



**AKAM On-Site** President Susan Fitch and Corporate Engineer Michael O'Hare were featured in an article about the importance of Building Superintendents and Chief Engineers that ran in the November 2013 issue of ***The South Florida Cooperator***.

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## SuperMen & SuperWomen!

Importance of Building Superintendents and Chief Engineers

By Lisa Iannucci

When corporate engineer Michael O'Hare of AKAM On-Site in Boca Raton arrives at work each morning, he first checks in with security for any possible situations that have come up during the night. He then reviews any outstanding work orders and walks the property, making sure that all of the building mechanicals—such as the cooling towers, boilers, pool, etc., are all running properly. If anything is wrong, he takes time to log in the problems. He then meets with his staff, divides the work orders for the daily and holds daily, weekly, and monthly meetings to follow up and make sure everything is running smoothly.

In the past, the responsibilities of a chief engineer or corporate engineer could have been described as 'it's a dirty job, but somebody has to do it.' O'Hare gets his hands dirty from time to time, but nothing compared to the way his job was 20 years ago. Think back to how chief engineers, also known as 'supers' or 'resident managers' in other parts of the country—were portrayed on television or in movies. They were the guys with the huge crowded key ring who were greased up and dirty from the repairs they made. Remember Schneider from "One Day at a Time?" He didn't really have authority to do more than basic repairs (although Schneider was a special case). Oh, how times have changed.

O'Hare started in the business more than 20 years ago as a facilities and maintenance manager at Calder Casino and Race Course in Miami Gardens. When he moved over to AKAM he was responsible for one property. Today, he is responsible for maintaining high-rise condominiums and property grounds, including all building systems, including elevators, fire alarms, fire pumps, sprinklers, emergency generators, electrical, domestic water, boilers, irrigation, HVAC systems and all associated equipment, swimming pools and Jacuzzis, gym equipment and health club amenities. He is also responsible for inspections and repairs as needed, working with vendors and hiring and training maintenance personnel.

Wendy Murray, CEO and president of Associa Gulf Coast in Fort Myers and Naples, says that her chief engineers, also known as operations managers, are responsible for facilities management and maintenance. "That means routine and

preventative maintenance, inspections and scheduling,” she says. “They see if there is unusual wear and tear on the building and discuss things with other engineers or contractors.”

Julio Chioldes was just recently promoted to regional chief engineer at Atlantic | Pacific Management in Bay Harbor Islands. Chioldes came to the job with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering and started his career in the hotel industry. He later became the assistant director of engineering in a hospital, where he says he performed detailed inspections on all the equipment. In 2008, he started as chief engineer at one of the properties and was then promoted in July.

“The first thing I do in my buildings is the same thing I would do as a chief engineer, which is perform an entire inspection of the property,” he says. “I create reports with all of the observations and recommendations.

He also has created a preventative maintenance program for each property and that includes daily, weekly, monthly and yearly inspections. “I take a lot of readings—temperatures and pressures, and make sure that every week we run the generator, sprinklers, etc.”

## Qualifications

Defining the perfect candidate for the job of a chief or corporate engineer is almost an impossible task, since every building is different, the kind of person they need will be different.

“It depends on the degree of skill set required by the building,” says Murray. “Typically they will demonstrate experience with maintenance and repairs and different facilities systems. Depending on the role in that building and the complicated systems, they may be required to have contracting or an HVAC license.”

In addition, Murray explains that someone interested in this line of work should have the ability to make decisions and supervise. “Again, it depends on the position, but some may have one maintenance tech underneath them and others may have five to 10,” she says.

Chioldes says that chief engineers need an eagle eye, too. “You need to be able to catch whatever problems there are before anyone else,” he says. “Walk the property every day and focus on details. Until the last detail is done, the job isn’t done.”

Chief engineers should also be able to adapt their personalities based on the situation, especially since they will encounter very strange or demanding situations. “In that field, they need the ability to interact with people,” says Murray. “They also need to be able to think in a highly stressful situation. Anything can happen with the systems, so you need ability to have a cool head, the ability to multitask, troubleshoot and, not only spot a problem, but propose a solution.”

