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# PSN

POOL AND SPA NEWS

**Close Up:  
Vinyl-Liner Pool  
Renovations**

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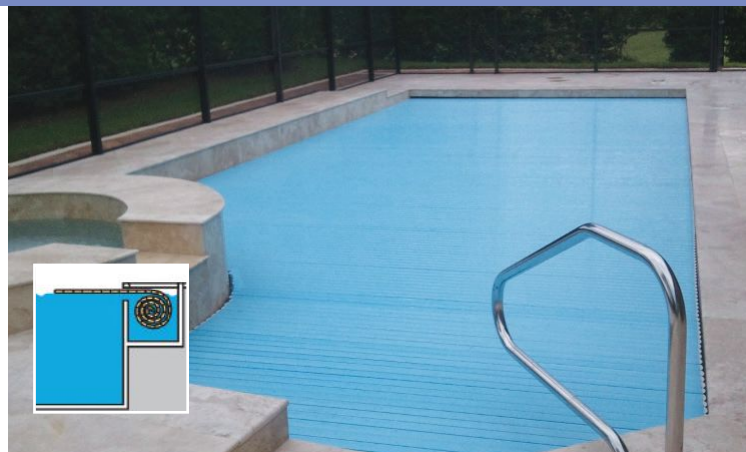
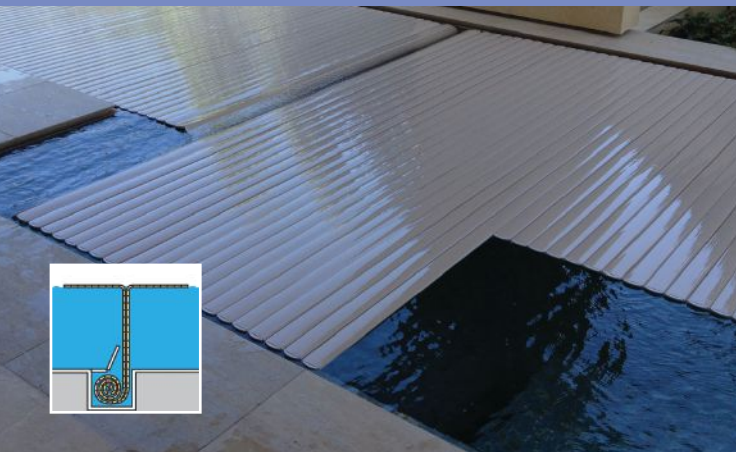


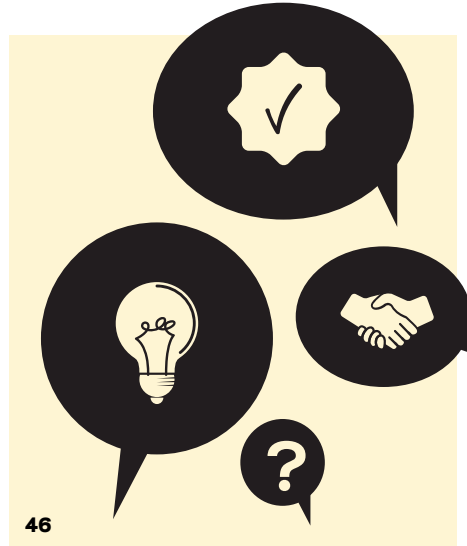
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**EDITORIAL**

**JOANNE McCLAIN** Editor-in-Chief  
jmccain@zondahome.com  
**REBECCA ROBLEDO** Deputy Editor  
rrobledo@zondahome.com

**SALES**

**GARY CARR** Director, Strategic Accounts  
gcarr@zondahome.com  
**LISA HEITNER** Director, Strategic Accounts  
lheitner@zondahome.com

**ART**

**CAROLYN SEWELL** Design Director, Media  
**MELISSA KROCHMAL** Graphic Designer



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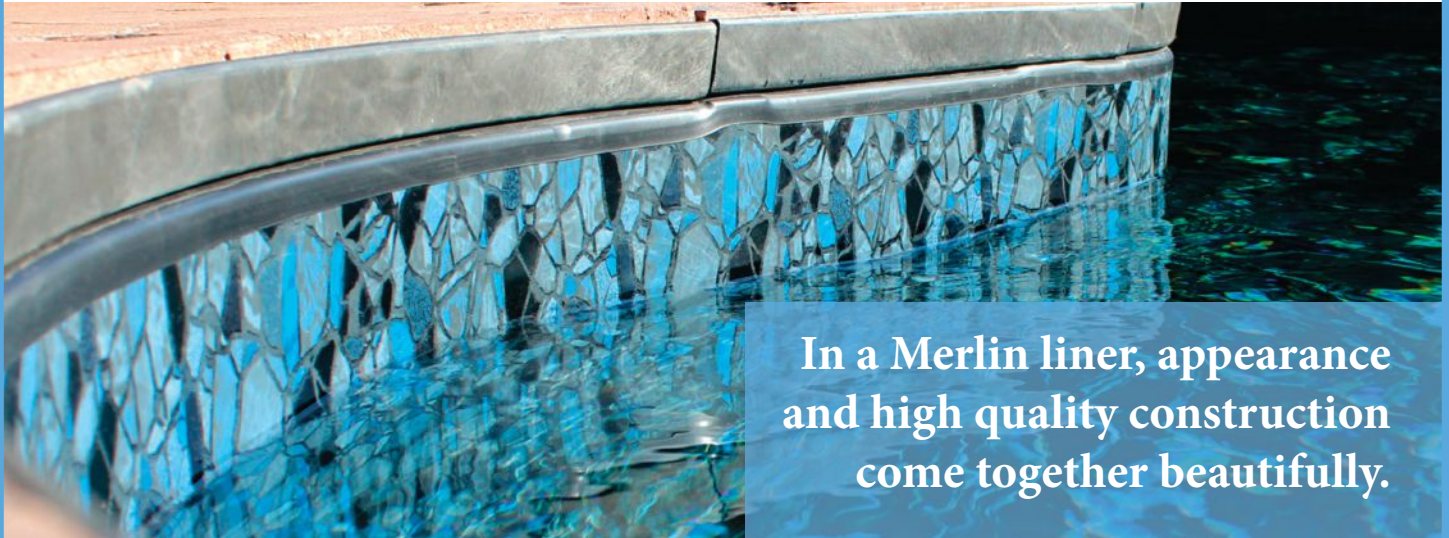
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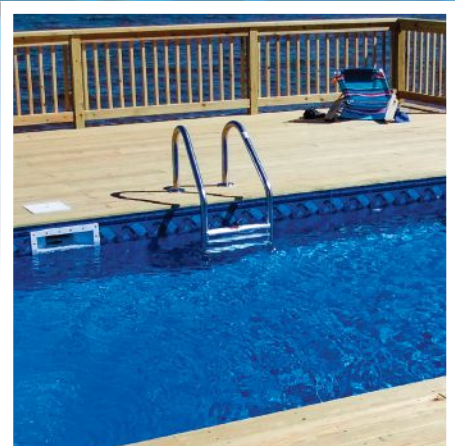
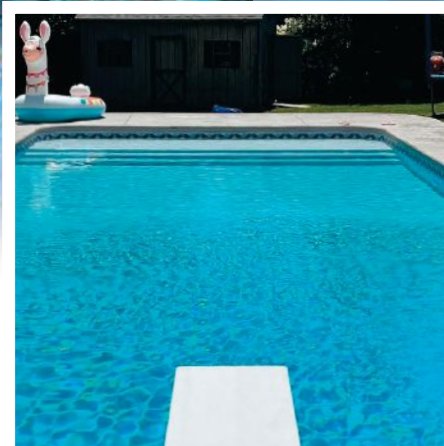
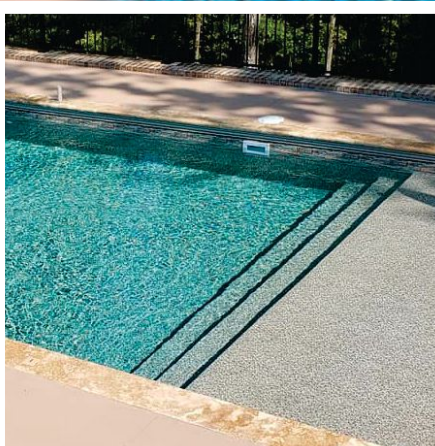
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# Do You Understand Noonchi? You'd Better.



**Joanne McClain**  
Editor-in-Chief, PSN

**I love untranslatable words.** I delight in learning new terms from other languages and cultures that perfectly describe the human experience in ways that simply don't exist in English.

My first experience with an untranslatable word came from Korean, my mother tongue. The term was “noonchi” and, when wanting to use it in a conversation with a non-Korean friend, I came up blank for its English equivalent. It was such a basic, everyday concept to me that I was certain there had to be a word for it in English — I simply must not have encountered it before. I wound up describing the term to the continued puzzlement of my non-Korean friend, which is when I realized that it had to be a uniquely Korean concept.

Simply put, noonchi is the ability to read people, whether it's through body language, facial expressions, mood, changes in tone, or even the circumstances of a situation. It's the ability to read non-verbal, indirect cues in any given interpersonal interaction and then — and this is key — adjusting your behavior accordingly. It's a sign of being respectful to another's concerns or needs.

This quality is so important in Korean culture that someone displaying a lack of it will often elicit dismayed exclamations of “Aigoo! Noonchi opda!” which means, “Unbelievable, they have no noonchi!”

I bring up the concept of noonchi because it's described in very good detail in a piece we're sharing from sister publication *JLC*. Called “Jobsite Etiquette,” it's a round table discussion with several top project managers

on the soft skills they've developed in their years of working successfully with homeowners.

In the story, what I call noonchi is described as having an awareness that another person's perspective will differ from your own and acknowledging that you're operating on your customer's turf.

“Maintaining that awareness takes practice, I think: Being aware and acting on that awareness, choosing to ask rather than assume, is key,” my colleague Clayton DeKorne (editor of *JLC*) says. Mike Whalen, one of the three project managers in the piece, says, “It's hard to teach. It's an awareness. And there is a whole range of personalities that force you to adapt how you communicate.”

It's easy to see why such a quality would be important to cultivate in a business setting, whether it's with customers or your own employees. It's a way of being proactively responsive. Learning to anticipate and care for their concerns will go far in building mutual rapport, trust and loyalty.

And that is noonchi in a nutshell. It's just one example of an untranslatable term that encompasses the complexities of human feeling and interaction in one succinct word. If you know of others, particularly ones that may be helpful in a business sense, please reach out — I'd love to hear them!

  
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# Riverbend Sandler Acquires Two More Texas Builders

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO



**Bruce Mungiguerra**  
CEO, Riverbend Sandler Pools

**Riverbend Sandler Pools**, the Plano, Texas-based builder consolidator, has announced its fourth and fifth acquisitions, which expand the company's footprint within the Lone Star State.

The company has acquired *PSN* Top 50 firm Richard's Total Backyard Solutions, a builder and service company that also provides hot tubs, swim spas and outdoor living products. Based in Houston, this marks the first company Riverbend has acquired outside the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

Owners J.R. and Julie Richard will remain with the 37-year-old operation in their current leadership roles for the long-term and retain substantial ownership stake. According to the company, Richard's Total Backyard Solutions has built more than 5,000 pools and delivered more than 8,000 hot tubs and swim spas.

The location will become Riverbend's anchor brand in the Houston market, said its CEO Bruce Mungiguerra.

Additionally, this is the first Riverbend Sandler brand to offer hot tubs and swim spas — an offering that may grow to the other locations.

