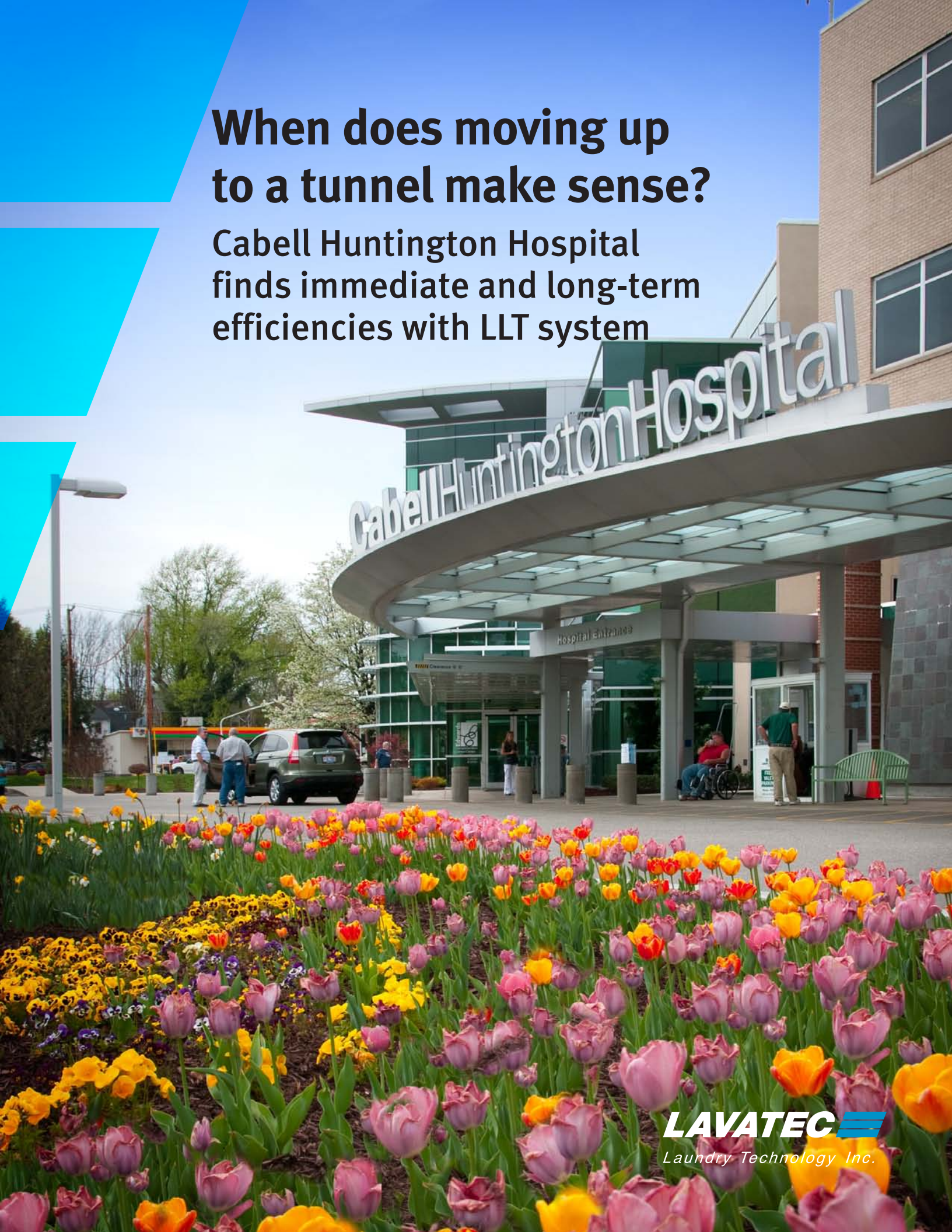


When does moving up to a tunnel make sense?

Cabell Huntington Hospital
finds immediate and long-term
efficiencies with LLT system





A 25-year industry veteran, Cabell Huntington Hospital Laundry Manager Mike Fry has spent most of those years observing the dependable performance of the facility's Lavatec tunnel washer, manufactured by Lavatec Laundry Technology (LLT).

Investing in new laundry equipment is never to be taken lightly, especially when it's a tunnel washer that can carry a hefty six- or seven-figure price tag before a single pound of goods is processed. This also emphasizes another prime consideration regarding your investment: long-term, you want to amortize those dollars over a good many years of dependable performance.

Cabell Huntington Hospital in Huntington, West Virginia, closely scrutinized these issues nearly 20 years ago, and continues to do so today when adding or replacing units in its Lavatec continuous tunnel system. According to Laundry Manager Mike Fry, officials at Cabell left no stone unturned, basing decisions on hard data along with simple logic in comparing various tunnel options with existing equipment and with each other.

Cabell installed ten 25-kilo (55-lb.) modules. The system from Lavatec Laundry Technology (LLT) was a giant compared to washers and dryers used to process the hospital's linens in 1993. More than that, it represented a giant step for Cabell into uncharted territory.

Current system vs. tunnel, and tunnel vs. tunnel

"Jim Coy, now retired, was Director of Materials Management and the person in charge of the investigation," Fry reveals. "He had no prior history with tunnel washers, but you won't find anyone more thorough than Mr. Coy. I worked with him for years and can tell you with certainty his analysis was built on hard numbers and real-user insights."

At that point in time, Fry said the Cabell laundry operation consisted of two, 450-lb. and one, 200-lb. washer extractors, two 200-lb. dryers and a 100-lb unit. They were plagued by frequent breakdowns, workflow was inconsistent and had occasional quality issues. Contrast this with the fully automated Lavatec tunnel system, which offers labor savings along with less potential for contamination.

