



★ **Charlotte Pipe and Foundry** ★

- ▶ 2022 industry outlook
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◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

Table of Contents



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶



Charlotte, North Carolina-based Charlotte Pipe and Foundry is inducted into Supply House Times' PVF Ring of Honor.

From left: William Hutaff, director; Jenner Wood, director and regional sales manager; Ned Hardison, senior director; Roddey Dowd, Jr., CEO; Hooper Hardison, president; Frank Dowd IV, chairman; Roddey Dowd III, director regional and regional sales manager.

Manufacturer celebrates 120 years rooted in family core values.



Features

▶▶ **2022 industry outlook: A familiar tune**
PHCP-PVF industry experts weigh-in on market projections for the year ahead.

▶▶ **Less is more**
Showroom professionals reveal shifts happening in showroom displays, customer needs and technology.

▶▶ **Digital transformation still relies on partnerships**
Dakota Supply Group shares digital journey challenges and successes, working with AD eCommerce team to achieve goals.

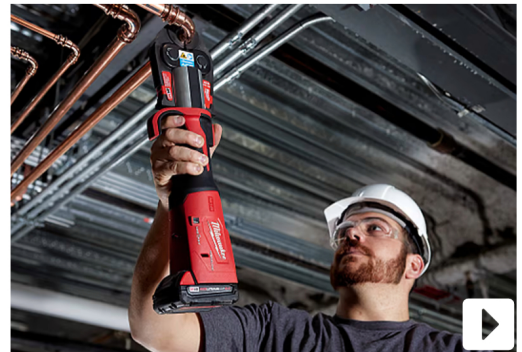


- ▶▶ **From the Editor**
Natalie Forster
- ▶▶ **Heating Help**
Dan Holohan
- ▶▶ **From the ASA President**
Chris Fasano
- ▶▶ **The ASA Files**
Mike Miazga
- ▶▶ **Women in Industry**
Meagan Owen and Tracie Sponenberg
- ▶▶ **Showroom Dollars and Sense**
Jeff Valles
- ▶▶ **Eye on Safety**
Michael Place



Departments

- ▶▶ **PVF Beat**
- ▶▶ **Movers and Shakers**
- ▶▶ **Down the Pipe**
- ▶▶ **Product Focus: Press connect systems**
- ▶▶ **Product Focus: New bathroom products**
- ▶▶ **ASA News**
- ▶▶ **Advertiser Index**



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◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

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FROM THE EDITOR || NATALIE FORSTER



Contact Natalie



Shark mentality

5 steps to success from Shark Tank's Daymond John.

The end of a year is always a good time to reflect and plan for the year ahead, and this is especially true when that year (or two) has been particularly challenging. When reflecting on my last year, one stand-out moment was getting to hear Shark Tank's Daymond John speak at ASA's NETWORK conference in Las Vegas this November.

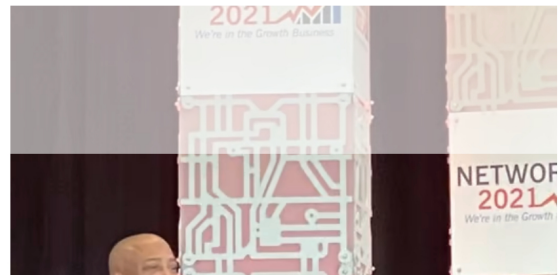
ASA's Plumbing Division breakfast attendees were treated with a history lesson on hip hop music that directly correlated with John's inspirational, entrepreneurial story. Throughout the presentation, John shared his five steps for success as a business "shark." I'm a sucker for lists and acronyms, so this lesson stuck with me as a good opportunity to share my takeaways.



I find these simple steps a good place to start when planning and preparing for 2022. Step one, setting a goal, is likely something you and your company have already done. You probably have a few goals on the docket.

John shared the importance of doing your homework. In a world where almost anything you want to know is easily accessible via the mini-computer we carry around in our pockets, there's ample opportunity to do your homework. Research the competition. Watch what's happening on their social media. Take advantage of webinars, podcasts and other digital content that will help your business day-to-day or in the future. There is surely one step you can take every day to do some homework.

His next step — amour or love — was a bit unexpected, but equally, if not more important, than the others. John explained this step isn't just about loving what you do, but remembering why you do it. He talked about a time in his life where business was thriving and he was finally "making it," but his wife and daughters rarely saw him. He advised to remember who you love and your reason for working so hard towards business success every day, and don't lose sight of that. A pretty relevant point as



work-life balance has recently been discussed possibly more than ever before.

