

Plumber

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Plumber Profile

Filling the Shoes

Plumber's unexpected death didn't mean a downslide for his longtime company, as his wife and children stepped up to ensure it remained strong and on a healthy growth trajectory.

- By Ken Wysocky

On the Cover

\$15 Sewer & Drain technician Charlie Morales prepares to install a new InSinkErator garbage disposal (Emerson) in a residence in San Jose after the last one failed. The company, based in San Jose, California, offers residential service and repair plumbing and drain cleaning services throughout the San Jose and San Francisco region. (Photography by David Elkins)



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Plumber

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Cory Dellenbach

Awarding Your Team

Service awards, other special awards, are great ways to show appreciation to your team at the end of each year

T

he other day I was doing some cleaning out of boxes we still had from when we moved into our house five years ago and I ran across many awards from my newspaper years.

The awards ranged from newspaper design to feature writing and photography. They were a great way for the state association to recognize the work we journalists did and it was a chance for us to see what other newspapers were winning with and push us to do better the next year.

It got me thinking about what types of awards a plumbing company could give out. It would be a fun end-of-the-year way to celebrate your team while acknowledging what they do for your company and the team.

CLEANEST VAN AWARD

We all know plumbers pretty much live out of their van or truck and we all know they can get messy at times. This award could go to a plumber on your team that keeps his or her work vehicle the cleanest, within reason.

Are there tools and parts scattered throughout the shelves and rolling on the floor or are they all stored in bins and labeled. Don't forget to make sure the bigger equipment (cameras, jettors) are put away nicely too and cleaned. How would this benefit your company?

The clean vans — especially the outside — get customers to notice them better.

CUSTOMER INTERACTION AWARD

Getting positive feedback from customers is something every plumbing company strives for and you could make it an award for your team. Which plumber on staff has received the most positive reviews from customers.

This would encourage your crew to step up their game when it comes to customer interactions and pushing for reviews after a job is complete. It helps both them (getting the award) and the company (getting the reviews).

There's always ways to acknowledge your team. One easy one is with tenure awards. Honor employees who are reaching milestones with the company — 5 years with the company, or 10, 15, 20, etc.

SELLERS AWARD

Does the company track how your plumbers do on additional sales? Encourage your team to offer customers maintenance programs or improved fixtures. Whichever plumber has the most sales at the end of the year would get this award.

It helps your team get more comfortable on the sales side, but also a good boost to the revenue stream for the business.

OTHER BASIC AWARDS


There's always ways to acknowledge your team. One easy one is with tenure awards. Honor employees who are reaching milestones with the company — five years with the company, or 10, 15, 20, etc. Those are always great ways to acknowledge the team.

Or recognize anyone who has moved on from an apprentice to journeyman or journeyman to master.

FOR YOUR TEAM

You don't have to present big trophies in any of these presentations. Just something as simple as certificates or gift cards to local shops/restaurants, or extra time off, will go a long way in showing your team how much you appreciate what they bring to your company.

Does your company already do something like this? I'd like to hear your ideas. You can email me at editor@plumbermag.com.

Enjoy this issue! 

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BEST PRACTICES

Pipe Plug Tips

Pipe plugs are a common tool to isolate specific sections for inspection or pressure testing purposes on drainage, waste and vent systems. Consider the best practices covered in this online exclusive by Sean Comerford, technical applications manager at Oatey.

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"... high-reliability teams ... adjust their systems not to prevent all failures, but to help them fail safely, then recover quickly, easily and cheaply."

— *How to Build Resilience Instead of Chasing Zero Errors*

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EFFICIENCY

Benefits of a Business-Management Software Solution

Armando Ramos, owner of Plomero en Phoenix, relies on efficiency to boost profit margins. That explains why he pays a monthly fee to have a business partner that works as hard as he does: ServiceTitan software, which to Ramos is the equivalent of having several more employees on board without paying the salaries and benefits. "It's definitely played a huge role in our growth," Ramos says. Check out this online exclusive to learn more about the various ways it benefits Ramos' company.

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Sharing the Best Content

We're always on the lookout for relevant and interesting plumbing content across the internet and social media. In our e-newsletters, we regularly highlight that and share what else out there we're reading and watching. For example, this article that takes a look at how home renovation TV shows have made turning antique dressers into bathroom vanities a popular trend, to the chagrin of plumbers. Be sure to sign up for *Plumber* e-newsletters if you haven't already.

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▼ Valerie McGinnis, owner of \$15 Sewer & Drain in San Jose, California, stands next to one of her company's service vehicles at the company shop. Valerie took over ownership of the company after her husband passed away in 2020. The company has 18 employees and offers residential service and repair plumbing and drain cleaning throughout the metropolitan San Jose and San Francisco area.

Filling the SHOES

Plumber's unexpected death didn't mean a downslide for his longtime company, as his wife and children stepped up to ensure it remained strong and on a healthy growth trajectory

By Ken Wysocky | Photography by David Elkins



\$15 Sewer & Drain, San Jose, California

OWNER	Valerie McGinnis
FOUNDED	1986
EMPLOYEES	18
SERVICES	Drain cleaning, residential service and repair plumbing
SERVICE AREA	Metro San Jose/San Francisco area
WEBSITE	www.thegreatamericanplumbing.com

When Valerie McGinnis' husband Mark unexpectedly died of a heart attack in January 2020 at age 60, she wasn't sure what would happen to \$15 Sewer & Drain, the business the well-known plumber and drain cleaner had started in 1986 in San Jose, California.

That all changed when she met with grief-stricken employees the following Monday morning.

"They were beside themselves," McGinnis says. "When I saw the looks on the faces of all these grown men, that's when I decided to keep going. I couldn't just walk away from almost 20 families."

That decision set in motion an emotionally and physically exhausting journey for McGinnis and her five children, three of whom joined the company to keep it traveling on the path envisioned by their father: Savannah, 20; Steven, 28; and Charles, 31.

"I went from being a 'class mother' at my kids' schools and a stay-at-home mom to a full-time employee," McGinnis says. "It was very difficult to step into Mark's shoes because he did almost everything. Between the long hours and dealing with things I didn't know a lot about, like finances, money for payroll and materials, it was very challenging. I was putting in 14 hours a day on some days.

"We all kind of worked into areas that fit our strong suits and then it got easier," she adds. "I also hired an outside payroll service, a CPA and other professionals to get things done right. Now I mainly take calls and handle customers, which is a much better mix than it was in the beginning."

