

Didlake Partners with the Navy Exchange Command

The Navy Exchange (NEX) of Norfolk, Va. expanded its Main Store to create the largest NEX in the world with a \$25 million, three-year renovation ending in 2011. Such a major project required a flexible cleaning crew to handle operations during construction in addition to the daily foot traffic of 13,000 people. Fortunately, the Navy Exchange Service Command (NEXCOM) had an AbilityOne® contract with Didlake Inc. for custodial services.

William Smith, project manager for Didlake's NEXCOM contract, says it was important for the facility to be presentable throughout the renovations. "We wanted to make sure that when people came into the exchange that they thought it was awesome," Smith said.

Through the haze of dust and debris, a clean facility didn't come naturally. Smith says it was the combined effort of Didlake and NEXCOM that resulted in a Navy Exchange that was open and presentable throughout the renovations. "The level of partnership has benefited all of us," he said. "It has been a positive thing. NEXCOM knows that if they ask something of us, we will take care of it."

Smith explains that during one phase of construction, more than 100 people would be working on renovations after the cleaning crew finished at 1:30 a.m. By the time the building opened at 8:30 a.m., dust had settled and the floors needed cleaning again. "We have good partners who allowed us to change our hours so that the vendors would finish their work and we could come in and clean afterward," he said.

Doreen Davis, a Didlake custodial supervisor, says construction was a good test of the crew's custodial abilities and flexibility, as up to one-third of the building would be sectioned off at a time. "The biggest challenge was trying to maneuver the obstacle course that the renovation caused. We constantly had to work around things," Davis said. Other special considerations included cleaning the dust from constant drywall cutting and keeping the heavily trafficked floors in top shape.

Other key members of the Didlake crew who made renovations seem easier include lead worker Jessica Ford and custodians Kecia Wellons and Monique Dwight. Without their constant tireless efforts, the team would not have been able to keep up the appearances.

The Navy Exchange officially opened its new store on June 29, 2011, with more than 180,000 square feet of retail space, including a uniform and tailor shop, a major appliance center, and a state-of-the-art lawn and garden center. Military personnel visiting the NEX can have their dry cleaning taken care of while they receive spa treatments or dine at the updated food court. "This was a major renovation that required a major team effort," said Smith. "All of us at Didlake are proud to call ourselves members of that team."



Didlake's Norfolk Navy Exchange Team, from left to right: Cheryl Davis, lead worker; Bill Smith, project manager; Kecia Wellons, custodian; Doreen Davis, supervisor; Donald Keesea, custodian; and Monique Dwight, custodian.