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Pool and Spa News

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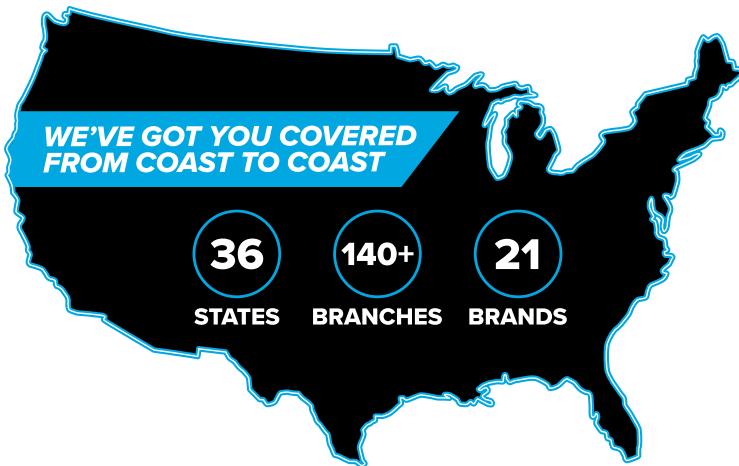


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More Power to the Industry



Joanne McClain
Editor-in-Chief, PSN

Not all heroes wear capes.

This is certainly true in the realm of swimming pools and aquatics. Just take a look at Bill Kent and Rowdy Gaines. No capes there, although Gaines does have the added weight of three Olympic gold medals to manage.

Both are honored in our sister publication *Aquatics International*, the flip side of the industry coin dedicated to commercial aquatics. *Aquatics International's* February/March issue is called the Power Issue, and in it, we profile a handful of the most influential people in aquatics — people who are making a profound difference in furthering the field of aquatics, whether it's in facility management, lifeguard training, water safety, and more.

As mentioned above, Bill and Rowdy have been honored this year for their long-standing work in driving awareness and support for creating new swimmers. The goal is both altruistic and self-serving — a seeming paradox, but teaching children to swim does both things. Children who know how to swim become safer around bodies of water, thus reducing the alarmingly high rates of drowning. And children who are swimmers grow up to enjoy water sports and other pool and spa activities, ensuring high demand for these vessels in the years to come, which equates to future growth for the industry.

It's wonderful to learn about the growing traction and progress of their efforts, and I invite you to learn more about their work in “Power by Numbers” on page 51.

I also invite you to subscribe to *Aquatics International*. I believe it behooves all members of the residential pool/spa industry to pay attention to

what's going on in the commercial sector. There are so many benefits to be gained, and I firmly believe the two sides work hand-in-hand to make the industry as a whole better.

To name but a few of the benefits:

1. Market expansion — Pool professionals with commercial knowledge can expand their business to serve both markets, creating more stability through economic fluctuations.
2. Training opportunities — Commercial certification programs provide valuable skills that enhance expertise across all pool environments.
3. Regulatory insight — Commercial facilities face stricter regulations, giving residential professionals early exposure to standards that may eventually affect residential pools.

Additional reasons include design innovation focusing on energy efficiency, accessibility and safety; advancements in water quality treatment; and sustainability practices such as water conservation and chemical reduction techniques — all topics that the residential market would find to be of interest and possibly scaled for residential applications.

As an added bonus, you get to learn about cool people like Bill and Rowdy. In fact, I invite you to read the entire February/March issue and meet the rest of our honorees: Nichole Bohner, Wes Long, Dr. Stephen Langendorfer, Pete DeQuincy, Ruby Newell-Legner and Leslie Schwene. You can find it at aquaticshintl.com.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne McClain". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".

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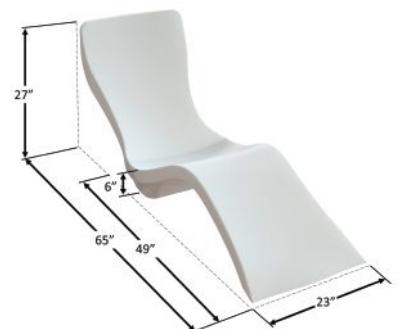
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LA Service Firms Scramble After Wildfire Damage

While the local service industry tries to assess the loss of business, one thing becomes clear: Clean-up will take months.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO



Service companies continue to assess the damage of January's wildfires in Southern California and their impact on business there.

The fires began Jan. 7 in the coastal town of Pacific Palisades, with the other major blaze sparking shortly after near Pasadena (called the Eaton fire), with others springing up throughout Los Angeles County during historic winds. Combined, the blazes killed at least 29 people and led to the loss of approximately 16,000 structures and the leveling of entire neighborhoods. The Palisades and Eaton fires lasted the rest

of the month, with officials barely announcing them as fully contained on Jan. 31.

It took weeks for service companies to learn the state of their pools, as affected homeowners worked through the overwhelming process of starting to rebuild, and officials blocked access to the burn areas while they assessed damage, assured the area was safe and started the process of removing debris.

It was a tense time for these companies. "I think at first everyone was freaked out," says Richard Okamoto, president of the Independent Pool

and Spa Association's Westside Chapter, which covers the Palisades area.

"We just heard that the entire Palisades had burned out, and you start thinking about how many you have in the area. Then as information got back to us and we could check on our clients, [we found that] most of us didn't lose a ton, but I think everybody in our chapter has at least a few clients in that area. It's a very big area, and it felt like everyone had pools."

Okamoto's company — West Los Angeles-based Hang Ten Pools — lost five accounts. He reports that seems about average among the 60 IPSSA member companies in his chapter. But he tells of others who took larger losses. In some cases, whole routes have been wiped out, leaving company owners to find a new route for the displaced tech or make difficult decisions. The impact on single-person operations has been more difficult to track.

There has been talk among the industry about one or two professionals losing their homes. No reports have come up of individuals losing their businesses. Some of the service professionals who spoke with *PSN* have lost a significant number of accounts for the foreseeable future.

The Pool & Hot Tub Alliance formed a fund to provide financial assistance to companies affected by the fires. Through donations and fundraising (continued on page 18)

Western Show Adjusts to Changes

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

Despite significantly early scheduling and historic fires nearby, the Western Pool & Spa Show reported attendance comparable to last year.

“We were down just about 7% from last year,” when the event took place at the end of March, said Show Director Eric Nielson.

He attributes this to a triple challenge: Because of scheduling with the Long Beach Convention Center, where it’s held every year, the show had to run more than a month earlier than normal — Feb. 6-8 compared with March 28-30 in 2024. This conflicted with the Southwest Pool & Spa show.

Then part of the organizers’ efforts to get word out were hampered when its marketing materials burned in the January Los Angeles-area fires.

Despite this, traffic remained steady throughout the three days of exhibits.

“[Exhibitors] told me the engagement was even better than normal,” Nielson said.

The co-branding trend was apparent at this event, with organizations such as Pool Nation and Watershape University highlighting its educational slate, which topped

90 sessions.

“We served our function: We had the best education and the opportunity for people to come in, see all the new products and learn as much as they could from all the exhibitors,” Nielson said.

The show held its first welcome event, for which it partnered with Heritage Pool Supply Group, HASA, AquaStar and RayPak. The Queen tribute concert sold out at 800 tickets, with very few ticket holders not showing up, Nielson said.

Additionally, between ticket sales and donations — both corporate and

personal — the event raised more than \$200,000, which was donated to the PHTA California Fire Relief Fund and Step Into Swim programs.

Nielson expects to continue such events in the future, with proceeds to benefit industry causes.

“I’d been trying to do one for 15 years but the logistics and [price containment] are tough in that area,” he said. Organizers were able to find a walkable venue that wouldn’t require expensive shuttles.

Next year’s Western Pool & Spa Show will take place Feb. 12-14, 2026 at the Long Beach Convention Center.



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FSPA Executive Director Departs Organization

Elizabeth McMurray, executive director of the Florida Swimming Pool Association resigned and left the organization Feb. 12.

"The separation was 100% amicable, and we have a search committee in place that is searching for a new CEO," said Dallas Thiesen, the group's chief government relations officer.

No timeline for the new hire has been set. "The search committee is looking for the right candidate, so it has not targeted a specific date," Thiesen said.

McMurray had served in the role since September 2021.



Easton Select Makes Two More Acquisitions

Easton Select Group, one of the recently formed industry consolidators focusing on the Northeast, added two new Massachusetts-based companies to its portfolio in February.

The company acquired Environmental Pools, a luxury pool builder and service provider based in Bolton, Mass. Founded more than 30 years ago, the company will retain its existing brand, as well as its design, construction, and service teams.

Environmental CEO/co-founder Andrew Everleigh now takes a position with Easton Select as its new COO. His brother, Environmental Co-owner Corey Everleigh, becomes President of Environmental Pools.

Easton then purchased Sweetwater Pool Service, a provider of residential pool care, maintenance and renovation serving Greater Boston for more than 50 years. The company will continue operating under its current brand, with its existing team in place. Former owner Stephen Cortner will work with Easton Select in an advisory capacity. Chuck Hernandez will remain with Sweetwater Pool Service as its president.

Easton Select Group, based in Easton, Mass., began in summer of 2024, founded by the company that owns PSN Top 50 Builder Easton Pool & Spa, manufacturer Plunge Pool Concepts and Atlantic Water Services. It is backed by Brenton Point Capital Partners.

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Actual size

(continued from page 13) events, the organization had collected \$140,000 at press time. During these early days, only seven companies had applied. The most impacted lost 60 of its 75 accounts, reported PHTA President/CEO Sabeena Hickman. The others experienced losses significant enough to have an impact but not to close businesses.

"I think everybody's still waiting to assess," Hickman said.