"We're excited to continue building on the Richard's name and adding additional services such as hot tubs and swim spas to our other brands," Mungiguerra said.

Riverbend Sandler also purchased Hawk Custom Pools, a 23-year-old construction and service firm based in Celina, Texas, a suburb of Plano. The company also has been listed in the *PSN* Top 50.

Owner Robby Hawk, who once worked for Riverbend Sandler, also will stay on to lead the operation for the long term.

Riverbend Sandler began its consolidation model in 2021, when it acquired Fort Worth-based Pulliam Pools and Southlake, Texas-based Claffey Pools. Since the acquisitions, the company has incorporated service operations in locations that didn't previously have them. Each location has maintained its original brand, with the previous owners remaining to manage them.

## Heritage Purchases Minnesota Distributor

**National distributor** Heritage Pool Supply Group has expanded its reach in the Minneapolis market with its latest acquisition.

The company has purchased Custom Distribution Inc. (CDI), a 57-year-old company based in Minneapolis, from owners Michelle and Doug Thayer.

General Manager Bill Gutzwiller will remain to head the operation.

Heritage already had a presence in Minneapolis through its Sun Country

brand. Those will immediately be rebranded to CDI, the company said.

Entering the pool/spa industry less than three years ago, Heritage has undergone a very rapid growth trajectory by acquiring independent distributors around the country. It now claims 115 locations across 32 states. Its brands include such institutions as Florida Water Products, Bel Aqua of New Rochelle, N.Y., and Hachik of Aston, Pa., along with tile suppliers Noble Tile

Supply and Classic Pool Tile.

In addition to acquisitions, Heritage has grown by opening new, Heritage-branded warehouses. It added 10 in 2023, located in Fort Myers, Jacksonville, and Orlando, Fla.; Boston; Jackson, Miss.; Omaha, Neb.; West Chester, Ohio; Charleston, S.C.; Fort Worth and College Station, Texas.

Heritage Pool Supply Group is a wholly owned subsidiary of SRS Distribution Inc.

# In Memoriam: Skip Greggs

The popular sales rep and trainer for Team Horner died last month.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO



**Skip Greggs**, a 50-plus-year veteran in the pool and spa industry, died February 9. The popular TeamHorner representative was 81 years old.

Glen “Skip” Greggs was born March 1, 1942 in Stoney Point, N.Y. In 1970, after four years in the Air Force, he and a friend from the military opened Poogie Pools, a service and retail company in Margate, Fla. In the 1980s, he sold his company and joined Team Horner, which had been a vendor for Poogie Pools.

Greggs remained with Team Horner for nearly the rest of his career. In his various sales positions with the company, Greggs also served as a frequent speaker and instructor, specializing in heat pumps and salt chlorine generators.

“He was both professional and personable,” said Horner CEO Bill Kent. “With most key

customers he would develop a personal relationship where they trusted him and enjoyed working with him. He was just a joy.”

Having started as a service professional, Greggs was known for his ability to fix just about anything, Kent said. “He loved everything about the pool industry — the people, the action, the services that we provide to our customers, the health benefits and the fun benefits,” Kent said.

Greggs earned lifetime honors in Team Horner. “His influence on Team Horner, acknowledged through accolades like the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014 and Hall of Fame induction in 2021, solidified his status as a pathfinder and trailblazer within the Team’s history,” the company said in a tribute.

Greggs is survived by his wife of 58 years, Sherry, two children and four grandchildren.

## Gillette Receives GENESIS Lifetime Honor



**GENESIS** presented its second Lifetime Achievement Award to Vance Gillette, long-time industry speaker, motivator and thought leader. The design and

construction school, now a part of the PHTA, recognized Gillette for his help in its founding 25 years ago. “Vance has touched the lives and careers of so many in our industry and developed many dedicated friendships across many years,” said GENESIS co-founder Brian Van Bower. “His impact and service to the industry as a whole has been tremendous.”

Gillette last served as vice president of business development with Zodiac Pool Systems, before it merged with Fluidra. He retired in 2013.

## Public Comments Accepted for Inground Pool Standard

The PHTA is taking public comments and proposals for revisions to one of its key standards. The PHTA/ICC-5 Standard for Residential Inground Swimming Pools applies to permanently installed residential inground pools intended for noncommercial use by three owner families or fewer, and with water depths exceeding 24 inches.

Those interested in suggesting changes must do so by March 25.

## Pool Troopers Gains Clearwater Pool Pros

**PSN Top 50 Service Firm** Pool Troopers has made its 23rd acquisition. The pool maintenance and repair consolidator purchased Clearwater Pool Pros, based in St. Petersburg, Fla.

This latest addition will expand the Tampa, Fla.-based company’s service in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties.

Pool Troopers, founded in 1952, established its aggressive growth model in 2020 and now serves more than 20,000 customers in Florida, Texas, South Carolina, Georgia and Arizona.



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# WPSS Heads to Long Beach

The 2024 California show attracts many pool/spa pros

BY LINDA G. GREEN

**It's full speed** ahead for the 2024 Western Pool & Spa Show! With the COVID pandemic in the rear-view mirror, organizers are moving forward with plans for the popular event.

Eric Nielson, director of this year's show, looks forward to it drawing a large crowd. Set for March 28-30, the event is expected to attract approximately 10,000 attendees to the 78,000-square-foot exhibit hall at the Long Beach (Calif.) Convention & Entertainment Center.

Nielson says it's difficult to predict exactly how many booths will fill the show floor this year, noting that a number of companies have been bought out in recent times. That said, there were approximately 140 booths confirmed at presstime for the 2024 event.

## CLASS IN SESSION

Many people come to the Western Pool & Spa Show to not only reconnect with colleagues and see the industry's latest, greatest products and services, but also to learn. Attendees seeking trade educa-

tion will find an extensive class schedule. Some sessions will be aimed at the "business side of the business," Nielson says, such as book-keeping and marketing. Other classes will focus on topics such as how to fix heaters, hands-on wiring and chemicals.

Classes will be held at the Long Beach Convention Center and at two hotels — the Renaissance and the Westin. It's a perfect opportunity for industry professionals to learn about new and/or improved products, tools and techniques, business skills and more.

Nielson says the educational offerings will include everything from water chemistry to the programming of new equipment, how to maintain a salt system in a pool, and much more. The schedule also offers "blended classes," Nielson adds, with a person instructing in English and then someone else translating into Spanish for the Spanish-speaking attendees. Attendees from Mexico and Guatemala also are expected to attend the show, Nielson says.

PHOTOS COURTESY WPSS



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### Exhibit Hall Hours:

Thursday, March 28  
6-9 p.m.

Friday, March 29  
2-6 p.m.

Saturday, March 30  
1-6 p.m.

Besides an extensive class lineup, a new two-day Boot Camp by Pool Nation is being offered prior to the show on March 26 and 27. Attendees interested in the Boot Camp will need to register here: [poolnation.com/western-boot-camp](http://poolnation.com/western-boot-camp).

In addition, Waterscape University will offer a total of eight sessions, which includes seven for pool builders on topics ranging from shotcrete placement and concrete defect identification to pool renovations and tile installation techniques. One class is geared towards service professionals to master electricity, bonding and controls. To register, go to [watershape.org/western-pool-spa-show-2024](http://watershape.org/western-pool-spa-show-2024).

Lastly, attendees have the opportunity to become Certified Pool Operators. The post-show, two-day course will be offered March 28-29. Go to [cpo.training/wpss\\_landingpage/](http://cpo.training/wpss_landingpage/) for more details.

## SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

As for the show's other features, the putting green typically located on the show floor has been retired, but there's still much to look forward to. Valuable equipment prizes such as motors, pumps, heaters, filters and

the like will be given away each hour, Nielson says. And, of course, show-goers will be anticipating the top prize giveaway — a \$20,000 check that comes from the spinning of a giant wheel. Definitely a crowd-pleaser!

There will also be a golf tournament, with proceeds going to the California Pool & Spa Association, Nielson adds. CPSA members include the state's pool and spa builders, service companies, manufacturers and distributors, as well as other industry associations. CPSA promotes the industry's interests in various ways, including lobbying the California State Legislature, governor's office, and state and regulatory agencies.

When all is said and done, WPSS' Nielson says, "We're a nonprofit — there's no paid staff. We're all about education and promoting the industry."

For more information and to register, visit [westernshow.com](http://westernshow.com).

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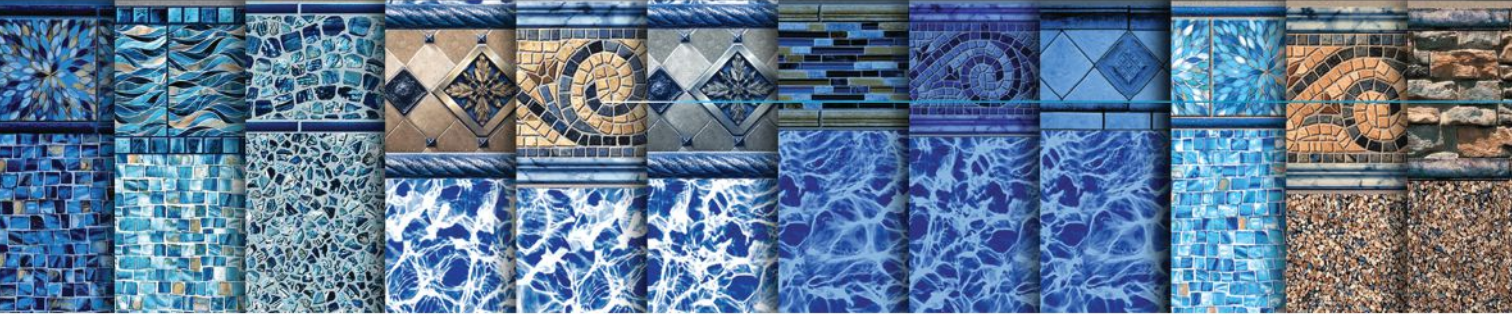
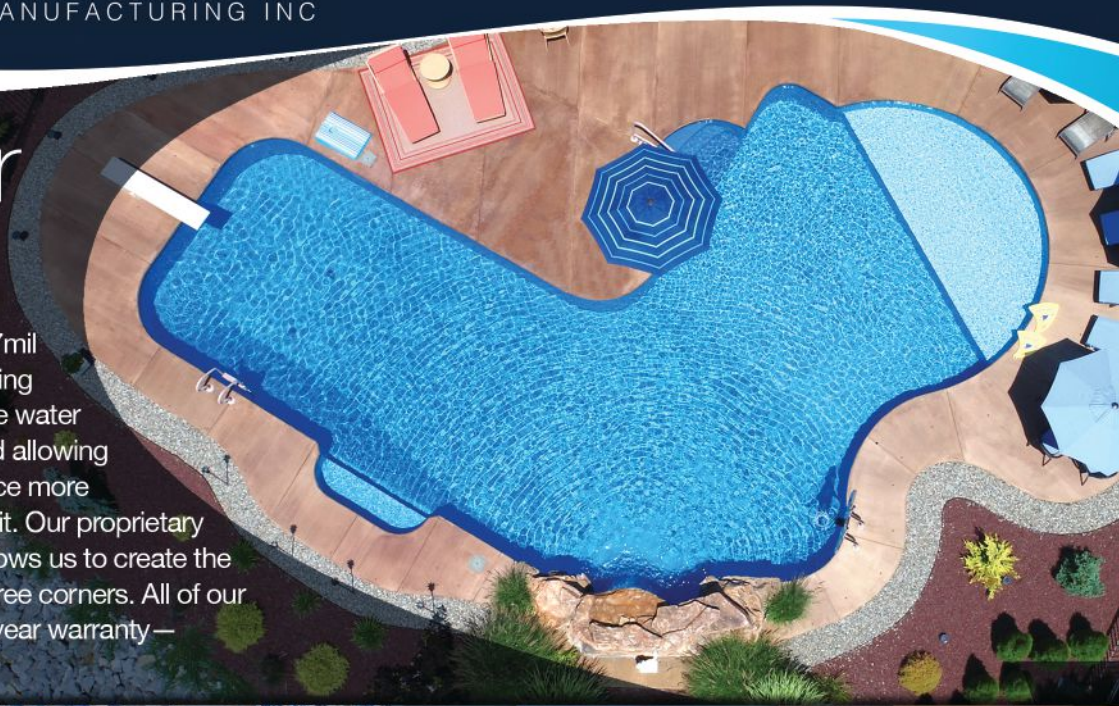


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## CLOSE-UP

# BEFORE & AFTER

Vinyl-liner pool builders share tips for successfully operating in the renovation market.

