

**POOL
& SPA**

NEWS

TOP 50 BUILDERS

Leading the List

Cody Pools takes the
top spot in our annual list



Criteria for choosing the Top 50 Builders

Pool & Spa News is proud to unveil the 2013 Top 50 Builders. Making it onto the list involved a rigorous judging process utilizing five criteria. This helped ensure that a well-rounded group would represent the industry. Below is a look at each area ranked.

- **Revenue** Total residential construction revenue (including income generated from new construction and renovation) had the most impact on builders' total scores.
- **Staff** A company is only as strong as its staff. This score took into consideration average employee tenure and the

amount, and type, of training staff members receive each year. Certifications were highly rewarded.

- **Industry Involvement** Companies that work together are more effective and help strengthen the industry overall. Firms that network and collaborate

through associations, buyers groups and other organizations both inside and outside the industry were rewarded.

- **Web Presence** Forward-looking firms continue to use new digital platforms to enhance their brand. This score reflected the attractiveness, usability and educational val-

ue of company websites as well the extent of entrants' social media engagement.

- **Community Involvement** Good citizenship is also good business. A small, but important, percentage of each builder's total score was based on participation in community and causes.

The Top of Their Game

This year's crop represents the best in earnings, education and engagement

By Rebecca Robledo This is the second year that the *Pool & Spa News* Top 50 Builders have been selected using new, more well-rounded criteria, and the competition has become fierce.

While many of last year's group made the cut again, they welcomed 10 newcomers who had the right combination of construction revenue, staffing proficiency, industry involvement, web presence and community engagement.

This year, the rules were changed slightly so that franchise and licensing operations were not permitted to enter all locations under the banner of a single company. Despite this, last year's No. 1 builder, Premier Pools, which licenses all its offices, was represented in the top 10 by its founding location in Rancho Cordova, Calif.

This year's assortment, ranging from volume to high-end companies, reported a total of 7,156 excavations in 2012.

Showing the strength of Texas, a whopping 15 of the 50 hail from the Lone Star State.

So read on to learn more about this group, with special packages devoted to those ranking in the top three overall, and the five that received the highest customer-service scores from former clients.

TOP 50 BUILDERS

	COMPANY NAME	TOTAL SCORE	CEO'S	LOCATION (METRO AREA)
1	CODY POOLS	93.76	Mike Church	Georgetown (Austin), Texas
2	SHASTA INDUSTRIES	89.24	Skip Ast	Phoenix
3	PRESIDENTIAL POOLS & SPAS	87.04	Tim Murphy	Gilbert (Phoenix), Ariz.
4	KEITH ZARS POOLS	86.72	Keith Zars	San Antonio
5	CLAFFEY POOLS	84.63	Charlie Claffey	Southlake (Dallas), Texas
6	SEASONAL WORLD	74.77	Tony Schiavone	Clarksburg (Millstone), N.J.
7	PULLIAM AQUATECH POOLS	68.58	Debra Smith	Fort Worth, Texas
8	ROSEBROOK POOLS INC.	68.08	Jamison Ori	Libertyville (Chicago), Ill.
9	PREMIER POOLS & SPAS	63.30	Keith Harbeck	Rancho Cordova (Sacramento), Calif.
10	MOREHEAD POOLS	62.58	Mike Moore	Shreveport, La.
11	CONCORD POOLS & SPAS	61.84	Michael A. Giovanone	Latham (Albany), N.Y.
12	PLATINUM POOLS	60.80	Scott Waldo	Houston
13	J. TORTORELLA SWIMMING POOLS	59.57	John Tortorella	Southampton, N.Y.
14	CIPRIANO LANDSCAPE DESIGN	58.11	Chris Cipriano	Mahwah (Bergen County), N.J.
15	COX POOLS	57.81	Richard L. Cox, Jr.	Panama City Beach, Fla.
16	POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC.	57.54	Tom Rozell	Plano, Texas
17	PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS	57.49	Jason and Jennifer Satterwhite	Fort Worth, Texas
18	AQUA POOL & PATIO	55.80	Ronald Giannamore	East Windsor, Conn.
19	SOUTH SHORE GUNITE POOLS & SPAS INC.	55.21	Robert Guarino	Chelmsford (Boston), Mass.
20	ALL SEASONS POOLS & SPAS INC.	54.95	Doug Mayhall and Guy Larsen	Orland Park (Chicago), Ill.
21	TEXAS POOLS & PATIOS	53.74	Jim Crites, Neil Crites, Jeff Crites	Lakeway (Austin), Texas
22	POOLS OF FUN INC.	53.49	Tim Colon	Plainfield (Indianapolis), Ind.
23	NVBLU INC. POOL DESIGN-BUILD	52.88	Jack Crowder	Chantilly, Va.
24	PATIO POOLS & SPAS	52.32	Gene Ragel	Tucson, Ariz.
25	SOUTHERNWIND POOLS	51.97	John Versfelt	McKinney (Dallas), Texas
26	GEREMIA POOLS INC.	51.54	Mike Geremia	Sacramento, Calif.
27	ADAMS POOL SOLUTIONS	50.70	Tony Adams	Pleasanton (San Francisco), Calif.
28	MONOGRAM CUSTOM HOMES AND POOLS	50.33	Tony Caciolo	Coopersburg (Allentown), Pa.
29	RISING SUN POOLS INC.	50.05	G. Da Roza, T. Onthank, M. Vassallo	Raleigh, N.C.
30	GEORGIA CLASSIC POOL	49.60	Vance Dover	Canton (Atlanta), Ga.
31	MARYLAND POOLS INC.	49.56	Robert Landon	Columbia, Md.
32	BAKER POOL CONSTRUCTION	47.59	Ray Holt	St. Louis, Mo.
33	TAMPA BAY POOLS	46.28	Kenneth J. McKenna, Jr.	Brandon (Tampa), Fla.
34	HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC	46.03	Robby Hauk	Celina (Dallas), Texas
35	BARRINGTON POOLS INC.	42.29	Dale Overson	Barrington (Chicago), Ill.
36	PLEASURE AQUATECH POOLS	42.26	C. Elfert, A. Elfert Elam, H. Elam	Mandeville (New Orleans), La.
37	HILLTOP POOLS & SPAS INC.	42.11	Brian Miller	Jonesboro (Atlanta), Ga.
38	BACKYARD AMENITIES	40.53	Brad Stephens	Baytown (Houston), Texas
39	VIOLA ASSOCIATES INC.	40.23	John Viola	Hyannis, Mass.
40	SERENITY POOL & SPA	39.66	Gary Martin	Bonita Springs (Cape Coral-Ft. Myers), Fla.
41	ROBERTSON POOLS INC.	39.23	Ronald Robertson	Coppell (Dallas), Texas
42	OCEAN QUEST POOLS BY LEW AKINS	38.69	Lew Akins	Belton (Central Texas), Texas
43	INTERCOASTAL POOL & SPA BUILDERS INC.	38.54	Thomas J. Arnault	Melbourne, Fla.
44	SUNSET POOLS INC.	38.02	Adam and Sonia Traugott	Katy (Houston), Texas
45	EASTON POOL & SPA	37.55	David Hobaica	South Easton, Mass.
46	OUTDOOR LIVING POOL & PATIO	37.42	Lance and Danita Hill	Highland Village (Dallas), Texas
47	WILDWOOD AQUATECH POOLS INC.	35.73	Jeff Kearns	Fresno, Calif.
48	AMERICAN POOLS & SPAS	34.27	Ben Evans	Orlando, Fla.
49	A & G CONCRETE POOLS INC.	34.19	Art Allen and Travis Leonard	Fort Pierce, Fla.
50	SWIM THINGS INC.	33.63	Chuck Baldwin	Blue Springs (Kansas City), Mich.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Keith Zars Pools
Keith Zars