Next up: Remembering that *you* are the brand. Yourself along with each and every person within your organization make up its brand. Your brand is not some nebulous idea floating around alongside your logo; it's who you are, how you act, how your customers perceive you, what you stand for; all of these things make up a brand.



And lastly, keep swimming. As executives discuss in our [2022 industry outlook article](#), the labor and supply chain challenges we've become used to at this point are not vanishing when the new year comes. So, just as you've been doing throughout 2020 and 2021, John told us to push forward. Keep advancing and don't stop working toward that goal you set, even if the original path in which you planned to reach it becomes disrupted.

As this year comes to an end, I want to say thank you to all of the great peers I've had the pleasure to connect with. And thank you for reading and engaging with *Supply House Times*. I am looking forward to another year of time well-spent in this great industry.

Natalie Forster is chief editor of *Supply House Times*. You can reach her at forstern@bnpmedia.com or 224-201-2225.



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ROCK-SOLID VALUES

2021 PVF RING OF HONOR INDUCTEE CHARLOTTE PIPE AND FOUNDRY CELEBRATES 120 YEARS ROOTED IN FAMILY CORE VALUES.

▶ Natalie Forster

From left: William Hutaff, director; Jenner Wood, director and regional sales manager; Ned Hardison, senior director; Roddey Dowd, Jr., CEO; Hooper Hardison, president; Frank Dowd IV, chairman; and Roddey Dowd III, director regional and regional sales manager.

It is pretty rare to see a private, family-owned company reach fourth-generation leadership, much less fifth.

For more than a century — 120 years to be exact — the Dowd family has led Charlotte, North Carolina-based pipe and fitting manufacturer Charlotte Pipe and Foundry. Built by **W. Frank Dowd** in 1901, the original foundry in Charlotte employed 25 men and produced cast iron soil pipe and fittings. Since that time, the manufacturer has grown through four generations of Dowd family executives and has expanded its product lines to include plastic pipe and fittings, commercial castings and more; the company is the only manufacturer of both cast iron and plastic plumbing systems.

In 1926, W. Frank Dowd's son, **Frank Dowd II**, began leading Charlotte Pipe, and by the 1950s, the third generation of Dowd men — Dowd II's two sons, **Frank Dowd Jr.** and **Roddey Dowd** — had joined the company.

Today, Charlotte Pipe is led by Chairman **Frank Dowd IV**, CEO **Roddey Dowd Jr.** and President **Hooper Hardison**.

In its 120th year of existence, Charlotte Pipe and Foundry is inducted into *Supply House Times'* PVF Ring of Honor. The annual award is given to a PVF manufacturer or master distributor that has enjoyed recent success through the execution of progressive and innovative best practices. As the award's eighth inductee, Charlotte Pipe joins NIBCO (2020), Midland Industries (2019), Merfish Pipe & Supply (2018), United Pipe & Supply (2017), Apollo Valves (2016), Penn Machine (2015) and Industrial Valco (2014).

Integrity through-and-through

In its mission statement, the company states, "Integrity is our foundation, meeting the expectations of our customers, associates and owners is our commitment." According to Hardison, Charlotte Pipe has made it 120 years because of the strong, family foundation it was built upon and its commitment to the values in its mission statement.

"Charlotte Pipe has lasted 120 years and counting because the Dowd family has had a singular focus to produce high-quality products and to take care of their hard-working associates," he explains. "The mission — to operate with integrity and to meet the expectations of our customers, associates and owners — remains the guiding force every day."



Also in the company's statement of values is its commitment to meet customer expectations — something that has grown increasingly challenging over the past 24 months. Hardison explains that without a firm foundation and clear principles, a company can waiver in its ability to meet these expectations.

"When faced with tough times, if you don't have a firm set of beliefs and principles to guide your business decision-making, you can get lost," he says. "As our Chairman Frank Dowd IV often says, 'If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there.' When things are going well, it is easy to get complacent. The unprecedented challenge of a global pandemic sharpened our resolve to take care of our essential workforce and our customers."

Mark Mitchell, president of North Carolina-based distributor Baker Mitchell Plumbing Co., says Charlotte Pipe is known for its loyalty and support of customers. "Charlotte Pipe has been a partner and the largest vendor of Baker-Mitchell for 76 years," he says. "I consider them our family as they have helped our family business grow through good times and bad and have never let us down. They are very supportive of their loyal customers and are easy to work with on special projects. We are fortunate to have them help us grow over the years and we are very appreciative of their support and friendship."

