

# CONTRACTOR

THE NEWSMAGAZINE OF MECHANICAL CONTRACTING

Firefighters arrive after sprinklers controlled an intense fire likely started by an overheated van in the garage.



## Sprinklers douse townhouse fire with minor damage

BY ROBERT P. MADER  
OF CONTRACTORS STAFF

DURANGO, COLO. — Former firefighter Gretchen Schmeisser watched in disbelief as flames from her overheated van threatened to destroy her three-level Colorado townhouse. Her shock soon turned to excitement as she realized that two of the home's fire sprinklers had activated and were helping control the heat and flames.

"If we did not have sprinklers in this garage, the entire townhome building — all seven homes — would have been lost to this fire," said Jerry Pope, partner of Timberline Builders and one of the developers of the 71-unit community, located in southwest Colorado. Pope credits Doug Lenberg, president of Fire Safe Homes and a fire protection industry consultant, with identifying an affordable and efficient solution. Pope, Lenberg and plumbing contractor Bradford P. Blake of Blake Mechanical selected a combination fire sprinkler and domestic cold-water system.

At the time of the installation, Lenberg was working for

Turn to Townhouse fire, page 12

## Pa. contractor helps fix Katrina's ravages

BY ROBERT P. MADER  
OF CONTRACTORS STAFF

PIPERSVILLE, PA. — Mechanical contractor Worth & Co. in early November sent 14 employees, trucks and supplies to hurricane-ravaged Mississippi to install the plumbing fixtures

on the Hancock County Child Development Center, a 10,000-sq.-ft. daycare center in Bay St. Louis. This will be the second trip down south for Worth & Co. as a part of its involvement with the Bucks-Mont-Waveland Katrina Project.

The Bucks-Mont-Waveland Katrina Project was the idea of Doylestown, Pa., attorney William Eastburn, who believed that the private sector needed to take action to help the residents and businesses

Turn to Katrina, page 8

## Construction material prices to rise by 6% to 8%

WASHINGTON — "A welcome slide in energy costs gave producer prices, including those for construction, much-needed relief in October," said Ken Simonson, chief economist for the Associated General Contractors of America, in mid-November. "However, there is still a huge gap between construction materials prices and the generally benign inflation in most of the economy."

Simonson was commenting on the Nov. 14 producer price index report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"Plunging petroleum prices drove down the overall producer price index for the second straight month and lowered the PPI for construction materials

and components for the first time since Hurricane Katrina struck in August 2005," he said. "The PPI for finished goods

dived 1.6% for the month and for the 12 months back to October 2005. The PPI for con-

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Changes in PPI for selected construction products  
January — August 2006



Sources: AGC Construction Inflation Alert; CONTRACTOR magazine

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Local Public Hearing  
in St. Louis

Exhibit No. \_\_\_\_\_

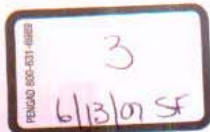
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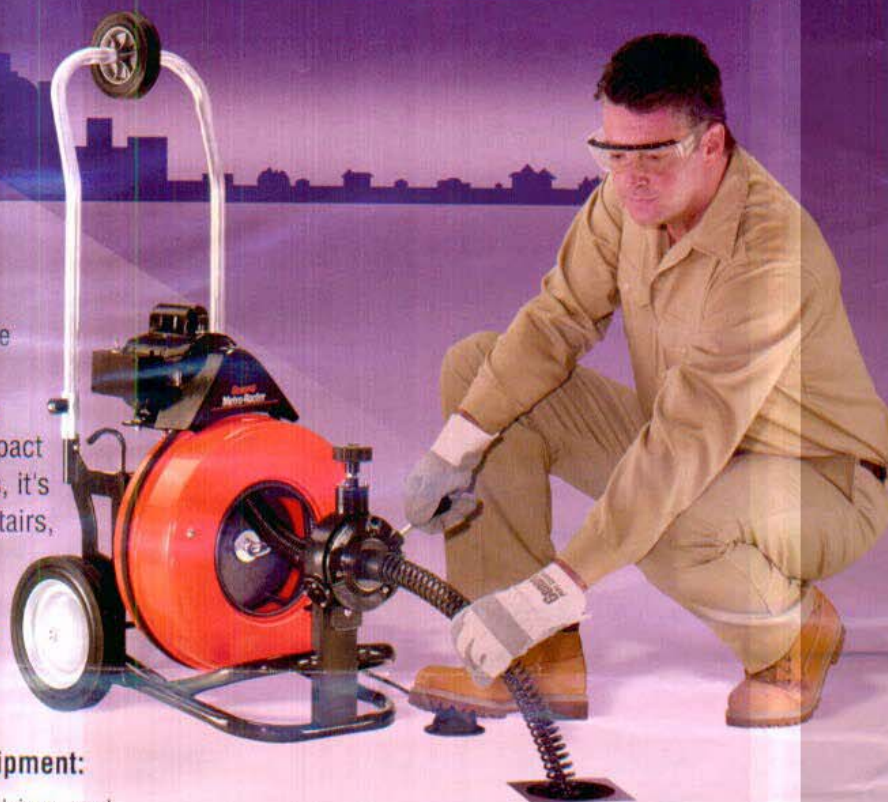
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# Contractors will feel 'urban-infill' impact

BY BOB MIODONSKI  
OF CONTRACTOR'S STAFF

WASHINGTON — Aging and upwardly mobile ethnic population shifts are among the factors contributing to "urban infill" — a trend in construction that may spell the end to suburban sprawl.

