can be very difficult to forge a new path, but this is like a dream job for me. I’m so thankful. I love coming home to the same place every night. Being on the road for 20 solid years was at times challenging, but I did get to see some amazing places around the world. When you get into your 40s and 50s, it’s difficult to do those long-haul flights anymore.

In the end, the Northwest is my favorite place out of everywhere I’ve travelled. I’m originally from Portland, Oregon. I mean, Paris, Florence, those places are hard to beat, but nothing compares to home.

I still do sing though! In October, I’m working with Philharmonia Northwest and the University of Washington with its production of Penelope, by Gabriel Faure. It’s the first time this production will be fully-staged on the West Coast, and I will have one of the main roles in that. I’m really looking forward to returning to the stage for this production. It’ll be a blast, but it won’t be a big thing that eats up too much time. It’s just a chamber opera instead of a big-scale production, so it will be a lot easier to put it on its feet.

FACILITIES SERVICES GIVES CANOE HOUSE A FRESH FACE FOR SUMMER

In mid-June, Shop 18 crews from Facilities Maintenance and Construction treated and power-washed the exterior of the University’s Canoe House, a spot famous on campus as the home of the gold-medal University of Washington crew team from the 1936 Berlin Olympics, and featured in New York Times Bestseller The Boys in the Boat.

The Canoe House was originally built by the Navy during World War One to be used as a seaplane hangar. It was turned over to the University of Washington in 1919 and used as the University’s shellhouse until 1949.

Dylan Clark operates the JLG lift in cleaning the Canoe House.

Mario Del Cid power washes the wooden shake exterior.

The UW Men’s crew team outside of the Canoe House. (Courtesy of UW Libraries.)

Allen Foster provided ground support for the cleaning.