Hottest trends:

We're doing a lot more beach entries. Of course spas are pretty popular. The types of material customers are choosing are going up. We're seeing glass tiles and Pebble Tec on a lot of pools.



Claffey Pools
Charlie Claffey

Fond memory:

Our first Master Pools Guild meeting in October 2012. We were met with open arms and everyone was extremely genuine. We were just blown away by the organization.



Seasonal World
Tony Schiavone

Hottest trends:

People creating a complete back-yard environment that encompasses everything from the pool, outdoor kitchen, cabana and everything in between.



Pulliam Aquatech Pools
Debra Smith

Social media:

We get sales from it. We're always shocked when we get someone though Facebook. It's worth my while, but it is another job. I've also gotten inquiries through LinkedIn.



Rosebrook Pools, Inc.
Jamison Ori

Social media:

My goal has really been to connect with our customers using it. When new customers check us out, they like to see that we have a Facebook page. I also have a really strong Google AdWords campaign.

TOP 50

	COMPANY NAME	TOTAL RESIDENTIAL CONST. REVENUE	POOL EXCAVATIONS	TOTAL REVENUE
1	Cody Pools	\$26,493,488	482	\$27,299,248
2	Shasta Industries	\$24,100,000	642	\$46,000,000
3	Presidential Pools & Spas	\$22,591,017	642	\$24,528,611
4	Keith Zars Pools	\$23,300,000	325	\$32,340,000
5	Claffey Pools	\$23,247,821	251	\$24,560,321
6	Seasonal World	\$14,637,692	256	\$17,206,724
7	Pulliam Aquatech Pools	\$10,218,325	196	\$13,350,970
8	Rosebrook Pools Inc.	\$6,576,207	47	\$7,998,378
9	Premier Pools & Spas	\$16,965,203	372	\$17,622,375
10	Morehead Pools	\$6,253,385	60	\$9,238,437
11	Concord Pools & Spas	\$7,262,191	165	\$10,847,818
12	Platinum Pools	\$19,521,000	380	\$19,521,000
13	J. Tortorella Swimming Pools	\$6,466,072	18	\$20,119,000
14	Cipriano Landscape Design	\$3,450,000	5	\$3,500,000
15	Cox Pools	\$6,000,000	220	\$8,000,000
16	Pool Environments Inc.	\$5,800,000	42	\$7,747,330
17	Puryear Custom Pools	\$10,927,000	201	\$11,118,000
18	Aqua Pool & Patio	\$3,745,000	53	\$6,240,000
19	South Shore Gunite Pools & Spas Inc.	\$7,933,940	83	\$19,396,600
20	All Seasons Pools & Spas Inc.	\$2,520,000	20	\$5,800,000
21	Texas Pools & Patios	\$7,782,096	126	\$7,860,400
22	Pools of Fun Inc.	\$6,907,000	127	\$12,156,000
23	NVblu, Inc. Pool Design-Build	\$5,688,880	44	\$8,786,420
24	Patio Pools & Spas	\$5,105,365	108	\$14,236,168
25	Southernwind Pools	\$3,489,550	43	\$4,271,807
26	Geremia Pools Inc.	\$3,320,589	41	\$4,649,317
27	Adams Pool Solutions	\$17,037,646	104	\$18,525,215
28	Monogram Custom Homes and Pools	\$4,392,800	48	\$5,158,000
29	Rising Sun Pools Inc.	\$5,161,982	136	\$9,942,000
30	Georgia Classic Pool	\$2,563,000	24	\$2,563,000
31	Maryland Pools Inc.	\$8,822,258	161	\$8,822,258
32	Baker Pool Construction	\$5,217,232	49	\$5,217,232
33	Tampa Bay Pools	\$8,446,278	199	\$8,691,543
34	Hauk Custom Pools, LLC	\$6,863,505	114	\$6,872,314
35	Barrington Pools Inc.	\$7,338,750	53	\$11,897,352
36	Pleasure Aquatech Pools	\$3,150,000	40	\$3,500,000
37	Hilltop Pools & Spas Inc.	\$2,896,027	49	\$4,217,149
38	Backyard Amenities	\$4,624,500	82	\$4,680,500
39	Viola Associates Inc.	\$3,100,000	25	\$4,600,000
40	Serenity Pool & Spa	\$5,385,000	143	\$5,503,000
41	Robertson Pools Inc.	\$12,450,000	189	\$18,535,000
42	Ocean Quest Pools by Lew Akins	\$4,759,966	66	\$5,757,836
43	Intercoastal Pool & Spa Builders Inc.	\$4,205,000	138	\$4,600,000
44	Sunset Pools Inc.	\$6,008,162	66	\$6,008,162
45	Easton Pool & Spa	\$3,105,000	45	\$4,750,000
46	Outdoor Living Pool & Patio	\$5,817,000	67	\$5,817,000
47	Wildwood Aquatech Pools Inc.	\$2,509,997	33	\$3,779,559
48	American Pools & Spas	\$5,774,517	173	\$6,799,762
49	A & G Concrete Pools Inc.	\$5,350,000	131	\$6,800,000
50	Swim Things Inc.	\$2,620,000	72	\$7,400,000

