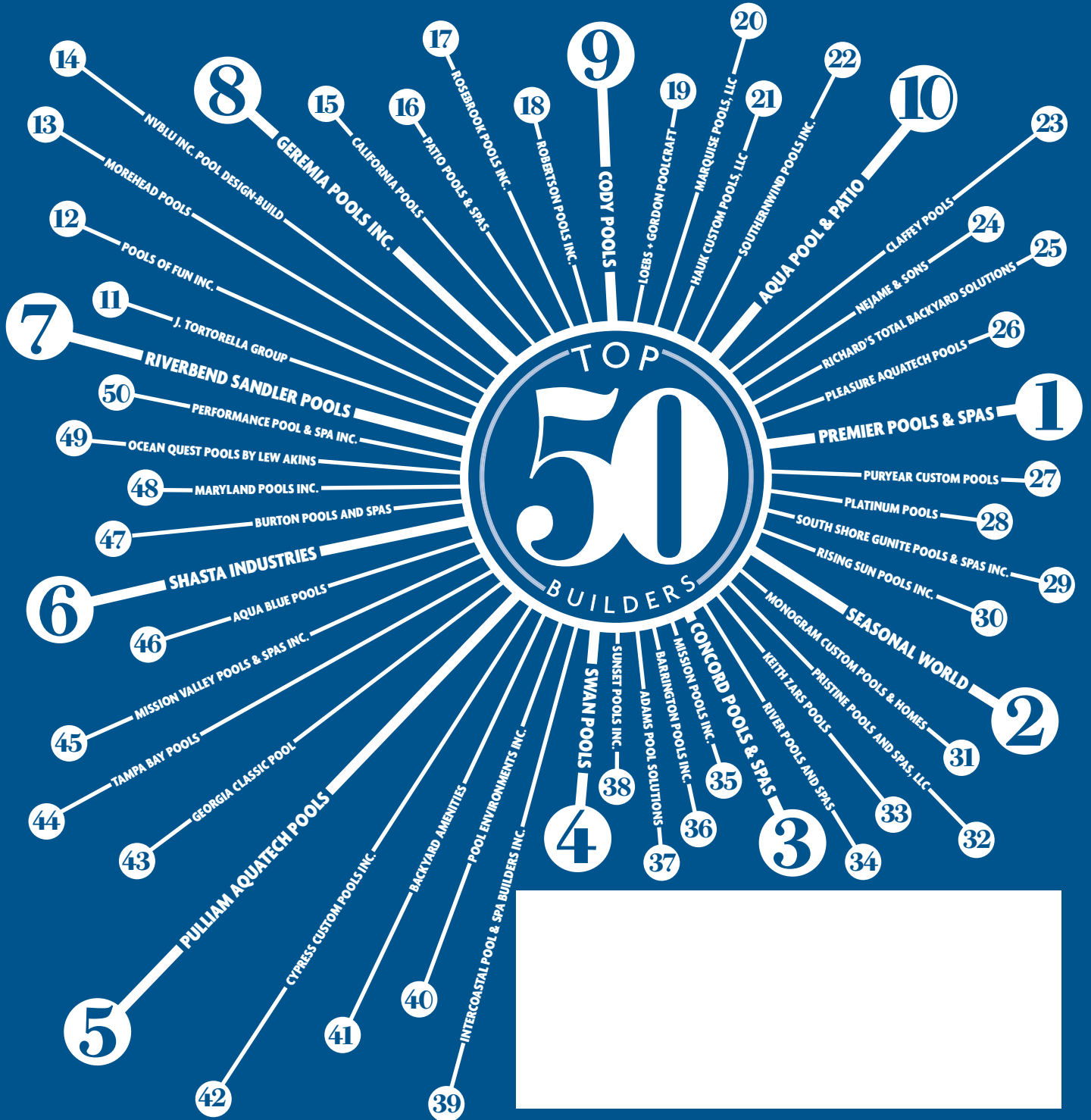


POOL & SPA

NEWS

hanley wood



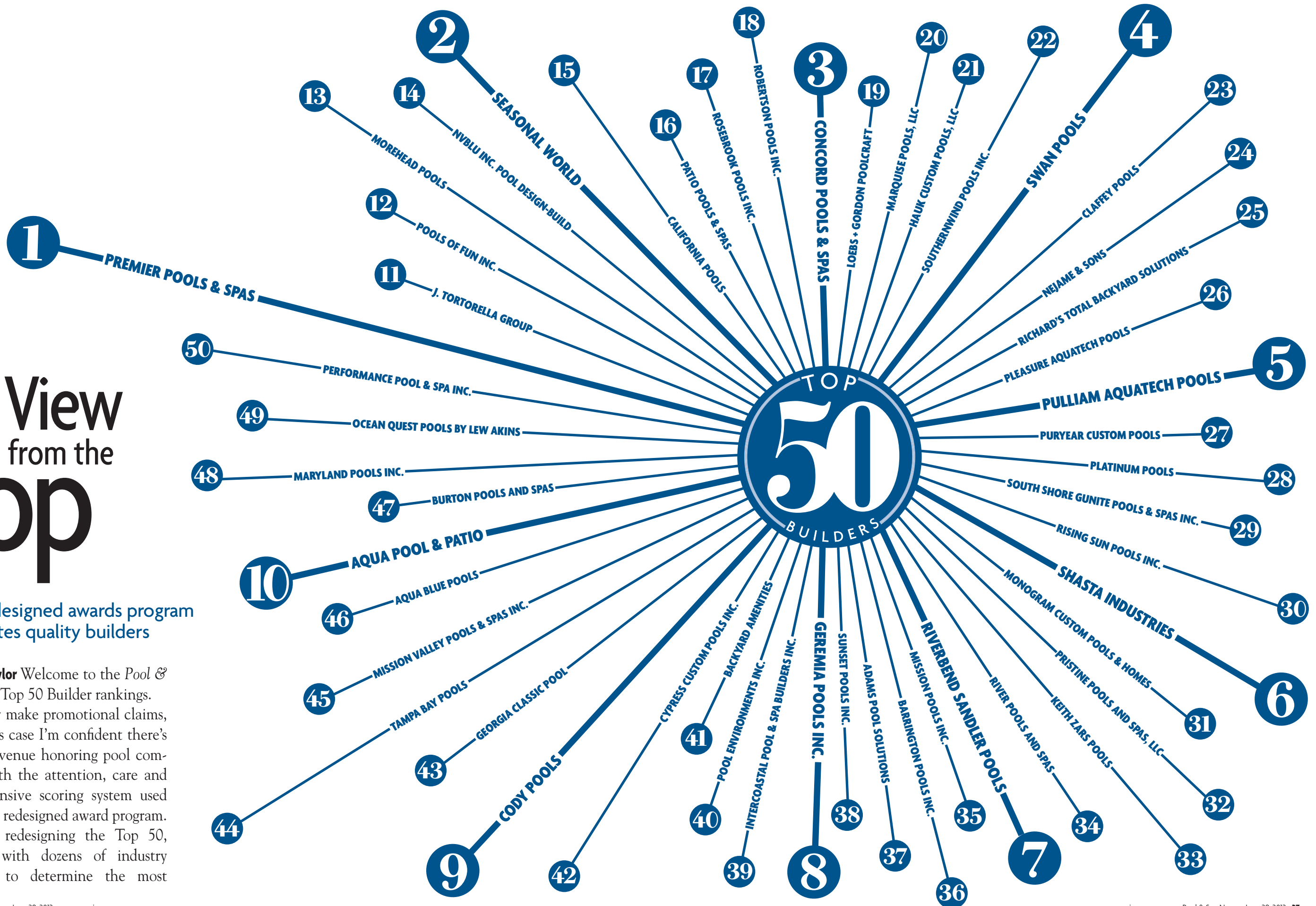
A View from the Top

Our redesigned awards program celebrates quality builders

By Erika Taylor Welcome to the *Pool & Spa News* Top 50 Builder rankings.

I rarely make promotional claims, but in this case I'm confident there's no other venue honoring pool companies with the attention, care and comprehensive scoring system used in our redesigned award program.

While redesigning the Top 50, I spoke with dozens of industry members to determine the most



objective and accurate way possible to rate builders.

With their help, we developed a six-pronged scoring template that I believe is a powerful indicator of a company's overall quality. Here's a breakdown of how it works.