“It's not always about making money. We're dealing with people at their worst — stressed and upset. That gives us a chance to save the day and that's what really matters.”

Valerie McGinnis

A GAPING LOSS

The family had giant-size shoes to fill. For decades, Mark was a fixture in the plumbing arena in the San Francisco Bay Area, a skilled technician who slowly but surely built a business — and a brand — by pledging to unclog drains for \$15. He strongly believed in embracing new technology, comprehensive training for employees, and never leaving a job unfinished, no matter how difficult.

"We still get calls every day from customers who say, 'My plumber is here and can't get my drain open, and he says you're the only company that can help me,'" McGinnis says. "Mark was very big on never leaving a customer with a clogged drain. We just don't do that. Ever. Period."

Mark also possessed the proverbial heart of gold, always willing to tackle drain issues that other plumbers wouldn't touch or give free plumbing advice to customers.



▶ Technician Savannah McGinnis uses a Gorlitz Sewer & Drain cleaning machine to clean out the drain of a bathtub at a residential customer job in San Jose.



- ◀ Technician Savannah McGinnis conducts a leak detection test on a property in San Jose.
- ▶ Technician Charlie Morales attaches the InSinkErator garbage disposal (Emerson) to the drain for a customer.



“Because our business model has always been based on high volume at low cost, our technicians have to be efficient — get in and get out.”

Valerie McGinnis

DOING THE RIGHT THING

Mark got into the trade after quitting high school and working for a neighbor who ran a drain cleaning franchise.

“He kind of fell in love with the freedom to be out in the field with customers, not stuck in an office all the time,” McGinnis says.

After working for a couple years, he encountered a situation that spurred him to form his own company. During a service call at a home owned by an elderly couple, both ill with cancer, Mark discovered that they’d merely forgotten to deploy their bathtub trip lever. He tripped it and left without charging them for the call.

A supervisor later questioned him about the free service, noting that the company’s mission was to make money.

“Mark said he never felt worse in his life,” McGinnis recalls. “It was a moment he never forgot. He figured there had to be a better way.”

And so \$15 Sewer & Drain was born. The business model was simple: Attract customers with a low price

Continued ▶

In fact, McGinnis says Mark would routinely take customer calls late at night, tell them what parts they needed to fix a problem, then talk them through the repair over the phone. In honor of that philosophy about doing the right thing for customers, every technician now is required to stay in the office on a rotating basis on Wednesdays and do nothing but take calls from customers and give them free repair advice.

“We do that because that’s what Mark used to do,” McGinnis says. “He always said that’s what made the company strong. He felt if he did the right thing, he’d always land on his feet when things got tough. It’s not always about making money. We’re dealing with people at their worst — stressed and upset. That gives us a chance to save the day and that’s what really matters.”



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▲ Charlie Morales and Savannah McGinnis, back, use a trailer-mounted, hot-water jetting machine (HotJet USA) at a residential property.

and make up the revenue shortfall by amassing a large volume of business. The formula worked. By the mid-1990s, Mark was running 45 trucks, employed about 43 technicians and served the entire San Francisco Bay Area. But after getting married and having children, he scaled back to about 20 technicians and trucks to make the business more manageable.

The company no longer charges only \$15 for drain cleaning. How does staff explain the discrepancy between the company name and the now higher price?

McGinnis says they tell customers that the company name when it started was \$15 Sewer & Drain, but the actual charge has increased over the years to \$15 just for a trip charge, plus \$100 for a one-hour service call.

“If the call takes more than an hour, we charge \$50 for every extra half-hour,” McGinnis says. “But I’d say about 75% of our calls take about an hour.”

Continued ▶

Hot-water jetter heats up business opportunities

During the nearly four decades that the late Mark McGinnis built \$15 Sewer & Drain into a well-recognized business in the San Jose/San Francisco Bay Area, he consistently reinvested profits into the company and prided himself on embracing advanced technology.

So it seems only fitting that six months after he died unexpectedly of a heart attack in January 2020 that his wife, Valerie McGinnis, who now owns the company, decided to invest about \$50,000 in a trailer-mounted, hot-water jetting machine (4,000 psi at up to 10 gpm) made by HotJet USA.

“Mark hadn’t talked about buying one,” McGinnis says. “But then I saw an ad in *Cleaner* magazine for a HotJet jetter and the thing that jumped out at me was the hot-water aspect. It just made sense that hot water would clean drainlines better.

“We had been looking for a different piece of equipment to bring in because Mark always was big on investing in new equipment. And this fit the bill.”

But it was more than just sentimental reasons that spurred McGinnis to make this considerable investment.

“It has brought us to a different level in drain cleaning,” she explains. “Now we can clean up to 12-inch-diameter drains and do more commercial work. It has opened up a whole new market

for us — got us a piece of the drain cleaning pie we weren’t eating before. We could clean 2-, 3- and 4-inch-diameter drains all day long, but when you hit drains filled with sand or slurry, we’d have to call someone else. Plus, if you say you’re a drain cleaning company, but you can only do up to 4-inch lines, how good can you really be?”

The machine also generates significant amounts of revenue. In fact, McGinnis says it paid for itself in about nine months.

As a bonus, HotJet officials flew McGinnis and some key employees out to the company’s production facility in Utah for training.

“HotJet’s customer service and follow-through is amazing,” McGinnis says. “If we get stuck on a job, they’ll walk us through it by phone.”

Moreover, in honor of Mark’s emphasis on employee training, McGinnis held a companywide training session for technicians at a trailer park; she offered to clean a sewer mainline running through the park for free in exchange for the training opportunity.

“We definitely took a gamble on it because if Mark would’ve been here, he would’ve done that,” McGinnis says. “You have to stay on the forefront of technology.”

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EQUIPMENT INVESTMENTS

The company owns a full complement of machines and equipment, including a pipe bursting system from TRIC Tools and a brush coating system from Picote Solutions, both of which reflect McGinnis' philosophy about embracing technology that can open up new markets and better serve customers.