"This is a trend that's here to

stay," consultant Clark Ellis of FMI told members of the Plumbing Manufacturers Institute Oct. 10 during their fall meeting here. "People don't want to travel any farther from home to work. There's a resistance to sprawl; commute time is a key factor."

Urban infill, which FMI



Clark Ellis

defines as the development of underutilized land and buildings in a city or close-in suburb, can include residential or mixed-used projects. Changing family composition and other demographic changes that are fueling this trend include:

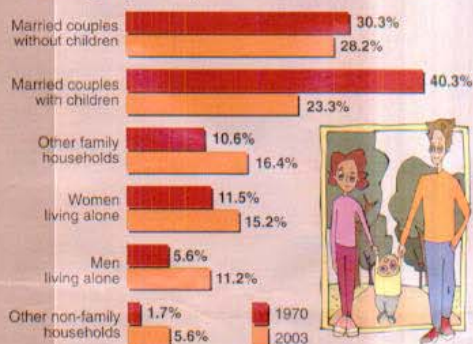
- Empty-nesters who don't want to move far away from home;
- People 25 to 35 years of age who have left colleges and professional schools and are making more money than young people in past generations; and
- Upwardly mobile ethnic populations who don't want to move to the suburbs but instead stay in touch with their cultures and families.

Basic consumer preferences such as safety of the community, parking availability, and proximity to retail services such as restaurants, banks, drug stores and dry cleaners are important to all these population groups, Ellis said. Differences among the groups, however, will affect the construction industry.

People ages 55 to 65, for example, want an easily managed floor plan for their homes, which typically means a single level, as well as the

Turn to Urban infill, page 46

## Changing composition of U.S. families



Sources: "America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2003," by J. Fields; U.S. Census Bureau; FMI; Plumbing Manufacturers Institute; and CONTRACTOR

# Utility program covers plumbing emergencies

BY ROBERT P. MADER  
OF CONTRACTOR'S STAFF

VOORHEES, N.J. — Independent water utility American Water has introduced the In-Home Plumbing Emergency Program, covering plumbing emergency repairs for leaks or breaks to the water line and clogs or blockages to the sewer line that occur within the home and are caused by normal wear and tear.

The program is available to existing American Water customers and those enrolled in

the company's water and sewer line protection programs, which cover leaks and breaks in water lines, as well as clogs or blockages in sewer lines running from a home to the street, respectively.

All repairs are performed by local independent plumbing contractors.

The IHPP covers common repairs, including a variety of plumbing emergencies such as a clogged sink, an overflowing toilet, a leaking hot water valve

Turn to Utility, page 12

# Weil-McLain and CPSC recall Ultra Series boilers for CO hazard

WASHINGTON — Weil-McLain and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission in November announced a voluntary recall of Weil-McLain Ultra Series gas boilers. About 16,000 of the units are in use. The

CPSC said that consumers should stop using recalled products immediately unless otherwise instructed.

These boilers were manufactured for use with natural gas but could have a blue tag incor-

rectly indicating to installers that they are intended for use with liquid propane gas. If an installer connects one of the boilers to LP gas without installing a propane conversion

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## Few contractors plan for business growth

BY ROBERT P. MADER  
OF CONTRACTOR'S STAFF

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Contractors want to grow but few have any idea how to do it right. Steven Little, senior consultant for INC. magazine and author of the book, "The Seven Irrefutable Rules of Small Business Growth," told them how in October at the 21st Annual Mechanical Service Contractors of America Educational Conference here.

Good business growth

means 20% a year or more over a period of five years, Little said, adding that 20% is sustainable. It may be a bit tough from a management and cash perspective, but mechanical service contracting is a good market and most contractors should be able to grow 20% without outside cash or additional management.

Business owners of growing



Steven Little told contractors that how we use tools defines who we are and that contractors who want to grow need to be great in their use of technology.

companies have a sense of purpose, Little said, the reason they get out of bed in the morning. It's not about money, although money is the way we keep score in business. Purpose manifests itself in a

1,000 ways, he said, that usually have something to do with serving others.

Growers have outstanding market intelligence, he said. They can recognize and adapt

Turn to *Few plan*, page 46

## Talk won't make meetings powerful

BY BOB MIODONSKI  
OF CONTRACTOR'S STAFF

DENVER — In preparing for a business meeting, you should devote most of your attention to how you start it and how you end it because they are the most important parts, consultant Cindy Rae Pautzke told members of the best practices group Nexstar Oct. 13 during their Super Meeting here.

"People will remember 90% of the beginning of the meeting, and 80% will remember how you end it," she said, adding that they will recall about 50% to 60% of the middle. "People will remember the beginning and end disproportionately with the rest of the meeting. Spend time on how you start and end your meetings."

"Your opener today could become your closer tomorrow if you modify it."