Though construction revenue is no longer the only component used to rank the Top 50, it's still the largest single piece of the equation. To be honest, part of me still thinks this is unfair. I know dozens of exemplary pool builders whose businesses are too small to make the list using this model, yet don't they deserve recognition, too? What if a given builder is in Michigan, and therefore builds fewer pools — is it fair to punish them because of where their firm is located?

Yet after giving it some thought, I realized my reasoning was flawed.

First of all, at a basic level, making money is the primary reason we all work. No one enters this business to give pools away for free. Revenue is the cornerstone of every pool and spa business, so it stands to reason that it also should be a key ele-

ment of our ranking mechanism.

Second, a high dollar figure actually is a symbol of something larger.

A business with a lot of revenue requires the owner to keep many more balls in the air than one with less earnings. Larger companies generally have a higher number of digs, which means more sales calls, bids, scheduling, purchases, budgets, staff, planning, strategy and marketing. Doing those things well is the earmark of a successful business, and the Top 50 celebrates success.

But a strong bottom line is only part of the picture.

Stay with me now — recently I purchased a pair of pants from Ann Taylor (a hugely successful retailer) only to have the zipper break almost as soon as I wore them. A similar incident happened with one of Ann's sweaters. If a company skimps on quality, the result will be less business over time, and we wanted to capture that fact in our Top 50 rankings.

To accomplish that, I racked my brains for a way of judging each builder's workmanship and adherence to scheduling, but

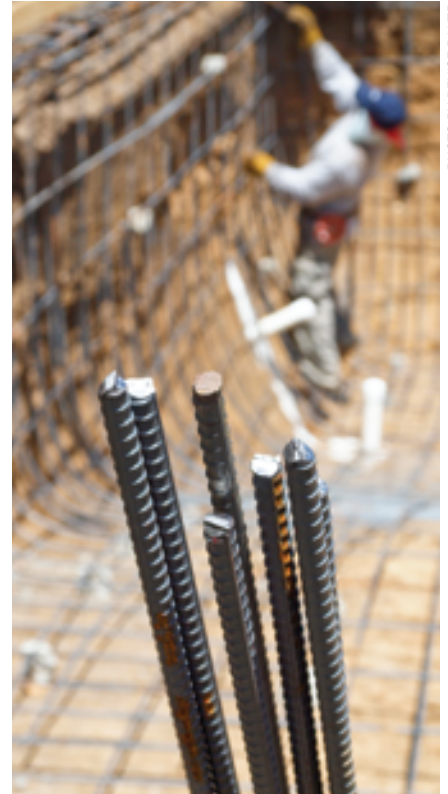


PHOTO BY DENISE BAKER



eventually scrapped that plan as being unrealistic. Instead, we devised a way to judge staffing, and made that the second largest component of a company's overall score. The logic here is that if a pool builder is serious about proper training, his or her investment will clearly show in the final product.

We awarded a smaller number of points to builders with longtime employees.

Next we looked at a less tangible aspect of what it means to be at the "top." To accomplish this, we created a sort of citizenship component composed of a builder's membership in industry associations, nonindustry groups and a separate community service score. While I can't say belonging to a trade group or local BBB contributes directly to a builder's business, I do believe it helps the entire industry grow and should be rewarded. In scoring this section, I was pleased by the large number of builders who are members of multiple organizations. I was also amazed, and moved, by the commitment these builders show to their communities.

Indeed, this section was one of the more

difficult to score because so many builders have woven charitable activities directly into their corporate culture.

The next category ranked the Top 50 Builders' online efforts, and included the strength of their Websites and social media presence. Sites were awarded points for completeness, design and functionality. Extra

Construction revenue is no longer the only component used to rank the Top 50.

points were given for a firm's regular participation on Facebook and other social media. Personally, I remain skeptical that Facebook provides enough ROI for pool companies to devote a lot of resources there. But the jury's still out. Meanwhile, I believe participation on Facebook and other social media is a

measure of a company's ability to embrace new marketing outlets.

Finally, there were the reference checks. As part of the application process, we asked builders to supply us with two different types of industry-related companies we could call. First, we wanted firms where the pool builder is the customer, such as tile companies and plasterers. We talked with those folks about the reliability of each builder in terms of scheduling and paying bills. Second, we asked for a list of firms that employ the pool company, including home builders and landscape architects. The idea here was to get a sense of each contractor's professionalism and ability to deliver what was promised on time.

We didn't publish the reference scores for confidentiality reasons, but it was an effective way to learn more about each firm.

On a final note, though this was truly a group effort, the redesigned Top 50 benefited greatly from the tireless work, insight and expertise of our design and construction editor, Rebecca Robledo. ■

An Eclectic Mix

With the new judging criteria for the *Pool & Spa News* Top 50, a mixed group of builder profiles are represented

By Rebecca Robledo It's been quite a ride.

Since its inception in 2003, the *Pool & Spa News* Top 50 Builders list has been determined solely by residential construction revenue. In this, the ninth year, we have decided to make the list more indicative of the best of the best by changing the judging criteria to include, in addition to revenue, factors such as staff training, Web presence, industry involvement, professional references and community service.

Many of this year's Top 50 Builders are familiar names, with 36 companies carrying over from past lists. But the additional criteria have allowed 14 new builders to join this elite group. And several companies placed in the upper ranks when they may not even have obtained a spot on the list under the old format. In fact, even in the top 10, companies that generated less than \$4 million in residential construction revenue co-mingle with firms that did significantly more business.

Here, we examine who's on the list and take a look at their strengths.

POWER GROUP: In the past, Top 50 winners were chosen based on residential construction revenue. But this year's new judging criteria include factors such as staff training, industry participation, Web presence, community service and references. The chart shows each company's total score on a scale of 0 to 100, as well as their rankings in each category against other builders. Often, individual scores were tied. Reference scores, which remain confidential, are not shown.

TOP 50 BUILDERS

CATEGORIES

COMPANY NAME	OVERALL SCORE	RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION REVENUE RANKING	STAFF RANKING	INDUSTRY RANKING	WEB PRESENCE RANKING	COMMUNITY SERVICE RANKING
1 PREMIER POOLS & SPAS*	74.1	1	18	2	4	5
2 SEASONAL WORLD	58.7	10	6	1	5	10
3 CONCORD POOLS & SPAS	57.2	25	2	1	6	4
4 SWAN POOLS	54.4	11	5	2	10	9
5 PULLIAM AQUATECH POOLS	54.3	15	8	2	7	1
6 SHASTA INDUSTRIES	53.8	4	11	5	2	6
7 RIVERBEND SANDLER POOLS	53.4	7	11	2	5	10
8 GEREMIA POOLS INC.	52.1	47	3	2	5	8
9 CODY POOLS	50.6	3	17	3	1	7
10 AQUA POOL & PATIO	50.4	44	1	1	12	9
11 J. TORTORELLA GROUP	50.3	19	9	1	11	2
12 POOLS OF FUN INC.	50.2	28	4	4	4	8
13 MOREHEAD POOLS	48.6	34	7	3	6	5
14 NVBLU INC. POOL DESIGN-BUILD	47.8	49	7	3	3	9
15 CALIFORNIA POOLS*	47.5	2	18	5	4	7
16 PATIO POOLS & SPAS	47.16	18	6	4	6	8
17 ROSEBROOK POOLS INC.	47.14	23	8	3	7	8
18 ROBERTSON POOLS INC.	46.1	12	10	3	8	12
19 LOEBS + GORDON POOLCRAFT	45.6	45	6	1	15	12
20 MARQUISE POOLS, LLC	45.1	20	7	3	11	12
21 HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC	44.7	37	10	4	1	6
22 SOUTHERNWIND POOLS INC.	43.8	40	7	4	5	10
23 CLAFFEY POOLS	43.3	8	19	1	9	6
24 NEJAME & SONS	41.9	29	10	3	10	8
25 RICHARD'S TOTAL BACKYARD SOLUTIONS	41.5	31	6	6	6	11
26 PLEASURE AQUATECH POOLS	41.4	43	7	4	10	10
27 PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS	41.3	22	7	6	8	7
28 PLATINUM POOLS	40.5	9	20	4	1	4
29 SOUTH SHORE GUNITE POOLS & SPAS INC.	40.1	21	8	5	10	11
30 RISING SUN POOLS INC.	39.4	38	13	4	4	6
31 MONOGRAM CUSTOM POOLS & HOMES	39.3	48	9	4	9	9
32 PRISTINE POOLS AND SPAS, LLC	37.9	32	8	5	11	11
33 KEITH ZARS POOLS	37.6	6	18	4	12	9
34 RIVER POOLS AND SPAS	37.4	41	10	7	3	3
35 MISSION POOLS INC.	36.6	14	17	2	11	8
36 BARRINGTON POOLS INC.	36.58	16	16	4	2	11
37 ADAMS POOL SOLUTIONS	36.53	5	20	3	13	11
38 SUNSET POOLS INC.	36.51	35	12	3	13	9
39 INTERCOASTAL POOL & SPA BUILDERS INC.	36.4	36	11	3	14	12
40 POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC.	35.6	30	12	6	4	10
41 BACKYARD AMENITIES	35.2	46	12	4	10	9
42 CYPRESS CUSTOM POOLS INC.	35.0	24	14	5	5	10
43 GEORGIA CLASSIC POOL	34.8	50	11	4	13	5
44 TAMPA BAY POOLS	34.4	17	17	3	9	9
45 MISSION VALLEY POOLS & SPAS INC	34.2	26	12	4	14	10
46 AQUA BLUE POOLS	34.1	33	15	5	3	11
47 BURTON POOLS AND SPAS	34.0	27	13	4	11	11
48 MARYLAND POOLS INC.	33.7	13	18	3	10	10
49 OCEAN QUEST POOLS BY LEW AKINS	32.69	42	12	5	9	11
50 PERFORMANCE POOL & SPA INC.	32.61	39	9	6	14	10