Rich Gallo, CEO of Los Angeles-based Pure Swim, lost approximately 50 clients. His company is large, so he doesn't expect his company to go into the red, but rather to have a flat 2025 instead of seeing the growth he had projected. "Our growth rate is about 50 accounts per year," he says. "So it's like we went back in time in terms of growth."

For those clients who lost their

homes, service pros are touching base when possible to assess the situation. But they are in the throes of processing their loss and focusing on housing, so pools remain on the back burner for now. And, as of press time, officials were still blocking access to some areas to homeowners, let alone contractors.

"They really don't have answers," Okamoto says about those clients who lost their homes. "They told me it's going to be months if not years before they're back in and able to be normal with pool service. With those, it's basically like, 'We'll call you when we're ready.'"

With the damage assessed, service companies find themselves under the gun to help those clients who were touched by one of the fires but didn't lose their homes. Flames may have breached their property and

burnt part of the home or surrounding structures and equipment. Or it may just be that enough ash fell in the pool to impact the water quality and even turn the pools black.

For each of those clients, Okamoto has to apply for permits to access the properties before performing the process of needed repairs, equipment replacements and water treatment.

The clean-up will not take place instantaneously. Gallo's company is treating each affected pool with a 30-hour process, with about 10 days passing from the beginning until the pool is swim-ready again. He expects this work to continue through the end of May.

Companies interested in applying for a grant from PHTA's fund can search "PHTA" and "California fire relief fund" as the quickest way to find the page.

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SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Setting Clients Up For Success

Providing an exceptional experience for a client must continue after the project is done.

BY PAUL WINANS



Maybe the real question is: How does the client deal with the possibility that, soon after their project is done, it starts falling apart?

I'll answer this as a remodeling contractor — the role I fulfilled the majority of my life — but also as a client, who has had remodeling work on our current home done by others. It's important we stand in the shoes of our clients, as we all can.

SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

The company must set clear expectations about what will happen after the project is completed. This can be a challenge, because it often is taking place at a time when the client is excited and apprehensive about the project starting and is overwhelmed

with information.

When running our company, we would review how the completion list at the end of the project would be handled. The never-ending punch list was something we and the client wanted to avoid.

After the project was done, we wanted the client to call us first whenever anything needed attention. We would tell the client that if it was our responsibility, we would fix it at no charge. If it was their responsibility, we would give them a price to fix it.

Getting very clear before the project starts about what the client can expect from the contractor after the work is done gives the client a sense of security that the contractor won't disappear.

PROVIDE INSTRUCTIONS

As the project progresses, a lot of information is generated about the project and all that comprises it. The contractor must collect all installation, operating, and care instructions for all items that are installed in the building. These materials should be organized with tabs bearing names such as "Appliances" and "Installation Instructions" to help the client find needed information quickly.

Without this information, the client is left searching for it when it is needed. That is something your clients would find very frustrating.

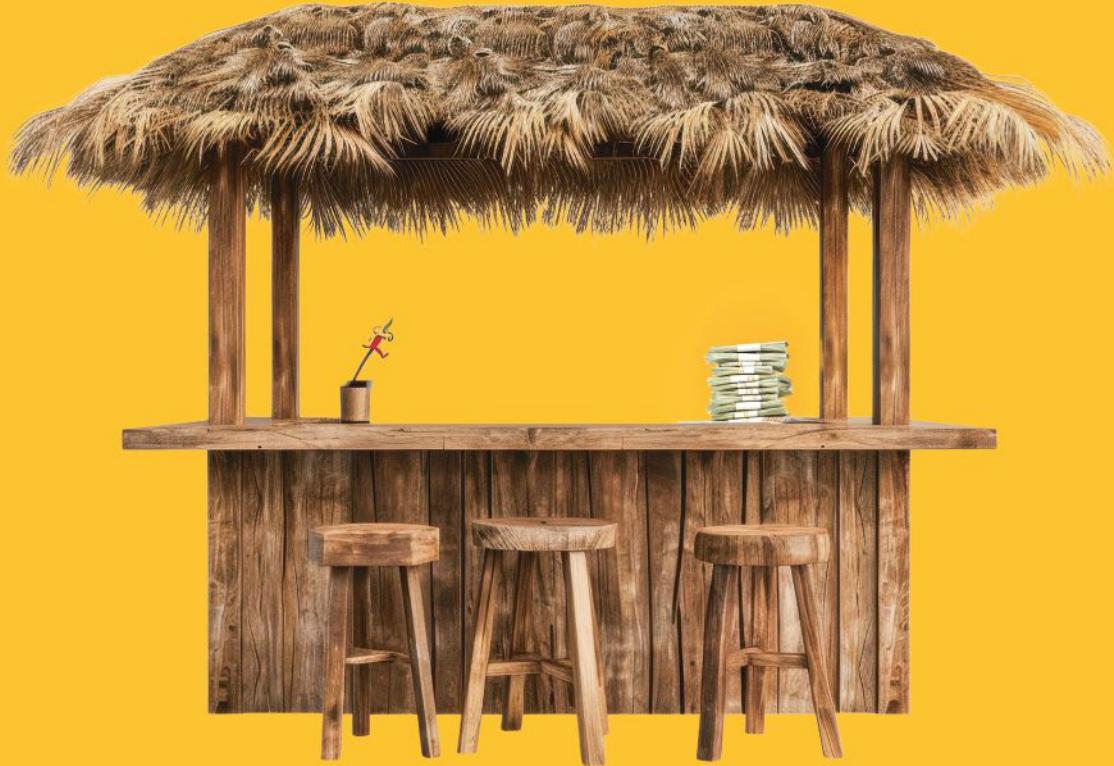
SYSTEMIZE CHECK-INS AND TOUCHES

When we were running our company, I would do a thank-you visit about one month after the project was 100% done. Part of the visit was to thank them for having our company do their project. Part the visit was to inspect the work. I would try to find a couple of items needing a bit of attention, things that the client hadn't noticed. Our company would then arrange for the lead carpenter who ran the job to get the items tuned up.

That set a good tone for the client regarding our continuing relationship with them. After all, much of our work came from past clients and referrals by them.

Our administrative assistant would do a check-in call six months after the project was over, asking how things were going and how the client

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was enjoying the completed project. We would call the client one year after the project was done to see if anything needed attention. If it did, I would go and check it out, since I was the salesperson for the job. Having the person who started the relation-

ship with the client show up a year after the job is over gives the client a powerful story to tell their friends. The client feels like a made a smart decision to work with your company. We included our past clients in our marketing efforts, making it difficult

for them to forget us and reminding them that we still cared.

I would hand write thank-you notes to anybody, including past clients, who provided us with a referral. I did this whether or not that referral turned into a job for our company.

AFTERCARE IS ESSENTIAL

When a remodeling company does a project for a client, it is not the end of a transaction. Rather, it is the first step in a long relationship.

The client wants the company to be a resource. As a business, we thought that was good for our company. We wanted our past clients to call us with any concerns. Why? Because we wanted to be their go-to resource so they wouldn't go to anyone else.

We could take a look at something that may or may not be our responsibility. If appropriate, we'd direct them to the best provider for their need.

If a company does not do this, their clients start thinking that they should call other remodeling companies.

CONTINUE BEING EXCEPTIONAL

Providing an exceptional experience for a client must continue after the project is done. One of the best reasons to do it is your good past clients will likely ask you to do their next project.

It takes planning on the part of the company to do this. And it will cost some money.

Build the cost into your budget. Build the time into your scheduling practices.

The first job a company does with a client is a learning experience for both. The second job goes even more smoothly. Why run your business doing only the first job?

This article previously appeared in sister publication JLC. Paul Winans is a veteran remodeler who worked as a consultant to remodeling business owners.

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Heavy Hitters

Get to know the pool/spa service professionals who earned the highest accolades in the 2024 Pentair Pool Pro Awards Competition.

BY NATE TRAYLOR



The 2024 Pentair Pool Pro Award honorees (l-r): Salvador Hernández, Keith Smith, Jacob Fladhammer, Joe Dempsey, Amber Gardner, Dan Dumas and Anthony Basilicato.

Pentair has the utmost confidence that the winners of its 2024 Pool Pro Award honorees are larger than life.

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- A compelling story of success

To gain the honor, nominees go through a vetting process before being placed on a ballot. An online vote determines the finalists, who then undergo an interview by a selection committee, which chooses the honorees.

The top honor goes to one man and one woman, who are called the Grand Finalists. With this year's theme being "Larger than Life," the bar was set high. Learn their stories.

PHOTOS BY NOBLE PHOTO



Grand Finalists Amber Gardner
and Keith Smith

AMBER GARDNER

Director of Client Services
Collins Pool Management
McDonough, Ga.

You don't need to be a 25-year industry veteran to be a Pentair Pool Pro Award winner.

Case in point: Amber Gardner.

Since entering the field just six years ago, Gardner has quickly climbed the ranks, starting as a receptionist at McDonough, Ga.-based Collins Pool Management and now serving as the firm's director of client services. To help drive such a quick evolution, she earned her Certified Pool Operator, Certified Pool and Spa Service Technician and Certified Pool Inspector in that time.

Oh, and she recently achieved Certified Building Professional status.

"I'm big on certifications," Gardner says. "When I started, I only knew the basics — just the chemistry required by code. I spent a lot of time reading and learning, listening to every podcast, every webinar."

Before joining the pool industry, Garder worked in property management for a homeowners' association. She was so impressed with how Collins operated the neighborhood pool that she decided to work for the company. She hasn't looked back.

"The moment I got in here, I fell in love with the industry and Collins' culture," she says.