It hasn't been easy for PVF manufacturers and distributors to meet consumer demand over the past year. According to Hardison, the Charlotte Pipe team has stepped up in a big way to these extraordinary challenges.

"To meet these challenges, our sales, forecasting and plant operations folks have stepped up their internal communication and coordination," he says. "In turn, we are communicating better than ever with our customers to keep them informed of inventory levels, shipping schedules and other aspects of the current market. While we can always find ways to improve, we are doing our best and our customers seem to appreciate our efforts."

Longevity is key

Because of Charlotte Pipe's commitment to integrity and respect, the company experiences very little turnover, with many associates working at the company for more than 30 to 40 years.

"Every company believes their culture is unique, and many companies in our industry have strong legacies. But Charlotte Pipe's culture, as reflected in our mission statement, is the reason we have associates who work here for 30 or 40 years or more, following in the footsteps of their mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.," Hardison notes. "And this culture is why we are not experiencing turnover and labor recruitment problems right now. We remain loyal to our associates, and all of us are proud of the work we do every day to make this a great company."

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Hardison adds that the company's culture is its best recruitment tool. This culture, coupled with generous pay and benefits and the offering of a clean, safe environment to work in, leads to longevity with its employees.

"We take care of our associates and in return, our associates take care of Charlotte Pipe. We primarily hire new associates through word-of-mouth or from friends and family recommendations, which is why we have a very tight-knit, dedicated workforce."

Technology meshed with relationships

Charlotte Pipe credits its ability to branch into new markets and achieve continuous growth for more than 100 years to the strong relationships it has built with wholesaler-distributors and manufacturers' reps. Hardison says the company's commitment to customer service extends beyond its internal team.

"We have always worked hard to build and enhance our relationships with our distributor customers. We view them as our partners. These strong wholesale relationships have enabled us to grow our business through the years," Hardison explains. "Additionally, our independent sales reps are the best in the industry. They are on the front lines every day providing outstanding service for both our wholesale and contractor customers."

Jeff Worly, president and COO of Columbus, Ohio-based plumbing distributor Worly Plumbing Supply, can vouch for Charlotte Pipe's focus on relationships. "Charlotte Pipe has represented best-in-class in service and quality for many years. The relationship between Worly and Charlotte goes back more than 40 years, where we have grown together as partners in the markets we serve," he says. "It is a pleasure to continue to work with a first class company. Congratulations to the entire Charlotte Pipe and Foundry family."

In order to fuel and develop these strong partnerships, Charlotte Pipe invests in a Technical Services department, which is dedicated to creating helpful resources for its customers.

"This department is dedicated solely to supporting customers in the field who are designing plumbing systems and installing our products. We also have a state-of-the-art Product Knowledge Training facility where we conduct classroom and hands-on training, not just on our products but on plumbing basics and industry codes and standards as well," Hardison says. "All of our technical information is easily accessible on our website and through our Tech Tools app for your smartphone or tablet."

While the company knows how important it is to stay up-to-date with digital communication and resources, Hardison explains the PVF sector is still a people business. "Technology can never replace the importance of being there in-person for our customers. Not being able to travel during the pandemic just reinforced how vital it is for us to be in the market building lasting relationships with our customers."

With that being said, Hardison adds that text and social media have become more important communication tools in the industry, but this doesn't mean the level of customer service has wavered.

"Even though Millennials were raised with technology that we Gen Xers didn't have, they still care as much as any generation about doing a great job and taking care of their customers," he says.

Moving ahead

Although the company has committed to taking advantage of the latest technology, Hardison notes that even the most cutting-edge technology can't help when outside sources — supply chain disruption, weather-related shortages, etc. — disrupt the business.

"These unprecedented factors have made meeting customer expectations extremely challenging this year," he says. "We have worked hard to communicate clearly with our customers and to treat everyone fairly."

Even through current restraints, Charlotte Pipe is working to innovate, bringing new products to market such as its ConnectTite Push-Fit PVC DWV fittings and Edge High-Performance Cast Iron. ConnectTite is the first-ever push-fit fitting for DWV systems and it is easy to install, with no primer or solvent cement needed. Edge HP Iron is a specially coated cast iron piping system designed to handle certain aggressive DWV applications.

"We have a dedicated group of senior and technical leaders within the company whose sole purpose is to develop new products to meet market opportunities," Hardison explains. "In an industry not necessarily known for innovation, these are two new products that help our customers better serve their customers."