BY REBECCA ROBLED0

As the **COVID-19 bubble** continues to temper on new pool and spa construction, more builders are pursuing renovation work. This trend has touched the vinyl-liner segment as well.

It makes sense. In any given vinyl market, there lie thousands of pools in need of a refresh.

“So many vinyl-liner pools in existence are coming of age,” says Mike Giovanone, founder of Concord Pools in Latham, N.Y. “You had the 2004, 2006, 2007 tsunami of sales, and those pools are all ready for updates.”

Brad Hunter, vice president of renovations for Concord Pools attributes another market reality. “Just because the cost of a new pool has jumped significantly, more people are willing to put more money into renovations,” he says.

But it’s not just that renovations provide an alternative to the new-pool market. For some, demand for renovations has risen. For Goodall Pools & Spas in Camp Hill, Pa., renovations show so much promise that the company has

BEFORE



The simple set of steps seen here has been replaced by a large tanning shelf, shown on the previous page.

made some staff expansions just for this specialty.

“Sales are increasing,” says Owner Rob Goodall. “They’ve always been busy but, before, the majority were on the smaller side. Now they’re going from basic liner flips to doing the whole backyard — fence, concrete, in-pool vinyl-covered stairs, sometimes changing the shape of the pool, putting in [sunshelves] and benches. So we’re getting larger, more detailed projects.”

The spectrum of possibilities is greater than ever. “You can pour a nice sunledge with bubblers, add returns in the steps ...redo your lighting with modernized LED lighting, then automate everything,” Giovanone says.

While new pools have their easy appeal, renovations generate a fair amount of profit, Goodall says. His company usually can manage renovations completely in-house, giving him more control of the project.

But these projects shouldn’t be approached the same way as new construction. They have their own rhythm and require skill sets and a level of analysis that their newer cousins may not. Here, vinyl-liner builders offer tips for successful vinyl-liner pool renovations.

## 1. Consider dedicating personnel to renovations.

Goodall recently promoted a staffer to a sales position specifically for renovations, and he’s looking for a dedicated project manager.

New construction tends to move at a faster pace, especially since the company also sells fiberglass pools. So Goodall wanted to free up the remaining project managers to focus on making sure all the products and players get to the site on time rather than having to provide guidance to crews when they unearth the surprises that often come with renovations.

“We have three crews who do renovations, and they need supervision and guidance on a daily basis,” Goodall says. “The immediacy of needing to resolve some of those unforeseens requires somebody in that position to mitigate or tell them how to proceed.”

Similarly, the new salesperson specializes in renovations so she can spend more time with customers, assessing what’s possible and potentially developing the projects in scope beyond a simple liner and coping replacement.

## 2. Look for safety and code-violation issues — and educate the client.

If an older pool has a single main drain, it will fall out of code compliance in many jurisdictions. Even if it doesn’t, a single drain does not meet best industry practices.

For these pools, Goodall Pools will either install a dual drain system or turn the single drain into a return and convert it into a drainless pool, with water exiting the vessel through the skimmers.

When doing this, make sure the client expects this change and understands the reason behind it. Goodall’s team provides the clients with an information sheet explaining local codes, the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool

and Spa Safety Act and the danger of single drains.

“It’s a lot easier capturing it on the front end of the project than halfway through the project,” he says.

Also let them know about a possible consequence. In a single-drain pool, water likely was moving faster than it should toward the drain. While unsafe, this motion would have created a sweeping motion over the pool floor, making it look cleaner. Without that, they may see more dirt on the bottom.

For this reason, Goodall’s company may offer clients a discount on a pool cleaner if they eliminate the bottom drain altogether.

Also look for electrical-code issues, such as wires not meant for a pool environment, a power source sitting too close to the pool’s edge, or a lack of grounding and bonding.

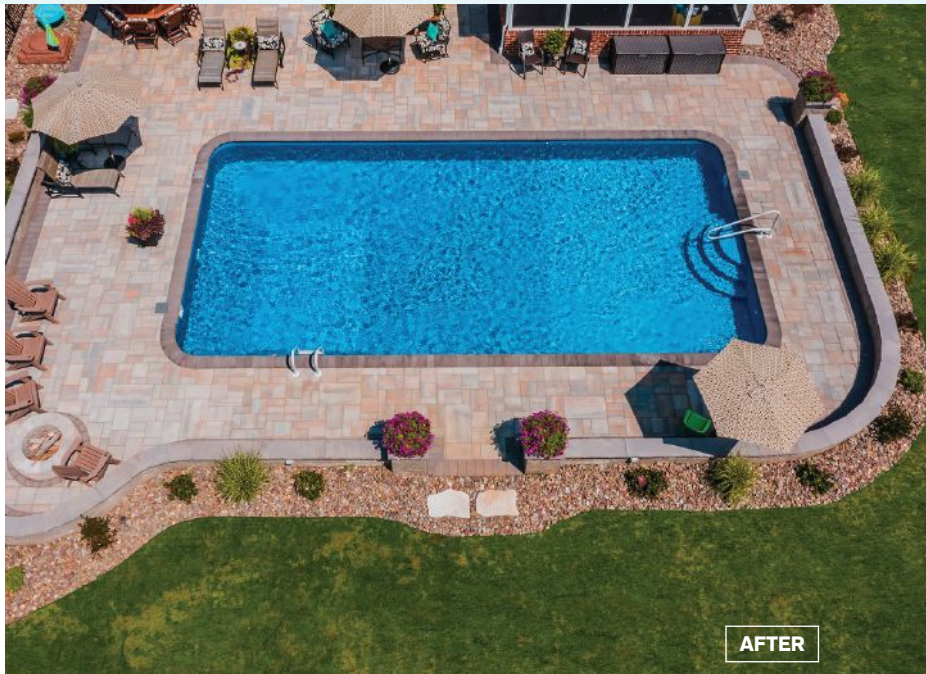
### 3. Investigate under the liner.

You’ll need to find out as much as you can about the construction method used and the condition of the pool’s various components and systems.

More work may be required, for instance, if the pool is surrounded by a concrete collar or if the bottom is finished in concrete. Then jack hammers are needed to change the pool’s depth or add steps and benches. Additionally repairing or altering the structure will depend on its type.

For this reason, Giovanone always likes to ask customers from the outset whether they took any photos during the pool’s original construction. This might offer clues about the construction method. You also may be able to piece together part or all of the plumbing layout if it’s been documented this way.

Also check the condition of the plumbing, especially on pools that are older, have been abandoned, or just look in bad shape, suggests Jimmy Brown, commercial and remodel aquatic manager for Burton Pools in Fort Smith, Ark.



AFTER

### 4. Prepare to employ old building methods.

These days, vinyl-liner pools most commonly are supported with steel or polymer panels anchored by a concrete foundation or apron.

But, decades ago, some builders supported the liner with block walls or even wood panels. Once you remove the liner and take a look, you may find the following repairs necessary:

**Block walls.** For these pools, you may need to bring in a masonry subcontractor. Goodall works with a sub who builds raised bond beams and walls and has a good handle on various historical methods of setting masonry materials. Repairs can range from fixing mortar that has popped out to replacing sections of block.

“We did one about a year ago where the wall actually pushed out,” Goodall says. “They had to take out that section of the wall and rebuild it from the ground up.”

Check to see if plumbing was run in the walls and, if so, assess its condition. You may need to replumb some of it and core drill new holes.

One thing for sure about renovating this type of pool: “We’re not going to change the structure,” Goodall



BEFORE

In-pool wedding-cake steps add a custom look, while a more extensive stone deck and planter walls create a more defined outdoor space.



AFTER

shore it up, confident that it will last at least the life of the new liner, the wood will stay in place.

### 5. Replace the deck if you can.

In addition to liner replacements, plenty of customers opt for new coping, especially if the existing pool has metal coping, Brown says.

If they can, builders like to take that further and replace the deck — for both aesthetic and practical reasons.

In many cases, the deck draws the eye before the pool itself, so updating it is at least as important. “The worst thing you can do is redo a 30-year-old pool and keep a 30-year-old deck,” Giovanone says.

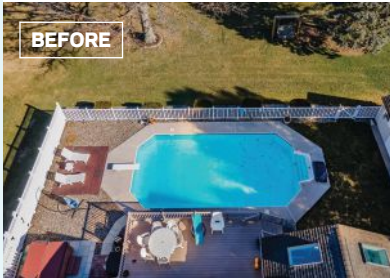
Covering a concrete deck with an upgraded material such as bluestone or sandstone can immediately elevate the whole yard. Installing a cantilevered deck creates a more modern appeal.

But removing the old deck also opens the way for other enhancements, such as adding an automatic cover, which requires installing tracking on the sides of the pool. The open trenches also leave room for the plumbing needed to add water features, or the electrical lines for new lighting, and even new skimmer boxes.

For stone or paver decks, Hunter’s team always pours a 3-inch subdeck. This helps lock the pool’s top flange in place, provides more stability to the stone or pavers, and leaves a place to secure safety-cover anchors.

If a client doesn’t want such a large-scale change, say for financial reasons, Burton Pools at least tries to replace a 12- to 16-inch border immediately around the pool.

“If the concrete deck still looks good, a separate border makes it look a lot newer and fresher,” says Caleb Burton, the company’s vice president of sales and marketing.



BEFORE

says. “We could make changes to the depth, we can go in and put vinyl-covered steps. Adding water features would not be a problem. But we’re probably not going to change the outside perimeter.”

Additionally, if block walls need any repairs, that means part of the deck must come out, making things easier for add-ons that would require additional plumbing, wire and/or conduit.

**Wood walls.** It’s true that this type of vinyl-liner structure has generally become replaced by manufactured panels made of materials more suited to exposure to groundwater and other elements underground. However, you may come across them in your renovation work. In fact, Goodall’s team still finds a good portion of these walls to be stable. So they’ll often leave these structures intact, save for some individual panels that may need repair or replacement.

If an individual panel has to go, for instance, they may replace it with a steel one and secure it with a concrete footer.

Other times, a wood wall may be pushed out a bit. If Goodall’s team can

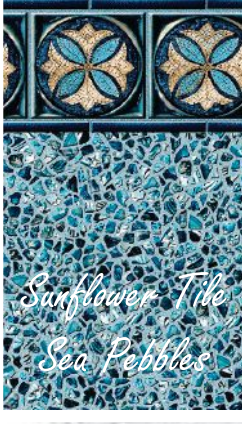
More expansive decking and a shade structure make the space more usable.