INNOVATING FOR EFFICIENCY

When she joined the company, Gardner had already practiced a hobby that would prove very beneficial to both the company and its clients.

As a certified SCUBA diver, she saw an opportunity to streamline the process of replacing pool grates to comply with the Virginia Graeme Baker Pool and Spa Safety Act. Instead of going through the costly and time-consuming process of draining pools, Gardner and a small team of certified divers perform inspections and replacements underwater.

"Of every pool that I dove — prob-

ably around 60 or 65 — there was only one that was in compliance," she says.

Now, thanks to her diving experience, she estimates a 43% increase in VGBA compliance among clients.

Now she's on a mission to get as many employees SCUBA certified as possible.

"We save lives by making sure these pools are in compliance," Gardner says.

CULTURE OF CARE

Gardner's impact has helped elevate the company's management style as well.

She believes that when team members feels valued and supported, their enthusiasm and care will show in the work. As she sees it, a leadership style that emphasizes mentorship and collaboration will lead to safer, cleaner pools. She reports that this people-first approach has set the company apart in a competitive industry.

Garner also made changes to help

ensure client safety. She implemented an eight-page checklist that her technicians must complete for every job to ensure the safety of customers and residents. She leads weekly safety reviews, reinforcing the company's commitment to maintaining the highest standards in pool management.

BUILDING A FUTURE

Gardner has found a way to leverage her HOA experience for the company's benefit.

Collins Pool Management recently launched a commercial pool construction division, and Gardner played a key role in securing its first bid. With a clear goal of growing the firm's maintenance contracts to 500 pools while establishing a fully operational construction department for HOA and developer projects, her drive and strategic vision are shaping the company's future.

It just goes to show: "If you want it and you're in the right company, the sky's the limit."

KEITH SMITH

Head of Renovations
Heritage Pools
North Charleston, S.C.

Keith Smith found his life's calling in a hole in the ground — a literal hole in the ground. But more on that later.

Smith serves as the head of renovations at Heritage Pools, based in North Charleston, S.C. But before that, he was a line cook with a baby on the way.

In need of a more lucrative career, he began exploring opportunities. He took the advice of his brother-in-law, a service technician, and interviewed for a role at Heritage.

"I worked for two days just to see if they liked me and if I liked the work," Smith recalls. "The moment I went

out there — the smell of freshly excavated earth, being outside instead of in a kitchen — I fell in love with it."

It was there at the bottom of a soon-to-be swimming pool that he discovered a path forward. "I knew this was something I wanted to pursue seriously," Smith says.

From there, he embraced every learning opportunity. He started in maintenance, soaking up knowledge like a sponge.

"I wanted to learn everything," he says. "I really enjoyed the mechanical

side of things — working with my hands, understanding pool chemistry, learning about service and renovations. I just kept growing."

UPWARD BOUND

Smith's dedication didn't go unnoticed. His commitment to customer service and high-quality work caught the attention of Heritage Pools' leadership, who began investing in his professional development.

"Michael Gesmond, the owner,

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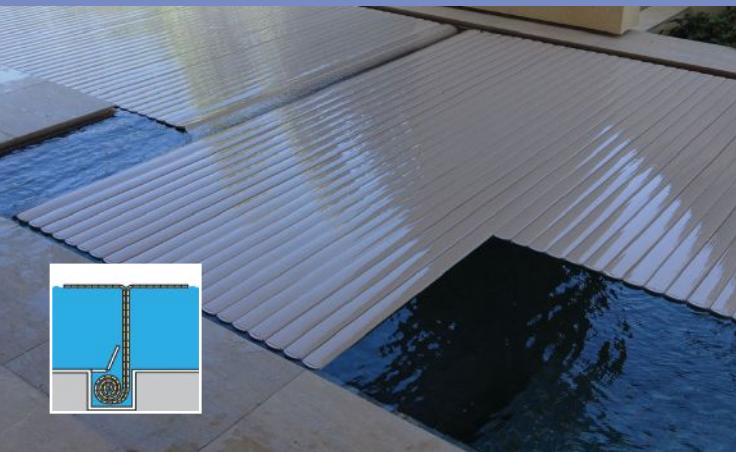


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started taking me to trade shows,” Smith shares. “I got my CST certification and became the service manager before eventually leading the renovations department.”

Today, as head of renovations, Smith takes pride in breathing new life into old pools.

“I love taking something that’s 25 or 30 years old and making it new again,” he says. “A lot of pools were built without today’s safety and efficiency standards. Now, I get to improve functionality, convert outdated single drains to safer dual drains, and introduce automation and variable-speed pumps.”

One of Smith’s most rewarding projects was a concrete pool and spa renovation that desperately needed an upgrade.

“The spa had a lot of poor repairs — just band-aid solutions,” he explains. “Rather than tearing every-



Staff from organizer Pentair (l-r): Christina Swanson, Sarah McClintock, Suzanne Templeton, Katie Baker, Jillian Swift.

thing down, we came up with a creative way to conceal the plumbing with a step feature, finishing it with

Tahoe marble and split facade stone. The transformation was incredible, and the client was thrilled.”

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TECH-DRIVEN

The potential for technology plays a sizable role in Smith's enthusiasm for the industry.

"I've always been fascinated by automation," he says. "The ability to control a pool's features — valves, lights, salt systems — from your phone is just amazing. It makes everything so much easier for homeowners."

But beyond technology, Smith is just as passionate about his team.

"I don't ask my crew to do anything I wouldn't do myself," he says. "I'll be out there in the field working alongside them, teaching them. Last year, we did a safety cover installation together — none of us had done one before, so we learned as a team."

GOAL ORIENTED

Winning the Pentair Pool Pro Award reminds Smith how far he's gone in his 12 years in the industry.



Staff from organizer Pentair (l-r): Tony Squieri, David Fladhammer, Bruce Sauvageau, Lifetime Achievement Winner Jacob Fladhammer, Scott Bushey and Christina Swanson.

And he has further yet to go. As he looks to the future, Smith is eager to expand his skill set.

"This year, I want to learn more

about pool design using Structure Studio," he says. "That's my next big step — creating my own designs from scratch."

PSN

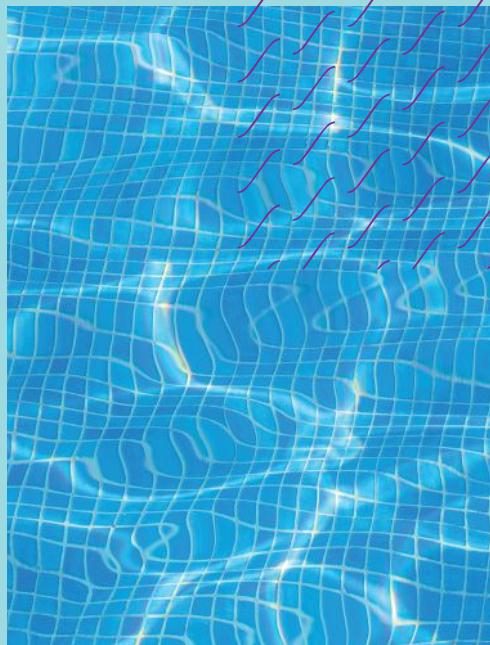
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The Story Behind Every Pool

Clients don't see themselves as bystanders in the design of their backyards. They want to play a part in the story as it unfolds.

BY FERAS IRIKAT



Business theorist Peter Drucker once said, “Quality in a product is not what the supplier puts in. It is what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for.”

I find that quote to be very instructive. In my industry, interior design, I often hear colleagues and friends complain about how attached clients have become to their projects.

It used to be that the designer presented a conceptual design, and the clients offered some input at certain points, maybe made some tweaks, but

they didn't lead the process. Today, clients are involved in everything, from A to Z, starting at the very beginning with the conceptual design phases.

But, some of my associates say, the designers are the professionals — they are the ones who know best. So why don't their clients let them do what they were hired to do, without interference?

Believe it or not, product quality holds less value today than it did in the past. It's no longer enough for a consumer to find the perfect product

or solution. They want to enjoy the journey of gaining that product. In fact, the journey — in our case, the design and construction process — is as important as the end result. In some cases it's even more important.

We also have to realize that consumers today have changed their idea of what their personal space should reflect, as well as how they buy and interact with the end product. Luxury has been redefined to suggest an experience more than a product or service.

POOL DESIGN, SELECTIVE DESIGNS AND CAJUN POOLS, PHOTO BY JIMI SMITH

A RARE EXPERIENCE

Everybody likes a good story and, ultimately, many clients want both the design/construction process and the final product to provide them with some anecdotes.

Every time I go into a home that's newly redesigned — say I'm visiting a friend — I will hear a story from that homeowner. They'll tell me about the designer, what they did, how they got involved, maybe how they traveled together. They'll talk about the hours they spent together. And they'll share a personalized story: "Well, we found that window in an abandoned church."

They also want a finished product that is absolutely customized and tells a story about them. At one time, the consumer would basically bring a picture or two, or choose photos from a book provided by the designer. It was almost like choosing out of a catalog: "I like this one." Then the designer went to achieve it. There would be slight changes — a little shift in color or moving something from here to there.

Now the consumer is coming in and saying, "I don't want to keep up with the Joneses — I want to stay away from the Joneses. I want something for me."

There's a hunger for customization. People bring their initials, family crests and heirlooms to be incorporated into their swimming pool designs. I design mosaics, and I receive plenty of requests for customized mosaic murals, whether it's a small medallion or covers the entire pool. That creates a personal connection.

I think of it like they're getting a tattoo — it has to represent something in their lives, and they want that to be a part of the story, so they can tell others what that mural means to them. It's not good enough to look good — it has to connect them personally to that environment.