The company also owns a HotJet II trailer-mounted, hot-water jetter (4,000 psi at up to 10 gpm) from HotJet USA; a sonar leak detection machine from LeakTronics; GO 50, GO 62 and GO 68 cable drain machines from Gorlitz Sewer & Drain; a GO 1500 Series water jetter (1,500 psi at 2.1 gpm), also from Gorlitz; a standard RIDGID SeeSnake pipeline inspection camera, plus SeeSnake Mini Reel, Compact C40 and Compact M40 inspection cameras; RIDGID FlexShaft 120 and 204 drain machines; a RIDGID NaviTrak Scout pipeline locator; a pipeline inspection camera from Forbest Products Co.; jackhammers from Robert Bosch Tool Corp.; ProPress tools and concrete saws from Milwaukee Tool; and a MaxiMiller descaling machine from Picote Solutions.

The company runs 17 service vehicles for plumbing and drain cleaning technicians. About half the fleet con-

sists of Ford cargo vans, with Dodge Ram ProMaster vans filling out the rest of the fleet. The company is slowly converting the entire fleet to ProMaster vans, McGinnis says.

"Mark always was big on having the best — the latest and greatest in equipment," she says. "He firmly believed that reliable and productive equipment always gets jobs done faster and more efficiently.

"Because our business model has always been based on high volume at low cost, our technicians have to be efficient — get in and get out. Each of our technicians does six to eight service calls a day for drains which, from what I understand, is more than normal."

NEW MARKETING APPROACH

One thing that has changed in the past few years is the company's marketing strategy. For reasons unknown, the number of plumbing businesses in San Jose's service area has skyrocketed.

In addition, the pandemic hurt business, which forced the company to increase its marketing. The upshot? The company started using social media platforms such as Yelp and Instagram to further bolster the \$15 Sewer & Drain brand.

Continued ▶

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Plumber Profile



▲ A big part of why Valerie McGinnis decided to keep her husband's company going following his death were the many loyal employees. "I couldn't just walk away from almost 20 families," she says.

"Before COVID, we made it because we had so many repeat customers," McGinnis explains. "About nine out of 10 people were either repeat customers or local plumbers referring business to us.

"But when COVID first hit, it was an eye-opener when we realized what we had to do (to strengthen marketing efforts and keep phones ringing). We had no social media presence — we fell a bit behind in that area."

But now the business enjoys a significant amount of reviews on Google and Yelp. As of early September 2023, the company had 509 reviews posted on Yelp alone.

"And we don't even encourage customers to post reviews — they just do it on their own," McGinnis says. "It's kind of amazing."

The company is also doing some internal restructuring to better market its plumbing services, which aren't as obvious to customers, given that the name of the business is \$15 Sewer & Drain. Instead of renaming the entire company and ditching nearly 40 years of built-up brand equity, the company is marketing its plumbing and trenchless pipeline rehab services under a different name, The Great American Plumbing Co.

"We think of it as two different divisions," McGinnis says.

MORE GROWTH EXPECTED

Looking ahead, McGinnis plans to keep building on her husband's legacy, which extends far beyond the company itself. She estimates that more than a dozen former employees have gone on to form their own companies — something that never upset Mark.

"He always wanted our guys to better themselves — have great careers," she says.

McGinnis says the company plans to extend its service coverage northeast of San Jose to the east side of Francisco Bay, out to Alameda County, and south of San Jose to Santa Cruz County.

"We feel we can step into those areas slowly and still maintain great customer service," she says.

And as McGinnis looks back at three very tumultuous — as well as fulfilling and gratifying — years, she knows she made the right decision in January 2020.

"I feel really good about how far we've come and where we've brought the business," she says. "We're just carrying on what Mark started. I think he'd be very proud." 📍

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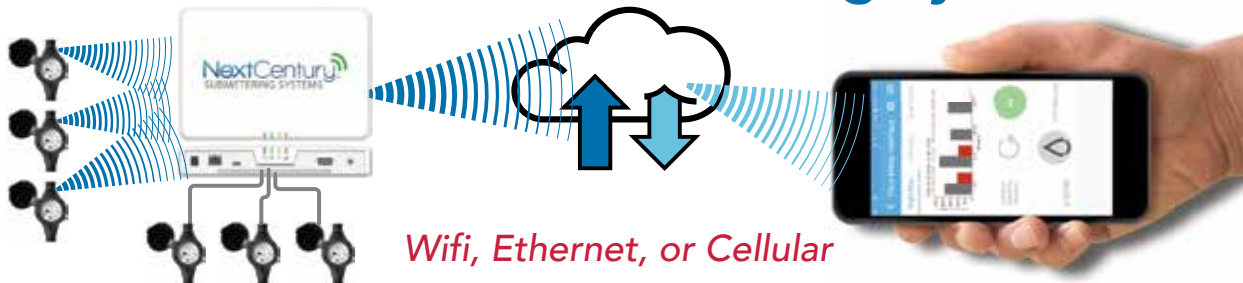


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Jeff Haden

Getting Your Name Out

You can tap into the lessons Toyota has learned sponsoring NASCAR and use them on a much smaller scale for your plumbing business

By Jeff Haden

Hoping to gain exposure, build goodwill and connect with a specific audience? (What small business isn't?) Sponsoring a local event might be a great option.

But not an easy option. While every event provides some sort of experience, the key is to partner with an event that provides an experience people will associate positively with your brand — and hopefully further characterizes and adds depth to your brand.

Then you need to leverage that experience, which requires more than simply slapping your logo onto a banner (even though that kind of awareness marketing does make an impact). You need to engage participants. Provide perks. Provide discounts. Integrate your sponsorship with the event's promotions. Align your sponsorship with the event's goals, and vice versa.

Yep: Not so easy — but when done well, extremely effective.

So where should you start? Don't try to reinvent the wheel. Take a few pages from an already successful playbook.

Perfect example (though decidedly not on the smaller scale of a plumbing company): The Toyota Owners 400 at Richmond Raceway. Toyota has been the title sponsor for the spring NASCAR race at Richmond for more than a decade. Toyota also sponsors the Camping World Truck Series event; as Richmond Raceway President Dennis Bickmeier says, "They take over the track for the weekend."

While sponsoring the race does generate plenty of visibility — the Toyota branding, while tasteful, is basically ubiquitous — lesson one is that for Toyota, the partnership is part of a long-term customer engagement strategy.

FIND YOUR FANS

"When Toyota first got involved in NASCAR," says Paul Doleshal, general manager of motorsports and assets for Toyota North America, "the average NASCAR fan didn't consider buying a Toyota. Purchase consideration, much less purchase intent, was extremely low."

