



# *Algoma Mop Manufacturers:* **Where Employees Are The Real ‘Clients’**

By Harrell Kerkhoff | Broom, Brush & Mop Editor

**A** major goal of most successful companies is to provide quality products and service for customers, while also offering significant employment opportunities for people in need of a rewarding career. **Algoma Mop Manufacturers** has been meeting such objectives for decades, with company officials continually looking to expand products and services in an effort to provide an even brighter future.

The origin of the **Algoma, WI**, company dates to 1926, and was operated for years as a family business producing mop products.

A major shift occurred in 1981, when **East Shore Industries, Inc.**, a non-profit 501(C)3 corporation, purchased Algoma Mop. East Shore started in 1973 as the Kewaunee County (WI) Development Center. Its focus has been to provide needed services to people with disabilities in mainly rural Kewaunee County, located in northeastern Wisconsin.

The acquisition of Algoma Mop gave East Shore Industries a source of steady work and training opportunities for local people with disabilities. East Shore officials refer to those they serve as “clients.”

Today, Algoma Mop produces a full line of wet mops, in both looped end and cut end styles. They come in a variety of colors and standard weights — from 12 to 32 ounces — featuring narrow or wide center bands. The mops are often customized to customer specifications. The company also provides dust mops, microfiber mopping pads and cleaning cloths, mop

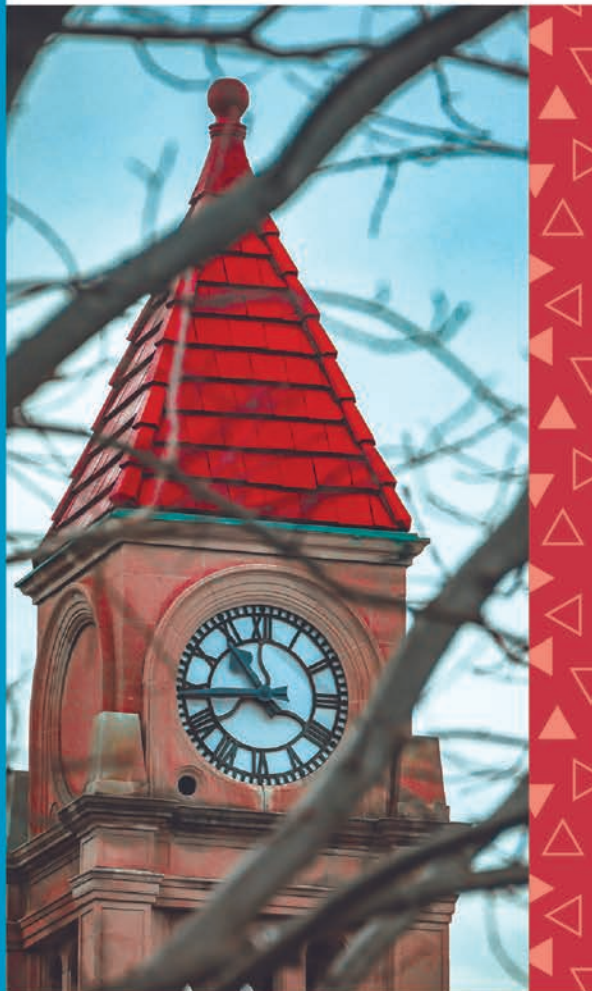
hardware, handles, frames and a growing list of other cleaning-related items.

“The relationship between East Shore Industries and Algoma Mop Manufacturers has worked out very well. It has given East Shore a means of continuous training and employment opportunities for its clients, while providing Algoma Mop a way to continually grow its business. That



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*Shown, left to right, are Allan Wartella, director of sales at Algoma Mop Manufacturers; Tracy Nelson, CEO of East Shore Industries, Inc.; Barb Heiges, production supervisor at Algoma Mop; and Jeff Espe, director of manufacturing at East Shore.*

includes an added product line to meet growing demands within the janitorial sector,” **Algoma Mop Manufacturers Director of Sales Allan Wartella** said.