And then many of these clients are looking for an educational journey —



a learning opportunity. For instance, they may not care about the technical aspect of the job, and they're usually willing to trust you with that. But they'll still ask, "What type of pump are you using and why? What's the capacity?" It's information that's not necessarily going to help them in any way — they have the warranty and everything they need to know if something were to go wrong.

But I honestly believe they just want to learn. Because they're emotionally connected to their environment, they're curious about what's happening to it.

ADAPTING TO THE TASK

I have to admit, this shift in the power dynamic can have a little bit of an effect on the ego for a designer.

I also come from an old-school approach where you're the designer — you're the professional, almost like a surgeon or doctor. So when you sense an attitude of, "I'm not going to take medical advice from you," there can be ego involved.

I first realized that this shift was occurring when I was presenting a client with a portfolio of my work. They looked at it as if to say, "Good for you, but that's not what we want." It felt a bit like a personal attack.

I asked, "But if you don't like my work, why are you here?" They explained that they liked the work, but they didn't want to copy any of it for themselves.

Those clients helped me figure myself out as a designer, that I am more than just a specific aesthetic — that I create meaningful, functional spaces that really connect with that specific consumer. They helped me understand that it's not just the final look that matters, it's really that higher-level connection. I had to check my ego and really think about how to make design not about me, because it's more about their vision, ideas, stories and journey. My job is to make sure they get all that, not just a nice, pretty end result.

We designers have had to adjust because this is now a reality in the



world of the consumer. They are in charge, they are in the lead.

Even manufacturers are following the lead of consumers, not of the designer, to learn what they want and need. This has not only occurred with pool or interior design: We also see fashion designers relying on consumers for input. Furniture companies will publish 10 designs on social media and ask consumers to vote for their favorite to help determine what gets included in their next line.

I enjoy this interaction with clients, because I know that, ultimately, the space is for them. It's appropriate that they take charge of what they want their environment to look like, how it feels, and how they interact with it.

The designer's ideas and input are still very important. A client can pick a paint color, but they have no idea what to do with it. That customer acts almost like a project manager, leading the designer down the right path, so they can create this beautiful masterpiece.

TRUE PARTNERSHIP

I often am asked what I do to bring clients in the passenger seat with me.

Make them your assistant versus your client. Open the dialogue completely, and make it all about them, not about the design or the outcome of the design. You also have to allow them to be in the passenger seat to enjoy the journey with you, not just the destination. Shoot for the customer's heart, not just their business.

Engagement and creating an emotional connection will make a customer relationship the driving force for loyalty and differentiation. It also gives the customer something very special: They will want to tell others about it.

Over a lifetime, emotionally connected customers are more than twice as valuable as highly satisfied customers. They buy more of your products and services, visit you more often, exhibit less price sensitivity, pay more attention to your communications, follow your advice, and recommend you more — everything you hope their experience with you will cause them to do. All of this because you have allowed them to be a critical part of finding the solution and not just getting there.

Let's face it: Today's consumers are more diverse, interconnected and

demanding than ever before. Their expectations are rising while their propensity to be loyal to you is declining. If they are not in the passenger seat, they are in the driver's seat.

It is in our nature to tell stories. It's what makes us human, and it's essential for our survival. There is a psychological comfort in telling our own tale. These narratives connect us to our emotions and the physical relationship to our environment.

Let your customer tell their story with you. Let them enjoy the journey and be a part of it as much as possible. Allow them to get credit for some of the journey and be a part of the final solution. Most importantly, make them a part of their own epic and their journey with you. It is the tale they will tell over and over because they helped to write it.

Feras Irikat is director of design and marketing for Lunada Bay Tile, in Harbor City, Calif. He has taught color theory, applications and psychology at SFSU, UC Santa Cruz extension, West Valley College, and at design seminars around the world. He is a frequent instructor for Genesis.



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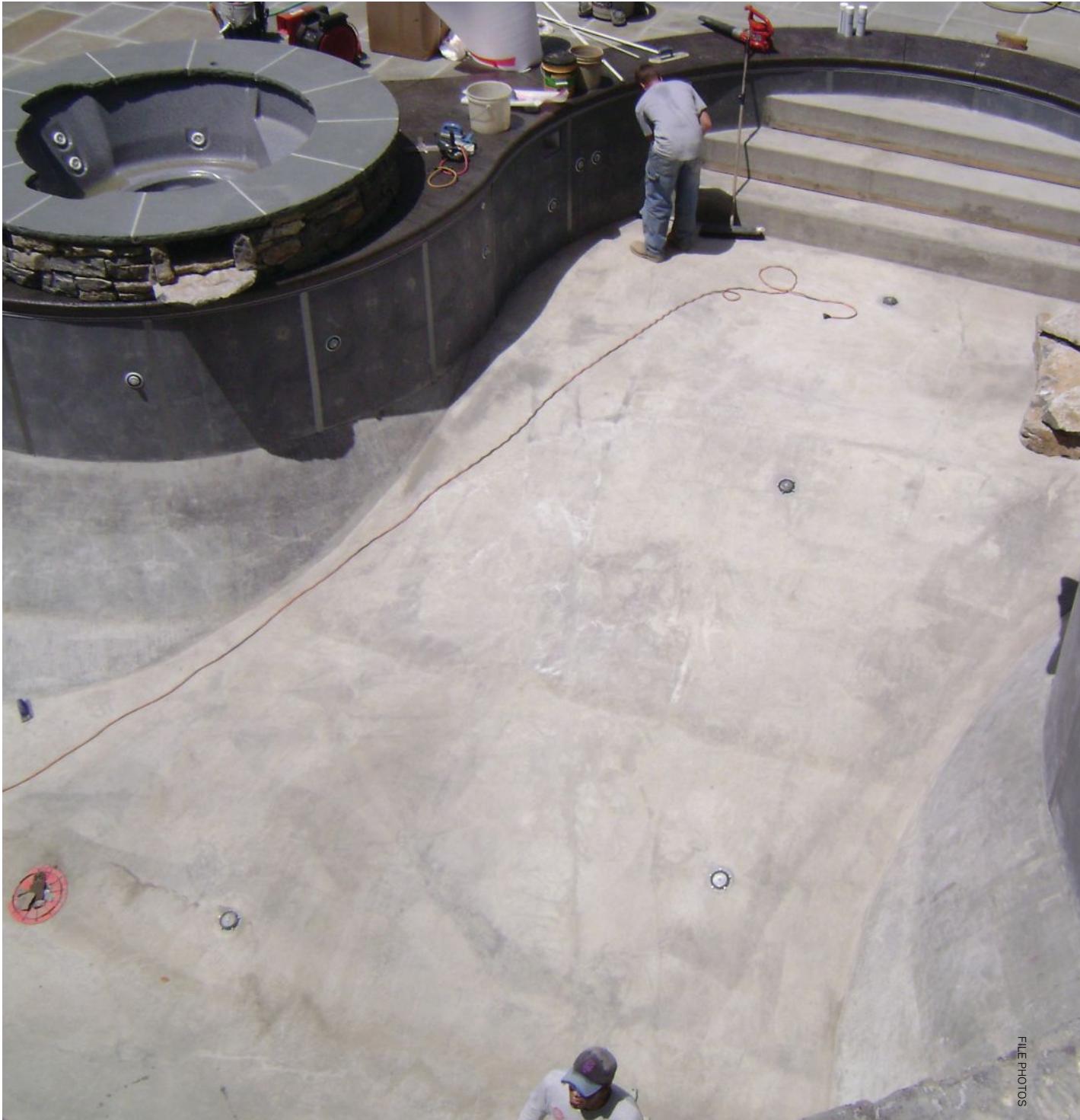
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WHICH FOR VINYL-LINER POOLS —



FILE PHOTOS

CONCRETE OR VERMICULITE?



Builders weigh the benefits of their favorite floor materials for vinyl-liner pools.

BY NATE TRAYOLR

There is a common debate among builders of vinyl-liner pools: Polymer or steel walls? But there may be an even more important argument to be had.

“The fact is that there is more square footage on the bottom of the pool than anywhere else,” says Mike Giovanone, a long-time industry instructor and former vinyl-liner pool builder.

So perhaps more thought should be given to the materials builders use when laying the floor. This comes down to two main options: Concrete and vermiculite. Each has its pros and cons. Here, builders discuss their preferred choices.

Let the new debate begin.

CONCRETE

If the objective is to create a solid floor impervious to the elements, accept no substitute.

Unlike vermiculite, its porous counterpart, concrete keeps groundwater at bay — no more floating liner. And liner replacements aren't complicated by floor repairs, which can be extensive given vermiculite's tendency to dent and spoil.

“You solve all your water problems, liner-change problems, footprints, heel marks — anything inherent to a vinyl-liner pool,” says Giovanone, founder and former owner of Concord Pools in Latham, N.Y.



To his mind, to build a vinyl-liner pool with anything less than concrete is folly.

“You would never pour benches or stairs with vermiculite. Why on earth would you pour a floor with vermiculite?” he asks.

Of course, concrete should be approached with caution. There is a learning curve to it, but Giovanone says it can be easily mastered. You just need to work with the right concrete mix.

If you decide to go this route, give careful consideration to the aggregate in the mix, he advises. You want crushed aggregate consisting of stone sizes between ½ inch and 2 inches. A variety of sizes creates a stronger matrix.

“If you’re using all [1- or 2 inch stone], they’re not going to inter-face as tightly when you mix them,” Giovanone says.

He cautions against round stone. “You’re going to put round stone on a 45-degree wall, and it’s going to want to roll,” he says. “I’ve had people tell

me, ‘I’ve been putting in concrete with round stone for years,’” and I say ‘Well, you’ve been working too hard, son.’”