* DENOTES A COMPANY WITH LICENSEE LOCATIONS

WHO'S ON THE LIST



PAUL PORTER

Premier Pools & Spas
Headquarters: Rancho Cordova, Calif.
Area Served: Multiple
Highlights: With branches in 16 states and reportedly the first and only U.S. pool builder to enter the market in India, the firm completed more excavations last year than any 2012 Top 50 Builder.



TONY SCHIAVONE

Seasonal World
Headquarters: Clarksburg, N.J.
Area Served: Central NJ
Highlights: The only New Jersey-based builder to join the list, the firm has an extensive training program and a social media campaign that includes sweepstakes prizes such as a cruise.



MICHAEL GIOVANOONE

Concord Pools & Spas
Headquarters: Latham, N.Y.
Area Served: Northeast
Highlights: One of the most reputable vinyl-liner builders in the country, the firm is a multiple-year Masters of Design winner and actively supports numerous charities.



ROBERT VENNES

Swan Pools
Headquarters: Lake Forest, Calif.
Area Served: California
Highlights: Thanks to a comprehensive training program that incorporates landscape design, and an average employee tenure of 17.5 years, this firm was a top scorer in the staffing category.



DEBRA SMITH

Pulliam Aquatech Pools
Headquarters: Fort Worth, Texas
Area Served: DFW, Houston
Highlights: Co-owner Debra Smith is an APSP Certified Building Professional and active in many industry and charitable organizations. Pulliam has been in business since 1916.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



ED "SKIP" AST

Shasta Industries
Headquarters: Phoenix
Area Served: Arizona
Highlights: The firm employs 280 people, more than any other builder on the list, and completes much of its construction using in-house staff.



CHARLES BARNES

Riverbend Sandler Pools
Headquarters: Plano, Texas
Area Served: DFW
 The firm ranked among the top 10 companies in four different categories: total revenue, number of pools built, Web presence, and residential construction revenue.



MIKE GEREMIA

Geremia Pools Inc.
Headquarters: Sacramento, Calif.
Area Served: Northern California
Highlights: One of the country's oldest pool builders, the firm supports disadvantaged youths and recently refurbished a pool for the St. Sava Mission Foundation. Owner Mike Geremia also is active in many industry groups.



MIKE CHURCH

Cody Pools
Headquarters: Georgetown, Texas
Area Served: DFW, Houston
Highlights: The company, which took second place for its social media campaign, is a sponsor of multiple athletic organizations, including the San Antonio Spurs NBA team.



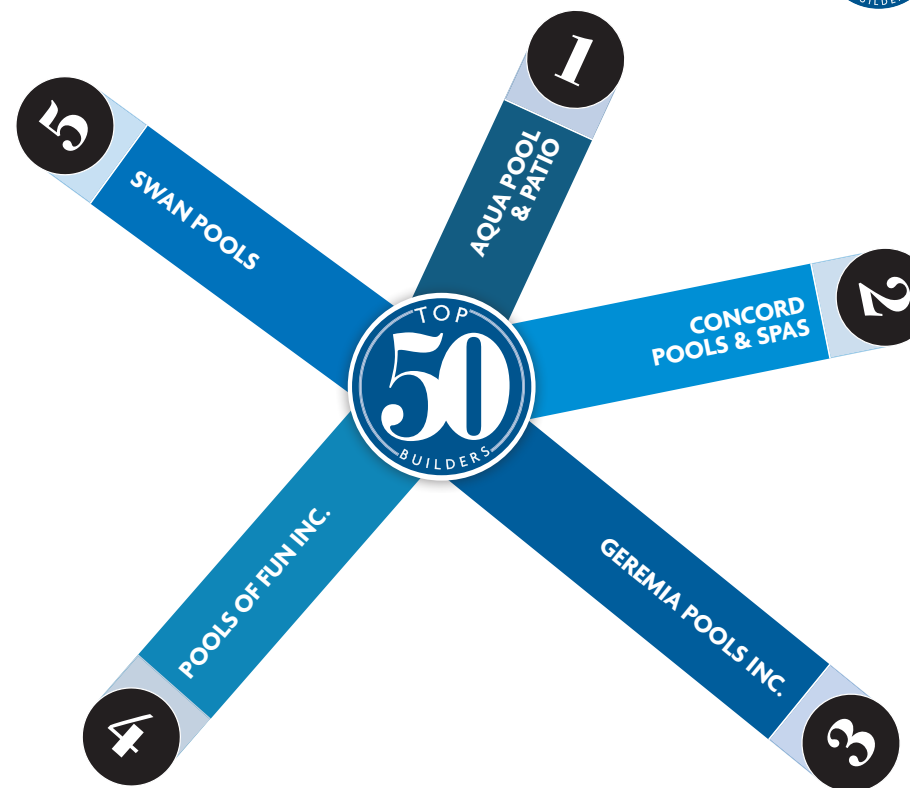
MICHAEL GIANNAMORE

Aqua Pool & Patio
Headquarters: East Windsor, Conn.
Area Served: New England
Highlights: New to the list this year, the firm provides extensive training for staff. Aqua is also a Masters of Design winner.