With product innovation and customer service top of mind, Hardison says the company's goals are simple. "We want to remain the industry leader in plumbing systems and to continue to provide best-in-class customer service and technical support. Our culture and day-to-day management practices are firmly aligned with these goals and that will see us through for the next five, 10 or even 120 years."

Taking pride in the company's longevity and reputation, Hardison says Charlotte Pipe's rock-solid values are the main driver for its success.

"I am most proud to work for a company that values hard work, gives back to the communities in which we live and work, and cares about its associates," he says. "Our leadership team makes decisions for the long term and in the best interest of the company, not to boost a quarterly earnings report. We are investing significant capital in our future. Stability, integrity and rock-solid values are why I joined this company and why many of us will work here for decades."

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[PREVIOUS PAGE](#)[NEXT PAGE](#)

2022 INDUSTRY OUTLOOK: A FAMILIAR TUNE

PHCP-PVF industry experts weigh in on projections for 2022.

BY NATALIE FORSTER

After enduring a unique set of challenges through 2020 and 2021, industry experts are excited to move forward into another high-demand year. The excitement is coupled with caution, as supply chain constraints, material pricing and labor shortages are not expected to resolve themselves in the near future.

Industry pros agree residential plumbing, non-oil and gas-related PVF, hydronics and heating are expected to see bounteous demand in 2022.

Bob Mucciarone, chief operating officer at F. W. Webb says specifically, high demand for heat pumps is anticipated in 2022. “As this is expected to be the most expensive heating season yet due to rising fossil fuel costs, we see heat pump technology exploding in 2022. In fact, we are already experiencing a push to go electric and to move away from fossil fuels.”

The high demand within the residential plumbing and remodel market will likely continue through most of 2022. **Kerry Stackpole**, CEO of Plumbing Manufacturers International (PMI) says PMI is projecting a strong 2022. “Our latest market outlook report forecasts a strong 2022, particularly in the residential sector,” he says. “Remodeling will continue to thrive and although the commercial side did see a slow-down due to the pandemic, we expect it to rebound through 2022.”

Wade Tennant, director of marketing for Legend Valve, expects the plumbing sector to continue strong. “Hydronics will continue to be good, but we do not expect the same level of growth there as with residential plumbing,” he says.

Tennant adds the commercial sector presents some concerns, but there are some commercial building projects that will provide demand in the market. “The federal infrastructure stimulus is likely to kick in by the end of 2022, but in the meantime, many segments of commercial construction have been vastly affected by the work from home phenomena and the loss of overall business travelers. Specifically in recreation facilities, lodging and office,” he explains. “Warehouse and distribution facilities will continue to expand along with healthcare facilities.”

Rob Ferguson, president, Winsupply Local Co. Group says he doesn’t anticipate a slowdown throughout 2022 in any sector.

Concerns carry over

The anticipated booming business doesn't come without a fair share of concerns — most of which are familiar issues carrying over from the past two years.

"There aren't enough people," is a phrase used all too often.

Ryan Clegg, vice president, human resources at Bradford White brings up the "great resignation."

"The last 12 months has been the period of the 'great resignation' and individuals are aligning their personal needs and values to what specific companies have to offer," he says. "We expect very little change in 2022 when it comes to finding new talent and retaining employees. We are somewhat optimistic that the 'great resignation' period will slow down the last half of the year. From a business/company perspective, we expect to see out-of-the-box ideas for both talent attraction and retention."

F. W. Webb's Mucciarone agrees, saying the company will continue its strategies from 2021 into 2022 in order to navigate the tight labor market. "Finding and keeping good employees has been a challenge over the last year and will continue into next year," he says. "To attract the talent we need and want, we have slid our pay ranges to the right. Paying higher wages paired with offering a competitive benefits package and long-term growth opportunities is helping us attract the best in the industry."

Stackpole points out that the labor challenges are something the PHCP-PVF industry has seen years before COVID-19, but the pandemic accelerated the issue. "The expectations of employees has risen significantly," he says. "They expect solid benefits, solid wages and the ability to see a career path ahead. People also want to be working on things that matter, which I think is really important."

Or industry can certainly deliver those things," Stackpole continues. "It's about getting the message out and making active changes that benefit today's workforce."

Stackpole adds that resources such as improvement increased access to daycare can help diversify and broaden the pool of candidates for jobs.

Legend's Tennant expects the labor market to become even tighter in 2022. "We expect overall a tighter labor market, but it should continue to open back up from the lows of the last 18 months," he says. "Finding qualified people across all business operations is still a challenge; notably finding warehouse workers continues to be our number one focus and challenge. We will continue to invest in technology to assist in workflow efficiencies with continued labor market concern."