In contrast, crushed stone will interlock with each other, securing the walls in place. Plus, it’s easier to trowel.

With the right concrete mix, a floor of at least a couple inches thick should hold up under the weight of the water, he says. And if the earth below the floor caves or settles, the concrete shouldn’t be affected.

On the other hand, even proponents of vermiculite acknowledge that their preferred material is subject to shift, crack or cave due to the ground settling. (However, they maintain that vermiculite repairs are much easier to make.)

Matt Rozeski made the switch to concrete after taking one of Giovanone’s courses. The owner of Penguin Pools, with locations in Waukesha, Wis. and Minneapolis, says one of the biggest adjustments to make was speed. Concrete sets faster, necessitating that his crew trowel quicker.

But this has an advantage: He can install a concrete bottom in about half a day, whereas vermiculite can take eight-plus hours to cure, provided there is no rain.

Because it is delivered already mixed, there are no dust or bags for the concrete, making clean-up a snap. Plus, Rozeski believes he’s giving his customers a better product.

“This is what distinguishes us from other builders,” he says.

VERMICULITE

Vermiculite is a lightweight mineral. Mixed with Portland cement, it forms a semi-hard surface that feels slightly spongy underfoot.

Many of the arguments against vermiculite are same reasons some builders favor the material. Because it is porous, it won’t trap water between the floor and liner. The liner may float, but it will recede in time.

As with concrete, crews should make the vermiculite layer between 1 and 2 inches thick. Any thicker and

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it will void the porosity, which would defeat its purpose.

Fans of this material also claim that it's easier on the liner. Vinyl expands and contracts with the temperature. The constant shifting back and forth on a rough concrete floor would, they say, reduce the liner's lifespan.

And because vermiculite takes longer to set, you can be more meticulous. Any imperfections can be addressed later. It can take one to two days for it to cure.

"We usually have a crew of four guys spending half a day putting the floor in. Then, the next day, we'll send guys to spend a few more hours on it to fine tune it," says Dan Lenz, vice president of All Seasons Pools and Spas in Oak Park, Ill. "Because it is soft you can shave the ridges off easily."

This is important, because pool lights will reveal all the imperfections

under the liner. Lenz recalls a minor eyesore in the pool that he had lived with for years. When it came time to replace the liner, he was easily able to file down the blemish. Concrete, on the other hand, would require a grinder and no small amount of skill and experience.

Proponents of the mineral mix say that the ability to quickly patch problem spots is the material's main advantage over concrete. New vermiculite bonds to old vermiculite well.

When doing a liner replacement, floor fixes are common. Frank Christiana, president of The Liner Specialists in Carmel, N.Y., will offer a ½-inch topcoat of vermiculite over the entire bottom if it requires extensive repairs.

"You're getting a consistent layer where there aren't any peaks and valleys," Christiana says.

Vermiculite advocates also tout a greater sense of control during application. It's mixed on site. The

advantage here is that you can control the pace at which the material is made. Lenz uses a gravity feed mixer, which dispenses the vermiculite through a hose at the bottom of the pool as needed.

A concrete truck isn't going to be patient.

"They're accustomed to doing sidewalks and driveways, so they dump it quick," Lenz says. "A pool requires a little more time."

If vermiculite has one major drawback it's this: The material can breed algae, which can bleed through to the other side of the liner. That's why it may be necessary to shock the floor when replacing a liner.

Builders who prefer this material will also acknowledge that the floor can cave in spots where the ground settles under the floor. But then again, concrete can crack and flake. Neither material is immune to problems.



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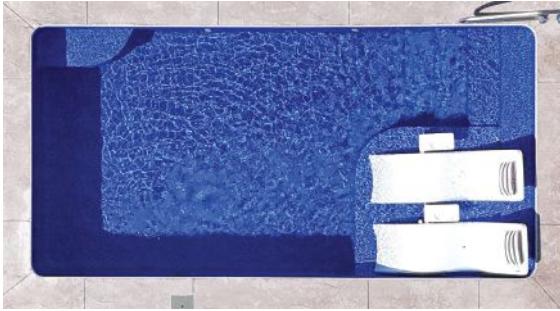


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Contact: kaydenmfg.com



Latham, The Pool Company

The all-new Calypso series of Latham's vinyl liner plunge pools features four 8-by-16-foot liner configurations, including step-up and step-in designs. Packages come complete with a pool base, step configuration, coping and vinyl liner. Available in Stardust Blue or Stardust Grey.

Contact: lathampool.com



LOOP-LOC

New for 2025, Bubbles & Bliss is an exclusive liner pattern inspired by the natural beauty of the ocean. It features a bubbly, creative mosaic that mirrors the fluid movements of water. This liner is CFFA-P-101 certified, and UV- and chemical-resistant.

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McEwen Industries

New for 2025, the Seton liner pattern features a border with floral-inspired details enhanced by the pearl reflection ink. This subtle shimmer in the border contrasts with the rich, deep blue base, reminiscent of the sparkling water surface.

Contact: McEwenIndustries.com



Merlin Industries

The Terracina liner pattern is one of Merlin's new all-over vinyl liner patterns. Joining the line of Aqua Intense liners, this pattern comes with a unique texture in the form of an embossed medallion pattern, and brings a handmade look throughout the pool.

Contact: merlinindustries.com



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Tara Pool & Outdoor Products

The Mosaic Sands liner pattern mimics the look of smooth, multicolored pebbles, creating a clean aesthetic that blends seamlessly with any backyard setting. Crafted with high-definition printing and a 36-inch repeat, it provides a realistic design that adds depth to the pool's appearance.

Contact: tarapools.com

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BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

Don't let the term “soft skills” fool you.

Meaning those personal characteristics that help someone interact with others effectively and harmoniously, soft skills may not earn a specific mention in your core job description, especially for technicians. But they can provide the key ingredient for a company's success.

It basically boils down to communication. And it's an important enough topic to Dan Lenz that he covers it extensively with his staff, especially during his company's winter training period. During that time, the team dedicates every Thursday solely to training. And each training day, Lenz addresses at least one communication topic. It often involves role playing.

The subject has become so top-of-mind that Hayward has slated designer/builder Scott Cohen to present on the subject at its Partner Summit in March.

With the ultimate goal being to make the customer comfortable and foster trust, he and other experts offer tips to develop your soft skills:

→ **“Drop your baggage, and prepare to meet a new friend.”**

When training his sales team, Cohen says to leave the day at the door.

“We are all in our day-to-day life — we're racing around, getting cut off the freeway,” says the president of The Green Scene Landscaping & Swimming

Pools in Chatsworth, Calif. “Maybe your boss said if you don’t sell a pool you’ll get fired, and your spouse reminded you of 10 things you forgot to do. So you may show up at the house frazzled, but that’s no way to start a meeting.”

Before entering a conversation, take a deep breath and leave those thoughts behind. Focus on the meeting in front of you, and building a relationship.

“I tell my salespeople, ‘I don’t want you to worry about selling a pool or a landscape — I want you to focus on making a friend,’” he says. “‘Don’t pressure them, don’t offer them deals or discounts, just make a friend.’ That’s the goal.”

→ **Avoid negative language.**

This doesn’t simply mean to resist the urge to complain or criticize. Instead, Lenz advises his staff to steer clear of negative words altogether. That means erasing “don’t” and “won’t” from their vocabulary as much as possible.

“If somebody says, ‘I want you to paint my deck with candy canes,’ we don’t say, ‘We don’t do that,’ or, ‘We won’t do that,’” Lenz explains. “We try to talk about what we will do instead.”

Outline feasible options and the reasoning behind them, he encourages.

An alternate example would come during pool openings. A client may tell the tech to vacuum their pool on the same day that they remove the cover, start-up the equipment and begin balancing the water.

“If we just answer, ‘We don’t do that,’ it’s almost like inciting a confrontation,” Lenz says. “Instead, we explain what we do: ‘Oh, you want it to be vacuumed? Here’s the process we go through ...’ We should be saying what we will do and why.”

This applies regardless of the mode of communication, whether it be in-person, voicemail, email or text.



→ **Key phrase: “It’s my pleasure.”**

It may seem odd, but a pet peeve of Cohen’s is when a customer thanks a professional for their work, and the pro says, “You’re welcome.”

For him, there’s only one response: “My pleasure.”

“It sounds so much better,” he says. “It feels better. Even if the [professional] says thank you, that’s not the same. ‘My pleasure’ says it’s an honor to serve you. When we’re working with somebody, it’s an honor to serve them so they should feel that way.”

→ **When texting, be judicious about shortcuts.**

We’ve known since the dawn of emails the challenge of communicating without the benefit of hearing one’s tone of voice or seeing their body language. Then texts made brevity crucial.

Despite this, Lenz doesn’t want his staff to use abbreviations. Some can come across as flippant, he believes, especially to those generations who weren’t raised on the shorthand.

“A personal pet peeve of mine is the use of ‘kk’ instead of ‘OK,’” he says. “I understand that it’s texting, but it’s from a business environment, so we’re

not going to use the abbreviations. I don’t want to see a ‘ttyl’ for ‘talk to you later.’ I want to see them use their words.”

However, he does encourage them to use emoji to help convey tone.

“Texts can be very cold and unfeeling, and by adding a happy face or thumbs up, to me it helps identify the tone in which you intended the message to be given,” he says.

→ **Take a lesson from the turtle.**

When things get busy and the to-do list gets long, we naturally want to speak as quickly as possible so we can check the transaction off our list and move on to the next one. Then some of us just naturally speak quickly.