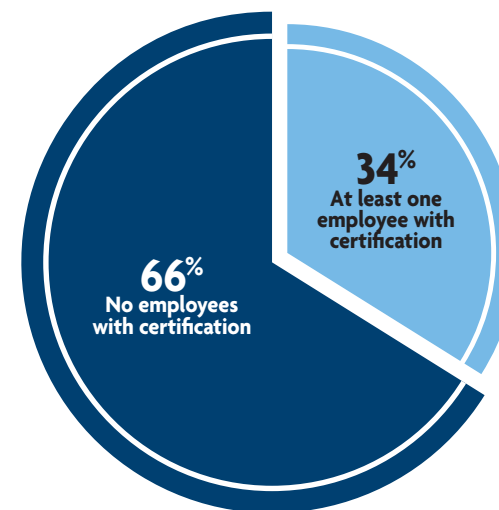
	COMPANY NAME	TOTAL RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION REVENUE	POOL EXCAVATIONS	TOTAL REVENUE
1	PREMIER POOLS & SPAS	\$64,175,351	1,432	\$66,375,351
2	SEASONAL WORLD	\$13,050,000	254	\$16,775,000
3	CONCORD POOLS & SPAS	\$6,572,250	141	\$9,575,529
4	SWAN POOLS	\$12,634,365	148	\$12,634,365
5	PULLIAM AQUATECH POOLS	\$8,710,076	172	\$11,644,859
6	SHASTA INDUSTRIES	\$25,200,000	653	\$49,000,000
7	RIVERBEND SANDLER POOLS	\$18,702,000	303	\$26,050,000
8	GEREMIA POOLS INC.	\$3,159,417	17	\$43,828,25
9	CODY POOLS	\$25,210,622	498	\$25,973,441
10	AQUA POOL & PATIO	\$3,554,000	38	\$5,803,000
11	J. TORTORELLA GROUP	\$7,627,000	18	\$20,534,000
12	POOLS OF FUN INC.	\$5,709,100	115	\$10,900,000
13	MOREHEAD POOLS	\$5,064,841	69	\$7,839,489
14	NVBLU INC. POOL DESIGN-BUILD	\$2,500,000	20	\$5,400,000
15	CALIFORNIA POOLS	\$32,089,700	626	\$57,672,736
16	PATIO POOLS & SPAS	\$7,667,233	174	\$19,243,504
17	ROSEBROOK POOLS INC.	\$6,988,744	53	\$7,928,892
18	ROBERTSON POOLS INC.	\$12,189,000	156	\$16,733,000
19	LOEBS + GORDON POOLCRAFT	\$3,504,924	9	\$3,530,762
20	MARQUISE POOLS, LLC	\$7,400,000	55	\$7,400,000
21	HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC	\$4,532,359	72	\$4,549,670
22	SOUTHERNWIND POOLS INC.	\$3,961,100	36	\$4,414,047
23	CLAFFEY POOLS	\$18,018,402	208	\$20,868,745
24	NEJAME & SONS	\$5,600,000	60	\$6,700,000
25	RICHARD'S TOTAL BACKYD. SOLUT.	\$5,150,000	98	\$7,000,000
26	PLEASURE AQUATECH POOLS	\$3,600,000	42	\$3,700,000
27	PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS	\$7,115,000	151	\$7,250,000
28	PLATINUM POOLS	\$17,270,796	361	\$17,270,796
29	SOUTH SHORE GUNITE	\$7,210,000	69	\$2,039,000
30	RISING SUN POOLS INC.	\$4,495,300	132	\$9,181,950
31	MONOGRAM CUSTOM POOLS	\$2,550,000	35	\$4,500,000
32	PRISTINE POOLS AND SPAS	\$5,150,000	87	\$8,014,000
33	KEITH ZARS POOLS	\$21,800,000	301	\$29,600,000
34	RIVER POOLS AND SPAS	\$3,812,331	79	\$4,033,066
35	MISSION POOLS INC.	\$10,418,000	184	\$22,435,000
36	BARRINGTON POOLS INC.	\$8,167,000	53	\$12,358,000
37	ADAMS POOL SOLUTIONS	\$22,810,287	114	\$24,140,828
38	SUNSET POOLS INC.	\$4,598,749	55	\$4,598,749
39	INTERCOASTAL POOL & SPA	\$4,535,000	112	\$4,250,000
40	POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC.	\$5,364,000	45	\$7,037,065
41	BACKYARD AMENITIES	\$3,498,000	70	\$3,498,000
42	CYPRESS CUSTOM POOLS INC.	\$6,719,590	104	\$6,817,140
43	GEORGIA CLASSIC POOL	\$2,500,000	25	\$2,500,000
44	TAMPA BAY POOLS	\$7,999,958	170	\$8,439,509
45	MISSION VALLEY POOLS & SPAS	\$5,922,000	102	\$7,486,000
46	AQUA BLUE POOLS	\$5,112,024	84	\$7,681,695
47	BURTON POOLS AND SPAS	\$5,866,000	99	\$11,400,000
48	MARYLAND POOLS INC.	\$11,263,980	198	\$11,263,980
49	OCEAN QUEST BY LEW AKINS	\$3,790,775	51	\$5,632,630
50	PERFORMANCE POOL & SPA	\$4,300,000	64	\$9,200,000

RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION REVENUE Though not the only deciding factor, this figure still counted significantly when selecting the Top 50. All told, these firms generated residential construction revenue of \$494.8 million. New work accounted for \$433.5 million of that amount. The figure includes renovation.

STAFF



TOP 5 STAFFING After residential construction revenue, staff tenure and training had the most impact in determining the Top 50 ranking. The group reported an average employee tenure of 9.5 years, with Concord Pools recording the longest, at 21 years.



CERTIFICATIONS Having a number of employees who hold certifications was looked upon especially favorably in the ranking. Of this group, 17 had at least one staff member certified by an industry organization. Examples include APSP, Genesis 3, the National Plasterers Council and the American Concrete Institute.



WHO'S ON THE LIST



JOHN TORTORELLA

J. Tortorella Group
Headquarters: Southampton, N.Y.
Area Served: New York
Highlights: The company, which ranks second in community service, supports environmental preservation by participating in a number of related organizations. The founder also started a company that distributes alternative energy products.



MIKE MOORE

Morehead Pools
Headquarters: Shreveport, La.
Area Served: Louisiana, Arkansas
Highlights: According to its Website, the firm is the only pool builder in its region to be an APSP Certified Building Professional and employ Certified Building and Service professionals.



JACK A. CROWDER

NVblu Inc. Pool Design-Build
Headquarters: Chantilly, Va.
Area Served: Metro D.C. area, West Virginia
Highlights: Ranking high in the social media category, the firm has been "liked" by more than 1,153 Facebook followers.



GENE RAGEL

Patio Pools & Spas
Headquarters: Tucson, Ariz.
Area Served: Southern Arizona
Highlights: One of the few builders to have made the Top 50 list multiple times and also receive a Masters of Design Award, the firm ranked eighth in renovation revenue.



JAMISON ORI

Rosebrook Pools Inc.
Headquarters: Liberville, Ill.
Area Served: Chicagoland
Highlights: Proud to be identified as one of the oldest pool builders in the Midwest, the company has the best Web presence of any of this year's Top 50 Builders.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Top 50 Charts cont'd from page 35

INVOLVEMENT



Robertson Pools Inc.

Headquarters:

Coppell, Texas

Area Served: North Texas, Oklahoma

Highlights: The company's president also serves as mayor of Bartonville, Texas.



Loeb + Gordon Poolcraft

Headquarters:

East Hampton, N.Y.

Area Served: Northeast

Highlights: The firm, a newcomer to Top 50, launched the group BlueSquare Design Inc. in April 2011.



Marquise Pools, LLC

Headquarters:

Oak Ridge, Texas

Area Served: Houston

Highlights: Chris Smith holds degrees in landscape architecture and horticulture, and is an ambassador to the Montgomery County BBB Advisory Board.



Southernwind Pools Inc.

Headquarters:

McKinney, Texas

Area Served: DFW

Highlights: The firm has been named repeatedly on the *Dallas Business Journal's* "Best Of Dallas" list of preferred pool builders.



Claffey Pools

Headquarters:

Southlake, Texas

Area Served: DFW

Highlights: One of the larger area builders, the firm is active in a number of charities, including the Make-A-Wish Foundation.



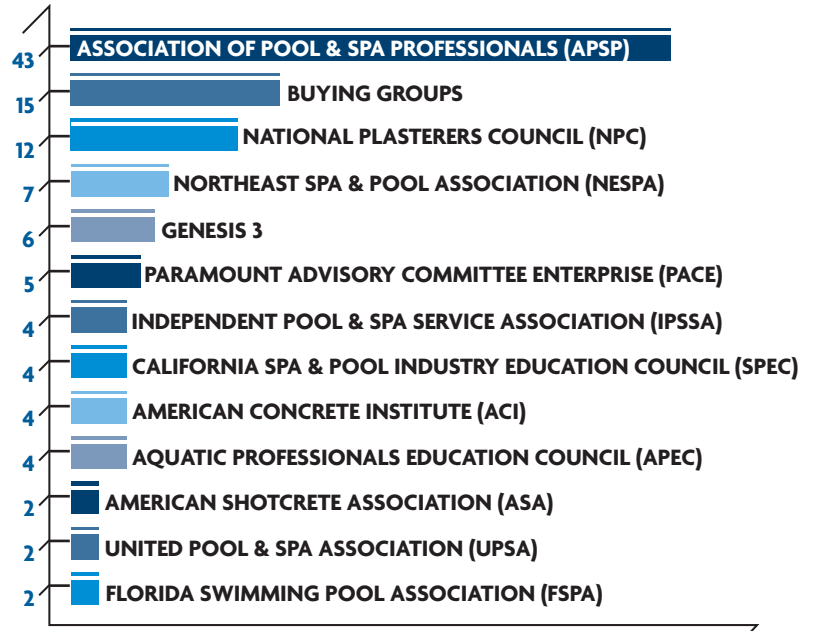
Nejame & Sons

Headquarters:

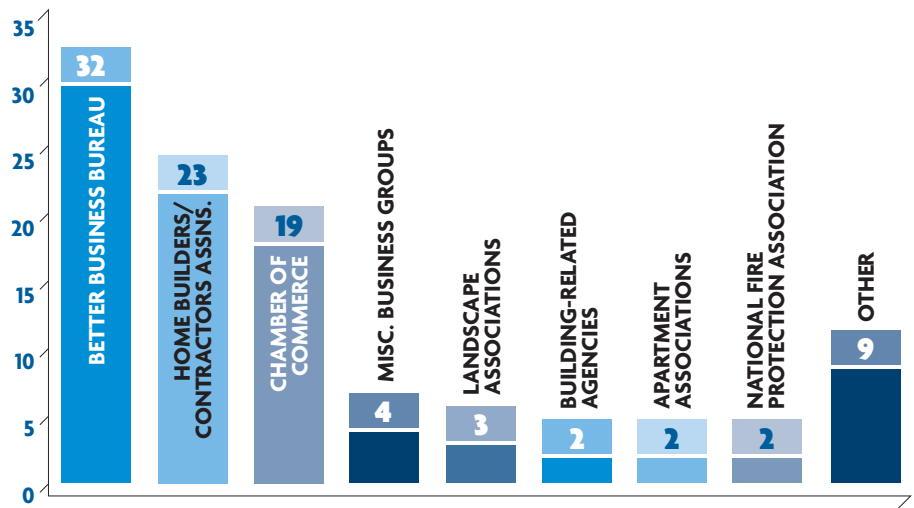
Danbury, Conn.

Area Served: Northeast

Highlights: The company has been family-owned and operated since 1921.



INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT Trade group participation carried weight in the scoring, though not as much as some of the other categories. Currently, 43 of the Top 50 are members of the Association of Pool & Spa Professionals. "I don't make any money or get any leads from doing it," Aqua Pool & Patio's Michael Giannamore says. "But, hopefully, I am helping build a better pool industry and therefore [it's] benefiting me."



OUTSIDE INVOLVEMENT The Top 50 join groups outside the industry as well. Most popular organizations are the Better Business Bureau, with 32 belonging. Home-building and general contracting groups come next, with 23 members. Chambers of Commerce also place high. "I never go to a Chamber function where someone doesn't come up to me and say, 'I'm looking for a pool. I need to call you,'" says Debra Smith of Pulliam Pools.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Richard's Total Backyard Solutions

Headquarters:

Houston

Area Served: Houston

Highlights: The firm, which has appeared on PSN's Top 50

Builders list consecutively since 2008, offers customers incentives such as a 30-day build guarantee that pays them \$100 for each day the deadline is missed.



South Shore Gunite Pools & Spas Inc.

Headquarters:

Chelmsford, Mass.

Area Served:

New England

Highlights: The company, which operates

an average of 70 trucks on the road each day, ranked third in commercial construction revenue among this year's Top 50 Builders.



COMMUNITY SERVICE

TOP 5 COMMUNITY SERVICE Though this played a lesser role in ranking the Top 50, the idea of giving back is close to these builders' hearts.

Many donate generously of their time and money, whether it be build-

ing a pool or participating in a charitable event. Several company presidents say it has seeped into their corporate cultures. "A lot of the causes out there are aligned with what we believe in as a company," says Paul Porter of Premier Pools & Spas.

45

THE CONTRIBUTORS The Top 50 are overwhelmingly involved in charities, with 45 donating to a cause. Athletic programs are particularly popular.



NEW TO THE LIST

FRESH FACES While 36 members of this elite group have remained from prior years, the new criteria made way for 14 new companies to be selected.

COMPANY NAME (in alphabetical order)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 AQUA BLUE POOLS | 8 NVBLU INC. POOL DESIGN-BUILD |
| 2 AQUA POOL & PATIO | 9 PLEASURE AQUATECH POOLS |
| 3 GEORGIA CLASSIC POOL | 10 POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC. |
| 4 HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC | 11 PRISTINE POOLS AND SPAS, LLC |
| 5 LOEBS + GORDON POOLCRAFT | 12 PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS |
| 6 MARQUISE POOLS, LLC | 13 RIVER POOLS AND SPAS |
| 7 MONOGRAM CUSTOM POOLS,HOMES | 14 SUNSET POOLS INC. |

WHO'S ON THE LIST



TONY CACIOLO

Monogram Custom Pools & Homes

Headquarters:

Coopersburg, Pa.

Area Served: Northeast, Pennsylvania

Highlights: The firm's fund-raiser for Hurricane Katrina victims generated \$100,000.



T J BROWN

Pristine Pools and Spas, LLC

Headquarters:

Meridian, Idaho

Area Served: Idaho, northern Utah

Highlights: The first-time Top 50 Builder is the only one from Idaho.



KEITH ZARS

Keith Zars Pools

Headquarters:

San Antonio

Area Served: San Antonio

Highlights: The builder has the second largest staff among this year's honorees, with an average tenure of 10 years.



JASON HUGHES

River Pools and Spas

Headquarters:

Warsaw, Va.

Area Served:

Virginia, Md.

Highlights: The firm, which is exceptionally active in community service, has helped its staff pay for college tuition.



BRUCE DUNN

Mission Pools Inc.

Headquarters:

Escondido, Calif.

Area Served:

Southern California

Highlights: The firm is known for its sizable commercial operation and seasoned in-house staff.



DALE OVERSON

Barrington Pools Inc.

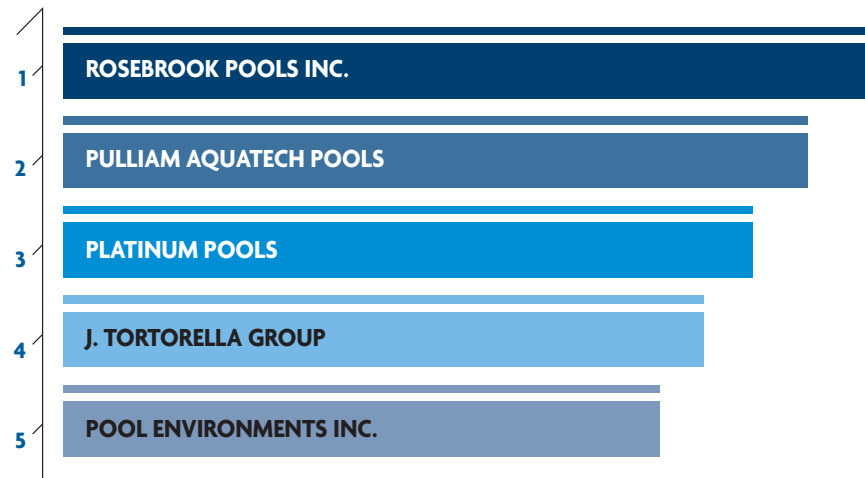
Headquarters:

Barrington, Ill.

Area Served: Chicago

Highlights: This company also is known for high-end projects and an in-house staff.

WEB PRESENCE



TOP 5 WEB SITES This category rated builders' sites on design, functionality, a compelling company history and easy-to-use galleries. Standouts include Rosebrook Pools' dynamic page openers, which show drawings transform into real-life projects, and Platinum Pools' construction videos set to upbeat country music. The site also had a "browse by price" feature that shows examples of what users can get at certain price points.

40 SOCIAL NETWORKERS Forty firms have Facebook pages, with 33 updating regularly. In addition, 24 companies are on Twitter, and 17 utilize other social media, such as instructional YouTube videos.

	COMPANY NAME	STATE
1	SHASTA INDUSTRIES	ARIZONA
2	CODY POOLS	TEXAS
3	POOLS OF FUN INC.	INDIANA
4	NVBLU INC. POOL DESIGN-BUILD	VIRGINIA
5	HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC	TEXAS
6	PLATINUM POOLS	TEXAS
7	RISING SUN POOLS INC.	NORTH CAROLINA
8	RIVER POOLS AND SPAS	VIRGINIA
9	BARRINGTON POOLS INC.	ILLINOIS
10	AQUA BLUE POOLS	SOUTH CAROLINA

TOP 10 SOCIAL NETWORKERS In scoring this category, social media participation was considered a sign that companies are pushing the envelope in marketing their brands. Highest scorers tended to not only have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts, but also update them regularly. Cody Pools, for instance, sends clients progress photos through Facebook so friends can view them as well. Overall Web efforts appear to be paying off, generating a reported 20- to 60 percent of these firms' leads.

WHO'S ON THE LIST



ADAM TRAUOGOTT

Sunset Pools Inc.
Headquarters: Katy, Texas
Area Served: Houston
Highlights: The company is a newcomer to the Top 50 list this year after operating for just over a decade.