Algoma Mop serves an array of customers, including those who represent public schools and municipalities, colleges/universities, restaurants, medical facilities and janitorial cleaning services.

“We also serve as a supply vendor to various wholesalers and distributors of cleaning and janitorial items. Most of their customers have remained loyal users of our products for decades,” Wartella said. “Many of the wholesalers and distributors we work with attribute part of their continued success to the consistent quality and service we provide. At Algoma Mop, no matter how small or large an order might be, everyone is given the same first-rate service. We know there are many other places for customers to procure janitorial supplies. Therefore, we at Algoma Mop, do our best to help customers, including wholesalers and distributors, retain their own customer base.”

The wholesalers and distributors that Algoma Mop works with are regionally-based, while many of the end-user customers of those companies are scattered throughout the United States.

Wartella reiterated that no matter the customer type, representatives of Algoma Mop strive to provide first-rate service in an ever-competitive business climate.





Allan Wartella, director of sales at Algoma Mop

"You never know what a customer might need. That person may be calling to inquire about the purchase of a dozen dust mops, but it could turn into something much larger — and on a more consistent basis," Wartella said. "Therefore, no matter the size of an order, it's important to provide the same level of service that we would give large orders. It's about growing relationships."

"One of the reasons we have added to our product line is to make it easier for customers to find what they need, while allowing us to become more of a one-stop source. We also work with many manufacturers and distributorships, allowing us to become the 'eyes and feet' for our customers. That helps them track down products they need, but might not be able to find. The idea is to become the go-to-source for people who are looking for additional janitorial products."

"We want the name Algoma Mop to 'pop up' in the minds of customers when they are seeking cleaning-related products and answers. We realize there is more to janitorial supplies than just mops. Our customers are purchasing other products needed to run a business. Therefore, it's important to help them fill those additional needs."

The recently expanded product line at Algoma Mop now features various types of brushes, brooms, sponges and other janitorial wares.

"It also now includes shank-free, jail-safe cleaning items, following requests for such products from correctional facilities," Wartella said. "In the past, Algoma Mop was like an office supply store that only sold staples and paper clips. The scope of our business was very narrow in the field of janitorial cleaning. That has changed. Today, when a customer calls looking for a product, rather



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**“Algoma Mop is a hands-on business. There is no automated production line. Each mop is handled multiple times, by multiple clients, before being packaged and shipped. Our clients have a good eye for the quality standards that are associated with Algoma Mop.”**

than saying, ‘No, we don’t have that available,’ I will respond, ‘Let me see what I can find for you.’

“As a company, it’s important to be as competitive as possible. That means helping customers, especially when it involves finding the cleaning products they desire. By doing that, the customer knows he/she can count on us to perform the needed legwork.”

Many of the top selling items that Algoma Mop manufactures are warehoused at the Algoma facility. For large orders, production starts at the time an order is placed. Turn-around times often range from a few days to a few weeks.

“A lot of our smaller-quantity orders are shipped using UPS,” Wartella said. “We also have LTL (less-than-truckload) shipments, often involving one to six pallets of products.”

In addition to Algoma Mop, East Shore Industries also has a production area manned by clients in the same facility. It is here that light manufacturing, assembly, sorting and packaging takes place. That involves such items as construction materials, parts for electrical appliances, bird feed supplies, hammocks and masonry weep vents.

east of them, thus the name “East Shore.” Indeed, the facility is within walking distance of the second-largest (by volume) of the five Great Lakes. Algoma is 32 miles northeast of Green Bay, WI, and considered part of the Green Bay Metropolitan Statistical Area. Algoma is also located just south of Door County, WI, a popular Upper Midwestern vacation destination.

“Being located in the same building, there has developed a real sense of comradery among the staff members and clients of East Shore and Algoma Mop. It really makes for an enjoyable place for clients to be employed, while also receiving the added services provided by East Shore, which are catered to each client’s individual needs,” Wartella said. “Our building is a modern, one-level facility. The interior is specifically designed to best serve the needs of our clients. The facility itself is fresh, bright and current.