# Garrett

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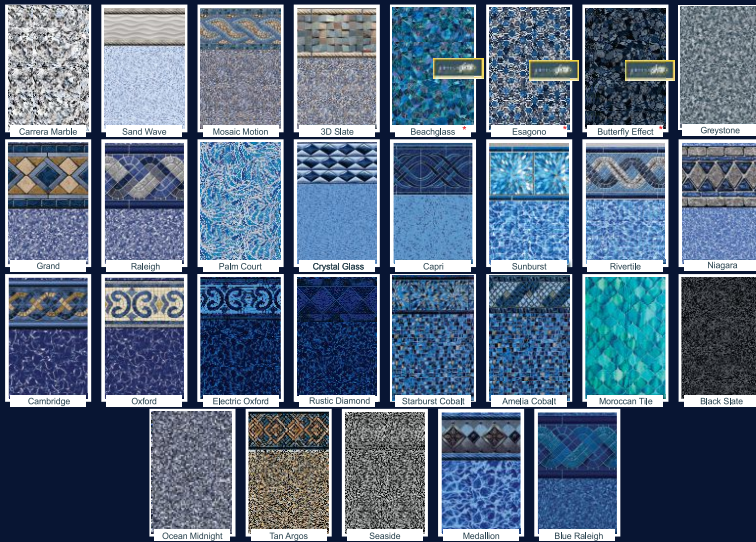
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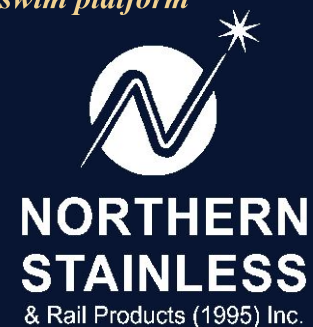
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# Pivoting for 2024

PSN Top 50 companies share how they respond more quickly, strategize more nimbly and market more precisely to move with the times.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

**At any time**, constant assessment and adjustments are necessary to keep a company at its leanest and meanest.

In this era, it seems especially crucial, as the volume and nature of business changes in ways that are sometimes predictable and sometimes puzzling. As one department dips, another grows; as one demographic seems to flag, another takes interest.

Here, three of our *PSN* Top 50 companies share changes large and small that have helped them not only adapt, but also to maintain profitability and marketshare.

# The Move to Same-Hour Service



**RICK GALLO,**  
CEO  
Pure Swim

With nearly immediate response times, Pure Swim reminds its customers why it's on the PSN Top 50 pool company list.

**Rich Gallo serves an exclusive clientele** in the Los Angeles area, charging some of the highest rates in the country for his company's pool/spa maintenance and repair services.

His firm, Pure Swim, has seen astronomical growth since the pandemic: 2021 marked an increase of 31%; 2022 saw a 46% boost; and, in 2023, sales rose by 23%.

Pure Swim has seemed relatively impervious to the economic down slides that have kept some on the edge of their seats. And he'd like to keep it that way.

To do this, he has upped the ante when it comes to responsiveness toward customers.

"We pivot to a position where we're always available to the client," says the CEO of the Valencia, Calif.-based company. "Instead of having a next-day or same-day service response, we're there the same hour. If somebody calls, with the force that we have out there, we can pivot, reschedule and get there within an hour. That makes us invaluable with the customer."

But this strategy requires preparation.

## THE BEST CURE

The company starts by doing what it can to avoid the kind of situations that would require an emergency call.

"The last thing I'd ever want to hear from my customers is, 'You were just here. Why wasn't this checked? Why am I paying all that money?'" Gallo says.

To prevent malfunctions and spontaneous calls as much as possible, Pure Swim technicians take the time on each visit to go through the pool and/or spa system, not only making sure it works, but to experience the process of operating the system as the customer would.

"We go on our phone, open up their app ... and turn things on in the same manner the customer would," Gallo says. "This way, we can verify that things work as they should and as they would be expected to from the customer's point of view. Otherwise ... you're not getting

the full grasp of what they're capable of turning on."

Most of the company's customer contracts stipulate that the tech can make repairs up to a certain dollar amount without prior authorization. That cap generally ranges from \$300 to \$800.

"We can go ahead and immediately take care of that and then invoice them or charge their card on file," Gallo says. "They see the value that, if we're there and something needs to be done, let's not waste time trying to make phone calls or send emails."

### QUICK RESPONSE

But, even with this preventive measure in place, of course, things come up. Gallo estimates that Pure Swim receives three to four calls a week from customers needing a special visit.

"It doesn't have to be an emergency — it could be anything," he says. "The customer wouldn't call if they didn't think it was an emergency — and the last thing they want to be told is that it's not a big deal."

But in order for Pure Swim to offer this level of service, its staff and trucks must be ready to turn on a dime.

"You have to have a system that shows [each tech's location], and you have to have them all trained and certified in the same way," Gallo says. "But even more important, you have to have a truck that's properly outfitted with the tools and parts that are necessary to take on almost any task."

Techs undergo a 24-month training period, during which time they earn just about all the certifications the industry has to offer.

"I look at employees as assets rather than liabilities, so that amount of money doesn't bother me," Gallo says. "I know I'm going to be investing in that, and there will be a payback."

When a client calls with a problem that can't wait until the next scheduled visit, ideally the company



can just send the closest technician to address it. "If he can't get back on his route and finish, you can have [remaining customers] rerouted for the next day," Gallo says. "Then we just call the customer and explain, 'We'll be there first thing tomorrow morning.'"

Depending on the issue, it may not be that straightforward. Not every truck is outfitted the same.

"The inventory on every truck has a baseline, then some trucks have a little more of certain items if their route calls for it," Gallo says.

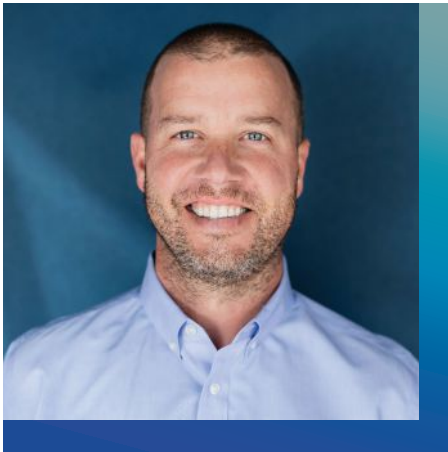
For instance, some trucks need a deeper supply of heater parts to meet the needs of that set of clients. So, if a heater issue comes up, that tech may be most equipped to take the call.

This same day/same hour service is available almost exclusively to those who have contracted with Pure Swim for routine visits. Gallo believes it will help safeguard his company against market highs and lows.

"That's been our most valuable change — creating the time that's needed to give that level of service," Gallo says. "We create an invaluable situation where, when times are tough, they have to really think hard about what they'd be giving up if they move on from us."

# Strategizing on a Dime

Morehead Pools' new approach for planning not only helps it pivot, but lets it take on new initiatives with more data.



**MICHAEL MOORE**  
President and CEO  
Morehead Pools

**Shreveport, La.-based** Morehead Pools maintained its months-long backlog through 2023 and will do so well into 2024.

For every pool that starts construction, another is generally sold and added to the list of pending projects. “We feel like we’re backfilling our backlog,” says Michael Moore, president and CEO of the *PSN*Top 50 Builder. “We’re keeping up with a one-to-one ratio.”

That may be the case, but the type of pool being sold has changed. Where projects used to include a wide price

range, now they’re skewing above \$150,000.

“In our market, the \$80,000 to \$120,000 customers are on the sidelines,” he says. “They have the equity, they have the credit, and the access to cash. They’re just not willing to borrow it at 8%. But they’re still interested. I feel like, maybe in 2024 or 2025, they will come from the sidelines.”

Despite its consistent performance, the company isn’t resting on its laurels, but has made several changes in response to the shifting environment.

## ADJUSTING WITH THE TIMES

Over the last few years, one thing has become clear to Moore and his team: Things move faster than ever. So they found that the company’s old way of planning and introducing new initiatives wasn’t working anymore.

“For years, we always strategically planned,” Moore says. “We’d draw a plan, talk about how we were going to do it, and we’d have this big road map and a new process. Then six months later, we’d start to implement it, and we’re out of date because the world moves so fast.”

Now Morehead implements “strategic thinking.” Here, somebody might bring up an idea at the monthly manager’s meeting — or even in conversation. When managers like an idea, they’re quicker to greenlight it.

“Before, we would say, ‘Let’s think about it,’” Moore says. “Strategic thinking is ‘Go with it.’ Then at our next strategic meeting, we’ll have data to help decide whether to continue moving forward with it or move on. Not every idea is a ‘go forward,’ but [at least] if we met yesterday at our monthly leadership team meeting and you have a great idea the day after, you don’t have to wait 29 days to share your idea.”

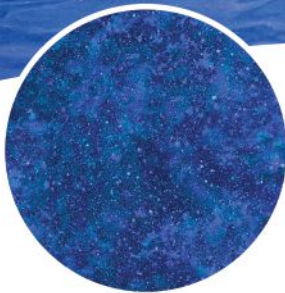
Of course, the team consults with all parties before proceeding, to make sure it won’t cause problems from their end and also to receive their input and suggestions for honing the new process. And, the appropriate manager must sign off.

“It’s just giving people a little more authority,” Moore says. “Just being a little lighter on our feet, with people not being afraid to pivot off something that we’ve always done.”

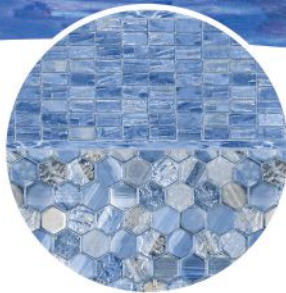
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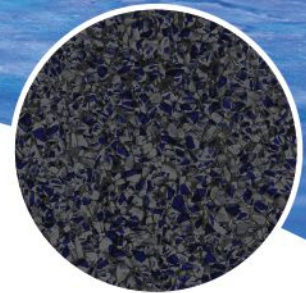
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## EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

With room to breathe post-COVID, Morehead's management is spending more time strategizing education for its workforce.

Things may not move at the unwieldy pace they had for the past couple years, but his team remains busy. So employees can't take multiple weeks away from the job

to attend all the trade shows and conferences. Management is evaluating which venues are most appropriate for each department — which will offer technical training best suited to its service/maintenance crews, for example, versus which specialize in the kind of business education that would help its administrative team.

Additionally, as part of its physical expansion from 7,700 to approximately 13,200 square feet, the company is developing a specialty training area. In addition to the education that Morehead provides on its own, the company is also partnering more closely with its vendors. Not only do they encourage vendors to train staff at Morehead's facilities, but Moore works with them to develop the content, making sure it best suits his company.

"I want to bring them to my backyard and say, 'These are the products I want to upsell, and this is how we want to sell,'" he explains.

## IMPROVING THE WORKPLACE

Like so many other companies, Morehead Pools has been looking for ways to attract and retain good employees.

With that objective in mind, it recently began qualifying employees for vacation earlier than before. This way, newcomers feel appreciated right out the gate.

Then, to make sure long-time staffers also felt valued, Morehead Pools now provides more vacation time each year than before. "We want to make it more lucrative to join our industry and our team," Moore says.

The company also got rid of cubicles. Before, some offices held multiple cubicles, but the company has decided to provide individual workspaces for most of those who have them.

"I've found that cubicles are not necessarily the best or most conducive to ultimate performance," he says, citing interruptions and personality conflicts among the reasons.



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# Fine-Tuned Marketing and the Drip Campaign

To catch and retain the attention of prospective customers, this PSN Top 50 Builder uses repetition as its tool of choice.



