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HIDDEN CHICAGO ON THE SCAFFOLDS

Hard job, nice view

Meet the bravest—and surely the coldest—workers in Chicago

BY SARAH A. KLEIN

Finding people willing to scale a 100-story building to clean its windows isn't like advertising for a good housekeeper. It takes a certain amount of nerve, an almost genetic indifference to heights.

"We're lucky that we have a lot of families in our business: uncles, fathers, sons," says Neal Zucker, 39, president and CEO of Corporate Cleaning Services Inc., a Chicago-based window-washing company that specializes in high-rise buildings.

To hold onto the staff it has, Corporate Cleaning Services pays experienced washers \$16 an hour and offers health and pension benefits. That keeps turnover low and allows Mr. Zucker to focus on another problem in a city of skyscrapers: the weather.

"Below 30 degrees, it gets to be a challenge," Mr. Zucker says. Adding methanol to the cleaning solution keeps the water from freezing, but not the employees. On

AND YOU THINK YOUR OFFICE IS TOUGH

No. of windows at some Corporate Cleaning projects		
Harbor Point Condominium	John Hancock Center	Thompson Center
6,996	11,459	24,600



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Corporate Cleaning window washer at 35 E. Wacker.

those colder days, he assigns them work indoors or on low-rise buildings—those with fewer than 15 floors. When it warms up, they go back up.

"We wear scuba diving gloves," says Juan Saavedra, a Corporate Cleaning supervisor, who has been washing windows for 35 years.

"You feel it mostly in your feet."

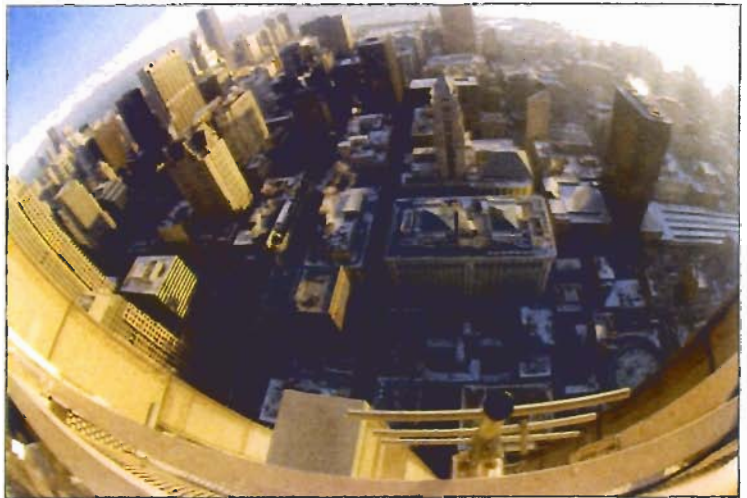
Offsetting the chill are the spectacular vistas. From outside a skyscraper, the view of the city "is extremely beautiful," Mr. Saavedra says. The view inside can be a little stranger. He and his crew have seen scores of naked people.

"You get a little embarrassed," Mr. Saavedra says. "Some people hide, but some don't even notice us."

There is plenty of time to see it all—for example, it can take as long as month to clean all 11,459 windows on the John Hancock Center. Building workers and residents are almost always friendly. "They usually wave," Mr. Saavedra says.

And fortunately, there are plenty of buildings at low heights. Among its clients, Corporate Cleaning has hospitals, hotels, shopping centers and universities. "Everything has a window," Mr. Zucker says. It was an observation he made 12 years ago, when, as a recent MBA grad from the Kellogg School of Management, he was living and working in a high-rise and looking for an entrepreneurial venture.

Washing windows proved to be a good one. Depending on the number of windows, the design of the building and the requirements of the job, annual maintenance and



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The view from 311 W. Wacker, on a Corporate Cleaning Services Inc. scaffold.

cleaning fees range from \$300 to \$150,000, he says. The window washers also pull weeds, get rid of spiders, replace caulking and remove screens, among other things. "Most people don't think about all the little stuff our guys do," Mr. Zucker says.

"The perception is that it's risky," he says of the work. To avoid an accident, everything is strapped down. "We bungee all of our equipment, from the squeegees to the brushes," he says. Window washers' cell phones are also tethered, along with the window washers themselves. "Safety is our No. 1 priority," he says.



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