In his 2022 Industry Forecast at ASA's NETWORK conference in November, Chief Economist **Dr. Chris Kuehl** stated that there is "no relief in sight," when it comes to labor shortages within the manufacturing and construction sectors, among other industries as well.

According to Kuehl, 10.3 million jobs are going unfilled. Kuehl added some bold labor predictions for 2022: Unemployment numbers will vary (U-3 rates at about 4% and U-6 closer to 9%), the quit rate will stay high and overall workforce participation will remain around 61%.

Have you heard about the disruption?

To no surprise, the other main ingredient in a 2022 industry forecast pie is supply chain disruption.

"The disruption is expected to remain a top concern moving into 2022 and 2023," Winsupply's Ferguson states. "Adding additional inventory and use of technology to communicate more efficiently while embracing digital commerce in all sectors is essential in offsetting the supply chain issues."

Ferguson adds that Winsupply is seeing continual vertical integrations being formed. "These integrations provide an opportunity for all segments of the supply chain and end-users to increase automation. As a result, you drive down the cost-to-serve and provide an opportunity to add back time spent on non-value add processes."



Tennant too lists continuing supply chain restraints as a top concern for 2022. "We anticipate continued delays in both inbound freight on the west coast and constraints with on-time delivery with overall package carriers," he says. "To prepare, we will continue working with our raw material suppliers to secure our target inventories and continue to focus on our supplier performance rating. Our target is to get back to our long-term average fulfillment in the high 90's to our customers."



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"We don't expect the supply chain to stabilize much in the first half of 2022 but hope to see improvement sooner than later," says **Greg Eynon**, vice president of sales and operations at Bradford White. "Businesses need to be able to adapt to bad news quickly and get the focus back on how they can continue to support the customer at the highest level possible."

Eynon adds that although business demand has been strong through the past two years, the industry needs to be prepared for a time when the market decides to level off.

Lack of available truck drivers, along with increased gas prices, are factors helping fuel the supply chain disruption fire. According to Dr. Kuehl, truck demand is up 35.2% since last year (2020) and fuel surcharge rates are 51.2% higher.

Louise Prader, senior director of product management at Bradford White says pent-up demand will continue to strain the supply chain into 2022. "The pent-up demand from the 2020 shutdown, combined with this year's new construction and replacement needs, will continue to outpace the industry's production capacity into 2022," she explains. "For the boiler market, we expect to see patterns continue through the first half of 2022 and some level of normalization in both demand patterns and supply availability during the second half of 2022. And the recently passed infrastructure bill may create additional demand that pushes any correction to the supply and demand imbalance further out towards the end of 2022."

High prices, high spending

A nice topic to round out the top concerns of PHCP-PVF professionals as we move into 2022 is inflation.

"Rising energy prices are a concern to keep an eye on," PMI's Stackpole notes. "I haven't quite seen the prices creep up on natural gas and oil, but those things typically follow suit after gasoline prices."

"Everyone in our industry, no matter if you're a business owner, manufacturer, distributor or contractor, shouldn't assume that materials are going to be available," Stackpole continues. "Everything is in short supply. And it's particularly difficult on manufacturers as raw material prices fluctuate. The savvy business owner will be diversifying their supply chain so they have more and better access to multiple resources."

Tennant agrees, saying PHCP-PVF businesses should be keeping an eye on inflationary pressures such as a spike in mortgage rates, higher costs of energy and material price increases.

“We assume at some point price increases will begin to affect demand, possibly in the second half of 2022,” Tennant adds. “PERT tube and alternative fitting systems appear to be higher in demand, mostly due to PE shortages and PEX fittings demand.”

Dr. Kuehl’s inflation advice is to closely monitor inflation in wages. “When it comes to inflation, commodities are indeed transitory — they go up and down,” he says. “Wages are a bit more worrying as once they go up, they don’t come back down, and the majority of the spikes we’re seeing are with skilled worker wages.”

Flexibility and stability

With so many factors at play, customer habits and demands are expected to change, and experts agree remaining flexible is key.

“We expect to see a rise in digital interactions and increased forecasting throughout next year,” Winsupply’s Ferguson says. “Customers are expecting distributors to be more accessible, allowing for interactions to occur 24/7 and permitting flexibility within the relationship.”