As owner and president of Participant Centered Results, Pautzke said she believes that successful meetings must consist of more than just a contractor talking to his employees or customers. People generally remember only about 20% of what they hear, she noted.

The percentage of the content that people remember goes up to 30% when they see something and to 50% when they both hear and see something, she said. It soars to 80% when they say something themselves at a meeting and to 90% when they say it and then demonstrate it to others.

"What occurs between you and participants is not as powerful as what occurs between participants, if you design the meeting properly," Pautzke said.

She suggested a half-dozen ways to open a meeting that would get people involved right away. She called one of them the "Shake 'Em Up," which first

Turn to *Just talk*, page 17

## Comfortech RoadShows to visit six cities

CLEVELAND — The successful Comfortech RoadShow Series will return in 2007 with an all-new program for plumbing and HVAC contractors. Produced and managed by CONTRACTOR and Contracting Business magazines, the RoadShows will stop in six cities with one-day pro-

grams designed to help contractors re-energize their businesses.

Only one day out of the office and registration fee of \$79 per attendee make the Comfortech RoadShow Series the best training value in the industry featuring: information-packed seminars taught by industry experts; extensive networking opportunities; idea exchange sessions; breakfast, lunch, and afternoon refreshments.

The 2007 schedule includes stops Feb. 13 in Dallas; March 13 in Atlanta; March 28 in Nashville, Tenn.; April 11 in Philadelphia; May 2 in Columbus, Ohio; and May 16 in Milwaukee.

Interested contractors can visit [www.comfortechroadshows.com](http://www.comfortechroadshows.com) for information about speakers as well as seminar information, venues and online registration.

■ Mechanical contracting company **Haberberger** has been recognized by Anheuser-Busch Cos. for its safe working environment and was recently presented the 2005 Anheuser-Busch Alabaster Eagle Award for Safety. Anheuser-Busch presents the annual award to its contractors who work more than 20,000 man-hours without a reported accident in a given year. This is the second time in six years Haberberger has won this award.

■ **Quality Service Contractors** has introduced its newest "Power Tool," the Service Fitness DVD Training Series. The program is provided through contributions from QSC Power Tool sponsor Grundfos Pumps. The program consists of a 42-module DVD series that includes a participant manual, instructor's manual, discussion questions and frequently asked questions along with sample scripts, conflict role-plays and sales role-plays. Each training module is designed to last from 30 to 60 minutes. Topics include pricing vs. value, customer service, profitability, communication and sales. For more information, call 800/533-7694; or visit [www.qsc-phcc.org](http://www.qsc-phcc.org).

■ Two couples, **Bill and Patty Jones**, **Raven Mechanical**, Houston, and **Orville and Doreen Taecker**, **Andor Inc./Taecker Plumbing and Heating**, Watertown, S.D., have been named contractor founders of the **Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors Educational Foundation Board of Governors**, the body responsible for developing and providing educational programs for contractors and their employees.

■ In accordance with the ANSI-designated 2009 Uniform Plumbing Code and Uniform Mechanical Code code change timeline, the **IAPMO Standards Council** has issued a call for proposals, which began Oct. 3 and will end at 5 p.m. EST, Feb. 1, 2007. Anyone interested in submitting a code change proposal should download the form entitled "Form on Proposals," found under the "Downloads and Applications" link at [www.iapmo.org](http://www.iapmo.org).

■ A record crowd of more than 600 people attended the 21st Annual **Mechanical Service Contractors of America Educational Conference** in October in Charleston, S.C. MSCA Board of Managers Chairman **Brad Bollino** of John J. Kirlin Inc. in Rockville, Md., opened the conference with a review of MSCA's achievements, including recognition of 28 MSCA contractors who qualified for MSCA STAR since the 2005 conference. The 2007 22nd Annual MSCA Conference will be held Oct. 14-17 at the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs, Colo.

■ **Linc Facility Services** and its family of companies have purchased **Ferguson-Williams**, a provider of facility operations and maintenance services to the federal government. LFS said it will leverage Ferguson-Williams' reputation and expertise in waterway, dam and port management to better serve its customers in the federal market, as well as expand its overall international facility management footprint. LFS is a business unit of The Linc Group.

## Police seek contractor's killer

PARK RIDGE, ILL. — Gerald Dhamer, 48, president of a suburban Chicago plumbing firm, was gunned down Nov. 13 by a ski-masked assailant who shot him two to three times at close range with a shotgun, police said. Dhamer was accosted by the gunman at 6:15 a.m., his usual time to leave for work, as he left his home here.

Dhamer was president of **Jim Dhamer Plumbing & Sewer Inc.** in Lisle, Ill. The

company is co-owned by Gerald Dhamer's brother Jim, although Gerald had taken over day-to-day operations in 2001.

Dhamer's wife, Cathy, reportedly heard conversation outside and the gunshots. She saw the assailant and called 911, but the killer had apparently gotten into a vehicle and left before police arrived.

The Chicago Tribune reported that Park Ridge police had taken file boxes and computers from the plumbing

firm in the search for a motive for the killing. A source told the Tribune that the killing appeared to be a professional hit.

The family has established a \$25,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the killer. At press time, police had no suspects.