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Premier Pools & Spas
Keith Harbeck

Hottest trends:

We've been doing a lot of installations with variable-speed pumps and LED lights over the last few years. The trend has almost become a standard. People are very interested in the latest equipment, energy efficiency and solar heating as well. That's a standard feature now in almost every pool we build.



Morehead Pools
Mike Moore

Family: My family really has made all the difference for our business. This new generation of pool builders is more innovative and our business has grown five times in the past 12 years. A lot of it is a result of the efforts of my son, Michael.



Concord Pools & Spas
Michael A. Giovanone

Community: We auction off dream backyards and donate 100 percent of the proceeds. We

raised \$68,000 for the Saratoga Hospital in one evening, and we raised \$35,000 for the Center for Missing or Exploited Children. I think it's very important that you not lose sight of the community you're serving.



Platinum Pools
Scott Waldo

Community: We support a variety of local school and sporting events, as well as the Media Alliance of Houston

and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo.

▲ **TOP 50 FOR 2013:** Residential construction revenue was weighted significantly when calculating each entrant's score. This year's group generated a total residential construction revenue (including renovation) of nearly \$418 million in 2012 and built 7,156 pools. Once again, the strength of the Texas economy becomes apparent, with 15 of the Top 50 hailing from the Lone Star State.

TOP 50



NEW TO THE LIST

In this second year with the new judging criteria, the competition was more fierce than ever. But 10 new companies managed to make the list.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



J. Tortorella
Swimming Pools
John Tortorella
Hottest trends:

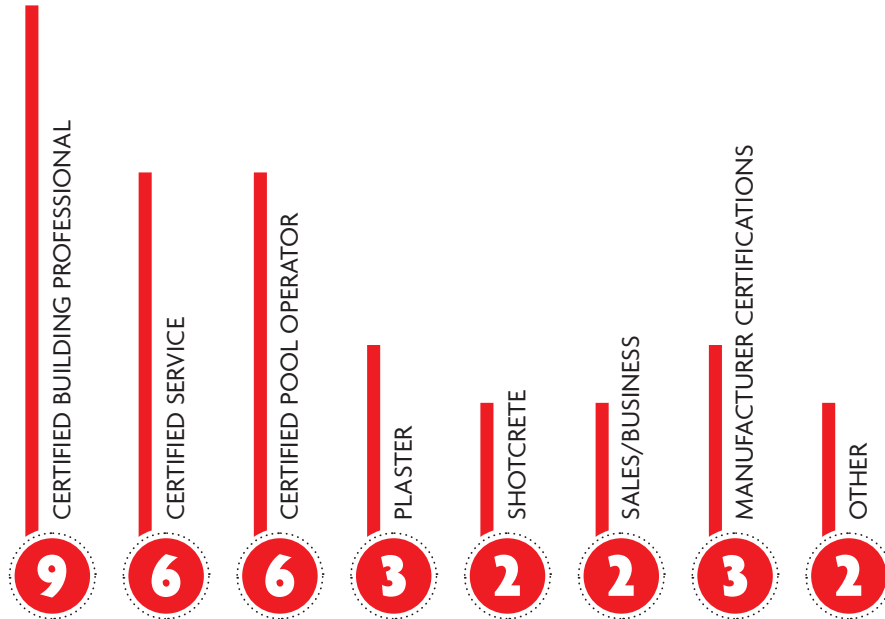
Rimless edge and negative edge swimming pools and full automation, energy efficient equipment and hydraulics, along with salt water pools, are very popular right now.



Cipriano Landscape Design
Chris Cipriano
Memorable project:

We did a pool in the shape of a violin for a family whose members were all very talented musicians. The owner has played at Carnegie Hall. There's color fiberoptic lighting in the pool synchronized with the audio system.