Although he expects more movement towards in-person business, Tennant agrees that flexibility is needed to meet customer demand. “While I think the majority of folks still want to meet in person, we think those customers who have gotten accustomed to the digital meeting space and are able to accommodate it better will continue on that path.”

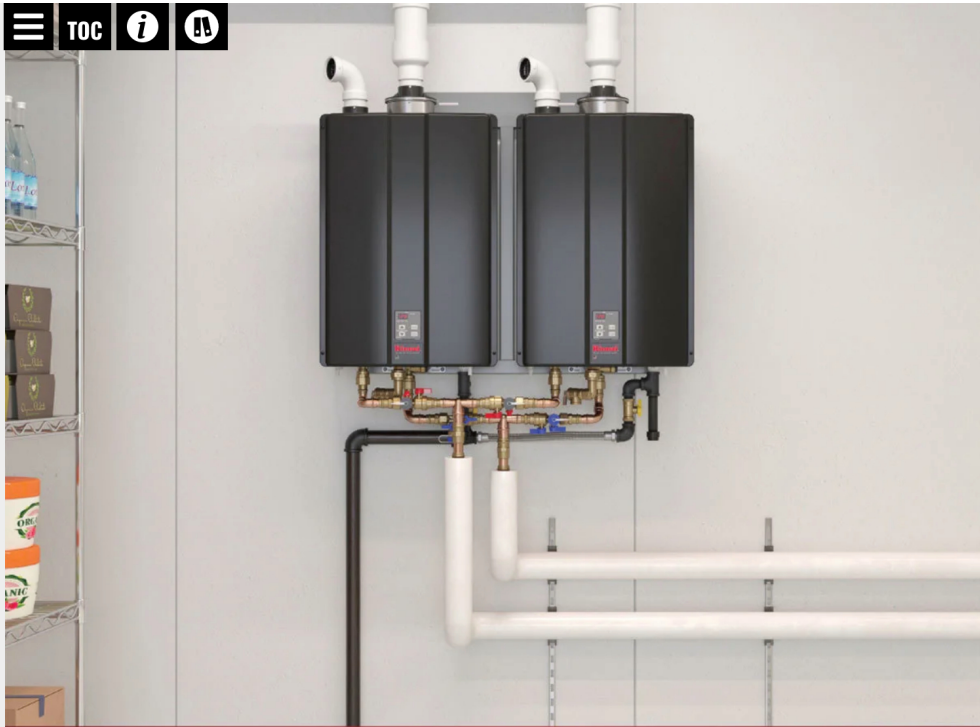
In addition to flexibility, consumers are after some sense of stability.

“After a very challenging 18-plus months, everyone is craving some stability at this point,” Eynon says. “Even though more disruption is likely ahead of us, our customers expect us to provide the highest quality products in a consistent manner. We are not above market disruption, but we need to make it as easy as possible to do business with us no matter what.”

Mucciarone emphasizes that one thing will never change: Customers want PHCP-PVF products wherever and whenever they need it. “We are seeing many customers buying certain products months in advance, and in some cases, we encourage them to do so, and to buy larger quantities.”

As we move into 2022, much of what the PHCP-PVF supply chain has been enduring over the past couple of years will continue to affect business. The good news is, the industry has proven its essentialness, many companies have seen record years and product demand is expected to remain high.

Stackpole encourages businesses to continue to find ways to adapt and innovate. “It’s not easy, but looking three to four steps ahead is essential right now. Can you source products elsewhere? Can you use a different resource or material?” he asks. “We as an industry will continue to find ways to innovate and improvise, working through all of the factors thrown our way.”



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LESS IS MORE



Showroom displays shifting to more flexible, simplistic designs, serving today's customers in ways the internet cannot.

BY **NATALIE FORSTER**

[Central Arizona Supply's Central Reserve showroom location in Scottsdale, Arizona.](#)

There's a shift happening in showrooms, and experts say it's not about competing with the internet, it's about offering an experience that can't be matched by online shopping.

"For a while, we were displaying as much product as we can, but the truth is you will never display as much as the internet," says **Jeremy Smith**, co-owner and direct of showrooms for Central Arizona Supply. "Your goal is to edit displays to be the most relevant to your client base, while at the same time having some level of inspiration. It is the adage of less is more."

Charleston, South Carolina-based Gateway Supply also values interchangeability with its displays. "Quality of product and customer service are always the focus in showrooms, but keeping product up-to-date and having the latest and greatest displayed is why customers keep coming back," says **Aimee Williams Garrett**, director of showrooms and marketing at Gateway. "So, it is important to have displays that are easily interchangeable and displays that are fully functioning so we can offer our customers a hands-on experience with different spray patterns before purchasing."