Jim Dhamer Plumbing is the plumbing contractor used by **CONTRACTOR** Managing Editor Robert Mader.



# Contractor helps after Katrina

Continued from page 1

of Mississippi. Bay St. Louis and Waveland, two towns hit by the storm's center, were adopted by the project. It was decided that a large daycare center would be built since only three centers remained of the 12 that existed before the storm.

Project Construction Chairman Jon

Otto of Penn Valley Constructors said Worth & Co. was among the first to offer its support.

"Stephen Worth was very enthusiastic about donating labor and supplies to the project," Otto said. "Worth & Co. provided the rough plumbing in June and ... put in the final touches [in November]."

Michael Mason, Worth & Co.'s vice president/residential construction, led the firm's efforts in Mississippi.

"It has been incredibly rewarding to help the people of Mississippi get back on their feet," Mason said. "They are very supportive and appreciative of all of the volunteers' efforts on the day-



The Worth & Co. team stand outside the Hancock County Child Development Center. Most flew down to Mississippi; two drove a truck loaded with tools and materials. care center project."

Worth said he had met Otto through the local chapter of Associated Builders & Contractors. When Otto asked him if he would be willing to do the project, "I decided it was a good thing to do as a company," Worth said.

The workers were excited, he said, although they didn't donate their labor; he paid them for their time. Worth's purchasing department tried to get donations of materials, he said, but they bought whatever else they needed. Worth said the total dollar value of the labor and materials was \$140,000.

Worth gave all the credit to Mason for pulling off the difficult logistics of 14 workers flying or driving down to Mississippi, the motel rooms, meals and obtaining materials.

The building is one-story, Mason said, and has about eight classrooms, five bathrooms including one for the public, project sinks in the classrooms and a kitchen facility that also has a mop sink. The bathrooms and classrooms have their own small Bradford White electric water heaters, with a large water heater serving the kitchen and common areas. The crew installed Mansfield toilets and Delta Faucets. Vanguard supplied the PEX plumbing system.

"We basically asked our supplier to find people who were willing to donate to the project the same type of material that we use everyday," Mason said.

The contractor was able to get donations from Deacon Industrial, Weinstein Supply, Charlotte Pipe, Carpenter & Patterson, Ferguson Enterprises, Modern Fastener, Danco Supply and Modern Hardware.

Mason said 16 people went down to do the rough-in in June. A dozen flew down in November while two others drove a box truck loaded with materials and tools.

The biggest problem facing reconstruction is the lack of materials, he said. The closest wholesaler was hours away, and with all the work in the region, The Home Depot has problems keeping materials in stock.

"Logistics and distance were the biggest problems," Mason said. "You can't lean on the infrastructure we have in place in Pennsylvania."

Worth & Co. is a leading provider of mechanical contracting and maintenance services in its region.

## It all Started with a Coffee Break...

2006  
UNIFORM  
PLUMBING  
CODE



It was a morning in 1926. A small group of plumbing inspectors were discussing work issues over coffee. Little did they know that their lively discussion would soon lead to creation of the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials—IAPMO. Since that time, IAPMO has grown far beyond the vision of its founders, producing the *Uniform Plumbing and Mechanical Codes*, offering educational and certification courses and serving product listing and testing clients around the world.

What hasn't changed over time is IAPMO's commitment to its members, or its mission of promoting safety, sanitary plumbing and mechanical systems. As IAPMO marks its 80th year, it stays true to the values that led to its start from that first coffee break. From an interactive website and publications to conferences and special events, the organization continues to break new ground. So whether you're a plumber, inspector, building official, contractor or apprentice, you'll find what you need through IAPMO.



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# See The BIG Picture!

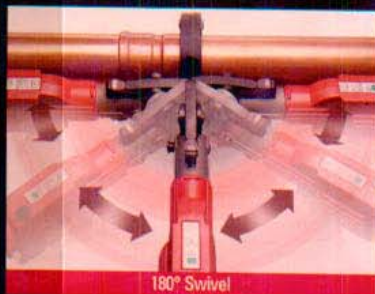
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## Weil-McLain recalls Ultra Series boilers

Continued from page 5

kit, carbon monoxide can build up due to incomplete combustion, posing a risk of CO poisoning.

Weil-McLain said it is aware of one incident where two consumers reported CO poisoning when the boiler installed in their home was connected to LP gas.

The recall involves Weil-McLain Ultra 80, Ultra 105, Ultra 155, Ultra 230 and Ultra 310 condensing, high-efficiency, gas-fired boilers. The user's manual and installation manual have "Ultra Gas-Fired Water Boiler" on the cover. The boilers are wrapped in a glossy silver/flat black jacket and either stand on the floor or are wall-mounted. The serial numbers range from CP5071716 through CP5327000. When the panel on the front of the boiler is removed, a bar-coded label with the serial number is located on the lower right hand side of the boiler itself. "Weil-McLain" is written on the front panel of the boilers.

Plumbing and heating wholesalers sold the boilers to plumbers and contractors nationwide from May 2005 through July 2006 for between \$4,000 and \$7,000.