“We continue to update and modify workstations to keep them safe and functional for our clients, as they have different needs and requirements. That has always been a high priority, not just since the COVID pandemic. We are always working to keep everything as safe as possible, including the installation of extra guards and barriers. Safety and worker-friendliness are both essential.”

Wartella added that East Shore and Algoma Mop share the same mission statement: “*Assisting individuals with disabilities in obtaining their personal independence and employment goals.*”

**“Our mission is to not just make great products, but to better the lives of our clients.”**

## ‘CLIENTS’ MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

**E**ast Shore and Algoma Mop operate in the same facility in Algoma, a city of approximately 3,000 residents, found on the western shore of Lake Michigan. To most area people, the lake shore is located

“It’s important to us, at East Shore and Algoma Mop, that our customers know about the mission (of both entities.) We also hope our customers feel that by doing business with us, they will not only be receiving quality products, but can become part of that mission focus as well,” Wartella said. “We want our customers to know that we are more than just a mop



*Clients of East Shore Industries play a critical role in producing high-quality products for Algoma Mop Manufacturers.*



manufacturer. We are providing services and employment opportunities to the clients we serve.”

Prior to COVID-19, an average of 20 to 25 clients worked at Algoma Mop throughout the year. Those numbers are currently down, due to adjustments that had to be made since the start of the pandemic.

“Even before COVID, not every client we serve works Monday through Friday. Schedules vary, and they may work just two or three days per week,” Wartella said.

Under the umbrella of East Shore Industries, there are approximately 80 clients, some of whom work in the public sector, outside of the East Shore and Algoma Mop facility. At Algoma Mop, clients learn, and hone in on, skills associated with mop manufacturing. That involves a variety of workstations throughout the mop production process.

“Algoma Mop is a hands-on business. There is no automated production line. Each mop is handled multiple times, by multiple clients, before being packaged and shipped. Our clients have a good eye for the quality standards that are associated with Algoma Mop. By having the mops seen, and touched, throughout the process, we feel that ensures a high quality product is being



produced, for the benefit of both customers and end-users,” Wartella said. “The whole idea of East Shore Industries purchasing Algoma Mop years ago was to give the clients we serve a means of employment on a continuous basis. If we went to an automated production line, we would be doing our clients a disservice.

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“Our mission is to not just make great products, but to better the lives of our clients. Therefore, we want to incorporate as much client involvement in the manufacturing process as possible. That is our entire purpose and why we are here. If we were to discontinue the manufacturing of mops, and just brought in products from other places and simply resold them, it would have no meaning to our company’s mission of helping clients. We continue to look at ways to add to our mop manufacturing side of the business, helping to build Algoma Mop and keep our clients busy well into the future.”

Wartella said that clients working at Algoma Mop truly enjoy what they do as mop producers.

“If things slow down, they let me know. They like to be kept busy,” he said. “If production does slow, we will move clients around in order to complete other tasks. Many clients working at Algoma Mop, however, prefer to remain in mop production. They also like to know where the mops they are making are heading, especially if the products are for a new customer or new location. We make sure to keep our clients informed.”

Wartella added: “Being located in an area of the country that has more cows than people may seem like an odd place to be manufacturing mops, but East Shore chose to be a part of this community due to the need for the services it provides to clients. Algoma Mop is also here just as much for the clients its serves as for its customers.

“Our location in Algoma has not hindered the business from selling products throughout the United States, and even shipping orders to Canada and Europe. The Internet has helped, allowing more people to find us. In response, we do our best to service both new, and established, accounts in an effort to build long-standing relationships.”

## LIVING AND WORKING DURING A PANDEMIC

**A**long with just about every other company on the planet, adjustments have had to be made at Algoma Mop and East Shore since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Above all else, the health of clients and staff has taken top priority, according to Wartella.