"Find new ways to reward your customers. Find new ways to engage with them. Find new ways to collect data, collect information, create new touch points, ... make sure the event is willing to grow and evolve with you."

Dennis Bickmeier

For Toyota, entering the NASCAR world enabled the company to interact with fans in their comfort zone, and use that opportunity to learn about consumer tastes and interests. And to organically become part of the conversation.

"Data shows that while at first you might get a boost from being the shiny new toy," Doleshal says, "What matters more is the authenticity you bring to the sport — and the longevity that shows you're there to make it better: To enhance their weekend. To improve their experience. To show your appreciation. Only then will people pay attention to your message. If you're not there, first and foremost, to serve the consumer, ... then you shouldn't be there."

That leads to lesson two: Consider using event sponsorship as a reward for current customers, not just as a sales tool.

Over the years Toyota has provided owners — the race is the Toyota Owners 400, after all — with a number of perks. Special entrances for any fan with a Toyota, Lexus or Scion key fob. Private events at the track. Special viewing areas. Tailgate events. Track rides. Free race tickets. Not as a direct incentive for becoming a new customer, but as a "thank you" for being an existing customer.

"It's definitely not just advertising," says Tanner Hulette, vice president of Page Auto Group and president of the

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Central Atlantic Toyota Dealers Association. “It’s more about rewarding Toyota ownership. The five dealers supporting the race get bulk tickets, suite passes, get to choose people from their owner bases to put in the spotlight. ... The celebration of ownership is great for the dealerships.”

For local dealers, the event sponsorship creates a meaningful way to engage long-term customers. Instead of simply sending postcards or emails to hopefully stay top of mind, the race creates a natural touch point. A natural conversation starter. An organic way to get customers back into the dealership and reinforce the relationship.

Those relationships have paid off. “Brand recognition for our market is exceptional coming out of the race,” Hulette says.

Which leads to lesson three. Building long-term customer relationships pays off in increased lifetime customer value, but it also helps generate new customers.

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But that’s only if you pay attention to lesson four: See the event as a true partner, not just the vehicle for a marketing effort.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT EVENT

“This is where the sport — teams, drivers, sponsors, fans — comes together,” Bickmeier says. “We want people who come to the track to have the best experience they possibly can. So we provide the access, the exposure, the midway, the ride and drive opportunities ... anything we can help Toyota do to improve the experience for their customers is a win for us, since it enhances the experience for our customers, too.”

And that’s lesson five: Pick an event that sees you as a partner, not just a business writing a check. And one that is willing to build the relationship over time.

Toyota’s success at Richmond Raceway isn’t unusual; Federated Auto Parts has been the title sponsor for the fall Richmond Race since 2012.

“A long-term partnership shouldn’t be rinse and repeat,” Bickmeier says. “Find new ways to reward your customers. Find new ways to engage with them. Find new ways to collect data, collect information, create new touch points ... make sure the event is willing to grow and evolve with you.”

And that’s the final lesson: Make sure you know what you receive for your investment.

Different events offer different levels of sponsorship. Know exactly what you will receive. If you’re looking for exclusivity, either as a title sponsor or as the only sponsor from your particular industry, make sure you will get it.

GET YOUR NAME OUT THERE

Event sponsorship can be a great marketing, brand awareness, and brand building tool. But it’s also an investment — so make sure you know what you will get for your investment. **P**

Jeff Haden is a contributing editor for Inc.com and a LinkedIn Influencer.

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Dave Bailey

Using Role-Playing to Boost Sales

To boost sales, your plumbing team should do role-playing drills to learn how to educate your customers on products and maintenance *By Dave Bailey*

In the highly competitive residential plumbing market, superior technical skills alone aren't enough to guarantee success.

Today, effective communication, customer relationship management, and the ability to successfully upsell services play pivotal roles in a plumbing company's growth. One of the most impactful training tools to sharpen these skills? Role-playing.

THE POWER OF ROLE-PLAYING IN SALES TRAINING

Role-playing allows plumbers to practice real-world scenarios without real-world consequences. They get a feel for a situation, develop interpersonal skills and learn to anticipate and address common customer objections.

More importantly, it prepares them to present services and solutions in ways that resonate with clients, enhancing the likelihood of successful sales.

Key Benefits of Role-Playing for Plumbers:

1. **Building Confidence:** Practicing difficult conversations or sales scenarios can help plumbers face actual situations with greater confidence.
2. **Receiving Immediate Feedback:** In a role-play setting, mistakes can be immediately identified and corrected, fostering learning and improvement.
3. **Encouraging Consistency:** Regular role-play ensures that all team members communicate offerings and value propositions consistently to customers.

IMPLEMENTING ROLE-PLAYING IN YOUR TRAINING REGIMEN

To start, managers should create realistic scenarios that plumbers commonly face. Allow your team members to play both the plumber and the customer, swapping roles to see situations from multiple perspectives.

Role-playing allows plumbers to practice real-world scenarios without real-world consequences.

Next, after each role-play session, hold a feedback round. Discuss what went well, which areas need improvement, and how to handle the situation better in the future.

Finally, remember that role-playing isn't a one-time event. Regular sessions, especially when introducing new services or facing new market challenges, can ensure that your team is always prepared and at the top of their game.

Role-Play Scenarios for Improved Sales

Here are a few role-play scenarios, complete with example questions and answers, designed to boost your plumbing team's sales efficacy:

Scenario 1: Upselling Services

Question: "You've fixed my leaky faucet. Do I need anything else done?"

Answer: "Your faucet is fixed, but while I was working, I noticed some mineral buildup which suggests hard water. This could lead to more plumbing issues down the line. Have you considered installing a water softener? It can prolong the life of your plumbing fixtures and appliances."

Scenario 2: Handling Price Concerns

Question: "Why is this service so expensive? I wasn't expecting to spend this much."

Answer: "I understand your concerns. Plumbing is a specialized skill, and we ensure the best quality parts and

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Scenario 3: Recommending Regular Maintenance

Question: “Why do I need a regular maintenance check? Nothing’s broken.”

Answer: “Regular maintenance helps in early detection of potential issues, which could become bigger, costlier problems later. Think of it as a health checkup for your home’s plumbing. It ensures everything runs smoothly and can save you money on major repairs in the future.”

Scenario 4: Offering Value-Added Services

Question: “Can you just fix this one issue for now?”