Whatever the cause, Lenz tells staff to slow down when speaking with clients. “Enunciate. Make sure your words are being heard, and have a conversation where the listener isn’t feeling rushed or cut short. Making sure they’re getting the information they need and understanding it is important.”

→ **Use inviting body language.**

The goal is to make clients feel comfortable and happy to do

business with you.

“I like people to talk in calming tones and offer some level of comfort,” Lenz says.

For him that means being relaxed and open in tone and body language. No folding arms in front of you or placing hands in pockets.

And always make eye contact. “Not facing away from them and turning toward them — but [physically] facing them,” he says. “All these things that give comfort to people beyond the spoken word.”

→ Match the mode of communication to the occasion.

Texts can save a ton of time but they don't always make sense, says Nick Day, general manager of Denton, Texas-based Gohlke Pools.

“If it's a long back-and-forth or a large amount of information that you need to send the customer, we would ask that they try to take that to a phone call,” he says. “They can even text, ‘This requires a long answer. Could you give me a call sometime so we can answer it.’”

The same holds true if there's a concern about tone — if the customer seems like they might not be happy or if the conversation is more difficult or sensitive.

“People over the phone might act a little differently than in text and even better in person,” Day says.

He avoids voicemail altogether: “When's the last time you listened to your voicemail?” (Unless the customer says they prefer it, of course.)

Day places emails one step above voicemails. For him, they make most sense for sending notices, quotes, contracts and other longer documents that might need some time and focus. But he doesn't use it for more interactive communication or exchanges that need a quicker reaction. Even when he does email, he'll usually text or call to notify them about the email, so they can look for it.

→ Walking the courtesy conundrum

You're in a client's home, and they ask if you'd like a cup of coffee or something to drink. On the one hand, you don't want to put them out. On the other, you don't want to seem like you're turning down their gracious gesture — plus, the caffeine boost may sound good.

Cohen has a rule for how he and his team respond to this situation: “If you're having one, I will join you.”

“I'm training a new guy and the client says, ‘Would you like a cup of coffee?’ Because that's a courteous thing to say,” he explains. “[My salesperson] says, ‘I'd love one.’ Then the client explains that she actually hates coffee, but her husband drinks it, and she has to spend 15 minutes figuring out how to make it. That's not what you want.”

If somebody offers an alcoholic drink, Cohen says never on the job.

“Whether or not you think they will, they will judge you,” Cohen says. “A guy may offer you a beer on a Saturday at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, but they will still judge you as the guy who drank a beer and got in the car to drive. Later in the project if you're buddies” — and you practice moderation — “that's great, but not in the initial consultations.”

→ Check in often.

Cohen checks on his clients regularly, whether they need it or not.

He schedules an on-site meeting with each customer every two weeks. He explains to them upfront that this is a necessary part of the process. During the visits, he might verify the client's choice of a material or tree placement. He might suggest they consider a lighting upgrade. But the overall goal is to make sure they're happy with how things are going.

“Be the waitress who comes to the table to see how your meal is going,” he says. “That's how you get good reviews. You don't wait until the end

of the job.”

These meetings are a hard requirement for him, even if it pushes back meetings with potential new clients.

→ Start with one voice

Some communication problems spring from a lack of confidence, Lenz recognizes. And customers can become frustrated if they get conflicting information from different employees.

To help with both these problems, Lenz sets his team up to speak with “one voice.”

“Everybody is always saying the same thing — whether it's about a technical issue, a feature, benefit or policy,” he explains.

As part of the company's annual training, and at meetings throughout the year, the staff goes over information about the products and services they offer, as well as policies and the like to make sure everybody shares the same knowledge.

The use of text and email templates to address various questions and situations also helps here. This ensures the customer receives the right information, and that the employee is confident in providing it.

→ Use technology to help bridge the gap.

For some individuals, communication will never come quickly or easily.

For this reason, the team at Gohlke Pools makes use of email templates that technicians can rely on to convey information clearly, thoroughly and with the right tone.

Companies that use texting platforms also can incorporate templates for this mode.

Day's team also has begun using AI to help compose emails.

Some do this through Microsoft Copilot, others through ChatGPT.

“That's something they're adapting more and more into their everyday job,” he says.

Choose Your Finishing Touch



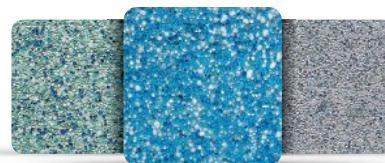
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POWER IN NUMBERS

The industry's collective buy-in to the 'Every Child a Swimmer' mission may have come fairly recently but for these two catalysts, it's been decades in the making.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

For a long time, the pool/spa industry struggled with the issue of swimming safety. Acknowledging the risks of water, the thinking went, would turn people off to a product that stands to improve their lives immensely.

But over time, many came to believe that promoting water safety could only serve as a positive — for everyone. The strategy of choice: Striving to teach every child to swim, with a special focus on providing financial assistance to families with fewer resources. The National Swimming Pool Foundation — once considered an association for commercial pools and aquatics — adopted the mission and established Step Into Swim. The program gained traction as more industry groups and companies contributed. Once NSPF merged with another group to form the

Pool & Hot Tub Alliance, the mission crossed the commercial-to-residential threshold.

Meanwhile, the International Swimming Hall of Fame revived its Every Child a Swimmer program to not only support families in delivering swim instruction to their children, but also advocating for the passage of legislation promoting water safety.

For their decades-long work toward the goal of teaching every child to swim, two individuals were honored by our sister publication, *Aquatics International*, in its annual Power Issue. One provided the impetus behind the two programs listed above, while the other has helped take fundraising to new heights.

Here, we look at their careers and paths into this special work.

MAN ON A MISSION

Through his chairmanship of various organizations, Bill Kent played a key role in mainstreaming the idea of free swim lessons for the disadvantaged.

As with so many things, the seeds for the every-child-a-swimmer movement were planted years before the fruits were borne. Decades, in fact.

The basic idea — that teaching every child to swim would make the most effective way to prevent drowning — was first expressed in the 1980s. Between then and the late 2010s, though, this concept saw little to no follow-through in the pool and spa industry.

In the last decade, these efforts have blown up and become a common mission among the aquatics and pool/spa industries, not only raising funds for lessons, but resulting in legislation to promote the water-safety message.

Bill Kent was there during the more dormant stages. Then he became a major driver converting idea into reality. Through his service for the National Swimming Pool Foundation and, more recently, the International Swimming Hall of Fame, he began two of the largest learn-to-swim initiatives in the field. And the recent push for legislation started with him.

“Every organization needs a spiritual mission,” says the CEO of Team Horner, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. “For the pool industry, the right mission is ‘every child a swimmer.’”

For 20 years, he has worked to see that the idea takes that lofty position.

EARLY EXPOSURE

After Kent joined the pool/spa industry in the early 1970s, it didn’t take long for him to move up the ranks, not only in the company he came to own, but among pool associations as well. In short order, he held high office in organizations such as the National Spa & Pool Institute (a precursor for today’s Pool & Hot Tub Alliance) and the International Swimming Hall of Fame.

That’s how he learned about the “every child a swimmer” concept in the mid 1980s. It was with ISHOF, where he served on the board. There, he met Harold Martin, who had co-founded ISHOF and started its



“Every Child a Swimmer” program.

“He kind of infected me with the idea that we should teach children to swim who can’t afford swim lessons,” Kent says.

At the time, ISHOF’s program was very small and basically faded away after Martin’s passing.

Decades later, another organization began a similar program, this time under Kent’s watch. The National Swimming Pool Foundation started Step Into Swim when Kent was chairman. The program funds lessons for those who otherwise can’t afford them.

NSPF saw the idea gain traction, taking spots in the philanthropy portfolios of many industry companies and organizations and increasing the lesson count each year. (NSPF merged with the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals to form the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance, which now runs Step Into Swim.)

Later, Kent became the chairman of ISHOF — a title he continues to hold. He created another means for children to receive free swim lessons. “One of the first things I did was revive Every Child a Swimmer,” he says.

In fact, he grew it into an operation that came to require a full-time executive director, Casey McGovern, along with two part-time staffers.

A LEGISLATIVE APPROACH

It became clear that embedding the “every child a swimmer” concept into the national fabric would take more than soliciting for donations.

“To bring it to life, I needed to create awareness,” Kent says.

He began promoting legislation that would generate awareness of water safety and the need for swim lessons. The first bill passed in 2020 in Florida. It requires every school to provide water-safety information to parents of children entering elementary school.

When it first sought a legislative solution, Every Child a Swimmer advocated to require all children to receive swim instruction by a certain age. It learned that wouldn’t work, because it would impose a financial burden on families, school districts or other government entities — a serious roadblock to passing legislation, especially in fiscally conservative states.

After hearing a fellow drowning-prevention advocate muse that schools should provide water-safety information, Kent set about writing model language for the bill. On his own, he reached out to representatives. “I was able to go face-to-face with several legislators, drove all over the state, had meetings and explained the goal.”

So far, bills have passed in four

“Every organization needs a spiritual mission. For the swimming pool industry, the right swimming pool mission is ‘every child a swimmer.’”

— Bill Kent

states — Florida, Georgia, Arkansas and Washington. Soon, Kent and his team hope to see Arizona, Illinois, New Jersey and Ohio added to that list, with the ultimate goal being all 50 states.

The organization now promotes a second type of bill. Recently, New York began requiring hospitals to give parents of newborns the option of watching a water-safety video during their stay. Every Child a Swimmer did not initiate that bill, but Kent’s group now advocates for similar language in other states, in addition to its first bill.

“This is a long-term marathon race,” Kent says. “But we’re becoming more and more successful. We now have people calling us wanting to get involved.”