“We did shut down in March, as only staff members were allowed in the facility for a few weeks, doing so on a rotating basis to reduce the number of people in the building. We then started slowly bringing clients back to the facility. There are a few clients who haven’t come back yet, but virtual services are available so those people can continue interaction with East Shore and Algoma Mop,” he said. “As clients started coming back, we had to keep social distancing in mind, including at the workstations. It continues to be very important that we wisely utilize space, which often involves spreading things out.

“Plexiglass dividers have also been installed in our break room, allowing people to be properly spaced. In our facility, there are, what we refer to as the ‘East Side’ and ‘West Side’ areas. Those are places where our clients have special programs and daily activities. Some of the clients eat in their own spaces, rather than coming into the break room like they used to do, prior to the pandemic.”

Other steps implemented to keep clients and staff healthy and safe include: the wearing of face masks and continually sanitizing surfaces.

“Buses and vans are used to pick up and drop off many of our clients. Their temperatures are taken before they board those vehicles,” Wartella said. “Fortunately, most of our staff and clients have managed to stay clear of COVID. There have been some people affected, but nothing has been devastating. Despite the many changes put into place since the beginning of the pandemic, I believe there is a new sense of normalcy for our clients and staff.”

Wartella said there has been a drop in business at Algoma Mop since the start of the pandemic. Hopefully, he added, the trend will end soon.

“When the pandemic started, and everybody was very concerned about cleaning and sanitizing, I was expecting to receive many calls from people requesting our products, but that really didn’t happen. The problem is, a lot of the customers we provide products to are in charge of cleaning, or supplying, public schools, universities and other away-from-home facilities — places that have been closed, or partially shut down, for long periods of time due to the pandemic. Therefore, such places have required fewer cleaning items. As a result, Algoma Mop is down approximately 25 percent in sales for the year,” he said. “Fortunately,





**“We don’t build obsolescence into our mops. We want them to last as long as possible.”**

East Shore is involved in the assembly, packaging and labelling of various products for other manufacturers in our area. That has helped the overall picture, as far as business is concerned.”

Clients at Algoma Mop are cross-trained to work in the East Shore production area, which has helped them stay busy throughout the past year.

“When we do have some light moments in mop production, we are still able to utilize our clients in different ways,” Wartella said.

## THE FINE ART OF MOP MAKING

**L**ike many people involved in business, officials at Algoma Mop and East Shore are trying to figure out what type of year 2021 will be in terms of both safety and business activity.

“As we enter 2021, there is still a lot of uncertainty. However, we are proceeding with optimism, waiting and hoping for a return to some sense of normalcy,” Wartella said. “When it comes to business, as I stated before, the need to take proper care of customers never changes. That includes focusing on their changing needs. We feel Algoma Mop is great at what it does when it comes to manufacturing mops. However, there are customers who are always asking for more, which means we are willing to work with other manufacturers/suppliers to better fulfill those needs.

“Algoma Mop has the ability to provide custom-made items at its facility, as well as meet other customer requests. Many customers appreciate knowing that they can contact us to take proper care of them, when it comes to janitorial supplies.”

All raw materials used in the production of mops manufactured by Algoma are sourced in North America. Suppliers are selected based on quality and consistency.

“Despite the pandemic, we have not experienced any major delays in obtaining raw materials,” Wartella said. “That includes mop yarn and handles. There was a little delay in receiving mesh material, but that could have happened in any year.

“There have been no major raw material issues to disrupt our production flow, which is fortunate.”

Wartella discussed further the type of materials used to make the company’s mop products.

“We use various yarns, depending on the type of mop being manufactured. The threads (in those yarns) are very

durable. In a lot of ways, thread is like a mop head’s nerve system. It holds everything together. We use high quality threads that can withstand many wash cycles, without falling apart,” he explained. “There is also the mesh, which serves as the center band of our mops. It’s PVC-coated and comes in different colors. Another item is the fantail, placed at the bottom of looped end mops, to keep the yarn properly spread out during the actual mopping process.”