After surveying some members, Luxury Products Group (LPG) shares that the next generation of consumers is after a well-lit, functioning vignette.

"The best part of shopping in person is seeing and touching the product with confidence in the product's functionality. When combining a running faucet, matching sink, tile backsplash and decorative pendant hanging above, you're helping customers make faster decisions and enhance showroom sales," explains LPG Director of Marketing **Leigha Lugo**.

Lugo emphasizes the importance of helping customers narrow down their selections. "An



Gateway Supply Showroom display in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

When it comes to post-pandemic showroom business, pros agree that technology — both in new products and showroom operations — is the forefront trend.

“The biggest changes of showroom displays post-pandemic is the incorporation of technology. It’s a game-changer to walk around the showroom with a representative who has an iPad to easily create a wish list or quickly write an order,” Lugo says. “On the other hand, incorporating a QR code can allow customers to walk freely and gain knowledge of products if they choose to peruse the showroom alone.”

Touchless is still all the rage, but showroom managers say voice command is growing in popularity as well.

“Working displays are still really important, but I see displays leaning towards showcasing the voice activation technology on the market,” Mack says. “Alexa-activated showers, hands-free toilets — any of that smart home technology is great to have showcased in the showroom.”

Color schemes are also shifting from the popular white and neutral design from the past several years.

“I like to have a pop of color in the showroom; a colored tub or powder-coated faucets — items in the showroom that are easy to switch out,” Mack explains. “It doesn’t necessarily mean the customer will buy that color, but it starts the conversation where we can tell them all of the finishes available.”

Again, Lugo points out having displays that are easily switched out is key. “The strategy is overall to have a 25% rotation of displays annually and measure the ROI of a display using your sales history. The bottom line is if it’s not selling, get it off the floor,” she says. “However, at a time where it may be difficult for some showrooms to receive new displays, a great way to keep a showroom looking fresh would be to rotate product placement. Another way could be to place attractive colors and textures at the end of pathways to encourage and create guided exploration.”

Foot traffic and digital presence

Offering a value-added customer experience starts as soon as the customer walks in the door. Gateway’s William’s Garret says foot traffic has been incredible in her market, and the company is focused heavily on brand marketing.

Smith says with current supply chain disruption, Central Arizona Supply is actually trying to slow down foot traffic right now. “I know that sounds strange being that we are in the business of making sales, but we are requiring appointments and working with more of the trade than the consumer. We are trying to focus on longer-term projects that have time to wait

customers narrow down their selections. An organized variety of brands is key, but with limited menu selection. By limiting selection, I find it’s easier to make a purchase decision when presented with a brand’s top sellers in no more than one to three finishes depending on whether we’re talking decorative lighting versus plumbing versus cabinetry,” she says. “It’s also helpful to be provided with a color palette of real metal swatches to see all available finishes in their true shade.”

Displays are also getting bigger, according to Consolidated Supply Co.’s Corporate Showroom Manager Amy Mack.

“I see displays moving away from slot walls and going to six-to-12-foot freestanding displays,” Mack says. “It’s still all about relationships, too. The more extensive of a trusted relationship we have with our vendors, the more inclined they are to invest in our particular showroom displays.”

for product,” he says. “Contractors are doing a better job of ordering earlier and keeping the client on track. Consumers, on the other hand, have heard about supply chain disruptions and feel like giving you an extra couple of weeks is all they need, which is just not attainable.”

Mack shares that Consolidated’s showrooms — The Fixture Gallery — use an app to keep track of foot traffic. “Every time someone walks in, our team selects whether they’re a builder, homeowner, designer, etc.,” she says. “That way, we can review and see who is visiting us and know specifically what group to focus on reaching out to the next month.”

[Consolidated Supply's The Fixture Gallery in Pacific, Washington recently underwent a remodel.](#)

For showrooms looking to boost foot traffic, Lugo advises finding creative ways to work with the local community and suppliers.

“Work with suppliers on events that drive awareness for a cause or celebrate with late-night networking events by inviting local businesses and designers and promote one another,” she says. “An awesome example is LPG member, Waterhouse Bath and Kitchen Design Studio. For World Toilet Day, Amy Siders, showroom manager, raised awareness about this important day by working with suppliers to donate toilets to be painted by local art students. This unique idea promoted the showroom, suppliers and community, and together made a bigger difference. Don’t be afraid to rally for a relevant cause to the showroom’s industry and send press releases to those local networks.”