**JR RICHARDS**  
Owner  
Richards Total  
Backyard Solutions

**Things have been going well** for Houston, Texas-based Richard's Backyard Pool Solutions.

In 2023, the pool side of the business landed somewhere higher than 2020's numbers, but a little lower than 2021. While he's happy with that, the spa side has taken center stage. This comes largely as a result of certain realities facing pools. "We're seeing a significant increase [in spa sales] because the cost of pools has gone up," Richard says. "People are looking at hot tubs as an alternative to pools. And more are looking at wellness concerns."

With a strong January, Richard expects this product category to remain robust through 2024.

## TARGETED APPROACH

To help the company keep sales figures in check, it has modernized marketing efforts to reach the right people.

It had already focused on Google ads and sound SEO practices to place it top of page during searches. The company recently began increasing social media engagement, posting more videos and information than before.

Now it's added commercials on streaming platforms. On Hulu, YouTube and others, the company can designate the demographics and specific zip codes that it wants to reach. This contrasts with cable commercials, where you choose a channel and particular programs. Now, he says, "You don't care if they're watching 'Real Housewives of Atlanta' or the sports channels. It's just targeting that audience."

With the program, he says, the company has performed better than the market as a whole. "I did a real test on it for about 120 days, and it did seem to help with sales," he says.

Richard believes the specific targeting will help reach each potential customer three or four times per 90-day campaign, which he believes is crucial to make a lasting impression. "The more times you can be in front of those prospective buyers, the more you're top of mind," he says. "If they see you three times ... you'll be one of the people they remember and call, instead of them just Googling."

## DRIP CAMPAIGN

Once a customer reaches out to the company, Richard and his team continue to use frequency in its favor, through a drip campaign to maintain a connection with leads.

After prospects contact the company, they immediately begin receiving emails to welcome and thank them, followed by messages containing information or notifying them of specials to motivate them to come back. All is meant to keep them in the loop.

After the sale, new customers receive updates on the status of their projects. If the crew is preparing to deliver a spa, for instance, they might send a video showing the team on the way. "It just makes them more confident and more excited about getting their product, and they know they're on our radar and we're not forgetting them," Richard says.

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# ADVANCES IN WATER SAFETY

**We are witnessing** a pivotal time for water safety and drowning prevention efforts. And the pool/spa industry is more involved than ever.

The water-safety community has never lacked passion. People willing to devote their careers and spare time to reducing drowning have resulted in the passage of federal water-safety legislation, countless state and local laws, as well as the increased education of government officials, media, parents and children.

But for a long while, it fell short in the area of cohesion. Organizations and foundations would frequently spring up all the time, with similar if not identical goals. For the most part, each worked independently, resulting in redundancy and repetition of labor.

Leaders in the water-safety advocacy community noticed this and made intentional moves toward bringing likeminded individuals and organizations together.

The results have become more concrete than ever through a number of programs and initiatives — most recently, the release of the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan and the California Water Safety Strategy last year, along with several states currently writing strategies tailored to their own populace and how it interacts with water. These plans will

guide officials and agencies as they develop water-safety rules and laws in the areas they govern.

This increased collaboration results from years of effort by hundreds of individuals and organizations, including some within the pool/spa industry, which increasingly sees the value of making every child a swimmer and providing water-safety information.

Through these collaborations, certain truths came into stark relief: We suffer a severe shortage of data that could help identify causes of drowning and provide guidance in preventing them; water safety needs to become ingrained into the culture; and one size does not fit all when it comes to solutions — indeed, best practices should change with each region and even community.

Each year, our sister publication, *Aquatics International*, recognizes a handful of individuals for their influence in the aquatics field in its “Power Issue.” For 2024, this special issue focused on water safety, in recognition of such historic progress. Here, learn about the efforts of these individuals — including a key member of the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance staff, who has helped solidify the bridge between the industry and water-safety community.

— **Rebecca Robledo**



Alissa Magrum of Colin's Hope and Families United to Prevent Drowning. She is featured on page 42.



# JUSTIN WILEY



In two short years with the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance, Wiley has made progress aligning the pool/spa industry more closely with water-safety advocates. **BY REBECCA ROBLEDO**

**There's no doubt** the water-safety advocacy community has expedited its progress through increased collaboration. And that extends outside the realm of safety organizations and foundations.

The swimming pool industry, which used to sit on opposite sides of courtroom and legislative aisles from water-safety advocates, has made serious inroads to aligning with the cause of drowning prevention. For example, through the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance's Step Into Swim program, more manufacturers and pool builders, service companies and retailers contribute to the goal of providing free swimming lessons. And some safety groups have begun exhibiting and teaching at swimming pool trade shows.

And, in his short tenure thus far, PHTA staffer Justin Wiley has made noticeable strides in bringing the two worlds together for the sake of pool/spa building codes and standards.

## Crossing Over

It makes sense that Wiley would help these two groups strengthen the bridge that joins them.

Out of college, he worked on political campaigns in Salt Lake City. As a council advisor to a member of the County Council, he was exposed to parks and recreation centers, land use and everything else the county

oversees. From doing that, he moved to the International Code Council (ICC), the organization behind many of the model building codes that are adopted by states and municipalities. Through a consensus process, the ICC develops the language, then state and local governments choose to adopt them. The model codes then are updated at regular intervals. Through ICC, he was exposed to stakeholders of all stripes, including industries and consumer and safety advocates.

He started at ICC as a regional government relations manager and, about six months later, was promoted to director of external relations, moving to Washington, D.C. In that capacity, he dedicated a fair portion of his time building relationships with stakeholders. He then became vice president of government relations, planning and operations. In that position, he oversaw a team of regional government relations representatives who helped facilitate the adoption of the ICC around the country.

The ICC offers 15 codes, with one of them being the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code. With ICC, Wiley worked on this code, interfacing with all stakeholders, including the pool industry and water-safety advocates.

"I came from a culture that really valued safety," Wiley says.

He remained with the organiza-

tion for about 15 years. He then took an interest in aquatics.

"It was something where I thought I could make a difference, and an area I thought was very interesting," Wiley says. "The more I dove into the statistics around drowning, [I realized] it was frankly shocking. So I thought there was really an opportunity to make a difference in developing safety standards, which PHTA does, as well as codes and getting them adopted and implemented."

## Toward the same goal

By the time he joined PHTA, most of the adversity between the pool industry and the water-safety advocacy community had been worked out and left in the past. Wiley brought his collaborative background to help continue developing these relationships.

As one of his first assignments, Wiley worked with various stakeholders to promote the reauthorization of the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act.

"My approach to a lot of things is to do them very collaboratively and work with coalitions," he explains. "My experience politically is not working for a major lobbying firm or corporations that have [plenty of manpower]. I'm very used to working with coalitions, and building that strength in numbers."

Accomplishing that in any context

requires listening more than talking, he says, but also proving the organization's attention through action.

"We [in the swimming pool industry] want to do [business] in a safe and efficient manner, and insure there is safety across all aquatics venues," he says. "I think conveying that to water safety advocates has helped — not only verbally but showing up at events, talking on panels shoulder-to-shoulder with advocates. We all want the same thing — supporting the progress of safety of water venues."

The pool industry does that through the writing of codes and standards to be adopted by states and local governments, he says. And, with

reach out efforts by Wiley, water-safety advocates have taken an interest in participating in the drafting of these codes. That's why members of the water-safety community, such as The ZAC Foundation's Megan Ferraro and Abbey's Hope's Alan Korn, recently joined committees that help oversee the writing and updating of standards such as the one cited in the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act for drain covers. It's something that Wiley expects to continue into the future.

"I look forward to those relationships continuing to strengthen," he says. "We all want more safety in aquatic environments for swimmers."



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# MEGAN FERRARO & KAREN COHN



Through their work with the ZAC Foundation and numerous collaborative projects in water safety, this pair will have an impact for generations to come.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

**After the entrapment** death of their six-year-old son, Zachary Archer, Karen and Brian Cohn advocated for the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act, bringing a flagging bill back to life.

They went on to found the ZAC Foundation, which has brought changes immediate and far-reaching. Under

the stewardship of Karen Cohn and Executive Director Megan Ferraro, the organization has brought swim lessons and water-safety education to 25,000 children. Considering that those children will one day grow up to teach their own little ones, the lives affected become innumerable.

At least as important, their efforts to build collaboration have made the water-safety advocacy community stronger. Most recently they did this through contributions to the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan.

Ferraro is chair of the California Water Safety Coalition. She now contributes to the pool industry, having recently joined PHTA's Standards and

Consensus Committee and Writing Committee, both of which play central roles in developing the organization's model codes. This helps place the days of contention between the pool/spa industry and safety community firmly in the rearview mirror.

Karen Cohn is a trustee on the Northeast Board of the Boys & Girls Club, as a result of a national partnership in delivering swimming lessons. She recently presented at the World Conference on Drowning Prevention in Perth, Australia. She is a board member of the California Water Safety Coalition and served on the Blue Ribbon Panel for the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan.

# WILL KOON



Topping the list of some of the most current water-safety projects, he has focused his efforts on fostering collaborations and improving available data on drowning. BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

**Will Koon** is one of those people who seems to have his hand in every pot.

He tops the credits for the most important recent initiatives, events and groups, including the California Water Safety Strategy; The U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan; the California Water Safety Coalition; and the World Conference on Drowning Prevention in Perth, Australia.

In his volunteer and career work, Koon has focused on building collaborations, filling gaps in lifeguard training, and gaining better data.

He serves as National Manager of Drowning Prevention Strategy for

the Royal Lifesaving Society, Australia, and an adjunct researcher with the Sydney-based University of New South Wales (UNSW) Beach Safety Research Group. His employer manages the Australian National Fatal Drowning Database, exposing him to "the gold standard" of drowning-data collection, taking information from various sources, including coroners, police, media, and lifeguard reports.

He hopes to see a similar database in California one day. "But that is going to cost money, it's going to take some human power and capital," Koon says.

# JULIE LOPICCOLO & JONATHAN ST. CLAIR

After losing a child to drowning, this couple worked to protect others by starting a foundation, advocating for new laws, and assisting others who have lost their children. **BY GARY THILL**

**In 2014**, 21-month-old Jasper St. Clair drowned in his babysitter's pool, despite his parents specifically saying he could never go there.

His parents, Julie Lopiccolo and Jonathan St. Clair, decided to do what they could to save others from suffering the same kind of loss. "We're both Type A personalities, so it didn't take much for us to decide we were going to make something good happen out of a horrific situation," St.

Clair says. "From there, it took on its own heartbeat."

The couple immediately began sharing Jasper's story. "We want to see the shame and guilt around a drowning to be less hateful toward parents and guardians," St. Clair says. "They already take that guilt on. They don't need an outside force adding to it."

They founded the Jasper Ray Foundation for Drowning Prevention and



Child Safety and were integral in steering passage of California's Pool Safety Act in 2018. It was the first state law to require new or remodeled pools and spas to include two child-protective safety barriers, out of seven options allowed in the law.

Lopiccolo also serves on the board for the California Water Safety Coalition, while St. Clair works with other organizations to contact newly bereaved parents of drowning victims.

Lopiccolo and St. Clair recently helped launch the Fish Outta Water 5K to raise money for water safety efforts and public awareness of the problem. This year, the event raised \$20,000.

## PAM CANNELL

The nonprofit leader was integral to the recent growth of the National Drowning Prevention Alliance. **BY RENA GOLDMAN**



**The President** of the National Drowning Prevention Alliance took on the issue of water safety as a

Masters swimmer after becoming aware of several incidents in her then-hometown of Fort Worth, Texas. She brought the issue to the mayor, providing data to back up her belief that the area had a drowning problem. With the mayor's encouragement, Cannell formed the Fort Worth Drowning Prevention Coalition, an organization that continues to operate after her departure.