TIRELESS ADVOCATE

Throughout his post-Olympic career, the ‘Voice of Swimming’ has prioritized bringing the sport he loves to those who need help accessing it.

It seems Rowdy Gaines was destined to become the Voice of Swimming.

Left to his own devices, things probably would have veered another direction. As a high schooler, he tried out for four other sports before he took a shot at competitive swimming at 17.

“I had a friend who wanted to try out, so I kind of went with him and didn’t get cut,” Gaines recalls.

Apparently, the fifth time was the charm.

He not only made the high-school swimming team but gained a swimming scholarship to Auburn University. He went on to win three Olym-

pic gold medals and has worked as a swimming commentator since shortly after his competitive career ended.

“It turned out pretty good,” he says with an audible smirk.

So the fact that he went on to be called the “voice of swimming” seems in the cards.

“I literally learned to swim before I learned to walk,” says Gaines, who wears one of his many hats for the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance, as its vice president of partnerships and development. “I grew up in Winter Haven, Fla. We lived on a lake, my parents water skied and took a boat

to work every day.”

He not only turned his family pastime into a career for the history books, but he’s also leveraged his considerable profile, knowledge and energy into delivering free swim lessons to hundreds of thousands of children who otherwise may not have been able to receive them.

LONG-TERM MISSION

Gaines is not new to the concept of striving to make every child a swimmer.

About 20 years ago, he worked for USA Swimming, hired to start up a



foundation for the governing body of American competitive swimming. At first, the foundation was meant to raise money for Team USA.

After learning the rate of childhood drowning in the country, he made a major adjustment. "I changed the direction of the foundation to concentrate more on the learn-to-swim part of things."

He went on to run similar programs in the private sector, as well as for YMCA of Central Florida, where he served as vice president of aquatics. Then in 2021, he joined the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance as vice president of partnerships and development, with the charge of running its Step Into Swim program.

"The mission for me has never really changed," he says.

In his four years with PHTA, the organization has provided swim lessons to approximately 100,000 children. Added to his previous work, he estimates that nearly half a million children have received lessons under his watch.

BREAKING TABOOS

In Gaines' four years leading Step Into Swim, the operation has increased its funding every year.

In 2021, the program distributed

"The biggest change I made was that I had no fear to go to the industry. ... It took me a while to educate these amazing companies [that], instead of making this a negative, let's turn this into a positive by creating more swimmers."

— Rowdy Gaines

approximately \$300,000. The annual figure bumped to \$560,000 in 2022, then \$750,000 in 2023. Last year, Step Into Swim raised and donated approximately \$1.26 million, making it possible to instruct approximately 32,000 children across 43 states.

Gaines believes his biggest key to success has been charging past the taboo that surrounded talk of drowning among pool and spa professionals.

"The biggest change I made was the fact that I had no fear to go to the industry," he says. "When I first started, I'd knocked on a lot of doors. When you mentioned the word drowning, [I'd hear,] 'People in our industry don't like to talk about the word drowning. It's not good for business.' It took me a while to educate these amazing companies [that], instead of making this a

negative, let's turn this into a positive by creating more swimmers."

In the near future, PHTA hopes to deepen Step Into Swim's international representation. It currently has a presence in China and American Samoa and aims to include Canada, among others.

"Drowning is a global epidemic," Gaines says.

The organization also plans to provide more grants directed at lessons for differently abled people, particularly children with autism, who are 160 times more likely to drown, according to the National Autism Association.

"We still have a long way to go," Gaines says. "Drowning is still the No. 1 cause of death in children ages 1 to 4. Until that number drops significantly, we still have a ways to go."



Everything Under the Sun Expo Marketplace

Details on products of exhibitors at The Everything Under the Sun Expo are based on materials provided by the manufacturers.



Aiper Intelligent LLC, Booth 1305

Product: Scuba N1 Ultra Robotic Pool Cleaner

Features: dual-layer filtration system; capable of horizontal wall cleaning; infrared sensor system

Contact: aiper.com



Anderson Mfg., Booth 1235

Product: Light Leak Tester

Features: user covers the light and squirts dye to see if it gets drawn into the dome, indicating a leak

Contact: leaktools.com



AquaCal AutoPilot, Booth 901

Product: Tropical Inverter Heat Pump

Features: advanced inverter technology for precise temperature control and energy savings; compact

Contact: aquacal.com



Aqua Creek Products, Booth 528

Product: Mighty Voyager Lift

Features: unique, portable design that doesn't require extensive mounting; users are able to move the lift

Contact: aquacreek.com



Aquamatic Cover Systems, Booth 310

Product: Hydramatic Automatic Safety Cover

Features: motors run on hydraulic pressure, not electricity, so ropes self-adjust, no lubrication needed

Contact: aquamatic.com

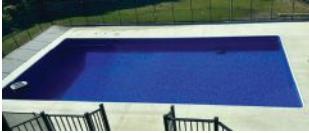


Artistry in Mosaics, Booth 325

Product: Dimension Series Morning Fog 2x4

Features: glass tile in three colors: Cirrus Blue, Dusk, Morning Fog; matching bullnose trim tile available

Contact: artistryinmosaics.com



B Squared Pools

Product: B Squared Pools Inground Pool Wall Kits

Features: made with 2-inch thick polypropylene sandwiched panels; requires no nuts, bolts, or fasteners

Contact: Bsquaredpools.com



Blue Square Mfg., Booth 518

Product: Vivid 360 LED Replacement Bulbs

Features: replaces most existing pool and spa bulbs; available in 12 and 120 volts; four color options

Contact: bluesquaremfg.com



BWT Pool Products, Booth 321

Product: BWT F1RX

Features: double hyperfine filtration; app; Gencore Navigation System; LED; rapid water evacuation

Contact: bwt.com



CCEI, Booth 623

Product: Oxeo VP

Features: connected, peristaltic chlorine/bromine chemical feed that automates chemical regulation

Contact: ccei-pool.com/us/



Fluidra, Booth 701

Product: JXiQ Gas Pool & Spa Heater

Features: ultra-compact and constructed with bronze headers and thicker-walled copper fin tubes

Contact: polarispool.com



Hammerhead Patented Performance, Booth 1241

Product: REMORA PRO Kit

Features: portable 21-inch vacuum head with a carry handle; dual-speed motor; 25-foot floating cord; more

Contact: hammerheadvac.com



Haviland Pool & Spa, Booth 1133

Product: Bagged Balancers
Features: select sizes of water corrective products now in resealable retail friendly packaging; gusseted base allows the bag to stand independently on retail store shelves
Contact: havilandpool.com



HFS Financial, Booth 715

Product: Swimming Pool Loans
Features: loan amounts up to \$300,000; terms up to 20 years; up-front funding; no impact on credit to inquire
Contact: hfsfinancial.net



Industrial Test Systems, Booth 921

Product: PoolCheck Xpress 3-Way Test Strip
Features: tests for the three most crucial pool parameters: Total Alkalinity, Free Chlorine and pH; convenient for on-the-go testing; 20 tests per container
Contact: sensafe.com



IPSSA, Booth 742

Product: Independent Pool Spa Service Association
Features: learn about the newly expanded IPSSA Education Fund helps advance training and education of pool service pros
Contact: ipssa.com



Jack's Magic Products, Booth 743

Product: Stain IDentification Kit
Features: kit offers a range of treatment packs tailored to different stain types: organic, metal, or others
Contact: jacksmagic.com



King Technology, Booth 722

Product: FROG @ease Sanitizing System for Swim Spas
Features: kills bacteria two ways; SmartChlor releases slowly at a continuous low 0.5 - 1.0 ppm chlorine level at all times
Contact: frogproducts.com

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LaMotte Co., Booth 1127

Product: WaterLink SpinTouch Lab
Features: photometer measures up to 10 tests in 60 seconds; can be used with WaterLink Solutions PRO
Contact: lamotte.com



Latham Pool Products, Booth 420

Product: The Attendant
Features: cloud-based pool automation system designed for inground, Latham fiberglass pools
Contact: lathampool.com



Lyon Financial, Booth 1113

Product: Unsecured Swimming Pool Financing
Features: offers low rates and long terms for pool financing; pays the pool builder directly
Contact: lyonfinancial.net



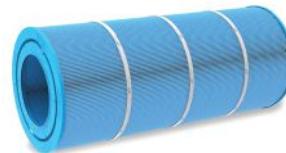
Magen eco-Energy US, Booth 1038

Product: Heliocol, Solar Pool Heating
Features: patented individual-tube and over-molding construction maximizes pool heating efficiency; robust build and roof-top friendly installation
Contact: mageneco.com



NC Brands/Bio-Lab, Booth 627

Product: Pool Perfect Max
Features: formulated to reduce scrubbing of scum, frequency of filter cleanings, and removes phosphates
Contact: naturalchemistry.com



On Core Filtration, Booth 1045

Product: EverFlow+ Replacement Cartridge Filter
Features: pointbond design prevents bacteria buildup; chlorine and mildew resistant urethane
Contact: oncorefiltration.com

(continued on page 66)

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



Beatbot AquaSense 2 Ultra

The AquaSense 2 Ultra features the revolutionary HybridSense AI Pool Mapping, an industry-first combination of a front-facing camera, infrared sensors, and ultrasonic sensors, says York Guo, Beatbot's CMO.

"This multi-sensor system, integrated with advanced AI algorithms, provides superior environmental perception, enabling the robot to intelligently and accurately scan and map the pool," Guo says. "By adapting to various pool environments, the AquaSense 2 Ultra optimizes its cleaning paths for precise navigation, full coverage, and improved cleaning efficiency."

The AquaSense 2 Ultra features surface skimming, waterline scrubbing, floor cleaning, wall scrubbing, and even water clarification.