THOMAS ARNAULD

Intercoastal Pool & Spa Builders Inc.
Headquarters: Melbourne, Fla.
Area Served: Central Florida
Highlights: Half of the builder's business in 2011 came from renovation.



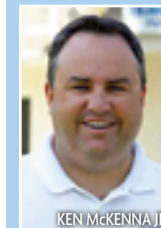
BRAD STEPHENS

Backyard Amenities
Headquarters: Baytown, Texas
Area Served: Houston
Highlights: A previous Top 50 honoree, the builder also has received two Houston Better Business Bureau Torch Awards.



BRIAN WHITLOCK

Cypress Custom Pools Inc.
Headquarters: Cypress, Texas
Area Served: Houston
Highlights: The firm, which made its Top 50 debut in 2011, is a strong supporter of educational programs and local athletic teams.



KEN MCKENNA JR.

Tampa Bay Pools
Headquarters: Brandon, Fla.
Area Served: Greater Tampa
Highlights: The firm's president is a board member of FSPA and president of its Tampa Bay Chapter.



ROBERT CUNNINGHAM

Mission Valley Pools & Spas Inc.
Headquarters: San Diego
Area Served: San Diego
Highlights: Supports the Mitchell Thorp Foundation, which helps families of children who suffer from life-threatening conditions.

Continued on page 98

Committed to Customers

The best customer service doesn't come from any single principle or practice, but from a set of attitudes

By Ben Thomas When it comes to building a successful company, satisfied customers are the single most important component. That's why business owners pour millions of dollars every year into better understanding and pleasing their clients.

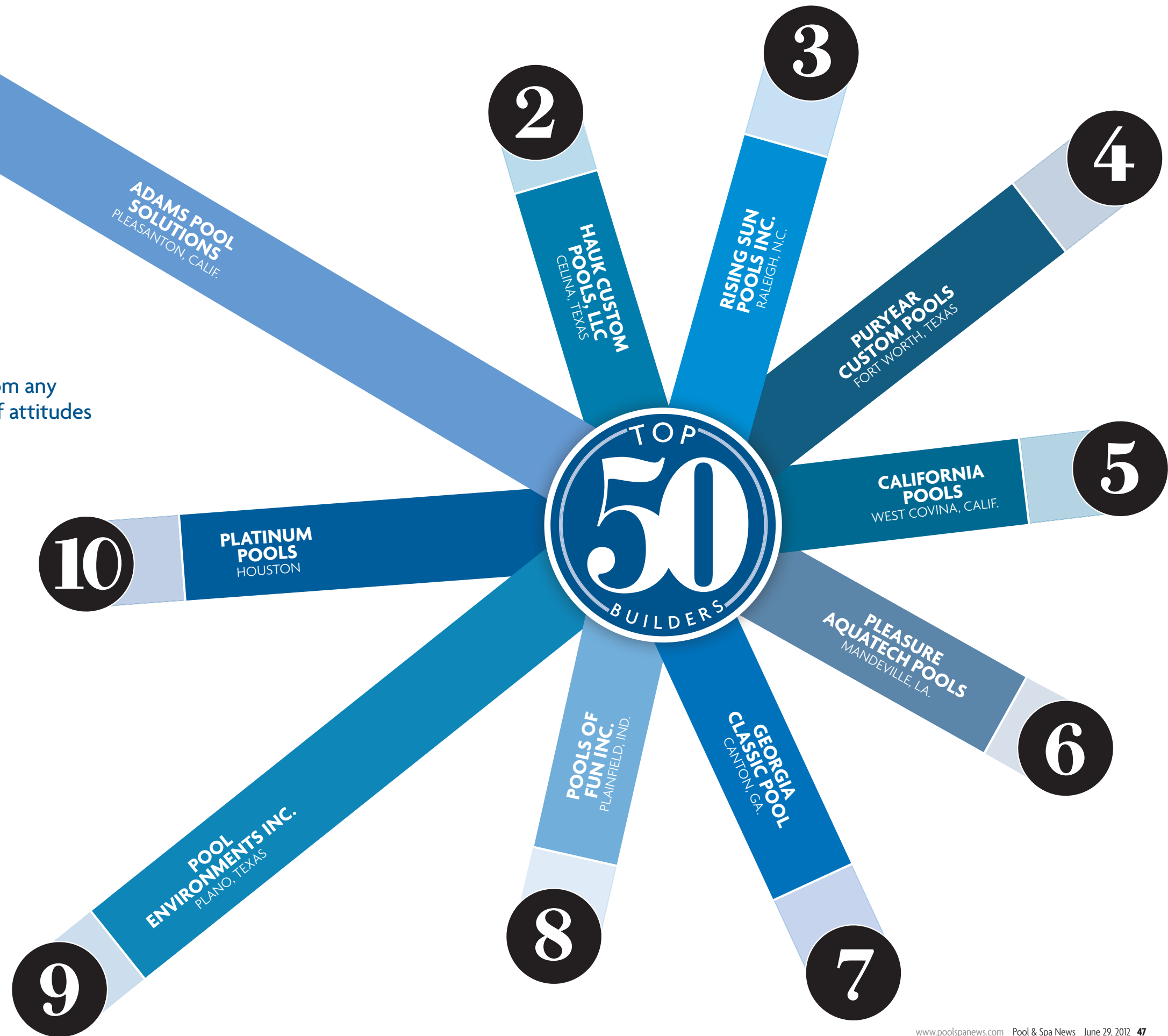
As part of our Top 50 program, *Pool & Spa News* commissioned a third-party company, Atlanta-based GuildQuality, to perform customer-service surveys for all entrants who wished to participate. The firm, which specializes in contractors, contacted former clients of the builders who had opted in, and asked their impressions of each company's expertise, customer service and professionalism.

The results were interesting. While the highest-scoring firm, Adams Pool Solutions, is located in Northern California, seven of the top 10 were in the South. This over-representation of one region speaks highly of old-fashioned Southern hospitality. Also interesting was the fact that there was no discernible relationship between high customer-service scores and the size of a given business or its years in operation.

The reason for this is clear when speaking with these company owners. Rather than discussing complex formulas, many of them cited simple, traditional techniques as the secrets behind great service. For example, one element listed as crucial to success was a willingness to pick up the phone and talk. E-mail and texting are great for quick communication, many say, but there's just no substitute for a phone call — or, better yet, an in-person visit.

And it's in tense negotiations that this willingness to communicate becomes most important. It doesn't take any special commitment to be friendly to a delightful customer, but a caring mind-set toward difficult clients can help not only to diffuse volatile situations, but also enhance a company's reputation in unexpected ways.

Here, *Pool & Spa News* speaks with the companies that ranked highest in GuildQuality's customer-service survey.



Tony Adams,
Adams Pool Solutions



It all comes down to communication. I have one number on my business card: my cell number. I'll give it to any customer I meet, and I answer my phone. I answer it Saturday, Sunday

— even if I'm in another country. Just answer your phone; it's as simple as that.

We try to call our customers every day [and] our only policy is, make yourself available. All our employees have cell phones, and we tell them, "If it rings, we expect you

TIP FOR SUCCESS

"Always answer your phone. It's as simple as that."

to answer it." That solves 90 percent of the problems.

We send out surveys for every renovation project — we don't need to do it for new construction because we're talking with the client everyday. But we send those surveys out with the bill and the thank-you letter, and it covers everything from sales to scheduling to construction and so on. If we get a negative response, we call.

Robby Hauk,
Hauk Custom Pools, LLC



I believe in making every pool as close to perfect as possible. On one job, I tore out some brickwork near the waterline and redid it three times. By the

second redo, even the client was telling me, "I'm sure it's going to be fine. Let's just move on." But I still wasn't satisfied; I had to get it just right. Now that customer tells his friends, "If you want the closest to perfection you can possibly get, buy a Hauk Custom Pool."

We have a project coordinator who

TIP FOR SUCCESS

"Customer service is a moving target. What's important changes every year."

sends our employees out with an up-to-date schedule of tasks for that day on every customer's pool. On Thursdays, we generate a customer communiqué, and the customer receives a checklist of remaining items to be completed. It also includes an estimated date of plastering.

My father built swimming pools in the 1950s, but I got my start as an automobile salesman, where I learned that you don't treat clients the way you think they deserve to be treated — treat them the way they want to be treated.

Customer service is a moving target. What's important to people changes every year, so you must continue to work to understand what makes them happy.