"Once the laundry is loaded into the tunnel, it's not touched until it comes out of the dryers," Fry points out.

“This Lavatec tunnel was a wise investment. It’s paid for itself over and over and will probably outlast us all.”

Cabell Huntington Hospital Laundry Manager Mike Fry





Moving up from traditional washer extractors to this 10-module Lavatec “mini” tunnel system with 25-kg (55-lb) chambers has paid off many times over since its installation at Cabell Huntington Hospital in 1994.

Of course, Coy included water and utilities in his analysis. The old Cabell machines used about 3-1/2 to 4 gallons of water per pound of laundry, not unusual for units such as these but far more than was needed with a tunnel. Math results and other items were pointing toward a tunnel, and Coy looked at more than one manufacturer.

Hard numbers, user references drive choice

“Price was not the primary driver,” Fry asserts. “No doubt it was a factor, but once a tunnel became a viable option, Mr. Coy’s nature was to probe much deeper. He was a stickler for references. Anytime we were considering a significant purchase, he would ask if we checked the references. User comments regarding reliability and service were strong points with him.”

Comparative data on water and energy were key items.

“I don’t think other tunnels could generate utility savings like Lavatec counterflow machines,” Fry said, adding “Lavatec wa-

ter usage was probably lowest at the time. Our machine is rated at one gallon per pound of laundry, but actual flow is less. Some manufacturers today claim lower numbers, but other factors can negatively impact processing results.”

Cabell administrators approved Coy’s recommendation and the new Lavatec tunnel was installed. A Lavatec LP 551 water extraction press also moved in. Three TT-733 110-lb. dryers, soil loading conveyor, shuttle and dryer unload conveyors round out Cabell’s contingent of Lavatec equipment.

Immediate and ongoing savings, plus years of capital-free laundry expansion

Cabell started realizing overall laundry processing savings from the first day. Monthly statements soon showed major reductions in water usage and utilities, plus savings on chemicals. Fry says using less water also directly affects the facility’s municipal sewer discharge costs, as this is based on their monthly water intake.

Ninety percent of all hospital linens are processed through the tunnel system, which operates at least seven hours a day, six days a week, with a short shift on Sundays. Two standalone machines are used for items such as water resistant barrier gowns.

Fry also notes that “since I started working here, we have increased processing 44%. The tunnel system has allowed us to handle this growth without having to add hours or equipment. The tunnel is running at about 80%. We can still increase output if need be by adding a fourth dryer. We’ve grown with our facility over the years, with no incremental capital investment.”

‘Gentle giant’ helps extend linen life, enhances bacteria control

“Don’t let tunnel size and configuration, relative to washer extractors, fool you,” cautions Fry. A properly matched and programmed water extraction press preps goods for faster drying, which also results in less stress on fabrics while concurrently saving energy. Reduced chemical usage compared to Cabell’s previous washers is another way in which this tunnel is easier on linens.

However, the Lavatec tunnel, Fry contends, allows him to send goods through sharp pH changes to have final acceptable pH levels with no residual chemicals from the main wash zone. Dryer temperatures add a final bullet in the laundry’s process arsenal. “We’ve found many ways in which this system contributes to critical quality standards, daily operational efficiencies and overall facility savings.”

Number crunching brings new extraction press into 19-year tunnel system

Another plus designed into Lavatec-engineered tunnels is the ability to incorporate newer technology, as well as matchups with the latest system equipment. Case in point: like Jim Coy 20 years ago, Fry recently did a bit of data analysis relating to his press.

“Our original Lavatec extraction press was a real workhorse,” says Fry. Problem-preventing replacement of the hydraulic cylinder, however, would have necessitated moving the unit to another room, a major effort involving rental of special equipment that outweighed the benefits. “It made dollars and sense to get a new LP 560 Lavatec extraction press instead. Lavatec had the new unit operational in short order.”

The new 55-lb. press with faster cycle time capabilities arrived with life expectancy anticipated to exceed its predecessor’s.

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Cabell Huntington Hospital Laundry Manager Mike Fry

All in all, Fry asserts, the Lavatec tunnel “has been a phenomenal machine.” It requires very little maintenance. Lavatec “service has been spot-on” when needed; likewise, “no problems with parts over the years. I hope I don’t jinx myself by saying this, but I’ve never changed a drive motor on this tunnel - only some seals, timers and electrical contacts now and then - and no software issues, either.”

Having two drive motors with belts versus chains used in other tunnels is a huge routine maintenance plus. “I’ve never had roping or internal jamming with this machine,” adding they replaced drive wheels a couple of times in 19 years, “but it’s not a major job. You can do it in 3-4 hours on an evening shift.”

After 18 years observing Lavatec tunnel performance, Fry states emphatically: “If I were moving up to a tunnel or starting a commercial plant from scratch right now - with money out of my own pocket - you can bet I would install Lavatec equipment. There’s no doubt in my mind. This Lavatec tunnel was a wise investment. It’s paid for itself over and over and will probably outlast us all.”

About Lavatec Laundry Technology, Inc.

Delivering dependable commercial laundry equipment engineered for higher returns throughout their lifecycles has always been the Lavatec Laundry Technology (LLT) mission statement. A rarity among manufacturers of continuous tunnel washers, Lavatec LT offers center transfer, bottom transfer and double-drum construction options, plus a full range of readily integrated, end-to-end laundry system components: washer extractors, extraction presses, centrifuges, dryers, conveyor systems, pickers, feeders, ironers and folders. Simple design, durable construction, user-friendly operation and low maintenance are hallmarks of Lavatec LT machines. A global leader with equipment in laundry operations throughout Europe, the Far East, South and North America, in the United States alone, over 6,000 Load Warriors are in place. For additional information, visit www.LLTusa.com.

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