

# Planet

# Laundry

Magazine of the Coin Laundry Association

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## Tracking Today's Trends

**5 Business Trends Sure to Shape Tomorrow's Laundry Industry**

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## 'I Love Providing This Service'

*Former Restaurateur Builds Successful Laundry Chain in Western Pennsylvania*



Louie Tsiris left his small hometown village in Greece in 1974 to come to America. When he arrived in Indiana, Pa., he had only a suitcase full of clothes and \$250 to his name. He spoke very little English and started working in a restaurant that his brother had established in the western Pennsylvania town. Only six months later, his brother left the business with Louie in charge.

Tsiris worked hard in this business and created a livelihood that would serve as a base for his respectable and lucrative career.

In 1983, Tsiris moved to Slippery Rock, Pa., and opened an Italian restaurant in the small college town. He will tell you that the restaurant business can provide some nice profits but represents long days of hard work.

"I had 25 people working for me, but I found that I had to schedule two people for every one that would actually show up," he said. "When somebody called off, guess who had to work for them?"

Back then, Tsiris would work 60 to 70 hours a week and, at one time, worked a full three and a half years without taking any vacation.

"After a while in the restaurant business, I found that I couldn't remember what my kids looked like," he explained. "There were a lot of headaches."

The restaurant in Slippery Rock had a basement area that he wanted to use for another potential business. Acting on the recommendation of a food deliveryman, Tsiris connected with an equipment distributor and decided to open a coin laundry in this space. He went into business

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with this individual, who as his partner, could help with the capital investment – and the rest, as they say, is history.

The initial Slippery Rock Laundromat was the springboard for Tsiris' successful coin laundry career. The college residents in town provided an instant customer base of patrons who needed to do their laundry.

“There were plenty of college students here who needed to do their laundry, and the laundry business was very profitable

in those days. With a low vend price, by today's standards, I could make quite a decent profit.”

With the initial store doing well, Tsiris looked to expand his laundry business, and leave the busy and tiring restaurant business altogether. So, in 1991, he ventured out on his own, purchasing a laundromat in Butler, Pa.

“Most of my friends thought I was crazy with the location I'd chosen, but it remains one of our most profitable stores,” he said.

Thus began his coin laundry chain.

Over the next 15 years, Tsiris and his wife, Beth, developed five more coin laundry locations until they owned seven stores in western Pennsylvania. The laundries cover a vast area, with stores one hour to the north and one hour southwest of their home in Slippery Rock. Only recently, did they sell one of the laundries in Kittanning, Pa., still leaving them with six profitable locations.

In 1999, Tsiris sold the restaurant in Slippery Rock, but he continues to run the basement laundry to this day. In fact, less than a year ago, he bought out his partner to own all of the laundries himself.

These days, Tsiris spends two days a week collecting the coins from his laundries, while Beth handles the paperwork and management of the stores. Louie said he loves the flexibility of his few hours spent working in the coin laundry business, especially when compared to the bustling restaurant business of his past.

“I probably work half the amount of hours, and I manage seven laundromats pretty much by myself – and I don't have any problems keeping up with it,” he said. “I love every minute of this business. One of the best things is that the machines never talk back!”

Two of the laundries that the Tsiris family purchased were existing stores; however, the others were different businesses that Louie had remodeled.

“When I started my first laundry, it was a vacant building,

and I was so excited to get in there and wear my old dirty clothes and remodel the whole building,” he remembered.

The western Pennsylvania area is unique. The area is covered with rolling hills and large tracts of land between the cities. Most of the towns there were booming steel towns, when that business was in its heyday. These days, the cities are comprised of the sprawling suburbs that epitomize middle-class America.

“Those who come into my laundromats are middle-income people, with a lot of elderly customers,” Tsiris said. “I enjoy having them as customers.”

One of the particular challenges that Tsiris faces is that many of his customers are resistant to change. All of his coin laundries are unattended, and the introduction of some of today’s modern equipment has been a definite challenge.

“I have mostly toploaders for my single-load washers,” he explained. “People here are used to these machines, and changing their ways can be difficult. The new frontloaders are good machines due to their efficiency, but I have had a hard time introducing them. As for card systems, forget about it. People here are used to using coins.”

In fact, only recently has the concept of enhanced cycles been introduced in Tsiris’ laundries. Louie’s equipment distributor convinced him to offer this feature on his newest equipment.

“During my most recent purchase of toploaders, we activated the Super Cycle,” he explained. “Yesterday, I saw a customer come in, and he used four washers and the Super Cycle in every one of them. The profit is good because it costs me only about seven cents, and I collect an extra quarter.”

All in all, Tsiris couldn’t be happier with his decision to invest in the coin laundry business, and he sees a bright future for the industry.

“I believe that the future of the coin laundry business is going to be good because of the economy, the cost of buying equipment for housing and the high cost of utilities,” he predicted. “These days, young people both have to work, and I think everyone goes to the laundromat at some point. I’m glad to be in this business, and I love providing this service for the community.”

*Alex Kane is the special projects manager at Equipment Marketers, based in Cherry Hill, N.J. Prior to that, he worked for USA Technologies, developing payment and monitoring systems for laundry equipment.*

## Equipment Mix

State Street Laundry | Meadville, Pa.

39	Maytag toploaders .....	\$1.75
6	Maytag 18-pound frontloaders .....	\$2.00
7	Maytag 30-pound frontloaders .....	\$3.25
4	Maytag 30-pound frontloaders .....	\$3.50
1	Maytag 50-pound frontloader .....	\$4.25
1	Maytag 55-pound frontloader .....	\$4.25
33	Maytag 30-pound dryers .....	.25 cents for eight and a half minutes
1	Ace water heating system	
1	Hamilton Manufacturing bill changer	
1	Standard Change-Makers bill changer	
8	R&B Wire Products laundry carts	
2	Vend-Rite Manufacturing soap vending machines ..75 cents	
	• Vinyl tile flooring	
2	soda vending machines	
1	snack vending machine	
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