We survey our customers, and it's a scary thing because there's a lot of stuff you don't want to hear. But I think it's important because it makes [us all] accountable.

Tara Othank, Rising Sun Pools Inc.

We invest in training, taking time to make sure the staff understands what level of customer service we expect from them.

We know people may have to go a little

out of the way to come to us vs. a big-box store, and we don't really distinguish between someone buying a \$2 bag of chlorine or a \$20,000 pool — we treat them with the same level of service. We spend time with them, learn their kids' names. It's more of a friendship than anything.

We send comment cards with service invoices to learn where we need to improve, and contact every customer who has a complaint or compliment.



We send out things on Facebook to ask for feedback, and I personally respond to every review about us that appears online.

Because we're mainly a vinyl and fiberglass builder, there aren't many day-to-day changes, but we do have a lot of personal

TIP FOR SUCCESS

"Customers get a sheet that shows what to expect at two days, five days and so on — and people they can contact for each phase."

contact with our customers. The day of the dig, we hand the customer a sheet that shows them what they can expect to see at two days, five days and so on — and the names of people they can contact for every phase.

We also do an annual photo contest for all new pool customers. The winner gets a \$500 store credit and is on the front cover of our catalog, which goes out to 20,000 people.

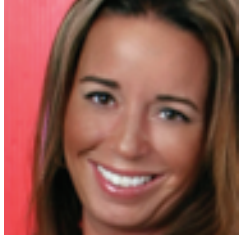
Editor's note: Charles Vassallo (above), the current owners' father, founded Rising Sun Pools 40 years ago. He passed away in 2003.

Jennifer Satterwhite,
Puryear Custom Pools

We make sure that our superintendents call our customers every day. Once a week we also do an office call to see that things are OK. We send out a survey at the end of every job, and I personally make a final phone call to the customer,

TOP 10 CUSTOMER SERVICE

COMPANY NAME	
1	ADAMS POOL SOLUTIONS
2	HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC
3	RISING SUN POOLS INC.
4	PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS
5	CALIFORNIA POOLS INC.
6	PLEASURE AQUATECH POOLS
7	GEORGIA CLASSIC POOL
8	POOLS OF FUN INC.
9	POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC.
10	PLATINUM POOLS



where I actually ask for the worst thing that happened to them. I look for criticism, basically, so I know what to fix.

We don't do any electronic communication as far as photos and so on. We're old-fashioned — it's all by phone or in person.

Once a customer ordered the pool as a

TIP FOR SUCCESS

"I personally make a final phone call to the customer, where I actually ask for the worst thing that happened to them."

Christmas present for their children. We created a 3-D drawing, and they presented it to the kids on Christmas morning. They went

into the backyard and outlined the pool in Christmas lights, then took photos throughout the construction process. At one point, there was a lot of snow, which is unusual here, and they built snowmen with inner tubes around them in the spa and they created a book of the photos, thanking us. Those are the customers you really do this for.

Ryder Steimle, California Pools

A passion for great customer service has to be in the DNA of the guy who's leading the organization. If he isn't concerned about it, nobody else is going to be. It's not something you can just talk about or put in a mission statement; you have to get out and show people what you mean and how you do it.



We have surveyed our customers for years, so that's very much a part of our culture. Our annual award, the Wayne Steimle Award,

goes to the office that had the best customer service that year, and it has to be an office that also deals in volume. It is the most coveted award — above sales, profitability and any-

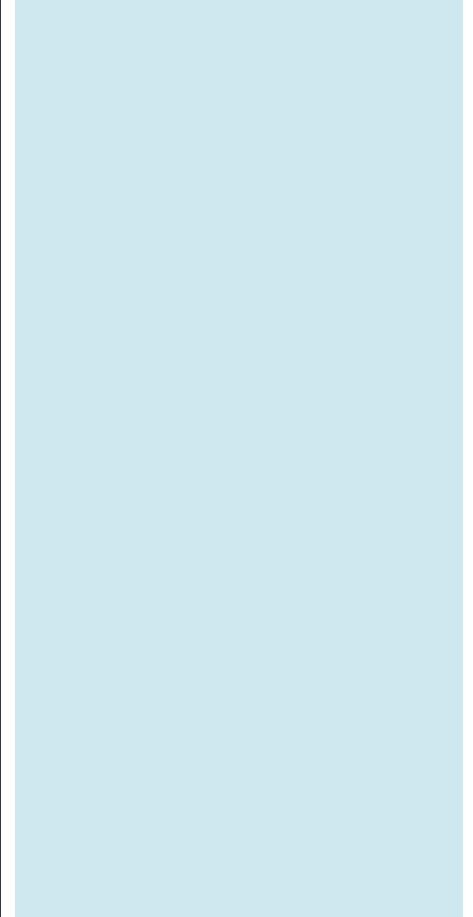
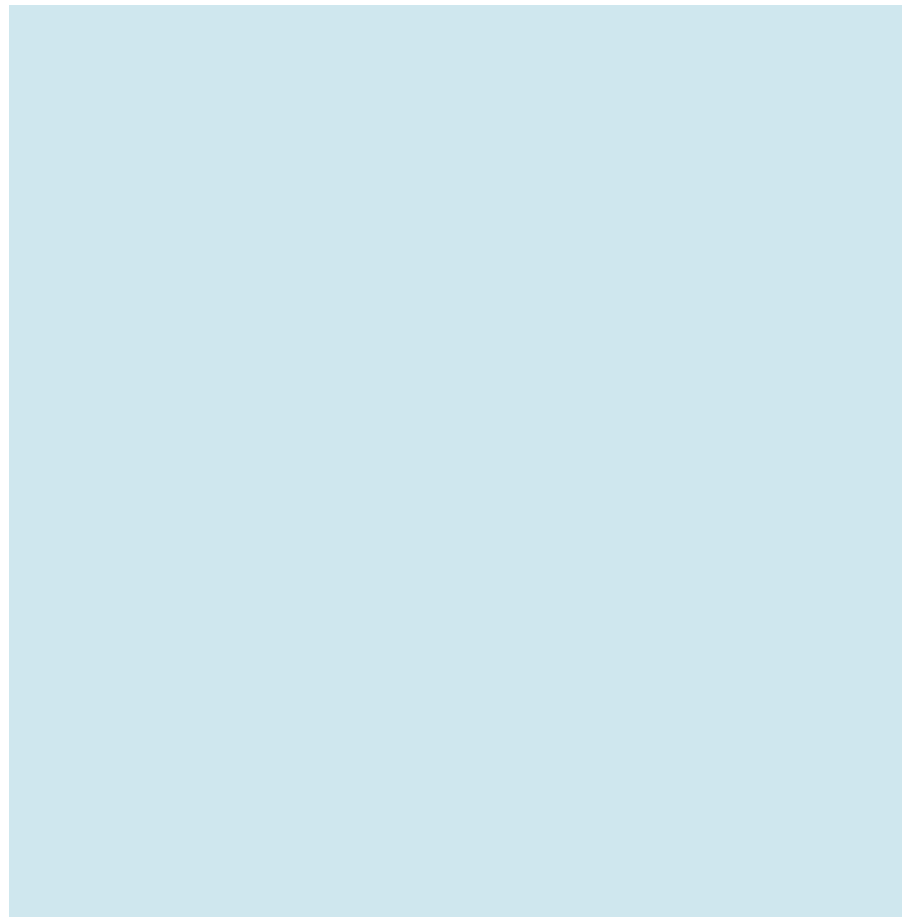
TIP FOR SUCCESS

"We talk to the customers on Mondays and Fridays, minimum, and fill in the in-between days with e-mails."

thing else. On the flip side, the Rubber Chicken is given out to an office that's slacking.

I think the two most important things to a customer are speed and communication. Technology can help that communication, but there's just no substitute for a phone call. We do a lot of training on that front. You need to talk to the customer on Mondays and Fridays, minimum. We fill in the in-between days with e-mails.

I believe that if you can win over the angriest customer, they will become your biggest fan. I've never gone that extra mile



for a customer and not seen a return on that investment. It's always worth it.

Charles Elfert, Pleasure Aquatech Pools

We don't only want to build a good pool — we want to be there to service the customer when the pool is finished.



I think that's what separates us from our competitors: We're

in the service business because we think of our work as a long-term investment. For instance, say I install a salt chlorinator on a pool, then some service guy comes along and convinces the customer to switch to tablet chlorine — and down the road, the chlorine in those tabs might damage surfaces or irritate swimmers' eyes. ... The only way we can defend our work is to be there for the client, taking care of the pool throughout its life.