TOP 50



CERTIFICATIONS: Builders who invest in certifications for themselves or their staff scored higher in the training category. Among the 50, a full 23 had certifications in a number of areas including business, sales, construction and maintenance. Topping the list were APSP's Certified Building Professionals, with nine Top 50 members attaining this credential.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



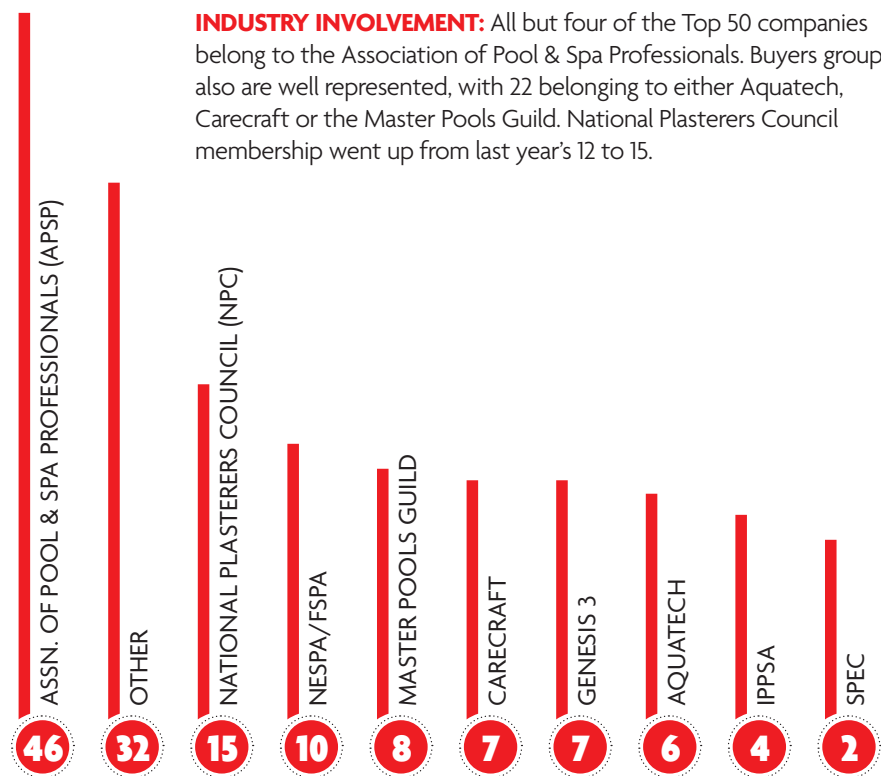
Cox Pools
Richard Cox, Jr.

Social media: We want all of our customers to be happy with the Cox Pools experience and share the good news with family and friends. There is no room for error in today's business world, as everything is publicized immediately.



Puryear Custom Pools
Jennifer Satterwhite

Hottest trends: We're still doing negative edge pools. Also, outdoor kitchens and living areas are huge.



WHO'S ON THE LIST



Aqua Pool & Patio
Michael Giannamore
Hottest trends:

Internet enabled automation. Everyone has a smartphone. Everyone is on their computer. So now they can literally turn on their hot tub while driving down the road. It sells itself.



All Seasons Pools & Spas Inc.
Guy Larsen
Memorable project:

We updated a vinyl liner pool, changed its shape, changed the decking, added a slide and made a cave with impressions of Disney characters in it.

37 BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU

26 CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

23 HOME BUILDER/CONTRACTOR ASSNS.

3 LANDSCAPE GROUPS

9 BUSINESS/EXECUTIVE GROUPS

3 WATER SAFETY GROUPS

4 ANGIE'S LIST

13 OTHER BUSINESS GROUPS

OUTSIDE THE BOX: Top 50 builders are a very engaged bunch — and not only within the industry. Three quarters belong to their local Better Business Bureaus and more than half to their Chambers of Commerce. After that, organizations for home builders and other contractor associations topped the list, with 23 of the builders belonging.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Texas Pools & Patios
Jim Crites

Education: We emphasize training by offering weekly sales training, six weeks of training for new hires, and construction training. We also hold weekly meetings.



Pools of Fun Inc.
Tim Colon

Career highlight: Last year, we built a double negative edge, one of the first ones we've done. It turned out fantastic. It was in the

Parade of Homes. Just being able to participate in the parade was a huge distinction.

TOP 50



TOP IN STAFFING: To arrive at this score, *PSN* considered average employee tenure along with the amount of training required of each staff member. Among the 50, the average tenure was slightly higher than last year's — 9.8 years compared with 9.5. Rosebrook Pools of Libertyville, Ill., had the longest, at 25 years.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



NVblu Inc.
Jack Crowder
Career achievement:

Keeping a cohesive group of dedicated employees who help further our goals and objectives of being a

top pool builder.



Patio Pools & Spas
Gene Ragel
Memorable project:

We finished a project at Casino Del Sol. It has these water laminars that are tied to multiple colors. It's

all synchronized to sound, so the water will dance to the beat of a sound system.

TOP WEBSITES: While judges felt that websites provided an area where there is room for improvement, these five stood apart from the rest. Two builders achieved the top scores in this category: Rosebrook Pools and Morehead Pool. Both rated highly in the overall design category. Besides the general attractiveness, websites scored highly if they presented a generous helping of quality information for consumers and if they were organized in a manner that made it easy to obtain essential information.

- 1 ROSEBROOK POOLS INC.
- 2 MOREHEAD POOLS
- 3 POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC.
- 4 PREMIER POOLS & SPAS
- 5 SERENITY POOL & SPA

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Southernwind Pools
John Versfelt
Career highlight:

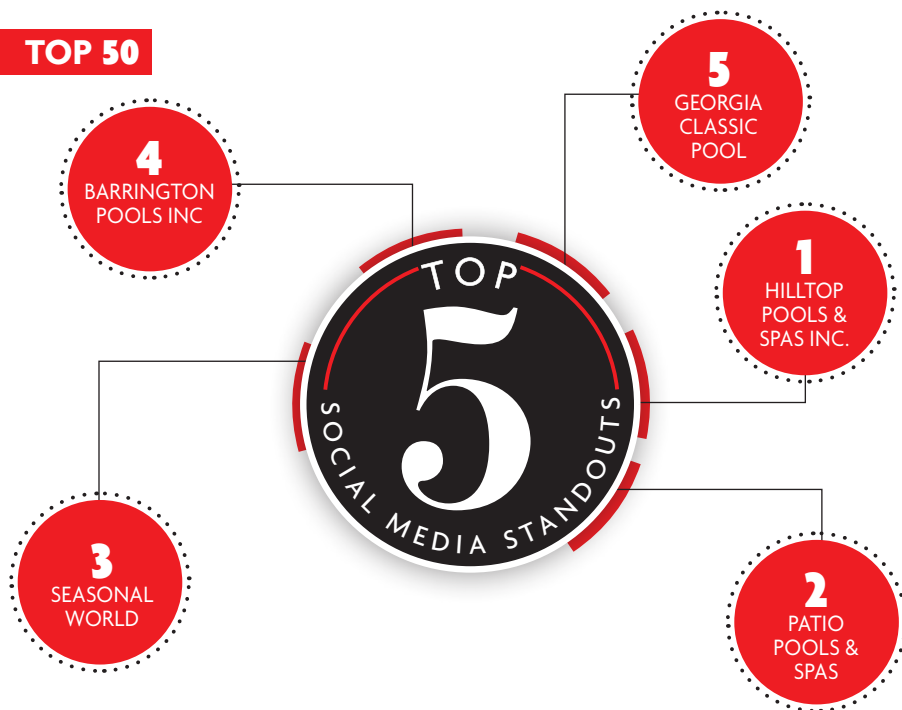
In 1993, I moved into our first true "business address" in Dallas. And while that was a major move, the most exciting step was to design and build a brand new \$1.2 million office and design center from scratch.



Geremia Pools Inc.
Mike Geremia
Family:

We are a fourth-generation pool builder with strong ties to the industry. We were a founding member of the Master Pools Guild in 1962.

TOP 50



MOST SOCIAL: Here, builders were scored based on whether they had pages on Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms. Extra points were given to those who post to the sites fairly regularly. While Facebook and Twitter continue to be the main outlets for this type of networking, YouTube and Houzz are gaining participants among builders.

continued on page 90

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Adams Pool Solutions **Tony Adams**

Career highlight:

Recently, we did a project for Hard Rock International in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, a 23,000-square-foot pool, all done in Pebble Tec. We had to mobilize 45 guys to work outside the country for a 30-day period.



Monogram Custom Homes and Pools **Tony Caciolo**

Hottest trends:

Creating a hassle-free pool with filters that go all year without being cleaned. The homeowner never has to backwash or vacuum their pool. Also, iPhone control and pH levels that are adjusted automatically.

The Trifecta

Business is thriving for the top three companies on our list, but their leaders remain cautious as the recession recedes | **By Alison Rice**

Five years of recession changes a business.

Just ask Tim Murphy, founder of Presidential Pools and Spas in Gilbert, Ariz. “We’re not the same company that we were at the height of the boom,” says Murphy, whose firm has shifted to rely more on subcontractors versus employees for various stages of pool construction.

Neither is Shasta Industries, which shed its six-store retail operation in 2012, selling it to Leslie’s. Today, the firm is concentrating on its core construction business while keeping a watchful eye on the economy. “Just what we can expect in the future is still iffy,” says Skip Ast, president of the Phoenix-

based company. “We go on the coattails of the home building industry.”

The same goes for Cody Pools, which qualifies as the youngster of these top three with “only” 13 years in business. Despite the downturn, the Georgetown, Texas-based pool firm has continued to expand geographically beyond its Austin roots, entering the Houston and Dallas markets in 2011. “We’ve had steady growth every year since 2009,” says Mike Church, Cody’s president. The recession “seems like it’s behind us now.”

Still, none of the three are quite ready to celebrate just yet, even as the pool business improves, thanks to notable gains in consumer confidence, home values, and the

availability of financing. “I can’t accept that the economy is back and business will be increasing every year,” says Murphy. “I just don’t look at it that way.”

Such skepticism makes good sense in a business cycle that’s still in the shadow of the recession. Indeed, by remembering the difficult lessons learned in recent years, these top pool builders are setting themselves up for success once the recovery seems solidly in place.

1 Cody Pools, Georgetown, Texas Unlike many other firms, Cody Pools wasn’t devastated by the recent recession. The Georgetown, Texas-based pool builder was able to maintain and



Mike Church

Mike Church, Cody's president, projects the firm will build 600 pools in 2013, an increase of more than 100 digs compared to last year. Cancellations, once as high as 15 percent, have dropped to a very low 3 percent, says Church, thanks to rising home values and less tight fisted banks.

even grow its business during the downturn largely due to its location in the more economically stable Lone Star state.

As the overall market recovers, multi-time Top 50 Builder Cody is seeing even more signs of improvement. "At the end of April, we were up 53 percent over last year," says Mike Church, Cody's president, who projects the firm will build 600 pools in 2013, an increase of more than 100 digs compared to last year. Cancellations, once as high as 15 percent, have dropped to a very low 3 percent, says Church, thanks to rising home values and less tight-fisted banks. "When they come in, they've got financing," he explains.

Cody, whose typical pool runs about \$65,000, will build in four different Texas markets this year — Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas/Fort Worth — with the same standards they developed in their home market of Austin, where they were founded in 1994.

Both outside researchers and company statistics agree. Cody was recently named as one of the 100 Best Companies to Work for in Texas by the Texas Association of Business and the Society of Human Resource Management. The results were published in *Texas Monthly* magazine. Cody Pools ranked 29th among employers with 15 to 99 workers, based on the results of employee surveys and other metrics.

Meanwhile, productivity has soared. In 2007, Cody did \$20 million worth of business with 52 employees, but in 2013, it expects to do \$33 million with 65 employees. That translates into a 65 percent increase in revenue with just a 25 percent increase in workers.

