

More space, less time for custodians

New buildings test 'high efficiency' cleaning system

By Nick Tabor
Copy Editor

With the Grewcock Student Union adding 70,000 square feet to the campus total, Hillsdale College custodians and administrators are adjusting to a new cleaning schedule, which helps them keep campus clean without adding new employees.

Vicky Phetteplace, assistant superintendent of custodial services, said the college hired one new full-time employee and one part-time employee to accommodate the student union, adding to the approximately 40 custodians on staff. They also moved one veteran custodian from a part-time to a full-time position.

"We're assessing the building's needs, what each team member is doing, how long it takes to do that," she said.

Still, she said, the "high efficiency team

cleaning" system they implemented last spring will let them clean the student union effectively without adding many new employees or substantially increasing current staff workload.

But Denise Carr, who helps clean Kendall Hall, Lane Hall and The Mossey Library, said her custodian team struggles with time to finish their job thoroughly.

"You don't take pride in your buildings as much," she said.

"You don't have time to," her coworker Kim Suits added.

Though neither cleans Grewcock, their own schedules shifted when Grewcock opened on Jan. 17. They said the "high efficiency" process had already strained cleaning, but their tasks have become much harder during the past three weeks.

Since they're not allowed to work extra hours, Suits said, they often skip breaks to

complete work — and they still run out of time.

"I always said everybody should do this job for at least a week," Suits said.

Suits and Carr belong to a four-member team that occupies the third shift: 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Under the "high efficiency" system, three teams work during each shift, and each shift lasts for eight hours, Phetteplace said.

The previous system assigned each custodian to a single building, which he cleaned every day, she said.

She said team members rotate tasks every night: one person vacuums, one cleans restrooms, one dusts and empties trash and the fourth mops, scrubs and cleans windows.

Every night they detail a different floor of each building and perform basic spot cleaning on the other floors, she said.

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But Suits said custodians rarely have time for detailing — especially when a team member is sick. Since there are no substitute custodians, she said, the other team members are left with even more work.

Helen Wright and Lu Lehman, who clean the Roche Sports Complex, said they almost always finish their work — but a coworker's absence sometimes means a 12- or 13-hour day for the other team members.

“It’s more effective, but you get more fatigued,” Wright said of the “high-efficiency” system.

Still, she said, she doesn’t consider her workload unreasonable.

“It’s a busy job, but it’s a good job,” she said. “I think they’re fair with everyone.”

Vice President of Administration Rich Péwé said

the process will smooth over time.

“Anytime you open a new building you will have a transition period before they really get efficient,” he said in an e-mail to *The Collegian*. “We have to adjust to use schedules and such.”

Phetteplace agreed.

“Anytime there’s a change, there’s a challenge,” she said. “It takes a lot of communication and a lot of patience.”

Carr and Suits said they expect their workload to decrease as the weather gets warmer, since salt used for ice removal makes their job harder.

Senior Andrew Toppin said he tends to notice salt buildup in Kendall and Lane.

“[They] used to be cleaned everyday,” he said. “Now it looks like they just do it every now and then.” Péwé said students can also help decrease the custodians’ workload by taking care of buildings — cleaning up their spills, trying not to damage equipment.

“Try to take pride in it, and that would be great,” he said. “Just like you’re at home.”

Professor of Philosophy James Stephens, who worked as a custodian during his own college years, said almost no one on the campus appreciates custodians properly.

“Because they’re doing such a terrific job, nobody notices,” he said. “They have a lot of work assigned to each — more, I think, than any of us in the faculty or student body would want to do.”

Even if employee workload has increased, Stephens said, their performance has not waned.

“As far as I can see, standards haven’t dropped a bit here,” he said. “I would be surprised to find anything different in Lane and Kendall.”

Phetteplace said she always wants students and faculty to tell her if they see problems.

“We really try to serve the vision of Hillsdale College,” she said. “We’re proud of our department.”