

Results

OSU received its special runs in July 2010. Delivery to the research site north of Anchorage went smoothly, as did the OSU's installations of the runs. Mason's kennels are purposefully designed – even the unique ones – to be easy to set up.

The runs have performed as promised, even under the harsh conditions of the environmental chambers. They have also met their expectation of being easy to disassemble for cleaning, and their components can frequently be seen in the back of pick-up trucks going through car washes in the northern suburbs of Anchorage. Best of all, the runs also came in on budget.

"Runs work great, no complaints," Dr. Davis said. Vinyl coating on the floors has held up in the single digit temps without any cracking so far, and they are easy enough to clean that we use them to store all our equipment between studies."



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Designing and Building Unique Features for Clients



*Specialized Kennels for
Research in Alaska*





Background

Oklahoma State University (“OSU”) is a leading research institution whose department of Physiological Sciences is studying how sled dogs can perform their incredible feats of endurance. OSU has developed a research facility north of Anchorage, Alaska where an environmental chamber is used to study and measure dogs’ metabolic reaction to exercise and climate change. In particular, how a sled dog’s metabolism differs from ours, and its implications for human afflictions such as obesity and type-2 diabetes.

To adequately conduct its studies, OSU needed to identify a kennel manufacturer able to design and build the specialized kennel systems required for its research and the unique constraints of its location.

Dr. Michael Davis is the Director of the Comparative Physiology Laboratory at OSU’s Center for Veterinary

Health Services and the professor in charge of the research. In 2000, Dr. Davis was selected by the Alaska’s famed Iditarod race committee to help improve the health and wellbeing of the race’s sled dogs (primarily Siberian Huskies). Dr. Davis became interested in how sled dogs can exert themselves at such high levels for such extended periods of time yet recover so quickly – the Iditarod typically takes 8-10 straight days of incredible exertion with only a few hours each night to rest and recuperate. It is equivalent to humans running a marathon every day for a week. We can certainly run one marathon, but need considerable recovery time before attempting another. Sled dogs muscles and cellular metabolism are unusual and have developed unique physiological differences that warrant studying for the benefits it may hold for various human diseases.

Challenge

To perform their studies, Dr. Davis and his colleagues developed a set of requirements for the kennels at the site in Alaska. The specifications were demanding. The equipment Mason Company needed to be especially durable because the environmental chamber would have temperatures down to -20 degrees Fahrenheit for up to 96 straight hours in order to replicate the Alaskan winter. The kennel runs also needed to be space efficient because the chamber is of limited size. They needed removable trays for collecting and cleaning waste. The entire run also had to be quickly disassembled for cleaning because the environmental chamber did not have running water. Instead of using hoses to clean the runs, OSU developed a strategy to clean the kennels by taking them apart and running them through a car wash in a nearby town.

After developing the outline of what they needed for the kennels, an OSU team member visited an animal care trade show to walk the exhibit hall, visit with various kennel manufacturers and acquire a feel for their products and services. The goal was to identify a design and manufacturing partner who could – and would – work with OSU to solve their unique needs. Several kennel manufacturers at the trade show responded that they were interested, exchanged business cards and promised to follow up. Upon returning from the trade show OSU contacted the various manufacturers to begin the process of designing and quoting the equipment. Mason Company was the only firm to respond.

“I expect good customer service and I wasn’t getting it when I was waving a check,” said Dr. Davis. “It made me wonder what the customer service would be like if something ever went wrong down the road.”



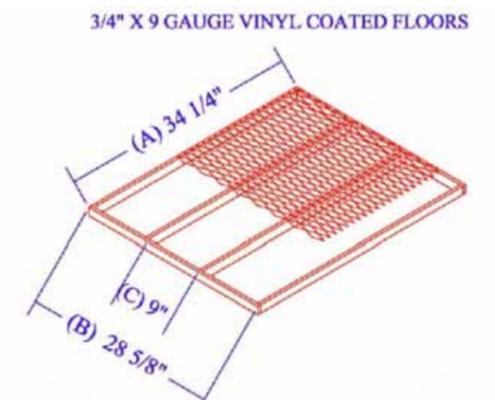
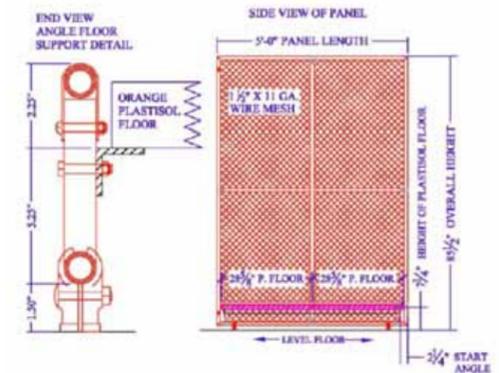
Solution

Mason’s sales consultants followed up on OSU’s request for design and quoting help, and spent some time on the phone with them to understand the unique needs of the research facility and the constraints of the environmental chamber. Mason’s engineering department subsequently became involved and began developing ideas on how to meet the specifications. Interestingly, the first few design ideas were ultimately discarded, and it was only through an iterative process of trial and error that the final working model was established. It was a collaborative partnership, and the result was better than if Mason had simply pushed an off-the-shelf or a “good enough” solution rather than investing the time and effort to develop the correct one.

Mason was able to invest the time and effort with OSU because of Mason’s unique ability to develop custom equipment. Mason manufactures everything in the United States; it does not import equipment from Asia. Its highly trained and experienced workforce can obviously make runs in standard sizes and with standard features, but can also manufacture unique or highly specialized equipment. Mason’s philosophy is that kennel runs should fit a facilities footprint and constraints – not the other way around.

Due to its unique manufacturing capability, Mason also has the culture and customer service to handle customized requests. As Dr. Davis experienced, anyone can promise to provide excellent service while promoting at a trade show. The question is how the firm will respond after the show.

“Mason’s people and its products exceed my expectations. From the start, Mason had wonderful customer service and demonstrated real follow through. They treated us like we were the biggest order of the year. They also showed patience and ingenuity as we worked our way towards a final design. The runs have performed great,” Dr. Davis said.



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– Dr. Davis