In 2016, she accepted an offer from NDPA CEO Adam Katchmarchi to join its board of directors, becoming vice president in 2020, then president in 2022. She has leveraged her consid-

erable experience in nonprofit board governance to help the organization evolve. To grow the NDPA, Cannell identified gaps in the board and recruited new members from outside the industry to help address issues such as business continuity planning and human resources. To get the team rowing in the same direction, she worked with the board to develop a strategic plan. She also played a key role in an important strategy for the organization — developing strategic partnerships and collaboration with other groups in order to raise awareness of the mission.



# ALISSA MAGRUM

After a drowning hit close to home, Magrum helped launch two organizations, write a book and course, and pass a Texas law.

BY GARY THILL

**Alissa Magrum** was living in Texas and working at a nonprofit when she learned that 4-year-old Colin Holst, a playmate of her daughter's, had drowned.

She was shocked to learn that drowning is the number one cause of death for children ages 1 to 4. "I had a real parental wakeup in that moment," she says. "You think about car seats, bike helmets, and all these different ways to protect your child. But you don't think about drowning."

Magrum couldn't stop thinking about it. She volunteered for two years at Colin's Hope, the foundation formed in response to the drowning, then became its executive director.

She has also created a water-safety curriculum in English and Spanish, called "Water Safety with Colin & Friends." Other credits: She penned a children's book for drowning prevention, co-chaired the National Drowning

Prevention Alliance's Advisory Board, and served on the Water Safety Education Working Group to help develop the National Water Safety Action Plan.

Another key legacy is co-founding Families United to Prevent Drowning, an organization of families who have lost loved ones to drowning. She helped to pass Texas' new Cati's Law, named in honor of Cati DelaPeña. Now, care organizations must get written notice from parents stating whether their child can swim and to put U.S. Coast Guard-approved lifejackets on those children.

# BILL RAMOS

The 'pracademic' has dedicated his life to studying the problem of drowning and applying data-driven solutions to save lives. BY GARY THILL



**Bill Ramos** has been an aquatics enthusiast for nearly six decades, starting professionally as a lifeguard at 18. His passion for drowning prevention crystallized in a single moment when he revived a teen who nearly drowned.

"To have given CPR to someone who came back to life was life changing," says Ramos, now associate professor at Indiana University School of Public Health — Bloomington, among many other credits and titles.

Starting then, Ramos became focused on helping aquatics professionals get the proper tools to prevent

drownings. He also was intent on helping the public be safer in the water. Ramos received his bachelor's degree in kinesiology, a master's degree in recreation, parks and tourism studies, and a doctorate in leisure behavior.

Along the way, he developed the nickname "Safety Bill." "I joke that I'm a pracademic," says Ramos, who sits on the American Red Cross' Scientific Advisory Council and chairs its Aquatics Sub Council. "I'm trying to bring the practical and academic together."

His work as co-chair of the U.S. National Water Safety Action Plan Data & Public Health Surveillance subcommittee ranks as his proudest achievement to date. In that role, he helped identify critical gaps in drowning prevention, whose solution can spell the difference between life and death.



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# ALISON PETRI

With Abbey's Hope, Alison Petri demonstrated how to tailor a water-safety campaign to fit local needs.

BY RENA GOLDMAN

**As program manager** for Abbey's Hope, Alison Petri traditionally focuses her water-safety efforts on pools.

The organization had been started because of the 2007 suction entrapment that took the life of Abbey Taylor.

When COVID-19 prompted pool closures and halted swim lessons, drownings in Minnesota nearly doubled. Petri didn't want to sit on the sidelines. She performed local research and found that most data represented open-water drowning, which largely occurs in lower-income communities.

Petri found a glaring barrier to drowning prevention in local low-income communities: Cost, with life jackets running approximately \$30, and swim lessons about \$120.

As the aquatics community waited for swim lessons to reopen, Petri fo-

cusced Abbey's Hope's efforts on providing life jackets to local kids. She ordered 75 life jackets and advertised a giveaway. They were gone in 15 minutes, so Petri did another giveaway that year. She expanded the project the following two years, calling it Project 2022, with the goal of giving away 2022 life jackets.

Petri enlisted help from the sheriff's water patrol to create a bridge between the police and local citizens.

Since 2020, Petri and her team have given away almost 6,000 life jackets in Minnesota. Parents also were educated on properly fitting the jackets for safety.

PHOTO COURTESY ALISON PETRI

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# JOBSITE



BY  
JEREMY KASSEL,  
RICK MILLS,  
MIKE WHALEN,  
CLAYTON DEKORNE

# ETIQUETTE

ADOBE STOCK

Clayton DeKorne, editor-in-chief of our sister publication JLC, sat down with **Rick Mills**, **Jeremy Kassel**, and **Mike Whalen** to explore the roles and responsibilities of project managers. Each of these individuals works under a different business model that together span the range of businesses of many readers: Rick is senior project manager for Jackson Andrews Building + Design, a custom builder based in Virginia Beach, Va.; Jeremy operates as a “bags on” general contractor and assumes the role of project manager on renovation projects in and around Albany, N.Y.; and Mike Whalen is a lead carpenter at DBS Remodel, a design-build residential remodeling company based in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

**This article** springs from a presentation Kassel did at the 2023 JLC Live conference on “Jobsite Etiquette” — a topic that Mills and Whalen had each talked about previously as a possible subject for an article. “Etiquette” seems a fancy word to describe the necessary decorum that project managers must adopt to be effective communicators with clients, trade partners, and co-workers, but it is appropriate to the skillful maneuvering with people that is necessary in the service roles project managers assume. In his presentation, Whalen organized the discussion around the different parties that project managers interact with — clients, employees, subcontractors, and vendors. We started from this premise, focusing on the client-project manager relationship first.

**Jeremy Kassel:** When most people think of the term “jobsite etiquette,” they probably think of behavior, but it’s more than this. It’s more than good manners, more than “please and thank you” and taking off your shoes at the door. It includes those, but it is more about (I don’t want to say “personality” management, because I think that has a different connotation) how we work effectively with people on the job. This requires certain skills — we call them “soft skills” — but it’s also an approach, which is hard to pin down, because there is so much variability in the perspectives of the people involved. While some of these things you can teach, or at least build awareness around, some of them come only with experience. I have somebody working for me who’s 24 years old,

and he's going to handle things very differently from somebody who's my age (I'm 44).

**DeKorne:** If we don't have that experience, can we build that awareness? What are some ground rules, or tools and procedures for working with clients you can pass along to other project managers?

## KEY ELEMENTS

**Mike Whalen:** When it comes to serving the client, I think the key elements we depend on, or build a relationship around, are the project design that we have agreed on with the client, along with the contract that defines the scope of work — the service that we will provide. Once they have been presented to the client, we have a foundation and can walk onto the job confident about what our company needs to provide. They set the tone. The clients trust that we're going to fulfill that contract, and if we go off contract, we have to complete a change order right away, so we make it clear we are doing something different from the contract.

Most of the issues that arise come from the client either not understanding the design documents or having a different idea of the job scope. It's on us — me as a project manager, especially — to make sure we are on the same page about these documents. When something comes up, we have to address it right away. If we don't, and the client holds on [to their misinformed point of view] too long, the harder it is to resolve a problem. As a project manager, I have to protect our company from that occurring.

But there are times when it becomes more difficult. For example, we had a situation in which the client didn't like the tile installation. I think they were within reason. I had been policing the installer [a subcontractor]

on the quality of the tile work and understood where the client was coming from, so I made the call and said, "OK, everything comes out. We will do it over." It's tough sometimes being able to deliver on what's promised and meet the expectations of the client. But we have to stand by our work.

In this case, I put myself in the client's position, and it was clear we had to redo the tile, as difficult as that was to the schedule and our margins. This is the challenging part because it's not straightforward. It was a very fine line.

It wasn't a botched job that was horrible, that anyone walking in would say, "Clearly, this has to be redone." Some clients would be willing to accept the installation. We wouldn't want to take advantage of that and deliver shoddy work. But at the same time, some clients can be so picky, and you have to draw a line, so they don't take advantage of us.

In this particular example, my de-

cision ate into the company's profit. Maybe 10 or 15 years ago, I would have been in a panic, thinking, "Now we're going to lose time and money on this job." But I see it differently now: It came down to the bigger value. I saw this as an opportunity for the company.

At the end of the day, the customer will remember how we handled the problem. They're going to say, "We weren't happy with the tile. But they came in, and they took all of it out and redid everything to make sure we were happy." While it's a loss now, in the long run it's a marketing win. Not that we're looking for that, but in the moment, you have to look at the big picture, and it helps to understand these situations as opportunities.

## CLEAR LINES OF COMMUNICATION

**Rick Mills:** In our company, Jackson [the company owner] is our main salesperson, so obviously the clients

**"The clients trust that we're going to fulfill that contract, and if we go off contract, we have to complete a change order right away..."**

**MIKE WHALEN**



**“We start with the scope of work, but it’s always developing. Clients constantly want to do more, and so managing those changes is a big part of the process.”**

**RICK MILLS**



have built a relationship with him early on. He needs to clearly turn the project over to the project manager and establish that this person is the main point of contact. We do this by scheduling a preconstruction meeting, and it’s important for me to go in there and build rapport with the client right away.

I’ve been with Jackson about 10 years, so there’s a lot of built-up trust between us. I usually handle the preconstruction meetings alone, so my role is usually clear to the client at the beginning. Jackson will come if I ask him, and maybe he’ll check in with the client once a month. But it’s always clear that I am taking the lead communicating with the client.

That’s first — a good handoff from sales to the project manager to build trust with the client so that there’s no “Hey, we need to call Jackson and see what he thinks.” We definitely don’t want a situation where the homeowner wants to speak to the owner all the time about job details the project manager is handling. I see my role here is to protect Jackson from this sort of thing occurring. The job of the project manager is taking that off the company owner’s plate, so there is one less thing for them to worry about.

The main goal of the preconstruction meeting is to go over the scope of work. Like Mike said, this is where we need to be very clear. Problems are most likely to come up when a client doesn’t fully grasp the scope of the job or thinks something is in that scope of work that isn’t actually documented and budgeted.

Of course, we start with the scope of work, but it’s always developing. Clients constantly want to do more, and so managing those changes is a big part of the process — getting them priced, drafting a change order, and getting signoff from the client and

making sure they are recognizing the changes to the budget.

**MW:** We have a similar process. We conduct a preconstruction meeting where I'll meet the clients and go over the job scope. The company owner, Brian, used to be the main salesperson, but he has hired on sales consultants, and that has allowed him to take a step back to concentrate on bigger-picture concerns for the company.

He may stop by. It depends on the size of the job; it could be every two weeks. It could be once a month. Same kind of thing, though: My role is to make sure that clients aren't calling him all the time about the job.

We use BuilderTrend, which I update every day, and he will track the progress of jobs through this. But it's on me to make decisions in the course of the job, even when it has an impact on the bottom line, like the tile decision. A company owner has to have project managers he trusts. He needs to know you have the best in mind for the company.

Every project manager is going to have a track record of how their jobs come in and if they're profitable based on the decisions that project manager makes. At the end of every job, we do a job analysis — an autopsy of how I did. That's something that everyone can look back on.

It includes a look at how I did ordering materials. We don't use purchase orders that need to be approved, because that can really slow things down. But I'm accountable for material orders, and I have to stay conscious of what's in the budget. How well I do will come to light at the end of the project.