He noted that many customers like the fact that the company’s mops are made in the U.S.A.

“It’s no secret that there are numerous imported mops available, and at lower costs. However, we are proud that the mops produced at Algoma are constructed to last. Our launderable mops will last longer, allowing for a better cost-per-use, which benefits customers. We try to make sure current and potential customers understand that importance,” Wartella said. “We don’t build obsolescence into our mops. We want them to last as long as possible. I have called on customers I haven’t heard from for some time, thinking that they went elsewhere for their products. Instead, I found out they simply had not run out of our last shipment of mops.”

At Algoma Mop, officials concentrate on emails, phone calls and quickly replying to inquiries. The company’s website is also being updated to include newly-added products.

“Trying to get noticed on the internet is a major hurdle for many small companies. Larger businesses will always beat us on page placement as potential customers web search for mops. In order to compete, we work to quickly connect with potential accounts, and when we do connect, make it count,” Wartella said. “Taking care of existing customers is the easy part, finding and reaching potential customers is the hardest task.

**“Taking care of existing customers is the easy part, finding and reaching potential customers is the hardest task.”**

“When a first-time customer contacts us, obviously there is a need. They have contacted us for something janitorial-related. Therefore, we are going to do our best to serve that need,” Wartella said. “Looking at 2021, we will continue to move forward in hopes that the world gets back to normal as the year progresses. We will also spread the news that our newly added products are available, as well as contact new and long-existing accounts in an effort to restore sales to pre-pandemic levels. Algoma Mop is capable of adding production, as it pertains to mop manufacturing, in an effort to handle new business. We remain optimistic about the coming year and moving forward on the road to recovery for everyone.

**“Providing a consistent product, with on-time service, remains a must.”**

“It will be important to keep people aware of any changes as they are happening at Algoma Mop, and hopefully grow due to those changes. Providing a consistent product, with on-time service, also remains a must.”

Wartella has been at East Shore/Algoma Mop for nearly 10 years, and said he greatly enjoys the work.

“I am kind of the ‘chief cook and bottle washer.’ I take care of sales and order entry. We also have a production manager who oversees the completion of orders,” Wartella said. “Prior to my employment here, I was involved in work that centered on building materials, including lumber and cabinetry. It has been a real pleasure (to work at East Shore/Algoma Mop). The staff and clients are very family-oriented, work schedules are flexible and it’s nice to be employed at a place where you enjoy coming to in the morning.

“In addition, knowing that we are helping people who need some assistance provides a real sense of pride. It always feels good to help other people.”

## WHEN HOLLYWOOD CAME CALLING

**T**he movie *JOY*, which opened in theaters in 2015, was a major film release featuring Jennifer Lawrence, as Joy Mangano, an inventor and entrepreneur of such products as the self-wringing Miracle Mop. For her portrayal of Mangano, Lawrence was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress. The film also featured such major stars as Bradley Cooper and Robert De Niro, and, by the way, mops and other items from East Shore/Algoma Mop.

“I received a call one day from a lady who was looking for some mops, wanting to know if we could make them for a movie set she was working on,” Wartella said. “I figured it was for some kind of documentary. I had no idea it was for a major Hollywood release.”

For the movie, Algoma Mop not only provided over 500 mops in various stages of production, but also large bales of yarn and metal-fabricated, hand-operated, mop looping workstations. Algoma Mop also contracted with Olson Fabrication, Inc., of Algoma, to create parts used in the production of machines seen in the film.

Scrap yarn and cotton dust bunnies were sent as well, to get the full effect of a mop manufacturing floor.

“That was a fun moment for our clients and staff, to be part of a Hollywood movie project,” Wartella said. “East Shore/Algoma Mop received a lot of publicity, such as from *USA Today* and TV stations throughout Wisconsin.

“We still have a big *JOY* movie poster hanging in our production area, as a souvenir.”

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