Dave Dolan, Weil-McLain's vice president/marketing, said contractors can obtain a propane conversion kit from the company's Michigan City, Ind., headquarters by calling the firm's Technical Services Department at 219/879-6561. Technical Services will ship the orifices.

"If a change-out is necessary on an installed boiler that is affected by this notice, a contractor should change the orifice and fill out the orifice conversion report form, and they will be compensated for one hour of labor and their travel rate," Dolan said. "If no change-out is needed after they have inspected the boiler, they should fill out an orifice conversion report form, and they will receive a check for 30 minutes of labor plus their travel time."

### Conn. PHCC sets trade show

HARTFORD, CONN. — The Connecticut Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors will host its annual Truck Expo and Trade Show from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Feb. 10, 2007, at Connecticut Convention Center here.

Up to 1,000 licensed professional contractors are expected to attend. The

company is most interested in capturing the CP number. Weil-McLain's serial number, for all the boilers inspected, Dolan said.

If a dealer has any questions he should contact his Weil-McLain sales rep or sales office, call the company's technical service line or contact his local distributor, Dolan said.

Consumers are being told that if they have a Weil-McLain Ultra series boiler installed for use with propane and have not already been contacted by their installer, they should contact the contractor for a free safety inspection. If the boiler was not installed with a propane conversion kit, one will be installed at the time of the inspection

at no charge to the consumer.

Heating professionals can contact Weil-McLain Technical Services at 219/879-6561 for more information. Weil-McLain can also be contacted toll-free at 866/426-6172 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. CST Monday through Friday, or on the Web at [www.weil-mclain.com](http://www.weil-mclain.com).

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# Sprinklers douse townhouse fire

Continued from page 1

plumbing wholesaler Dahl Plumbing. The municipality asked Timberline to install sprinklers in all rear-facing units, or about half the development, since firetrucks and equipment could not easily access these homes.

A multipurpose system, such as the



The wiring in the ceiling, which didn't melt, shows how sprinklers controlled the fire.

one Lenberg recommended, combines the cold-water plumbing and the fire sprinkler system into one. Water continually circulates to the fire sprinklers each time an occupant uses a cold-water plumbing fixture. This ensures fresh water is always available.

These combination systems can cost as much as 15% less than stand-alone systems because of the reduced labor, a systems manufacturer said. Since these systems are fed by a home's domestic

water supply, there is no need for check valves, backflow preventers or a separate water meter, further cutting installation time and costs.

Blake said he learned about combination systems supplied by Uponor in 2001. He went to Apple Valley, Minn., for the factory training session, installed a system in his own home and has been installing them ever since.

"We probably do 50 of those a year and depending on whether we do a big project we may even do up to a 100 a year," Blake said.

Once the developer saw that the sprinkler system was affordable and installed easily, Pope and business partner Emil Wanatka decided to incorporate fire protection in each of Parkside Terrace's 71 units.

To install a combination system, Blake runs the service line into the home to manifolds on each occupied floor of a dwelling. The vast majority of services lines are 1 in., he said, although a handful might be 3/4 in. Branch lines run from the manifolds to the sprinkler heads. Blake noted that Uponor has a patent on the four-port sprinkler so each sprinkler has water going in or out from four sides with 3/4-in. PEX tubing. The PEX lines are installed in the ceilings, he explained, and when he needs

to supply water to a fixture, he pulls a 3/4-in. PEX line from one of the four ports of a sprinkler. One sprinkler can supply just one toilet, sink, shower or other water-consuming fixture.

"There's no shortage of lines to use," Blake said.

He installed 1,300 linear ft. of 3/4-in. pipe in each unit at the townhouse development. Blake did the Parkside Terrace job for \$1.25/sq. ft., but he's now charging \$1.50/sq. ft. because his costs for practically everything have gone up.

Blake noted that many subdivisions in his area, including his own, now require residential sprinklers, either because they're remote or Colorado winter weather makes it difficult for firetrucks to get to them on time.

Blake Mechanical also installed all the bathrooms. Most units, typically 1,600 to 1,800 sq. ft., have 2 1/2 baths with a powder room. The contractor installed Moen and Kohler products. Most water heaters are 50-gal. gas-fired State Industries products, although a few homeowners opted for electric water heaters.

The cause of the Parkside Terrace fire is still undetermined, but Durango Fire Marshal Tom Kaufman believes the fire stemmed from the 1990 Volkswagen Westfalia van's engine overheating in the desert climate.

"The fire originated in the van's engine, but we were not able to determine the exact cause since the engine compartment was totally destroyed," said Kaufman, a 29-year firefighting veteran. "Damage to the home was limited to the garage, thanks in large part to the fire sprinklers, which controlled the flames before they could build deadly heat and smoke, typical of a gasoline fire."

Kaufman said the fire in Schmeisser's 1,600-sq.-ft., two-bedroom townhouse burned so hot that the outline of a clothes hanger was imprinted on the metal garage door leading into the house.

During reconstruction following the fire, Pope was amazed to discover that the wiring above the garage did not melt from the heat, nor did the insulation catch fire.

To reduce the likelihood of extending a fire's reach to adjacent rooms or floors, the sprinklers worked with another fire-protection code: the requirement of 3/4-in. Sheetrock on all the townhouse's ceilings and common walls instead of the standard 1/2 in.