This system gives me a lot of independence but also makes me accountable. I think it shows a lot of respect for my abilities, and it relies on the respect I have for the company's goals.



### DON'T WAIT TO ADDRESS ISSUES

**RM:** While I do try to protect Jackson, the owner, it's also important to recognize when I need to call him in to help resolve an issue. Of course, we all want to handle those issues ourselves. And the way to do that is to jump on them as soon as they arise and make sure things never escalate to an extreme level.

Recognizing when a communication problem arises between you and a client, or when a client is uncomfortable with a decision, or even when you see something go wrong on the job — the wrong delivery, something damaged, or a mistake by a subcontractor, or anything that might have financial consequences — you need to step in and let the client know right away that you see the problem and are working on it.

It's so much worse if the client dis-

covers it for themselves. I'm also going to reach out to Jackson and fill him in. He may not need to step in, but he needs to know what's happening.

Yes, you have to be responsive and not let things wait. But of course, there are going to be people who you just know you're never going to please. Hopefully, our sales process has weeded out those clients who may be really difficult or who can't make a decision, the husband or wife who can't agree, most of the problem clients. We do have to say "no" and not take on some jobs. Of course, it helps that we're still in a market right now where there's plenty of work and we can pick and choose the jobs we want to take on.

So, yeah, it's being selective with your clients, but honestly, most of them we have a blast with. There are ups and downs over the course of any job, and we work through them, but

**“Every project manager is going to have a track record of how their jobs come in and if they’re profitable based on the decisions that project manager makes.”**

**MIKE WHALEN**

everybody gets along fine, and I think that comes not just from us being selective about clients but from clients being selective about who they want to work with as a builder.

**MW:** Early on when I was project managing, I think it was just more of a pride thing: I felt like I needed to take care of as much as possible on my own. I felt that if I didn’t, Brian would think I couldn’t handle it.

It took me awhile to learn when and where it’s necessary to get him involved. I agree, the owner needs to be kept informed when things go awry. At the same time, there are a lot of hard decisions he’s not going to be the best to handle. He’s not in the mix.

As he should, he’s delegated everything to others, so he may not have all the answers. I have a better grasp on the details because I’m on site all the time.

### **AWARENESS OF OTHERS**

**CD:** Ideally, a contract would include some sort of rules of the road for how you communicate with clients and how they communicate with you. But these are going to be broad: They might spell out the process for conducting a preconstruction meeting and will reference the scope of work and hopefully set some boundaries on when clients can call and who they should call with questions. But there are a lot of little things that the contract doesn’t cover. To help us with these, are there any guidelines you can offer on how project managers should conduct themselves going into a new job, especially in remodeling situations where you are literally living in their home for a time?

**JK:** In my session, I touched on some contractor do’s and don’ts for the first meeting and when doing a walk-

through of the home with a client. For example, I don’t open any doors in any client’s house without asking first. It doesn’t matter if it’s a cabinet door, closet door, entry door, pantry door. You’re in someone’s home, so you have to keep reminding yourself that this is their space and you have to abide by their rules. Like I always ask if they want me take off my boots and put on a pair of house shoes.

Other things are much less clear, though. What if somebody offers you a glass of wine or beer at a meeting? Is that OK? Or I had one incident when doing a walk-through and measuring for a window replacement job. Taking out my tape measure in the dining room, I set my aluminum, flip-top clipboard on the dining room table. The client looked at me and said something to the effect, and I’ll paraphrase, “If you don’t take that clipboard off my table, you will not be hired for this job.” I was taken aback. It never even crossed my mind that this wouldn’t be OK, because the dining room table that I grew up with was not an heirloom. Any protection we put on our dining room table was decorative; you know, if there was a holiday or a party, we put a nice tablecloth on it but not to protect the table necessarily.

As it turned out, that response, the way he said it, was a bit of a red flag, because he was a difficult client to work for. We did end up doing the work, and all in all, we did a good job, and he was happy with it, though not without vocalizing what he was unhappy about along the way and being very particular about a lot of things. This first experience with him, however, was the point at which I thought to myself, “OK, not everybody’s built the same.” Not everybody has the same mindset as I do. And you need to always remember that

you're in somebody else's domain. The awareness of these two things — people's different perspectives and that you're meeting them on their turf — demands that I ask a whole host of questions: Things like which sink should I be washing my hands in, and even which towel should I be drying my hands on. It's their home. They're going to be particular about certain things that are impossible to foresee. All clients, all human beings, whether they're the building owner or even a tenant, are going to be particular about certain things. It could be a clipboard, it could be shoes, it could be where you park your vehicle. The list goes on and on and on when you're working in someone's home.

**CD:** That constant awareness about being in another person's domain you speak of is paramount. Maintaining that awareness takes practice, I think: Being aware and acting on that awareness, choosing to ask rather than assume, is key. It seems like that is an important stand-in for experience. Because experience is the other key, right? You [Jeremy] and Mike both touched on the importance of that. For you, Jeremy, these learning moments — the clipboard, the hand towels — were eye opening when you first encountered them. They gave you that insight, and the next time you were in a client's home you were reminded and knew what not to do and knew to ask first. And that's exactly how our experience grows. As experienced project managers, you have all developed a natural way of working in a person's home. But until project managers gain that experience, they have to learn to maintain an awareness, an alertness to how others have different perspectives, which they need to respect.

I want to ask, Rick, I know a lot of the jobs you do now are the bigger

projects, mostly new construction and not necessarily living with the client during the workday. What are the little client issues you deal with on a new build that aren't necessarily spelled out in the contract?

### GRAY AREAS IN THE CONTRACT AND SCOPE OF WORK

**RM:** Certainly, there are communication issues. Most relate back to the scope of work and the contract, as Mike pointed out. Even in new construction, it's common to find some gray areas that weren't spelled out specifically in the contract or scope of work. If it's something we missed, like the shower door, then we're just going to take care of it.

But other times, the client will misremember what was in the scope of work, or they had one thing in mind that didn't really get expressed at the design phase. Here's one example: We had one-piece crown scoped in, but the client was expecting a larger, three-piece crown. That can create some frustration for them. I wasn't in those meetings, so it's hard for me to speak to what happened to help that frustration.

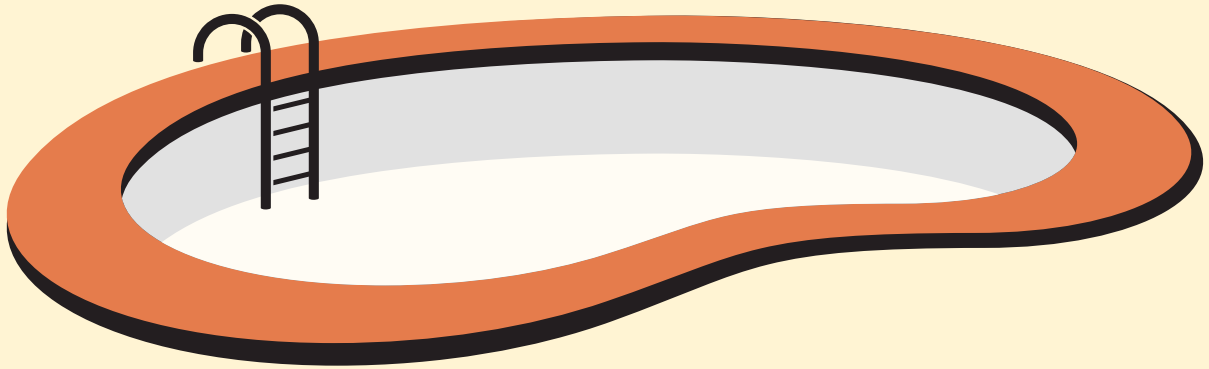
It's important for me not to make any judgments or speculate in any way on how that might have happened. Speaking from a place you're not certain about can go sideways, and I try to avoid that. What I can do is be clear that the job wasn't priced for one-piece crown and show them what it will cost to change it. That doesn't take away the frustration, but it shifts the focus away from why it happened and toward how we move forward. There's no perfect solution, but if you can move on effectively, they'll usually get over it and be like, "Yeah, that's fine. Let's get the price for the three-piece crown."

### LEARNING HOW TO READ PEOPLE AND SHIFT PERSPECTIVE

**JLC:** There's a lot of finesse involved when the client is not OK with paying more or with not getting what they think they now want, like the three-piece crown. You have to be super-diplomatic to keep the client's emotions from taking over. I used to have to remind myself I was in a service position with clients. It's a fine line because you don't want to grovel or show too much weakness because some people may take advantage of that, as Mike mentioned earlier. I think this stems sometimes not so much from their greediness, necessarily, but more from emotions around asserting what they want, which might spiral out of control. But at the same time, you want to be respectful and be there to serve. That's a fine line to strike. Any tips on how to finesse this?

**RM:** That's something we've learned over the years. From early on, Jackson has done a really good job of protecting our reputation. Like with Mike's tile example, there have been plenty of times where we have done something that we had to pay for to make sure the client felt satisfied in the end. We did that knowing the client will remember and tell their friends that we made it right even though we had to eat that. That's what gets you a good reputation and gets you good jobs in the future. But you're right, we have faced certain personalities that get carried away with their emotions.

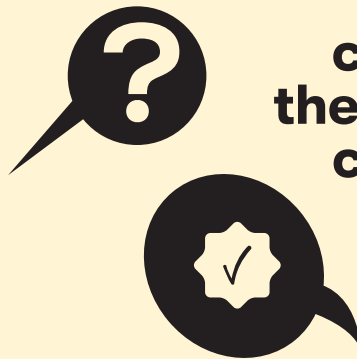
**MW:** There's a skill in being able to read people that can help you avoid getting taken advantage of. But it's hard to teach. It's an awareness. And there is a whole range of personalities that force you to adapt how you communicate. For example, if someone starts out very nervous, concerned, asking a lot of questions. You need to read that and shift to that. I'm



working for a client like that right now who just left for the city where she has another place. I have to send her lots of pictures. I have to do a lot more back and forth with her.

In our company, we spend a lot of training time on EQ, emotional intelligence, by working through different role plays to help talk with people in certain difficult or unfamiliar situations on the job. A lot of it has to do with being able to shift your perspective. We've had project managers in the past that couldn't make this shift. They weren't able to deal effectively with, for example, employees who made mistakes or with vendors when a delivery got messed up. Issues with deliveries and material orders come up a lot: It isn't going to be delivered on time; the truck broke down; it's not going to be here until next week. It's sometimes difficult to be understanding, especially when we're on a schedule. But it's going to pay off if you treat them well and can be understanding. The pay off is that when you need them, they're going to go out of their way and remember how you treated them when things got tight. There's also a payoff in being able to work with a tough client. It can help you retain employees and just have good working relationships with trade partners and vendors.

**RM:** I would say with all of our



**“We need to establish that single line of communication with the client but also stay conscious of how we maintain it.”**

**JEREMY KASSEL**

trade partners and vendors, we really like to be the intermediary and be the only person who interfaces with the client. Occasionally, it might be necessary to bring a trade partner into the discussion to discuss a certain detail we might not have knowledge about. But as a rule, we always want to assume that lead role communicating with the client.

I think this makes it easier on the client. You're the only person they need to worry about communicating with. It's the project manager's job to go to the different people from there. It's also nice for the trade partners and vendors.

**JK:** It's also important that we maintain a healthy separation between vendors and trade partners

and the client. I learned this early in my career when speaking with the client about a door I was installing. I referred several times to the name of the person at the lumberyard, Butch, who supplied the door.

Well, then the client had a problem with the door and called the lumberyard, asking for Butch. The client should have come to me with that issue.