Answer: “Of course, we’ll address the immediate issue. But based on what I’m seeing, you might benefit from our comprehensive plumbing inspection. It’s a service designed to assess the overall health of your plumbing system. It can offer peace of mind and often saves homeowners from unexpected future expenses.”

CONCLUSION

Incorporating role-playing into your training program can be a transformative decision for your plumbing business. By preparing your team for real-world scenarios and giving them tools to communicate effectively, you’re not only ensuring higher customer satisfaction but also paving the way for increased sales and business growth.

Dave Bailey is the vertical market manager, plumbing for Service Nation Inc., and has 25 years working in the plumbing industry – 23 in the field. If you would like to send a message to him, email dbailey@servicenation.com.

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Nelson Salas

Going Underground

Adding leak detection to your service offerings could be a way to boost profits and secure new customers looking for a shop that does it all *By Nelson Salas*

Adding leak detection to your list of services can be a lucrative move. Leaky pipes are a common occurrence, and homeowners are willing to hire a professional to fix the issue.

Trained leak detectors can locate the source of leaks without tearing up structures in the house in the process. If you are able to obtain the necessary tools and skills to do noninvasive leak detection, your business will benefit.

THE BENEFITS

Besides providing your company with another revenue stream, the main benefit is that you can fix water leak issues quicker, making customers happier and allowing you to move on to new jobs.

A company could choose to contract out leak detection work to another firm, but if they are booked you have to wait to make the repair. Waiting a few days forces you to commit more time to a job that could be fixed the day you receive it. Adding leak detection gives you another revenue source and allows you to do your job more independently.

UNDERSTANDING DEMAND

Before you start buying leak detection equipment, do some market research and see if there is a demand that you can fill. Check how many calls your company may get for leak detection services and ask customers you visit if they would or have benefited from leak detection services.

Check the competition in your area and see how many companies are providing leak detection and exactly what types of leak detection they are providing.

Leak detection is a broad service since leaks can occur under a home, on the driveway and in the street. You need more tools to check a leak under a concrete foundation as opposed to finding a simple leak in a sink.

Then do some research on what the best equipment is. When you subcontract out leak detection to another company, ask the techs what equipment they use, watch them do their

The best way to improve leak detection is for you and your team to practice using the new equipment. Practice in your office or in your own home. This will help you get familiar with the process.

job and then find the right suppliers to buy the equipment from. In my experience, most leak detection companies are willing to talk shop with plumbers and drain cleaners since you will still need their expertise for harder-to-detect leaks.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

The best way to improve leak detection is for you and your team to practice using the new equipment. Practice in your office or in your own home. This will help you get familiar with the process.

The two machines you need to get started are a metal detector and an ultrasound leak detecting device. The metal detector connects to the waterline on top of the water heater and tells you how deep the pipes are. The ultrasound leak detector allows you to find the leak.

It is important that you understand the structural layout of homes in your area. Many home styles have similar layouts so it can help you detect more quickly where leaks might appear. Look at architectural plans from old and new houses and familiarize yourself with where the waterlines run.

Knowing the layout of the homes lets you focus your search instead of blindly searching for waterlines. You can request public records to see some of these home layouts or you can Google search PDF layouts of different homes in your area.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Lastly, if you feel like you can't adequately detect a leak,

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don't be afraid to call a more seasoned leak detection expert.

Some leaks are too small for your average plumber to find and you might not have the necessary equipment to find the leak. The most important part is making sure the job gets done in a way that is easiest for the customer. It is beneficial to do your own leak detection, but only if you know your limits.



Nelson Salas is the owner of Amigo Rooter & Plumbing in Goodyear, Arizona, a suburb of Phoenix. He has worked as a master plumber in Arizona and Texas for over 14 years.

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By Craig Mandli

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Taco Comfort Solutions 1911ecm and 1915ecm

The **1911ecm** and **1915ecm** light commercial ECM pumps from **Taco Comfort Solutions** are highly efficient. The 1911ecm is a 425-watt, self-sensing, close-coupled, mechanically sealed pump that features a high-efficiency volute, ECM motor and an integrated frequency drive. It is easy to install and program, and provides a maximum 50 feet of head and 105 gpm. The 1915ecm offers all the user-friendly features of the 1911ecm, but in a more powerful package. At 650 watts, it provides a maximum 65 feet of head and 120 gpm. Simple yet versatile control options on both circulators include constant pressure, constant speed, proportional pressure, 0-10 volts DC and parallel pump alternation. These standard features, combined with the intuitive user interface, allow for quick startups, achieving optimum system efficiency and maximum comfort. Both are available in ductile iron for closed loop hydronic heating and cooling systems or stainless steel, NSF/ANSI/CAN 61 and 372 Commercial Hot Certified for domestic hot water applications. **401-942-8000; www.tacomfort.com**



Saniflo Sanicondens Best Flat

The sleek, low-profile **Sanicondens Best Flat** condensate pump from **Saniflo** offers a 3 1/2-quart tank capacity with a built-in neutralizer, and is capable of handling a total of 500,000 Btu/h. The compact unit combines a condensate pump with a pH-neutralizing pellet tray into a single space-saving, eco-friendly solution for both residential and commercial ultra-high-efficiency condensing equipment, boilers, water heaters, AC and refrigeration systems, and other appliances. It neutralizes and pumps away acidic condensate to 15 feet in height and/or 150 feet away from a soil stack. **800-571-8191; www.saniflo.com**



Constant Pressure Pump

EFKAY PUMPS Davey DynaDrive Constant Pressure System

The **Davey DynaDrive Constant Pressure System** from **EFKAY PUMPS** provides constant water pressure at the touch of a button. With its user-friendly controller, a water



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experience can now be customized to your preference at home. The controller allows the user to set and forget preferred water pressure settings. This means no-reprogramming even if it loses power. It only operates based on demand, reducing energy consumption. Applications include household, domestic and light industrial water supply, farming and agricultural water systems, irrigation and turf watering systems, automatic general water transfer and mains water pressure boosting. **800-515-2021; www.efkaypumps.com**

Effluent/Sewage/Sump Pumps



Ashland Pump sump pumps

Ashland Pump offers sump pumps including the PS series, B series, the SPV series and sump basin package systems.