We use a program that prints out work

TIP FOR SUCCESS

“We don't only want to build a good pool — we're in the service business because we think of our work as a long-term investment.”

orders for each work phase, and it's accompanied by an inspection sheet that either my superintendent or I will go through and make sure every task is finished before we move on to the next phase.

I'm not into price-gouging like some of these other guys — actually, we're one of the higher-priced pool builders in our region — because we don't cut corners, and we use the best equipment available. There will always be somebody who can make a product for cheaper and sell it for less, but then you've got to put money aside for the risk you run, which means you might as well spend a little more to invest in a product that'll work properly and last.

Vance Dover, Georgia Classic Pool

We have passion about our jobs. We love being able to go in, create spectacular projects and make people happy. We've come to realize that every pool we build will lead



to another job, but for every customer we make unhappy, we potentially lose 10 jobs.

We definitely utilize e-mail and texting. When clients are out of town, we send *continued on page 56*

TIP FOR SUCCESS

“When clients are out of town, we send photos and keep them updated on the projects at least once a day, sometimes more frequently.”

Committed to Customers

continued from page 52

photos and keep them updated on the projects at least once a day, sometimes more frequently. We also try never to over-promise, lest we under-deliver. We don't give anyone false expectations.

We send a survey out when the job's completed, asking questions like, "What

could we have done better?" I figure there's no point in having our ears tickled with the compliments we might like to hear, so we ask very specific questions about anything that didn't go as the customer had hoped.

Tim Colon, Pools of Fun Inc.

I can put all the policies and procedures in place that I want — and we have those, don't get me wrong — but it's the staff that

makes the difference. When I make a hire, I'm looking at them, thinking about whether they're someone who'll have the customer's best interest in mind.



We're in contact with each customer daily, to

head off any issue before it becomes a problem. At the end of each project, the homeowner fills out a survey grading us through the process, and we share that with our

TIP FOR SUCCESS

"I use QR codes in the store so customers can scan those into their phones and submit comments about how they were treated."

whole staff. I even have secret shoppers go into our stores [because] I'm big on inspecting what you expect.

I use QR codes in the store so customers can scan those into their phones and submit comments about how they were treated. We review those comments with our staff as well.

I make personal phone calls to customers on a regular basis. E-mail is great and so is texting, but proactive phone communication gives the customer a real sense of security. I hire people (project managers) just to call customers, so they never have to wonder what's happening with their projects that day.

Ted Anderson, Pool Environments Inc.

Our approach is kind of old-fashioned — we think of ourselves as servants. As corny as it might sound, it's about making sure everyone's heart is in it.



We make ourselves avail-

able to our customers. We return phone calls in a timely fashion, even at 8:00 or 9:00 at night, 365 days a year. We feel fortunate to have the clients we have, so we try to make sure they

understand how important they are to us.

We don't bill clients until we've gone through the entire invoice, and checked that every step of what we billed them for actually got done — and done to their satisfaction.

In new construction, we have a scheduler whose job is to manage the interaction between the field superintendent, all the workers and the homeowner — and that's all that person does. So if I had to chalk our

TIP FOR SUCCESS

“Our approach is kind of old-fashioned — we think of ourselves as servants.”

success in customer service up to one single thing, I'd say “communication.”

The personal touch works for us, whether

that's on social networks like Facebook, or through in-person or phone interaction.

We've worked with one very successful family — building, remodeling and servicing all their pools for at least two generations. In one nine-year period, we built seven pools for them. So, while some would say the greatest compliment is a referral, to us, the greatest compliment is when a client moves to a new city and asks us to build their new pool, from generation to generation.

Scott Waldo, Platinum Pools

For the last 10 years, we've had a private company call ev-



everyone we've ever built a pool for, and the construction department's bonuses are based on customer satisfaction. If we make a mistake,

everyone in the department is authorized to fix it without discussing it with me or anyone else. Our philosophy is that we don't worry about profit; we worry about taking care of the customer first, and the rest will take care of itself.

Our scheduling program takes the cus-

TIP FOR SUCCESS

“If we make a mistake, everyone in the department is authorized to fix it without discussing it with me or anyone else.

tomer from the time they're just a lead all the way through their warranty, sending an e-mail whenever something's scheduled on construction. We do four walk-throughs throughout construction, and if anything isn't up to the customer's satisfaction, we stop construction, make them 100 percent happy and then move forward again.

The supervisors have to call every customer every day; the scheduler has to call every customer every day; and the designers have to call every customer every Friday. If we see a problem starting to happen, we do our best to head it off before it gets to be an issue — but the only way you're going to know that is if you have those lines of communication in place. ■

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Top 50 Charts continued from page 45

BY THE NUMBERS



Aqua Blue Pools
Headquarters: Hollywood, S.C.
Area Served: Charleston/Hilton Head, S.C.
Highlights: Another newcomer to the Top 50 list, the company is active in social media outreach.



Burton Pools and Spas
Headquarters: Fort Smith, Ark.
Area Served: Northwest Arkansas, eastern Oklahoma
Highlights: The sole Arkansas-based

honoree, the firm also is the only one to report membership in the Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association.



Maryland Pools Inc.
Headquarters: Columbia, Md.
Area Served: Mid Atlantic
Highlights: Founded in 1949, the firm is active in charities and a longtime member of the Master Pools Guild.

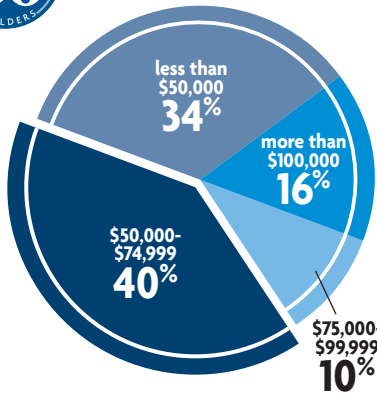


Ocean Quest Pools by Lew Akins
Headquarters: Belton, Texas
Area Served: Central Texas
Highlights: A recipient of 187 design awards,

the founder also is considered a father of the negative-edge pool.

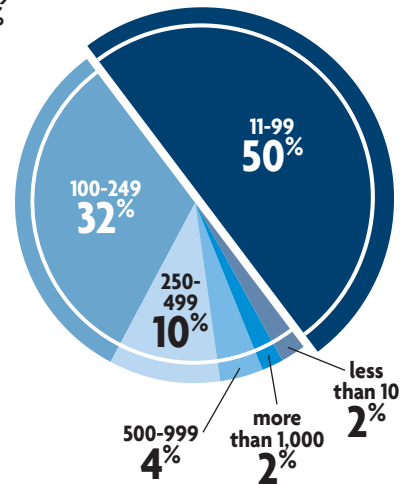


Performance Pool & Spa
Headquarters: Woodbury, Minn.
Area Served: Minnesota
Highlights: From its humble beginnings in a residential garage, the company has grown to four locations and even operates its own online retail store.



AVERAGE POOL PRICE IN 2011
 This group is more tilted toward higher-end projects than in the past, with an average pool price of \$71,952. For eight companies, the average price tag was more than \$100,000, while 13 reported \$75,000 or more.

EXCAVATIONS IN 2011 The Top 50 builders are not exclusively high-volume operations. Only three firms excavated more than 500 pools in 2011, while more than half saw a volume of less than 100. One, Loeb's + Gordon Poolcraft, was in the single digits.



\$663M TOTAL REVENUE In 2011, the *Pool & Spa News* Top 50 generated a total of \$663.26 million.

	COMPANY NAME	RENOVATION REVENUE
1	ADAMS POOL SOLUTIONS	\$12,070,414
2	SHASTA INDUSTRIES	\$4,200,000
3	ROBERTSON POOLS INC.	\$3,710,222
4	SWAN POOLS	\$3,611,426
5	CALIFORNIA POOLS	\$2,929,376
6	CLAFFEY POOLS	\$2,917,125
7	PREMIER POOLS & SPAS	\$2,255,300
8	PATIO POOLS & SPAS	\$2,197,596
9	NEJAME & SONS	\$2,100,000
10	J. TORTORELLA GROUP	\$2,050,000

RENOVATION REVENUE Though still a significant market segment, at \$61.3 million total, renovations took a back seat to new construction. Seven firms generated 25 percent or more of their residential construction earnings through renovations. For one company, Adams Pool Solutions of Pleasanton, Calif., renovations accounted for more than half of residential construction revenue.