"I think everyone's taking things more seriously now," Church says. "It seems like we all do more than we used to, after the scare with the slowdown."

2 Shasta Industries, Phoenix

Skip Ast has seen his share of downturns, but even he admits this one has been difficult. "I've been through eight of these recessions, and the average one lasts nine to 13 months," he says. "We're now into the fifth year."

It's left Shasta, a perennial Top 50 Builder, with some challenges to overcome. While the company still expects to do a healthy 600 to 700 pools this year, that's essentially the same as last year. "We're not where we'd like to be," Ast says matter-of-factly.

Staffing is one of those challenges for Shasta. In addition to residential and commercial pools, the firm also handles service, makes decking, and maintains its own pool product manufacturing firm. Overall, it adds up to a workforce of more than 230 people.

But like many pool firms these days, Shasta could probably use a few more good men and women. The sustained weak job market in Phoenix in recent years forced many underemployed or laid-off workers to look elsewhere for jobs, leaving Shasta and others now searching for staff as the market picks up. "There were a lot of skilled people in the pool industry, but because of the long-term recession, they have gone into other vocations," says Ast, whose firm is also dealing with the retirement of a number of experienced salespeople.

But Shasta's president remains undaunted. "We're just going to focus on what matters most, which is astonishing our customer," says Ast, whose firm has built more than 80,000 pools in the Phoenix area since its 1968 founding. (Today, its pools start around \$20,000 and go up from there.)

That emphasis on the mission is a reflection of Ast's — and Shasta's — embrace of leadership guru Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits" philosophy, which focuses on being proactive and achieving mutually beneficial solutions to problems.

It represents an approach that Rick Mortensen, Shasta's director of customer care, feels has helped the company during the downturn in terms of taking action and working together. "Whether you are in manufacturing or sales, the chemistry of

the team has to come first, not just all the skills," he says.

Those principles have guided other major decisions as well, such as the choice to sell Shasta's retail stores to Leslie's last year. "Our competitors are telling people that we needed to sell it. I'm the one who made that decision,"

Ast explains. "Our number-one vision is to astonish our customer, and I couldn't honestly say I was astonishing the customer when they had to drive 10 to 12 miles to a store. ... It was a big part of our business, but at the same time, I had to be honest with how we were fulfilling our mission."



Skip Ast

3 Presidential Pools and Spas, Gilbert, Ariz.

Tim Murphy can hardly believe the numbers he's seeing for 2013. "It's absolutely crazy. ... We've already sold almost 450 pools this year, and every single week, we're gaining traction. ... I predict we will do 1,000 pools this year."

That represents a 40 percent increase compared to last year's figure of 665 pools at Presidential, where the vast majority of sales are for projects under \$40,000.

It also qualifies as a welcome rush of business for the firm. Founded in 1991, Presidential's volume rose to more than 2,000 pools annually during the 2000-2006 boom and then plummeted by 75 percent, to just 500 pools during the bust. The company's workforce dropped from 350 people to 80.

That experience continues to shape decisions at Presidential today, especially when it comes to adding employees for responsibilities that could be farmed out to subcontractors. "We used to do our own shotcrete and fieldwork," says Murphy. "We don't do as much of the work in house today. I'm not sure if we ever will."

For those positions that he does bring on staff, technical expertise remains critical. Pool designers, for example, "can't just be pool designers. They need to know how a pool works," says Murphy, who started in the industry as a cleaner and repairman in 1983. Innovation matters too. Two of the products Presidential uses are produced by Blue Square Manufacturing, a company affiliated with Presidential.

As demand for pools has rebounded in Phoenix, so has the company's marketing budget, growing by 25 percent this year. Among the strategies are extensive radio spots and a creative "Carpool Giveaway" promotion with a local Ford dealership that promised the winner a free Presidential pool or a free Ford vehicle. The firm also uses the well-known voice of an Arizona Diamondbacks' baseball broadcaster for its advertisements.

The investment made sense to Murphy, who saw an opportunity to gain share in the post-recession Phoenix pool market. "Forty percent of the pool builders have left, so we have less competition," he estimates. "That is a huge deal."

Despite all the progress, though, Murphy remains wary. "I don't think we're out of the woods yet," he says. "I think we need to learn from what happened." ■

As demand for pools has rebounded in Phoenix, so has the company's marketing budget, growing by 25 percent this year. Among the strategies are extensive radio spots and a creative "Carpool Giveaway" promotion with a local Ford dealership that promised the winner a free Presidential pool or a free Ford vehicle.



Tim Murphy



Doing a Good Service

The top five customer service award winners offer tips on making it to the top

By David Conrads A company's greatest asset is its customers. While that's hardly an astonishing observation, it's a fundamental truism that successful business people never forget.

As in past years, as part of our Top 50 program, *Pool & Spa News* commissioned Atlanta-based GuildQuality, a third party company, to conduct customer-service surveys for all entrants who chose to participate. Former clients of builders who opted in were given the opportunity to share their opinions of the company's expertise, professionalism and customer service, from initial sales through completion of the project.

For companies that achieve a place in the Top 50 program, overall business excellence is basically a given. What seems to differentiate those who achieve high scores in customer service is attention to what might be considered "soft" aspects of the construction industry: highly effective communication, rigorous follow-up on any problems, and strict adherence to budgets and schedules.

Here, the five companies that scored highest in GuildQuality's customer-service survey share how they achieved such a high ranking.



Ray Holt
Baker Pool
Construction
Chesterfield, Mo.

Our approach to customer service lies in finding the right employees. That means a strong staff who want to make things right by the customer.

We've found our best employees by meeting with them several times and getting a feel for them and a sense of their integrity. It's finding people who [will] offer our customers the same service we would.

We're pretty cautious about having them interact with customers when they first start. They're going to observe quite a bit before they're actually on the front line, so they can see the level of service that's required.

