



THE ROOF CLEANING INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

How Chris Tucker's Vision is Raising the Roof Cleaning Standard

by Allison Hester, Editor

Chris Tucker, owner of Apple Roof Cleaning in Tampa, Florida, has spent 20 years helping contractors not only learn about proper roof cleaning, but helping them become successful business owners as well.

As founder of the Roof Cleaning Institute of America (RCIA), Tucker has not only helped train hundreds of contractors, he's managed to run a successful roof cleaning business in one of the most competitive markets in the industry.

"When people learn from me, they're learning from someone still in business who is out there cleaning roofs every day and surviving," he explained. Actually, Apple Roof Cleaning is doing more than surviving; it's been honored locally as the Chamber of Commerce's business of the year. And Tucker has become recognized nationally through the RCIA and other groups as a top non-pressure roof cleaning industry information source.

20 Years of Trial and Error

"I've never had anyone who became a successful roof cleaner go back to pressure washing," said Tucker. "Roof cleaning is where the money is. The modern equipment is so fast. Sometimes the hardest thing is trying to act busy in front of the homeowner."

Roof cleaning was not always as efficient as it is today, however. In fact, when Tucker began in the roof cleaning industry 20 years ago in Seattle, Washington, there were no pumps. Instead, he would roll chlorine on the roof with a paint roller.

Moving back to Tampa, Florida, Tucker said he saw a pressure washing contractor making \$400 a roof in his neighborhood, but knew that method was damaging the shingles. He decided to get back into roof cleaning, using his "Apple Stick" – a stucco roller and a bucket or chlorine and water mix. "After losing all the hair on my legs and getting a good sunburn, I decided to investigate pumps instead."

Tucker then went to a local agricultural store, where he purchased a small Sureflo pump that produced 1.5 gpm and 100 psi. "They were slower than molasses in January, but faster than my roller." As Apple Roof Cleaning grew and Tucker was cleaning

eight to 10 roofs a day, six days a week, he found he quickly burned through those little pumps.

Next he moved to a roller pump, which worked "great" for about two weeks. "We'd buy a case of them – 24 pumps at \$80 each – then when they went bad, we'd just throw them away."

In looking for better, more efficient cleaning methods, he found that in those days, few contractors cleaned roofs, and even fewer would share information on how they did it. Tucker felt that was not only unnecessary, but also damaging to the professional roof cleaning industry. Instead, he began sharing his knowledge via the newly-developed Internet. Through Delco's bulletin board, Tucker became known as the industry's roof cleaning guru as he helped contractors from across the country,



always sharing his knowledge for free.

After the Delco board demised, Tucker moved his instruction to other industry boards, but he met some resistance. “My ideas were different from the accepted wisdom at that time,” he explained. Specifically, many people talked about using small pumps, small hoses and strong solutions. “I taught the opposite: big pumps, big hoses, big tanks, and using solutions that didn’t damage plants. My ideas that were challenged back then are now accepted as the norm.”

Starting the RCIA

About five years ago, Tucker decided it was time to not only start his own forum, but to begin certifying contractors “to bring a level of professionalism to the industry.” Tucker, who has “always had a following,” said the RCIA has around 450 paid members, and has certified around 200 contractors. Also, approximately 3,000 industry members have registered with the forum.

Anyone can join the forum for free. The cost of RCIA membership is \$100 annually, and includes the use of the RCIA logo on websites and vehicles and access to the members-only portion of the forum. “The guys wanted a private forum area where they could share secrets without everyone being able to see them,” he explained. Members are also required to adhere to a 50-point standard that includes areas of professionalism, equipment, chemicals, safety and education.

Members also are allowed to make promotional posts about their businesses, which benefits them in the search engines, as the RCIA site is “a search engine magnet for all things roof cleaning.” Tucker adds that “some members don’t even have their own websites. They just use our forum to draw customers.”

To qualify for RCIA certification, companies must have at least 100 “legitimate” posts to the forum, complete video training, and pass a verbal test that is administered by Tucker himself. The cost for certification is \$250, and those who pass are given a certification logo and certificates that they can use in their marketing. “The important part of certification is that it builds trust with the customer,” Tucker adds. “It’s something contractors



Larry Millette, Bill Booz, Mike Hockman and Chris Tucker during NCE East in Tampa.

can use to separate themselves from their competitors.”

A Labor of Love

For those thinking Tucker started the RCIA as a way to

get rich, he assured me he makes more in a month from his roof-cleaning business than he does in a year through RCIA. “My son tells me all the time that if I spent half as much time on our roof cleaning business as I do on the RCIA, we’d have it made.” Additionally, he was never paid for his help on the Delco or other industry boards.

Because Tucker does own a roof cleaning business, he is always researching new products and technologies that can help him with his own company, as well as that he can pass along to his RCIA members. He is also working with a PhD in Phycomyology – i.e., the study of algae – and continuously studies patents in roof cleaning technology. “I try to interface with experts on a technical basis, then teach contractors in a way that everyone can understand.”

As a result, Tucker has helped hundreds of contractors over the past 20 years, and he’s built a “brotherhood” through the RCIA. “We are a forum, but we’re like a family. We help each other. We have little secrets we share only among our brothers. There’s something amazing about being part of an organization that’s growing by leaps and bounds.”

To learn more about the RCIA, go to www.Roof-Cleaning-Institute.ActiveBoard.com.

