



MANAGER Of The Year RUNNER-UP

Jennifer Curtis
StorQuest
Self Storage
Parker, Colorado

BY JENNIFER S. HOLLINGSWORTH

Facking several years of commercial property management experience in the office and retail sectors under her belt, Jennifer Curtis set out on her first venture into the self-storage industry determined to make her mark.

And make her mark she did.

At the time of winning the runner-up position in *Self-Storage Now!*'s Manager of the Year contest, Curtis had been in the self-storage industry for exactly as long as StorQuest Self Storage had been open in Parker, Colo.—seven months. The remarkable part is that in these times of slower lease-ups due to increased competition, she managed to push the facility from zero to 60-percent occupancy in that time span of just seven months. According to Christen Gibson, operations coordinator for the Santa Monica, Calif.-based William Warren Group, which is the management company for StorQuest, “Jennifer has not only met our expectations, but exceeded them tenfold.”

A Recipe for Success

Just as her peers compliment her, Curtis credits the people behind the manager. “I have a wonderful support team, from co-workers to the president of William Warren Group. Truly they make my job easy. I know I work for a company full of energetic, hard working, dedicated individuals who really want to make the self-storage industry a class act in the world of commercial property management.”

Curtis took advantage of the strength of these team members who allowed her to worry less about the smaller trials and tribulations of managing the store, and focused more on a manager’s most pressing goal: occupancy.

As her first marketing maneuver, the grand opening started with a boom. Wise in the ways of spreading the word, she contacted the local paper and had them write an article about the grand opening, introducing StorQuest as the newest, premier self-storage facility in town. She also joined the Parker Chamber of Commerce and contacted all of the town’s doctors and dentists to propose the need for storage of their documents. All of the realtors heard from her as well.

Contending with six competitors within a five-mile radius, she then hit the pavement. “Within the first few months, I canvassed the town, dropping off fliers and coupons to dozens of businesses, and had apartment complex managers enclose our brochure in their move-in packets.” In addition, she sent her team to post marketing material at high-traffic stores, such as Wal-Mart®, King Soopers and Home Depot®, while hitting residential neighborhoods with fliers. An exhibition at the Parker Business Expo topped off her marketing efforts, exposing an estimated 5,000 attendees to the facility.



The Hurdles of a New Facility

While Curtis' marketing efforts and winning style have hit the mark in terms of renting units, she is quick to give credit to the facility itself. "The Parker facility is one of the nicest storage facilities I have ever seen. In this case, the lease-up period has been quite a pleasure because the property sells itself in most situations. Tenants are constantly commenting on the upscale feeling they get when they walk through our doors."

Before the doors opened, however, much work had to be done. As with the majority of construction projects, the path to opening was rife with issues, including securing vendor maintenance contracts, and deal-

Curtis realizes that while a little friendly competition never hurt anybody, competition should remain just that—friendly. Moreover, her firm belief in maintaining a good working relationship with competitors has benefited facility occupancy. She says, "I've met with all of my competitors. Since many of them have high occupancy levels, when they refer business to me I personally call them or send gift baskets in appreciation."

StorQuest Self Storage also stays a step ahead in the delinquency department. Sporting a delinquency rate of only 1.6 percent, Curtis has her team take turns handling receivables reports so that late tenants receive plenty of friendly reminders. "Our

part of the equation. "I expect myself and my team to give 100 percent to each customer. This is how you stay on the forefront of people's minds."

Curtis finds that the growth in technology, along with the available education on the industry to be very impressive, and points out that "customers are realizing those facts when they walk in today's storage facility."

Aided by the advancements in self-storage technology to impress customers, she also strives to keep an aura of positivity around the facility. She states, "I'm insistent on having candles or other scents to aid in the first impression stage of a sale."

If first impressions are everything, then Curtis is right on track. Offering the supreme compliment, Pam Leelayuwapan, marketing director of the William Warren Group says, "Jennifer's professional demeanor, and warm and friendly personality enhance the appearance of the facility by giving all customers an exceptional first impression of the quality of the staff and our product."

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—Jennifer Curtis, Manager, StorQuest Self Storage

ing with warranty issues involving roof work, sealing, landscaping, wiring and security. Curtis jumped into the situation headlong, making constant property inspections and seamlessly dealing with all of these matters. "My job was to keep the general contractor, the subcontractors, and the key members from William Warren Group all on the same page," she adds. "I had to follow-up with work that still needed to be done and make sure that all loose ends were tied." The result is a fantastic-looking property that still shines seven months down the road.

Regarding her quick education on self-storage, Curtis views her situation as unique. "I feel lucky to have been placed into a new facility. My goal was to learn about the self-storage industry as fast as possible, and what better way than with a ground-up situation. Having to deal with construction issues helped me learn about the differences in how storage facilities are built, powered and secured—the very basics of self-storage management."

Ahead of the Game

Camaraderie between facilities assists her in staying ahead of the game.

program for maintaining a low delinquency level is to call, call and keep calling."

While a novice in terms of time as a self-storage facility manager, Curtis has already experienced her share of interesting situations and has jumped to front of the pack by quickly realizing that they are commonplace in the self-storage industry. "Despite the occasional search warrant for the possible international identity-theft character and tenants throwing rocks at your roof in the middle of the night to wake you up because they 'forgot' the hours of access, there really isn't any situation that is too out of the ordinary," she states.

It's About the Customer

Curtis prides herself on customer service, and her experience in commercial property management has aided her in being able to make the right decisions, ask the right questions, and maintain operations at a very professional level. She adds, "Tenant relations are the key to happy, satisfied customers who want to spread the word—if you're keeping them smiling." She also feels that excellent customer service is absolutely imperative

Looking Ahead

While Curtis has gone above and beyond in her short tenure with StorQuest Self Storage, she has her eye firmly on the future. Knowing that constantly keeping the facility in the public eye is a must, she already has marketing activities lined up at the starting line. She has a number of projects ready for the upcoming holidays, including being a collection center for the Toys for Tots and Coats for Colorado programs, and sponsoring the Colorado School of Dance Nutcracker Production. She also plans to contact local schools and churches to donate units, thus getting the name of the facility out into the community.

How do all of these activities fit into her exact game plan? With assurance Curtis says, "My occupancy goal is to have 80 percent of the facility full by the end of the year. With our current marketing strategies, we believe we can achieve this mark." ▣

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