The pumps are built of corrosion-resistant anodized aluminum or rugged cast iron. All are equipped with permanent split capacitors and continuous duty-rated motors for higher efficiency. They have an upper and lower ball bearing design for longer life and smoother operation. The vortex impellers are made of thermoplastic or cast iron to better handle up to 1/2-inch solids. They have contractor-grade vertical or wide-angle piggyback float switches for quick and easy field servicing. The sump basin packages come complete with sump basin, sump pump, check valve and discharge piping. They are suitable for new or replacement installations. **855-281-6830; www.ashlandpump.com**

Flygt - a Xylem Brand 6000 Series Concertor

The **6000 Series Concertor** pump from **Flygt - a Xylem Brand** is designed for clog-free operation, reducing vacuum cleaning callouts by up to 80%. The pump is preprogrammed for wastewater applications and includes all the logic unique to pumping stations, with built-in analysis for sump and pipe cleaning. One pump can achieve the duty conditions of multiple models and impeller trims to reduce inventory by up to 80% and up to 70% energy savings. Paired with the MultiSmart powered by Nexicon monitoring and control solution, the pump(s) can be controlled through a customized Codesys system to meet exact needs. **855-995-4261; www.xylem.com/flygt**



Grinder Pumps

Crane Pumps & Systems Barnes RAZOR

The 2 hp **Barnes RAZOR** grinder pump from **Crane Pumps & Systems** is suitable for light commercial and residential solids-handling applications. It is designed with axial cutting technology to reduce solids like flushable wipes, diapers and other nonbiodegradable items. Maintenance is convenient with only a single tool needed for disassembly. The plug-and-play cord also provides easy servicing without requiring removal of epoxy in the conduit. Its 1.25-inch discharge is suitable for preconfigured packaged systems and turnkey solutions. It is available in the Barnes EcoTRAN Pressure Sewer System for grinding in tough terrain. It provides a practical and environmentally safe alternative to traditional gravity systems. Numerous configuration options are available. **937-778-8947; www.cranepumps.com**



Liberty Pumps ProVore

The **ProVore** grinder from **Liberty Pumps** is designed for use in applications where addition of a bathroom or other fixtures below sewer lines requires pumping. It has the same V-Slice cutter technology used in the Omnivore Series. Powered by a 1 hp motor, this smaller grinder is designed to operate on a standard 115- or 230-volt circuit, requiring only a 20-amp breaker. No special wiring is needed. The pump comes with a 2-inch vertical-style discharge and a standard leg pattern matching the LE Series. This allows for easy retrofit into existing systems. Compact factory-assembled systems are available in simplex and duplex versions: the ProVore 380 and ProVore 680. **800-543-2550; www.libertypumps.com**



Zoeller Pump 72 HD Series

Zoeller Pump's 10 and 15 hp **72 HD Series** is an expansion to its existing grinder product offering, now ranging from 1 to 15 hp. The units includes a lower silicon carbide/carbon lower seal and carbon ceramic upper seal, moisture and thermal sensor, a buna-N gasket to protect the 3,450 rpm motor, and class F windings. Pumps



Continued ▶

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Pipe Patch Kits enable quick and efficient trenchless point repairs with all required consumables and components packaged together for one-time use. Patch Kits make inventory management easier on your business while ensuring you have all components needed when showing up to a job. Fiberglass patch meets ASTM F1216 requirements and cured patches have a life expectancy of up to 50 years under normal conditions. RIDGID Pipe Patch Kits are designed for 2", 3", 3-4", and 4-6" Packers and at lengths for 32', 3', and 6' repairs.



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*Press Booster is needed for carbon steel

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are available in 208, 230, 460 or 575 volts using a three-phase connection. The 3- or 4-inch ANSI flanged horizontal discharge allows for easy adaption to a variety of grinder or solids handling rail systems. Pumping performance ranges from 250 feet at shut-off and a maximum flow at 150 gpm at 50 feet TDH. Removable legs clear the bottom of the pump to allow debris to flow easier into the cutter assembly when used with a guide rail assembly. This assembly uses a 440 stainless steel with a Rockwell C hardness of 55-60 cutter and cutter plate in a scissor-like cutting motion that reduces solids down to 1/8 inch. **800-928-7867; www.zoellerengineered.com**

Pressure-Boosting Pumps

A.Y. McDonald E-Series DuraMAC Water Pressure Booster System

A.Y. McDonald's E-Series DuraMAC Water Pressure Booster System comes complete with easy setup instructions, all metal connections, a half-gallon pressure tank and check valve. In addition, users experience a quiet operation due to the TEFC single-phase motor. Designed to shut off when no flow is detected, this solution gives an extra boost to water pressure. **800-292-2737; www.aymcdonald.com**



Webtrol Pumps SJP

Low city water pressure is frustrating for most homes. During high use demands, water pressure drops below minimum requirements. The **Webtrol Pumps SJP** is a small, inexpensive pump that can boost pressure up to 50 psi above the incoming pressures. The power is supplied for a 115-volt outlet where the pump is simply plugged in. Adding a small diaphragm tank balances to pressure, along with a small pressure switch and check valve, makes a complete pressure system. Even homes that have sufficient pressure can suffer due to small piping or buildup in the pipes. Adjusting the pressure switch allows the pump to boost incoming pressure within a small range. It is small, space-saving, and constructed of stainless steel to provide longevity as well as low power consumption. **800-769-7867; www.webtrol.com**



Utility Pump

Milwaukee Tool M18 FUEL 5 CFM Vacuum Pump

The **M18 FUEL 5 CFM Vacuum Pump** from Milwaukee Tool, powered by M18 REDLITHIUM batteries, delivers the runtime and speed needed while minimizing the time and effort of setting up and tearing down, allowing users to get their work done and move onto the next job. Featuring a POWERSTATE Brushless Motor that allows for evacuations as fast as corded during system pull downs when using large hoses, the pump harnesses REDLINK PLUS Intelligence to ensure maximum performance and protection from overload. It features Manifold Mode, which allows users to maximize speed and optimize runtime in manifold setups, enabling up to 90 minutes of runtime per charge. For evacuations utilizing direct connections and large, 1/2-inch hoses, Default Mode provides up to 60 minutes of runtime. It solves corded frustrations by providing instant power while also minimizing the time and effort to set up and tear down. **800-729-3878; www.milwaukeetool.com** 



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Product Spotlight

Efficient water heater designed for easy retrofits

By Craig Mandli

When converting a residence from a gas hot water heater to an electric model, the less renovation that's required, the better. A. O. Smith recently launched the **Voltex 120V Plug-In Heat Pump Water Heater**, an extension of the existing Voltex HPWH residential line. This addition is specifically designed to meet the demands of natural gas water heater replacements, offering an easy 120-volt installation that plugs into a standard electrical outlet, making for an easy retrofit.