Clearly, it was my responsibility. The whole thing snowballed, because then I had Butch asking, “Why is your client calling me to handle this? Why aren't you handling it?”

So, yes, we need to establish that single line of communication with the client, but also stay conscious of how we maintain it.

# Product Profiles: Green Technology



## Hydramatic Automatic Safety Cover

The motors of Aquamatic's Hydramatic covers run on hydraulic pressure rather than electricity. That means one-fourth the moving parts, no lubrication, and ropes that self-adjust, says Tom Dankel, company vice president.

The Hydramatic's modular design takes only four bolts to assemble, making installation simple. Another time-saver is Aquamatic's patented cable compensator, which automatically aligns both sides of the cover as it extends and retracts. "Technicians are constantly telling us, 'I started your system up, and it worked right away with no fuss,'" Dankel says.

Every Aquamatic cover meets the ASTM F1346-91 safety standard and is custom-fitted down to the half-inch. Consumers can choose from 11 standard colors and six designer colors.

**Contact:** Aquamatic Cover Systems | [aquamatic.com](http://aquamatic.com)



## REMORA PRO Kit

The REMORA PRO Kit is designed for the pool pro. The kit includes a portable 21-inch vacuum head with a carry handle, Smart Switch to monitor power going to/from the motor, dual-speed motor, 25-foot premium floating power cord, wearable battery pack, a 10-amp battery charger, two easily interchangeable 1.8Ah LiFePO4 lithium-ion batteries, and one standard and superfine vacuum bag.

**Contact:** Hammerhead Patented Performance | [hammerheadvac.com](http://hammerheadvac.com)



## Latham Recovery Express Safety Cover Template Program

This easy, turnkey service allows customers to send in an old safety cover for Latham to measure, quote and remake.

Latham will process shipping arrangements for free to one of its regional cover measurement facilities. Once the old cover arrives, it's measured using Latham's proprietary technology and a new cover is recreated with the perfect fit.

If the old cover is a Latham cover, the process is even simpler. Send in the serial number and Latham will remake the cover. The serial number can be found on the back of the label sewn onto the safety cover.

"Customers enjoy the ease and convenience of the Latham template program, which allows them to get ahead of the safety cover season, proactively schedule installations and generate increased revenue," says Travis McChesney, Latham's liner and safety cover product manager.

**Contact:** Latham, The Pool Co. | [lathampool.com](http://lathampool.com)



### Aqua-Xtreme Virtually Solid Mesh Cover

Loop-Loc's Aqua-Xtreme Virtually Solid mesh covers are constructed with light-blocking fabric that not only deters algae growth but drains quickly at up to 80 gallons per minute without clogging, eliminating the possibility of a standing water hazard, says LeeAnn Donaton-Pesta, Loop-Loc's president/CEO.

"Aqua-Xtreme covers are built super strong and will last for many years to come," Donaton-Pesta says. "Homeowners and dealers love opening up Aqua-Xtreme Covers in the spring to a pool almost as clean as the day it was closed".

Tough, double thick solid polypropylene webbing straps surround the perimeter, and the springs are made of noncorrosive 302 stainless steel for superior weight-bearing capacity.

All Aqua-Xtreme Virtually Solid mesh covers are supplied with a 15-year, pro-rated warranty.

**Contact:** Loop-Loc | [looploc.com](http://looploc.com)



### Paddling Paws Vinyl Liner

Merlin Industries' Paddling Paws vinyl liners are pool films fabricated with paw friendly material so pets can join in on pool-time fun in a sustainable way.

The Paddling Paws material is made with a double topcoat, and the wall and step material have been designed with pets in mind. It's made with ReNew technology, and certified by SCS Global Services, a third-party certification firm for environmental, sustainability, and quality performance claims, to contain 51% recycled content.

"This material is 34 percent more puncture resistant than traditional vinyl," says Rabia Danyaro, marketing coordinator at Merlin Industries. "Customers appreciate having a beautiful liner that is good for the environment and allows their pets to enjoy the pool too."

Paddling Paws comes in the Dog Days Tile/Global Seas Floor pattern pictured above. It comes with a 20-year warranty.

**Contact:** Merlin Industries | [merlinindustries.com](http://merlinindustries.com)



### POOL360 PoolService

PoolCorp's POOL360 PoolService software is designed for pool service businesses.

It offers leading route optimization, mobile water testing, automated billing and payments, integrated pricing with pool360 for installation and repairs, and more.

**Contact:** PoolCorp | [pool360service.com](http://pool360service.com)



### Crosswind V

Raypak's Crosswind V was designed with a smaller footprint and lighter weight, ensuring a seamless and hassle-free setup.

"Its compact size and lightweight design provide ease of installation, reduces install time, and saves on unnecessary labor costs to the homeowner," says Akshaya Sekhar, marketing specialist III for Raypak.

In addition, the control junction box (J-box) can be easily and quickly removed with four screws, making it easy to service and clean.

Raymote Mobile App allows users on-the-go control of the pool temperature and more.

Crosswind V fits on standard equipment pads and industry standard 2-inch water connections, conveniently accessible through the front panel for enhanced serviceability.

Crosswind V Deluxe models also include Cool Mode, which allows homeowners to cool their pool and maintain a steady water temperature, even on hot days.

**Contact:** Raypak | raypak.com/pool



### Celestial Skies

Celestial Skies is the latest exclusive vinyl liner pool pattern from Tara Pool & Outdoor Products.

This unique design is printed on ReNew vinyl, the only pool vinyl certified as a sustainable product. ReNew not only reduces waste, it uses UV and anti-microbial additives for chlorine and abrasion resistance for sustained material brilliance.

In addition to being a sustainable product, Celestial Skies is a pattern with a purpose. All proceeds from the sale of Celestial Skies will be donated to the Cure Alzheimer's Fund.

"We are proud of the fact that every purchase of this pattern contributes directly to the Cure Alzheimer's Fund," says Thomas Kennedy, Tara's marketing director. "We have had an outstanding response to both the pattern design and the cause that it supports."

**Contact:** Tara Pool & Outdoor Products | tarapools.com

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**LaMotte Company | lamotte.com/pool**

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# New Products

BY PSN STAFF



## Fluidra

The Polaris Spabot is an automatic, cordless cleaner designed to clean a hot tub or spa in just 60 minutes. A unique guidance system enables Spabot to maneuver out of tight spaces by floating up and diving back down to resume cleaning. At the end of the cycle, Spabot will float to allow users to grab it at water level.

**Contact:** [fluidrausa.com](http://fluidrausa.com)



## Sensorex

The new Pool Plus line of electrodes feature the Salt Ring Reference System — a visual indication of sensor life. This crystallite structure visibly alerts users when the sensor needs replacement, eliminating downtime due to unreliable readings and sensor failure caused by depleted electrolytes.

**Contact:** [sensorex.com/pool-spa](http://sensorex.com/pool-spa)



## Poolside by CGT

The Water Street vinyl liner design combines a stylish tile border with a complementary wall and floor pattern in rich, vibrant blue hues. Water Street is available in both 20- and 28-mil thickness.

**Contact:** [poolsidebycgt.com](http://poolsidebycgt.com)

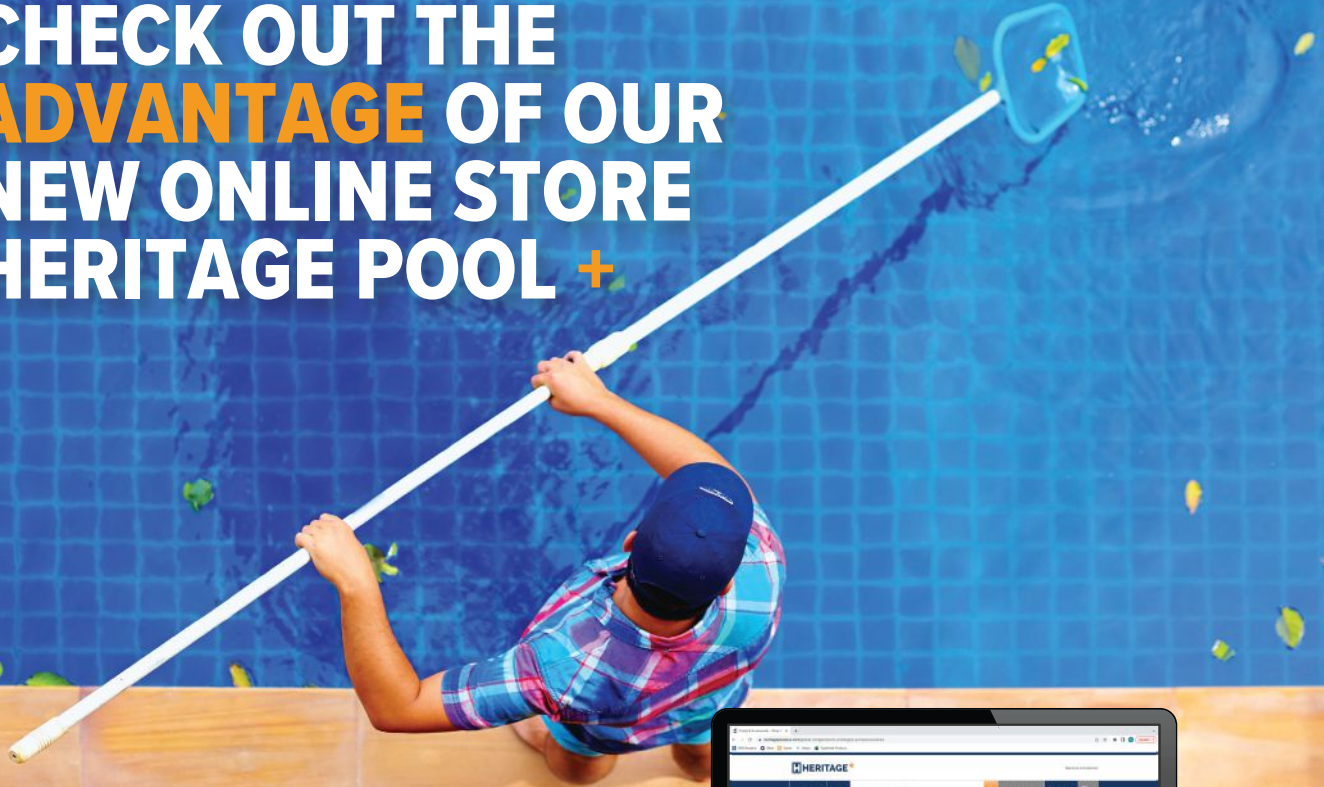


## JED Pool Tools

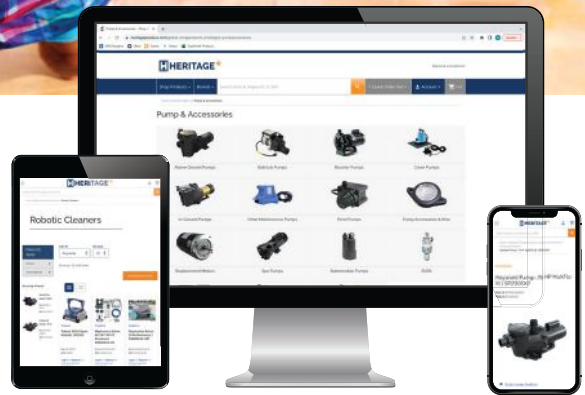
Custom Maintenance Kits can contain any of the products a pool professional wants to provide to their customers. JED Pool Tools will package whatever products pool professionals choose and will private label the exterior of the box with the pool company's name and contact information.

**Contact:** [JEDPoolTools.com](http://JEDPoolTools.com)

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