Additionally, through continuous learning, the AquaSense 2 Ultra recognizes different types of leaves and continually improves its detection capabilities over time.

Contact: Beatbot | beatbot.com



Vigipool App

CCEI's TILD automation system provides a simple and affordable entry-level automation system that is easy for pool professionals to sell and install. Clients and professionals can access their pool data from anywhere in the world with the Vigipool app, which monitors the pool in real time with alerts if there are issues with water chemistry saving on chemical usage and energy consumption.

Perfect for pool owners who want to start using simple automation to manage their pool, the TILD system can manage the pool's heater, pump, filter, lights and water chemistry — all from its simple Vigipool app on any smart phone.

The system allows users to conserve energy by setting heat and lighting as needed. The controller also keeps chemicals in check to save on chemical usage.

Contact: CCEI | ccei-pool.com



Coverlon Safety Cover

Offered in mesh or solid materials, these covers are available in a variety of colors. The solid covers come in natural, earth-tone colors of gray and tan, in addition to blue and green. Super-mesh comes in green, blue and tan; regular mesh is available in those colors, plus black.

The safety cover is fabricated with durable materials, and strapping on the top and underside — the entire length and width of the pool — making for a stronger, safer cover, notes Frank Patel, company owner/president. “Our regular spring is what other companies refer to as ‘heavy duty,’” he says. “Customers are pleased with the construction, especially for waterfeatures and complicated pools. They comment on the superior fit, construction and longevity of the covers.”

Installed properly, children and pets cannot fall or accidentally slip into the pool. They also are tamper proof, requiring a special tool to remove or install.

Contact: The Cover Co. | coverlon.com



REMORA PRO Kit

The REMORA PRO Kit includes a portable 21-inch vacuum head with a carry handle, dual-speed motor, a 25-foot floating cord, and more.

Contact: Hammerhead Patented Performance | hammerheadvac.com



The Emerald Stuff and the Sapphire Stuff

The Emerald Stuff and the Sapphire Stuff are flocculants formulated as a time-saving method to help clean pools.

Use 8 ounces per 10,000 gallons to drop dust, debris and other particles to the bottom of the pool, allowing it to be vacuumed as waste. Resume swimming after 24 hours.

Contact: Jack's Magic Products | jacksmagic.com



Kayden Pool Bladder

The Kayden Pool Bladder is a simple-to-use, high-capacity, temporary water storage unit.

Use these ultra-portable units when doing a liner change, draining a pool for maintenance, or to stage water when you need it fast.

"As an old service guy, I wish I could take these back in time to when I was working on pools out in the field," says Jim Dorsey, Kayden's director of sales/technical specialist. "It sure would have made my jobs go a lot quicker and easier!"

Available in a variety of sizes, the bladders can be utilized to work on anything from small hot tubs to large in ground pools. The most common sizes are kept in stock for the convenience of immediate shipping.

The bladders are made from a heavy-duty, 22-ounce, vinyl-coated polyester weave, just like a solid safety cover but twice as thick. They come with a 1-year warranty.

Contact: Kayden Manufacturing | KaydenMFG.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



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

Product Profiles: Backyard Products



HD Mesh Safety Covers

Tara's HD Mesh Safety Covers are engineered with a densely woven mesh fabric that blocks 99% of sunlight, preventing algae growth and making spring openings easier. The lightweight yet strong material allows water to drain efficiently while keeping out debris, reducing maintenance for homeowners.

"Tara Pool & Outdoor Products Safety Covers offer significant savings by reducing evaporation — up to 95% — and saving water and between 35-60% less in chemicals used," says Thomas Kennedy, Tara's marketing director.

Each cover is custom-made to fit the exact specifications of the pool, ensuring a precise, secure fit. Tailored solutions are offered for complex pool shapes, including features like spillover spas, slides, handrails, and other unique design elements.

Heavy-duty springs provide long-lasting performance, keeping the cover secure in all weather conditions. Available in green, blue, tan, and now gray.

Contact: Tara Pool & Outdoor Products | tarapools.com



Las Olas Pool Lounger

Las Olas Pool Loungers offer a truly authentic American-made quality, says Nikki Nagy, the company's vice president of sales and marketing.

"Rated UV20, the loungers are built to withstand up to 20,000 hours of UV exposure (or roughly 13 years of direct sunlight) making them perfect for enduring extreme heat, salt water, and chlorine," says Nagy.

The loungers are constructed from the same durable materials found in whitewater kayaks and hard-sided coolers. The patent-pending, tool-free assembly design allows for quick setup and disassembly, making seasonal storage both simple and convenient.

The loungers feature an ultra-smooth bottom that protects pool surfaces even when submerged up to 9 inches, and an ergonomic design for comfort.

Contact: Las Olas Luxury Living | lasolasluxuryliving.com



Spazazz Cold Plunge Treatment Collection

The Spazazz Cold Plunge Treatment Collection is formulated to optimize and maintain water quality and are carefully crafted to enhance hydration, stability, and cleanliness.

The collection includes ELEV8, REGUL8, and RAD18. This is a complete, easy-to-manage solution for plunge pool care.

Contact: Spazazz | spazazz.com

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TERRITORY SALES REPRESENTATIVE

We are looking for a sales/service tech. to cover the states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and temporarily Tennessee and Kentucky. This person MUST have experience in the swimming pool industry and knowledge of the A-B method of measurements.

The candidate must be able to install a safety mesh and vinyl pool cover, plus measure the pool using the A-B method.

We are a twelve month company, with two months of vacation time from January thru February. We provide the company Ford F-150, expenses and tools for installing pool covers and sales calls. Sales calls will be made during the months of March thru August. A salary plus health care 60% paid by the company and a 401 retirement fund with contributions by the company. Dental, vision is available paid by the employee. Commission will be paid on covers sold in your territory and / or installed.

Send your resume to;

Richard W. Rayner, Jr.

Or call 847-695-2264

rrayner@raynercovering.com

RAYNER COVERING SYSTEMS, INC.

665 Schneider Drive

South Elgin, Illinois 60177

>>>POSITION AVAILABLE



Rayner Covering Systems, Inc.

TERRITORY SALES REPRESENTATIVE

We are looking for a sales representative to cover the states of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee. This person MUST have experience in the swimming pool industry and knowledge of the A-B method of measurements.

The candidate must be able to install a safety mesh and vinyl pool cover, plus measure the pool using the A-B method.

We are a twelve month company, with two months vacation time from January thru February. We provide the company Ford F-150, expenses and tools for installing pool covers and sales calls. Sales calls will be made during the months of March thru August.

A salary, plus health care 60% paid by the company and a 401 retirement fund with contributions by the company. Dental, vision is available paid by the employee. Commission will be paid on covers sold in your territory and /or installed.

Send your resume to;

Richard W. Rayner, Jr.

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LaMotte Company | lamotte.com/pool

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Contact hr@sgm.cc and reference Sales Rep. Position.

(continued from page 60)



Pentair, Booth 401

Product: IntelliCenter Lite

Features: replacement for the EasyTouch Lite system; a smaller enclosure for the breakerless power center

Contact: pentair.com



Rico Rock, Booth 1329

Product: Temple Stones

Features: new cast concrete stones for use around pool and outdoor living spaces; can be used as jump rocks on the pool deck, as seats or benches

Contact: ricorock.com



Universal White Cement, Booth 1143

Product: Radiant Fusion

Features: pre-blended with Universal High-Performance Cement enriched with pozzolans and polymers; enhanced with 25% Jewels for Pools Glass Blend

Contact: finestfinishpools.com



Water Tech Corp., Booth 738

Product: Volt Leaf Vac Recharge

Features: easily removes leaves from water surface and pool floors; works independently from pool filtration systems; smart water sensor; auto on/off; 3-hour run time

Contact: watertechcorp.com



Raypak, Booth 821

Product: Crosswind V

Features: vertical discharge heat pump pool heater designed with a smaller footprint and lighter weight

Contact: raypak.com



Speck Pumps — Pool Products, Booth 1321

Product: BaduJet Turbo Pro System

Features: designed to provide a smooth and strong swim lane

Contact: usa.speck-pumps.com



The VacDaddy, Booth 1044

Product: The VacDaddy Pool Vacuum 2.0

Features: a variable speed power supply; new, larger filter bags; shallow water adapter; vac to waste kit; VacCaddy carry bag; remote on/off switch; aluminum adapter pole

Contact: thevacdaddy.com



Waterco USA, Booth 639

Product: HRVR Retro-Fit Series Fiberglass Filter

Features: a direct replacement for Pentair's Triton Series; fishtail laterals for improved backwashing hydraulic efficiency

Contact: waterco.us



PEGASUS
Vinyl Liners



Sunburst



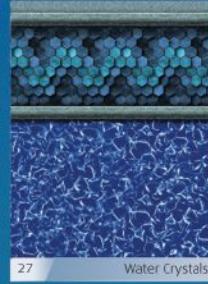
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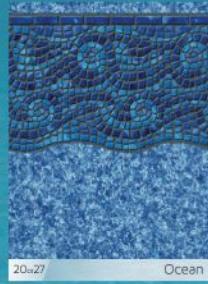
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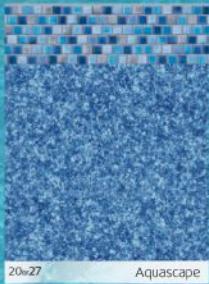
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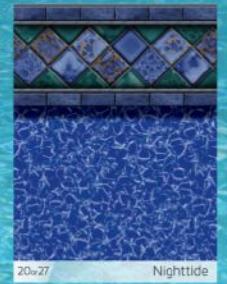
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