The unit is specifically aimed at meeting electrification and decarbonization requirements on the U.S. West Coast. The Voltex 120V model can be plugged directly into a shared circuit wall outlet, ensuring a simplified installation process. Top water connections and a zero-clearance design support an easy installation for contractors and allow for the unit to be installed in a variety of applications. The unit is Energy Star certified and qualifies for many federal, state and local utility rebates.

"The launch of the Voltex 120V model showcases A. O. Smith's unwavering commitment to pushing the boundaries of innovation and sustainability," says Arthur Smith, A. O. Smith product manager. "With cutting-edge features like a new lower Global Warming Potential refrigerant, R-513A, and the digital smart valve for superior hot



water production, these advancements not only deliver exceptional efficiency but also play a significant role in reducing a home's carbon footprint."

Quiet operation eliminates the need for vibration isolation accessories. Featuring a digital outlet temperature control, homeowners can easily set their desired water temperature without the need for a manual mixing valve, simplifying maintenance and providing added convenience for users. Additionally, the Voltex comes equipped with a leak sensor and shut off valve, providing enhanced protection and minimizing potential water damage. Homeowners can also stay informed and in control

with iCOMM remote monitoring notifications, allowing for proactive monitoring and maintenance.

"At A. O. Smith, we're dedicated to creating a greener future without compromising performance," says Smith.

Because it plugs directly into a standard electrical outlet, the unit is sized differently than other units from the Voltex family. Typically, contractors will need to size up to ensure that homeowners can continue to use hot water at the same rate. Models are designed to provide similar First Hour Ratings to 30-, 40- and 50-gallon gas water heaters to cover the most common installations. **800-527-1953; www.hotwater.com**

True Position Tools cabinet plumbing jig

True Position Tools' cabinet plumbing jig is designed to eliminate the pain points associated with installing cabinets with plumbing and/or electrical connections. This includes things like hot- and cold-water pipes, drainpipes and outlets typically located in both



kitchen and bathroom walls. Users can easily create a transferrable template from their wall to the back of their cabinet for quick and accurate drilling. Just align the jig arms to the pipe and outlet locations, secure the jig knobs to hold them in place and move the jig from the wall to the cabinet. **562-668-2555; www.truepositiontools.com**

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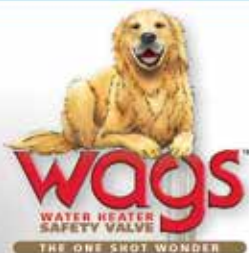
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Chicago Faucets CF Connect app for HyTronic touchless faucets

The CF Connect app for the HyTronic and HyTronic for Patient Care touchless faucets is now available from Chicago Faucets. The app allows health care, commercial building, school and public facility operators to easily implement protocols shown to minimize infection spread via the water systems. It includes preset HyTronic faucet settings, download usage logs to email and adjust easily for hygiene flush, detection distance, run-on time, safety shut-off time and service mode. Chicago Faucets has added advanced capabilities to easily access settings,




update firmware, download usage logs and quickly access key activities on the CF Connect home screen. **800-566-2100; www.chicagofaucets.com**

Southco Universal Latch Sensor

Southco's Universal Latch Sensor is a simple magnet that attaches to an existing latch, and a magnetic sensor that attaches to the inside of an existing door frame. When the door is closed, and the latch is engaged, the magnet comes into proximity with the sensor, sending an electronic signal to a security system. This lets you know the door is closed and the latch is secure. The ULS can be used in a variety of ways, from integrating security systems, to turning on existing lights inside an enclosure. The ULS monitors the latch itself, so users always know if a door is closed, and the latch is secure. **610-459-4000; www.southco.com**



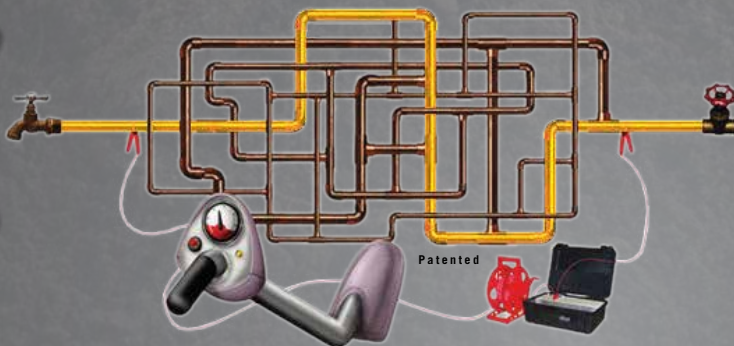
RectorSeal Big Red stainless steel gas connectors

RectorSeal added Falcon Big Red stainless gas connectors are designed to connect gas supply lines for stationary and caster-mounted appliances. The connectors are constructed of 304 braided stainless steel with a red PVC coating and chrome-plated brass fittings and are 100% leak tested. The NSF-listed PVC sleeve provides an extra layer of protection against damage to the movable gas connectors from abrasion, cuts, or impact. Flexible and easy to install, Big Red connections offer quick and easy repositioning of appliances for regular cleaning and repair. In addition, Big Red fittings feature 360-degree rotational fittings allowing for greater installation flexibility. **800-231-3345; www.rectorseal.com** 

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Daniel Zrubak joins Rinnai Canada as general manager

Daniel Zrubak has joined Rinnai America as its general manager, Rinnai Canada, and will join the executive leadership team for Rinnai America Corp. Most recently, he was vice president of Canada, DeLonghi. Zrubak was a part of the North American leadership team and was responsible for the Canadian business. Prior to DeLonghi, he was the national sales executive for Dyson Canada.



Caleffi expands its Milwaukee headquarters

Caleffi North America expanded its facility in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The expansion will double the warehouse footprint and will also augment the assembly area, adding much needed space for growth. Chairman Marco Caleffi, along with a delegation from the Italian office, joined the North America leadership team in celebrating the occasion during a groundbreaking ceremony.

Marcone Plumbing appoints Tim Shearer as president

Marcone has appointed Tim Shearer as president of its plumbing group. Marcone Plumbing comprises the PlumbMaster, Speakman and Wolverine Brass brands. Before joining Marcone, he served in various executive roles at Ferguson Enterprises, Fortune Brands Global Plumbing Group and Moen Inc.