While there was light smoke damage to the upper two floors of the unit, Kaufman noted that there was no heat damage. Amazingly, Schmeisser slept in her home that very same evening.

## Water utility's program covers plumbing emergencies

Continued from page 5

or a leaking washing machine valve.

At a cost of \$3.99 per month to existing water or sewer line protection program customers, the IHPP covers the cost of up to \$1,500 per repair, with no limit on the number of allowable repairs each year. Homeowners pay a \$50 service fee each time an authorized service provider is dispatched to investigate or service the water or sewer line within the home.

The program is available to American Water customers in nine states: Arizona, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Tennessee. The company expects to launch the program in California, Pennsylvania and Virginia in the coming months. American Water also offers service line protection programs for both water lines and sewer lines to its residential customers.

The combination of the three service programs covers every problem a homeowner might have from the service line, through the water supply and DWV system inside the house to the sewer lateral outside the house, explained American Water Resources

Director of Operations Robert Birdwell. American Water Resources is a wholly owned unregulated affiliate of American Water.

The company establishes a contractor network through referrals, inquiries from contractors or solicitation of contractors by the company so that it has a service contractor infrastructure in place before it starts soliciting customers, Birdwell said.

American Water Resources has about 130 contractors in its network now. It makes the most sense to use local contractors, Birdwell said, because they know the codes and the inspectors. The contractor must be licensed and the company has high insurance requirements. American Water Resources has quality and workmanship standards and requirements for response times.

The company will pay contractors their customary rates for labor and materials, although Birdwell pointed out that some major repairs will require the homeowner to pay part of the bill.

Some contractors in the network might get only one or two service calls a year, Birdwell said, while others might receive one or two a day.

The company can use a few contractors

in selected areas. Contractors who are interested should call American Water Resources Claims Manager Bradley Lavite at 618/433-4051.

In addition to the residential products and services, the company extends these programs to municipalities through LineSaver. At no cost to the

municipality, American Water's Homeowner Services Group fully manages a sewer and water line repair program. The utility will take care of all requirements for developing and implementing the program, establishing a local contractor network and providing customer service.

## CONTRACTOR readers pick the year's top products

DES PLAINES, ILL. — A space-saving toilet and boiler were the most popular products of 2006, as determined by CONTRACTOR readers.

Eljer's Titan Triangle Toilet, which plumbers can install in the corner of a bathroom, placed No. 1 in our annual Readers Choice products. Laars' wall-mounted condensing Mascot Boiler, which promises high efficiency and versatility in a small package, was our featured Editors Choice product that generated the most interest from readers in 2006.

The top products featured in CONTRACTOR's monthly Products depart-

ment in 2006 are featured this month on pages 19 and 20.

Readers determined the rankings of the products in both the Readers Choice and the Editors Choice categories by requesting more information on these products through our Reader Services department. The Readers Choice products were selected from all the products described in CONTRACTOR's Products section in 2006. The Editors Choice products reflect the popularity ranking of the products highlighted in our monthly Editors Choice box from January through October.





# 'Mexican or Italian, which would you prefer?'

HAD BEEN in Dallas for four days conducting sales training seminars with a fine group of successful contractors. We covered all aspects of the sales cycle: suspects, prospects, qualifying, writing proposals, asking for the sale and following up.

I had come back to Seattle with a slight Southern drawl. I had learned several important bits of Southern philosophy. No. 1: the difference between a Yankee and a "Damn Yankee?" A Yankee is one who visits, as I had. A "Damn Yankee" is one who stays. I was just a Yankee.

I also learned the plural of "You all" (pronounced YAWL) is "All-YAWL!" Good stuff. I love Texans. They just might be the most polite people in the United States.

My wife picked me up at the airport. She had been in court reporting for 18 years. It was a fine career but things had changed: margins shrinking; a glut of lawyers in Seattle; increased competition from technology (the unspeakable, being replaced by video); and, of course, motherhood.

She was a fine reporter. It's the toughest kind of mental work. You had to be perfect, capture every word. She worked for one of the largest and most prestigious firms in Seattle. But no one could have accused her of being a salesperson. Her technical competence assured repeat business.

As we drove away from Sea-Tac airport in late afternoon on that beautiful Indian Summer day, a smile appeared at the corner of her mouth, like the

gentle wiggle of a cat's tail just before it pounces on its prey.

"How was your flight?"

"Oh, fine. I read most of the way."

I looked out the window as she drove. As we came to a stop at the light, she turned to me, lowered her voice an octave and in a sultry, soft tone asked,

enlightened self-interest.

That is exactly what Deb had done to me. She knew I would choose Italian if followed by the word "better." As far as I know, she has never attended a sales training class, mine or anyone else's.

This proves a point I have long contended: Women are smarter than men

Man, she was good (or should I say, Woman, she was good?).

Sales are like a four-legged chair: Trust, Relationship, Competence and Timing. Deb understands this. In this case, Timing was the biggest factor. I was hungry, therefore, near helpless. I never had a chance.

Remember that the next time you need to close an important sale. Mexican or Italian, which would you prefer?