“Several weeks ago while working in one of our buildings, I received a radio call from our on site management office that a resident said that water was dripping from her ceiling,” says O’Hare. “I asked our office to call the apartment above the leak and see if they were home and, if not, to have security bring the emergency keys for three units above the apartment that was experiencing water dripping from their ceiling.”

O’Hare went to the unit to investigate the leak and although the resident had already placed a container under one of the leaks, it was now leaking in several locations. O’Hare and the resident placed more containers to make sure the wood floor did not get damaged and called the assistant engineer to bring the shop vacuum to clean up any water on the floor.

“I ran up the stairs to the apartment above and knocked on the door,” he says. “I explained what was happening and the upstairs resident said that she knew she was not supposed to use the shower because there was a problem with that shower pan and that it was going to be repaired this week, but that she was just cleaning the shower.”

O’Hare explained to her that cleaning the shower was the same as using it, and there was water leaking into the unit below. “I am guessing that she thought for some reason that cleaning the shower was different from using it,” he says.

## Union or Not?

Florida chief engineers are either non-unionized or a member of 32BJ, the largest union of property service workers in the U.S, including janitors, property maintenance workers, doormen, security officers, window cleaners, building engineers, and school and food service workers. There are over 145,000 members of 32BJ. The 32BJ Training Fund, which is not a part of the union, is a joint labor-management partnership that offers training to eligible participants at no cost. According to 32BJ, they are concentrated in the Northeast—in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Northern Virginia, and Washington, D.C.—but the union’s reach extends to southern Florida.

“In most cases non-union workers get a better deal, but those are rare cases,” says Peter Grech, a resident manager in New York, who is also a member and Director of Education for Local 32BJ. “The majority of non-union makes a little less money than union employees, but the responsibilities are no different.”

## Getting Training

If someone wants to be a chief engineer, they often start their careers as a doorman or porter and work way up to being a chief engineer and the seminars and classes they can take accelerate their knowledge. “We offer several career tracks that pertain to certain job titles,” says Linda Nelson, the director of the 32BJ Thomas Shortman Training Fund in New York. “For example, we have superintendent/resident manager 1 and 2 career tracks and listings of course offerings that we recommend people take who want to become a super.”

Some companies also offer their own training. “Associa has training, safety meetings as well as lunch and learns,” says Murray. “We’ll bring in staff to teach them about certain areas, such as technical instructors to talk about different

building systems. We also partner with Associa Green to learn about such things as energy savings. We also have a resource e-library and Associa University to go to, and they have the ability to go into an online discussion room to post a question, for example, on coolant towers.”

Chirolde says that Atlantic | Pacific also has a quarterly chief engineers meeting. “The entire company meets and we talk about many things,” he says. “At the end of the sessions we are asked what we want to have taught at the next meeting.”

“For part of our onboarding process for new hires, AKAM doesn’t do contracts, but we do customary background checks and provide a formal job description and a comprehensive employee handbook,” says Susan Fitch, president of AKAM On-Site, Inc. in Florida. “In addition, we provide our own quarterly educational seminars, including elevator preventative maintenance, emergency procedures, updates, energy savings and more.”

O’Hare says that he reports to Fitch and Murray explains that her chief engineers report to the building manager. “We also visit properties and walk the grounds with the building engineer to do an evaluation,” she says. “Supervisors visit on a monthly basis and I visit on a quarterly basis. It’s like proofreading a paper for someone where there are more eyes on a paper and you can spot things that the other person might not have seen.”

Gone are the days of the Duane Schneider’s (“One Day at a Time”) and Nathan Bookman’s (“Good Times”) of the past. In today’s world, chief engineers have much more responsibility, including supervision of staff, reporting and other administrative duties. As one New York superintendent once said, “Gone are the days of the old janitor, tool pouch and key ring. Today, a resident manager only has three keys—one to the office, a master key for the apartments and a key to his own apartment.”

*Lisa Iannucci is a freelance writer and a frequent contributor to The South Florida Cooperator.*