Communication is a tremendous part of how you gain success on the whole customer service side. We let the customer decide how often and how they want to be communicated with on an ongoing basis.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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Matt, our project manager, sends out a letter the week the pool is sold, introducing himself and providing contact information. He then meets with the homeowners to do their color selections and look through the project's details. At that time, he'll establish when and how they want to communicate. That's also when you get a feel for the type of personality you're dealing with. Certain people may say they only want to be communicated with this often, but Matt's good at inferring if the customers are a little more demanding, so he's probably going to communicate with them a little more.

We've put quite a bit into our website over in the past several years and are starting to dig deeper into social media. But the key to our success has been grassroots marketing for the last 45 years. If you keep customers happy, they are going to tell other people that you did a great job. In my mind, you can't buy enough advertising to equal really satisfied customers.



Chris Polito and Tom Rozell
Pool Environments
Plano, Texas

We target the high-end market. It's more challenging and you really have to stay on your toes, but our thought process is that we can service 60 or 70 clients a year better than we can service 300 or 400.

A few years ago we started providing customers with an emergency call number. We'll get a couple of calls a weekend, and clients love that if it's 5 p.m. on Friday and they have a problem, they don't have to wait until Monday. We'll call them back Friday night and if we can't fix it on the phone, we'll try to have someone there Saturday morning. After-hours calls go through to our service manager [and] clients love that, too.

Recently, we hired a company to do customer satisfaction surveys that are sent to homeowners after we finish a job. There are over 20 questions, and they rank us 1 to 4. Any time we get a 3, I gather the troops. We were getting a lot of 3's [at one point], and I think it's because people weren't kept in the loop on the schedule; they would get an email occasionally, but an email should be a follow-up to a phone call. A phone call is so much better than email.

We meet every Thursday and go over every job under construction. Approximately eight sales and new-construction people gather to review everything — what to do next week, materials choices, anything [the crew] needs to know.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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Our scheduler spends Fridays putting the schedule together and contacting customers. Some people like emails; some like phone calls. Some clients are happy getting called once a week, [while] others want a more personal approach, including daily communication. We listen to individual needs and respond accordingly.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Rising Sun Pools Inc.
Michael Vassallo
Customer service:

A customer recently commented that whomever taught us taught us well. "That was our father," I

responded. His whole philosophy revolved around customer service. It was the backbone of everything he did.



Maryland Pools Inc.
Robert Landon
Memorable project:

We did a pool in the shape of a football for a gentleman who was a very big Washington Redskins fan. It had

an artificial turf and a goal post at each end. We did alternating tile in burgundy and gold.



Tampa Bay Pools
Kenneth McKenna, Jr.
Memorable project:

We did a project with an island and a 15-foot-high, 30-foot-long rock waterfall with an enclosed tube slide

that went through the middle of it to the deep end. It had a little lazy river that went around the island.



Hauk Custom Pools
Robby Hauk
Community:

We provide an annual \$1,000 scholarship to a graduating high school senior, we sponsor a fundraiser to benefit

veterans, and we support numerous little league teams.



Barrington Pools Inc.
Dale Overson
Advice:

Work hard and do what you say. It's about credibility. If you ask God to do something and he does it, you should expect

people to do the same.



**Brian Miller, Matt Miller
and Kelly Miller Erjavec**
Hilltop Pools & Spas
Jonesboro, Ga.

Our approach to customer service is reflected in our mission statement, which has governed our operations since 1976. It's hanging in our front lobby. It's all over our website. It's on our letterhead.

"To have a positive impact on all the people who come in contact with our company by providing the finest products, the best service, and an attitude of honesty, integrity, optimism, and appreciation for their interest and business."

There are a number of ways we implement this mission. First, we've made sure there are enough team members to address customers' needs. For example, we increased our office staff and made sure it is highly organized so it can assist customers efficiently. We also have a construction coordinator that communicates with the clients daily. And

our project manager is out on the job site for the major phases of construction. We always want to have someone present to address questions or and put customers at ease during the process.

Another way we make our customers feel they are a priority is by not overbooking ourselves. We will not oversell our capabilities.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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Perhaps the biggest change is our emphasis on technology and using social media. By having a strong online presence, we've made it so clients who are using the Internet to research before purchasing a pool find us on online review sites. Prospective clients like reading about satisfied customers and current pool owners enjoy sharing photos of their pools, from construction to completion, on

WHO'S ON THE LIST



**Pleasure Aquatech
Pools**

Aimee Elfert Elam

Highlight: We did a pool a couple years ago that was almost 3,000 square feet, quite extraordinary.

It was the largest residential pool we've ever built. If we were in Houston, maybe we would have done several pools of that magnitude.



Backyard Amenities
Brad Stephens

Memorable event:

HGTV recently came out to my home and spent the day doing a special on my pool. It's a nice thing to get

to the point where I'm on national TV for 11 minutes of glory.

our Facebook page. They even tag photos of their kids in their pool, so it's a very interactive experience for them that they enjoy.



Vance Dover
Georgia Classic Pool
Canton, Ga.

[In dealing with customers] we don't set expectations too high, so that rarely do we have a situation where we're not meeting them. When we project a timeframe, we set the completion date out a little further because we have to compensate for weather. Ninety-five percent of the time we complete the job before the deadline.

Materials selections is another area where we make sure customers know exactly what they're getting. We have a great website, so they can look at different selections. Also, we can almost always get them out to another job within a 5-mile radius. We usually let them go on their own so

they can talk freely with the former client.

Either my brother or I are on every job every day, so face-to-face communication is a regular thing. We definitely use email and texting. We're easy for our customers to find.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

We can almost always get [the client] out to another job within a 5-mile radius. We let them go on their own so they can talk freely with the former client.