Mark Matteson of the Pinnacle Service Group can be reached by phone at 877/672-2001, by fax at 425/745-8981, by e-mail at [psgmarm@msn.com](mailto:psgmarm@msn.com) or visit his Website at [www.mattesonavenue.com](http://www.mattesonavenue.com). His new e-book is "101 Stories to Make You Laugh, Cry or Think." He will be the opening and closing speaker at "Striving for Excellence," the Quality Service Contractors' Power Meeting XXVI, Feb. 22-24, 2007, in Scottsdale, Ariz. For more information on the meeting, visit [www.qsc-phcc.org](http://www.qsc-phcc.org) or call 800/533-7694.

## When it's time to ask for the sale, you offer the prospect two choices.

"Are you hungry?"

Now this was a loaded question. I am always hungry! (Remember "Jaws"?)

"Starving!"

"Well," she said, almost in a whisper, "I could make dinner and then do the dishes, and I wouldn't really get to hear how your trip was. So ... I was just wondering, would going out for Mexican be good, or Italian be better? Which would you prefer?"

### Choices of Yeses

Without hesitation or any real thought, I said, "Italian!" It wasn't until I was dipping the bread in the olive oil, I realized what she had done to me!

In sales, I teach the "Alternative Advance" or "Choice of Yeses." When it's time to ask for the sale, you offer the prospect two choices, the second one being your personal preference and the one that is also in the prospect's

in many areas. (Do you know the difference between men and government bonds? Bonds mature!)

What was particularly powerful about this experience was I never knew it was happening to me. It was sooo smooth, sooo seamless.

## QSC Power Meeting to 'Strive for Excellence'

FALLS CHURCH, VA. — Members of Quality Service Contractors will be told Feb. 22-24, 2007, at their Power Meeting XXVI in Scottsdale, Ariz., that superior business management processes and analysis are crucial to any company's success.

With the theme "Striving for Excellence," the meeting will offer a variety of seminar topics and speakers. They include:


- "Management Processes" - Gary Elekes;
- "Operational Processes" - Gary Oetker;
- "If You Made So Much Money, Where Is It?" - Ron Collier;
- "Keeping Score" - Lawrence Snow; and
- "Striving for Excellence" and "Implementing and Executing


Change" - Mark Matteson.

To encourage participation and discussion, the seminars will be formatted for smaller groups of contractors and will be offered several times so that everyone will have the opportunity to attend all sessions. In addition to the seminars, other networking opportunities will be available, including the Feb. 22 Challenge Air Golf Tournament sponsored by Hodes Co. and an Industry Partner Showcase.

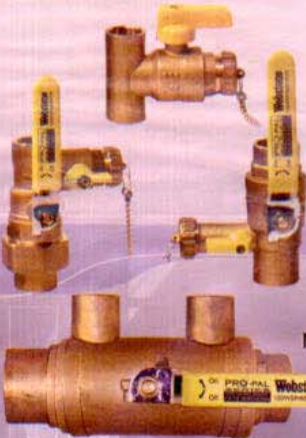
QSC is an enhanced service group of the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors-National Association. QSC delivers training programs, products and services for plumbing and HVACR service and repair contractors.

For more information about the meeting, call (800)533-7694; or visit [www.qsc-phcc.org](http://www.qsc-phcc.org).






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# Be selfish this holiday season!

BY JOE HODES  
SPECIAL TO CONTRACTOR

**W**HAT ARE YOU in business for? Are you risking everything each day only to spend your "free" time trying to figure out why your ends don't meet? How about spending that same time walking with your "honey" along a tropical island shoreline at sunset?

Your vacation funds could very well be found right under your nose. Are needless hidden expenses costing you that vacation, more time with your family, buying that next truck or even staying in business? If you're wasting time searching for the products you need, driving around town to get them or tying up valuable dollars in dead stock stuff, then there is good news for you.

Being selfish with your time by following through on a plan to get organized can save you enough cash out of daily operations to gift wrap for yourself that all expenses-saved vacation. The following might be some things you can work on:

## Separate 'stock' from 'stuff'

Don't be materialistic. It is easy to turn cash into inventory. The magic comes when you are able to consistently turn inventory into cash. Start by placing all products you have not used in the last 30 days in a separate area of your shop. It is amazing how much time is spent walking past or even looking at dead stuff. You can

from becoming delivery drivers when items are not brought into stock quickly enough.

## A spot for each stock item

Just as your home has a street address so folks can find you, so should all your products have a stock number that allows *anyone* and everyone to find the product he needs quickly. If you've designated the item as a stock

stock or to tie up cash in products that don't get used? To illustrate the pay-back equation for taking the above actions, below are notes taken from an actual inventory control conversation. This may sound familiar:

"One-and-a-half truck service-and-repair operation. Booked about \$250,000 in revenue last year. Material purchases were about \$52,000 of which about \$39,000 was for regularly used, 'stockable' products. Currently without an inventory-control system in place, finds he is going to the supply house for relief valves, auto air vents and other little stuff. A supply house visit to pick up one item takes about 30-45 minutes total. If he knows he needs other things and *happens* not to have all his lists with him (has multiple lists ... in his truck, in his techs' trucks and one in his office) he'll spend a lot more time walking around the supply house trying to jog his memory. His total average trip time then is one hour and he goes about twice per week, which is eight hours a month. Time taken to make up an order list, when working on it a little bit during the month, includes consolidating his three lists, looking through catalogs and going through his bins, is about two hours per month. The big time user is putting things away, spends about one hour a day, or 20 hours a month. Total time per month is 30 hours, break-even rate is \$147, sell is \$175, which is break even of \$4,410 spent per month, sell is \$5,250 ... believes a bar code inventory-control system could save him half of these numbers per month ... \$2,205 and \$2,625 monthly or \$26,460 and \$31,500 respectively, per year."