Sewer Equipment celebrates 82 years

Dixon, Illinois-based Sewer Equipment is celebrating 82 years of business this year. The company began in 1941 in a garage in Park Ridge, Illinois, with a simple idea of a tool to unclog kitchen sinks. In the 1970's, the second generation of O'Brien's developed several machines in Chadwick, Illinois. The company has continued to evolve, developing safe, simple and reliable solutions for municipalities, plumbers and industrial contractors. Last June, Sewer Equipment manufactured its 10,000th unit, a Sewer Equipment Co. of America Model 900 ECO combination sewer cleaner truck, a production milestone highlight.

RIDGID employees donate food and personal care items

RIDGID, a part of Emerson's professional tools portfolio, and its employees donated more than 400 food and personal care items to Elyria, Ohio-based Pioneer Freedge as part of a donation drive sponsored by Mosaic, an Emerson employee resource group focused on serving the community, celebrating diversity and creating an inclusive work environment for people working away from their home location. The Freedge, located at the Elyria Public Library South Branch, is a place where people can leave surplus food items for others to take, reducing food waste and promoting community connections.

Uponor awarded Gold level by EcoVadis

Uponor has been awarded the Gold level rating by the global sustainability rating platform EcoVadis. Ranked in the Silver level in 2022, the company's total score improved to 70 out of 100 putting Uponor among the top 6% of the 5,000 companies in the plastic products manufacturing sector evaluated by EcoVadis globally. This is the first time Uponor was awarded with the Gold level.


Sarah Simpson named Viega's CFO

Sarah Simpson has been appointed chief financial officer of Broomfield, Colorado-based Viega. Simpson joins the company's executive team, and worked previously at Baker Hughes, General Electric, and most recently as CFO of Nexus Controls. In addition to her professional expertise and experience, she is passionate about community involvement and has volunteered for more than five years at the STEM girls summer camp hosted at Colorado School of Mines.

RectorSeal announces new manufacturer rep territory coverage

The following manufacturer's representative coverages are effective immediately for the full line of RectorSeal and Shoemaker products. Pacific Product Sales will support Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. MJM Associates' coverage will include Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming, and Wright Sales Co. will cover Hawaii, Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico and El Paso, Texas.

Heat-flo celebrating 25 years in business

Heat-flo, headquartered in Uxbridge, Massachusetts, is celebrating its 25th anniversary. Serving a range of industries from plumbing to hydronic heating to renewable energy, the company designs and manufactures stainless steel water heaters and storage tanks. Heat-flo's dedication to quality assurance, sustainable practices and customer satisfaction has earned them a reputation for reliability and excellence. 

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CALENDAR

Nov. 9-11

Service Edge Conference,

Plano Event Center, Plano, Texas.

Visit <https://serviceedgeconference.com/>

Nov. 15-16

South Florida Build Expo,

Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center.

Visit <https://buildexpousa.com>

Dec. 6-7

Charlotte Build Expo, Charlotte Convention Center, Hall B,

North Carolina. Visit <https://buildexpousa.com>

Jan. 16-18, 2024

2024 Mechanical Contractors Association of America

Safety & Health Conference, Loews Ventana Canyon

Resort, Tucson, Arizona. Visit [www.mcaa.org/events/](http://www.mcaa.org/events/calendar/2024-safety-health-conference/)

[calendar/2024-safety-health-conference/](https://www.mcaa.org/events/calendar/2024-safety-health-conference/)

Jan. 22 - 24, 2024

AHR Expo, McCormick Place, Chicago.

Visit <https://ahrexpo.com>

Jan. 24-27, 2024

**Water & Wastewater Equipment,
Treatment & Transport Show,**

Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis.

Visit www.wwetshow.com

Jan. 29-31, 2024

Manufacturing Extension Partnership Innovative

Conference, Signia by Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek, Orlando.

Visit www.mcaa.org/events/calendar/2024-mep-innovation-conference/

Feb. 7-8

Tampa Build Expo, Tampa Convention Center (East Hall),

Tampa. Visit buildexpousa.com/tampa-build-expo/

Feb. 27-29

National Association of Home Builders International

Builder's Show, Las Vegas Convention Center.

Visit www.buildersshow.com

Feb. 27-29

Kitchen & Bath Industry Show, Las Vegas Convention

Center. Visit www.buildersshow.com

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WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY SERVICE?

- Plumbing/Heating/Cooling Rehabilitation/Relining/Bursting
 Sewer/Drain Cleaning Dealer/Distributor/Manufacturer
 Septic System Installation/Repair Consulting/Engineering
 Other _____

WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRIMARY JOB FUNCTION?

- President/CEO/Owner Management/Supervisor
 Operator/Technician Other _____

HOW MANY EMPLOYEES DO YOU SUPERVISE OR WORK WITH AT YOUR FACILITY?

- 1-3 4-9 10-19 20+

HOW MANY VEHICLES DO YOU CURRENTLY HAVE IN SERVICE?

- 1-5 6-10 11-15 16-20 21+

WHAT IS THE APPROXIMATE POPULATION OF THE AREA IN WHICH YOU PROVIDE SERVICE?

- 1-10,000 10,001-50,000 50,001-100,000
 100,001-200,000 200,001-500,000 500,001+

WHAT IS YOUR ANNUAL EQUIPMENT BUDGET?

- \$1-\$50K \$51K-\$75K \$76K-\$150K \$151K-\$250K
 \$251K-\$350K \$350K +

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PERFORM ON A REGULAR BASIS?

- Plumbing Maintenance/Repair Sewer/Drain Cleaning
 New Construction - Commercial Pipe Bursting
 New Construction - Residential HVAC TV Inspection
 Location/Leak Detection Septic System Installation
 Septic Tank Pumping Other _____



Conference: **January 24-26**
 Expo Hall: **January 25-27**
 Indiana Convention Center

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- » **Workforce Issues**
- » **Education**
- » **Advocacy**

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Veronica Croiser
 Executive Director
 PSAI



Thomas Groves
 Executive Director
 NOWRA



Sheila Joy
 Executive Director
 NASSCO, Inc.



Kim Seipp
 Owner
 High Plain Sanitation

SESSION MODERATOR:




Joseph Blackman
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