We use a third party company to survey every customer when we complete a job. I tell customers that we appreciate even less flattering comments. It helps us to refocus in those areas. I'm the owner. I want the facts. I'll tell homeowners that I love great comments, but if there are issues, I really want to hear about them because that's how we get better. We're OK if we get a bad comment. We don't really get that many, but occasionally we do.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Viola Associates Inc.
John Viola
Memorable project:

Building on Cape Cod provides for some of the most spectacular views. We positioned a freeform pool to take advantage of a stunning view of Buzzard's Bay. It had a sunken kitchen and an elevated spa.



Serenity Pool & Spa
Gary Martin
Community:

We support several sports teams and participate in a number of charity events, including Habitat for Humanity, Builders Care, and the Make-a-Wish Foundation.



Robert Guarino
South Shore Gunitite
Pools & Spas
Chelmsford, Mass.

Providing good customer service begins with having a knowledgeable and reliable staff. To achieve this, I give employees real world pay grades so they can have a nice car, own a home and send their kids to college. I pay commission on every single item that they sell. If they take a 10 cent screw off a truck, they get commission. And I pay overtime.

Another part of this philosophy is to only service what we sell. If I take on customers that we don't know, I'm setting myself up for [problems]. The reason is because the techs are assigned to specific pools and only handle those pools, so they become familiar with the customers' product and needs, and the clients know what to expect from the tech. My trucks go out with more than \$15,000 of inventory, and 99.9 percent of the time the

tech will have the part on the truck. Having equipment gets the customer back on track faster, so of course they are happy.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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Training is another key piece of the puzzle. We have a teaching room and every year we bring in manufacturers and do seminars for a week for all my people. I've got guys who've been in that class ten different times. They're always learning something new. Then, when my people go out to a job, they fix the problem, so my call backs are very low. Because I invest in my team and training, we have the most expensive rates for pool openings, closings, and weekly service routes. Yet last year we closed 1,200 pools. There's a cost associated with this kind of overhead, but it's well worth it. ■

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Robertson Pools Inc.
Ronald Robertson
Hottest trends:

I think it continues to be outdoor kitchens incorporated with the pool. We've seen the average cost of jobs go up significantly because they're adding all of that in.



Ocean Quest Pools
by Lew Akins
Lew Akins
Hottest trends:

We're seeing more formal projects as opposed to natural pools. There is a lot of interest in features such as fire bowls and colored LED lights. They're also opting for fancier coping options.

WHO'S ON THE LIST


Intercoastal Pool & Spa Builders Inc.
Thomas J. Arnault
Social media:

We'll take various pictures throughout the construction phase to post on Facebook. We'll tag people in the photos, then they all get involved. A family who lives out of town will see it online and say, "Oh, we're coming down on vacation!" It's been pretty fun.


Sunset Pools Inc.
Adam Traugott
Community:

We sponsor more than 12 school athletic teams in Katy, including four swim teams.. We also support the Boy Scouts Association.


Easton Pool & Spa
David Hobaica
Hottest trends:

We've gone from building traditional to more custom pools with water features, sun benches, automatic covers and salt systems. I'm sure automation is going to become more and more popular, especially systems that use handheld personal devices as controllers.


Outdoor Living Pool & Patio
Lance Hill
Awards:

We are actively involved in our local community and have been voted the Best Pool Builder in Denton County for two consecutive years, in 2011 and 2012.



These companies received the highest possible score for community service. High marks were earned by those that organized fundraising efforts or donated their handiwork. "It is always such a gift to give back to those in need," said Puryear Pools in its Top 50 entry materials.

CIPRIANO LANDSCAPE DESIGN Awards \$10,000 in scholarships to Rutgers students through the Cipriano Keeping It Green Foundation.

CLAFFEY POOLS Provided a pool through the Make-A-Wish Foundation to a young lady in need.

CONCORD POOLS Provided vehicles, funding and organizational efforts to help Hurricane Sandy victims with supplies and assistance.

MONOGRAM CUSTOM HOMES AND POOLS Organized a Habitat for Humanity fundraiser that netted \$100,000 for hurricane victims.

NVBLU INC. Has for 16 years funded and maintained websites for all local swimming and diving leagues.

PULLIAM AQUATECH POOLS Holds a yearly golf tournament to raise funds for local causes, including up to \$15,000 for a local children's charity.

PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS Performed its annual "Project Puryear," in which it organizes the rehabilitation of a family's home.

RIISING SUN POOLS Provided a pool to a local girl suffering a debilitating immune disease, through Make-A-Wish.

ROSEBROOK POOLS Donated basements and walkways for two Habitat for Humanity homes in the Chicago area.

SHASTA INDUSTRIES Built a backyard pool for the Wounded Warrior Project; provided office space and support for a local youth charity.

WHO'S ON THE LIST


Wildwood Aquatech Pools Inc.
Jeff Kearns
Economy:

The one-percenters are coming out of the woodwork. Of course, there are still a lot of cash buyers out there, there's not a lot of financing. But, I think the overall feeling is that, "We're getting older, might as well spend the money while we have it."


American Pools & Spas
Ben Evans
Technology:

iPad-equipped employees receive up-to-the-minute information on projects. Customers can map out their dream pools with 3D drawings and the company's research and development department tests the latest pool materials and processes.


A & G Concrete Pools Inc.
Art Allen
Lesson:

The easiest thing I do is build pools. I can do that all day long. The hardest part is the paper end of the business: dealing with architects, engineers, and homeowners' associations. You have to remember not to take everything personally. It's just business.


Swim Things Inc.
Chuck Baldwin
Hottest trends:

I think for us, as far as design goes, it's shallow-water sunning ledges for putting chez lounges in, or for laying around in about six inches of water. Adult ladies especially like this a lot and it's great for kids.