For this particular contractor, saving more than 10% of his revenue dollars each year might not be a bad way to gift wrap himself some much needed "recharge" time each year. How about you?

Joe Hodes is president of Hodes Co. To contact him, or for information on Hodes Co.'s Inventory Control Stock Service System for warehouses and service trucks, products and services, visit [www.HodesCo.com](http://www.HodesCo.com) or call 800/777-6500.

## Create a specific list of your valued stock items.

deal with those slow-moving items later by returning them to suppliers or using them as unique tree ornaments.

Create and maintain a specific list of your valued stock items. Just like Santa, the owner should take sole responsibility for creating and maintaining a specific "naughty" or "nice" list of what to keep in stock. This prevents unusual items from gaining stock status or, more importantly, keeps techs

item, then it's very likely that you will receive it into stock on a regular basis. How much faster would it be to put products away on a daily basis if you knew *exactly* where the item belonged? Ask your vendors to pack items in your bin location order.

It may seem obvious but make sure the product you've purchased gets put away the very same day it's received.

## Track all products

Does a bank allow all their employees full access to their vault? The stock on your shelves represents an investment risk and opportunity that must be protected. Allowing your technicians full access to your "vault" is not in the best interest of them, you or the customer. It creates future stock-outs and many hours of lost time keeping things organized.

Tracking parts as they leave the bin will allow for efficient replenishment of stock based only on what was actually used as well as make overstock situations and those emergency product pickup runs unlikely.

## Keep inventory space clean

Designate a specific person to be responsible for keeping the inventory space clean, organized and properly stocked. I've visited hundreds of service shops and have yet to find a consistently successful business that is in disarray.

What does it cost you to run out of

## Allied Supply donates controls

DAYTON, OHIO — The Allied Supply Co. has made a commitment to donate a wide range of high-tech controls equipment, valued at \$48,000, to Dayton's United Association Local 162/Mechanical Contractors Association of Greater Dayton Mechanical Equipment Service Training Program.

The Honeywell equipment will be used to train local apprentices and journeymen enrolled in the Dayton-based training center in HVAC equipment service.

The donation ensures that the training facility has state-of-the-art equipment for new training modules.



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# Just talk won't make meetings powerful

Continued from page 7

poses a question to the group and asks each participant to write a response on a piece of paper. The responses go into a bag, which is then shaken. Participants reach into the bag and read what they picked out to the group, which discusses the different ideas.

Closing a meeting effectively can be an opportunity to celebrate what has just been accomplished and link together the points made. It's also the time to share action plans and to encourage participants to continue to network with one another.

Getting people to participate in meetings can make them more enjoyable too. She cautioned Nexstar members, however, about losing sight of the meeting's objective.

"Do not have fun for fun itself," she said. "Link fun to content or you will lose credibility as a business leader."

The meeting's content should be divided into three chunks: critical content; content that supports or complements the critical part; and reference materials.

"The critical content should be the smallest chunk or the shortest in terms of time, but it should be business results oriented," she said.

Although her seminar was titled,

## LETTERS

### Apology for urinal remarks

YORBA LINDA, CALIF. — My letter to the editor that appeared in the October issue of *CONTRACTOR* magazine regarding politics and non-water urinals was clearly inappropriate ("Politics in play on lead bill, waterless urinals," pg. 31). What was an attempt at light-hearted humor was certainly not communicated as such and I take responsibility for that.

I apologize to Falcon Waterfree Technologies and the other manufacturers of these products for inferring something about politics for which I had no information.

Non-water urinals have their place in the building industry and new construction as viable water-saving fixtures. Independent testing of non-water urinals is ongoing and, as always with the water utility industry, the results of such work will be made public when it is completed.

JOHN KOELLER  
KOELLER AND CO.

"Leading Powerful Meetings," Pautzke demonstrated how the same principles could apply to company training programs. She asked Nexstar members to rank seven types of instruction on the "Learning Pyramid," which shows the average percentage of retention of material 24 hours after each method is used.

At the top of the pyramid is a lecture

by an instructor, with an average retention rate of 5%. It's the least effective form of instruction, she said.

Next is reading at 10% and then audio-visual materials, such as a movie, at 20%. When content is demonstrated by an instructor, the retention rate jumps to 30%. Discussion groups bring the rate to 50%.

When participants practice the material by doing it, the retention rate rises to 75%. The most effective method, at 90%, is when participants teach others by making immediate use of what they've learned.

For more information about Nexstar, call 888/609-5490 or visit [www.nexstar-network.com](http://www.nexstar-network.com).

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