Although foot traffic in the decorative plumbing space is always important, showroom professionals know digital presence is vital in today’s market as well.

Mack says social media has been a great tool in growing The Fixture Gallery’s online footprint. “We recently launched a social media campaign on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn where we make short — about 30-second — videos of our staff featuring a product,” she says.

Smith agrees that social media is a great tool for showrooms. “We’re active on social media and we work to make sure the website stays up-to-date,” he says. “The ability for potential clients to make an appointment online is huge. If we can get them to book an appointment, we turn that quote into a sale 95% of the time.”

Lugo says LPG encourages its members to have a strong website and take advantage of Google’s capabilities. “Having a website is vital. Additionally, Google is a powerful tool. If I’m looking for a local business, I’m quick to search Google for location and reviews. It’s important to tap into the power of SEO and get your business to the forefront of your competitors and big box stores,” she says. “Local showrooms will always provide better customer service and a more personalized experience with a far better variety of brands and products to offer than any big box store. Reviews are vital for generations currently buying homes and doing the most renovations.”

Lugo adds that one way to prompt reviews is with customer incentives or discounts. When talking social media, she explains each channel has different strengths. “Facebook is great for groups and events, while Instagram is great for showcasing products and going live to talk about new showroom updates. Finally posting boards on Pinterest and linking back to your website is one of the best ways to stay relevant with home design inspiration as new homeowners devise renovation plans.”

Much more to come

As showroom displays evolve to match current consumer desires and design trends, one thing is for certain — product and internal operations technology will continue to advance.

“We live in a world where screen-time is significantly higher than our face-time with other humans. Interactive touch screens built into displays will prove to be helpful for most customers who prefer to peruse a showroom or for those designers who would like to view design inspiration and product details,” Lugo explains. “For the contractor who needs quick answers, these digital displays can provide spec information and quantities remaining, or even installation videos that can be forwarded to your phone with Bluetooth technology. QR codes may be here for a while and I hope to see more showrooms utilize these in a concealed way within the physical display for quicker order writing.”

Williams Garrett summarizes technology in the decorative space well: “Technology has been the main focus of manufacturers in the bath and kitchen industry and it will continue to be a focus as our world revolves around technology today. Who would have imagined years ago that we would be selling fixtures controlled by voice command? Things are only going to advance from here and showrooms will continue to provide beautiful displays and a customized, valuable customer design experience.

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SUPPLY HOUSE TIMES PROFILE

Digital transformation still relies on partnerships

BY NATALIE FORSTER

Distributor shares digital journey challenges and successes, working with AD eCommerce team to achieve goals.



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

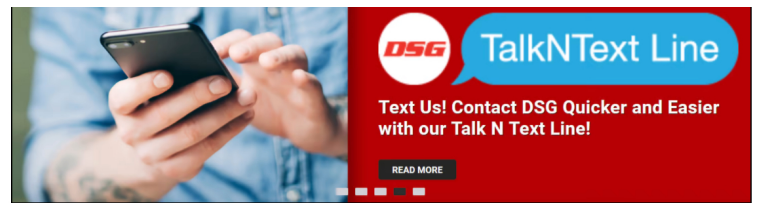
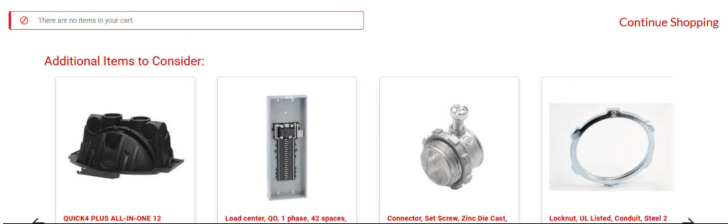
Digital presence can be somewhat of a buzzword in the PHCP-PVF industry as it continues to adapt and evolve in an accelerating digital age. Each company may have a different definition of what digital transformation means to them. For Fargo, North Dakota-based PHCP distributor Dakota Supply Group, it's simply about delivering the best online solutions to its customers.

Todd Sisson, digital commerce manager at Dakota Supply Group (DSG) says the company first began its digital journey in 2009 with a very simple order placement tool that was directly tied to the company's ERP.

"In 2016, we decided to start the process of evaluating the platform options, technology solutions and finding the right people to partner with in order to deliver the best online experience for our customers," he explains.

After a few years of research and improvements to its current website, DSG launched a new website in September of 2019. "The new website came with a wave of activity and interest, and a few thuds," Sisson says. "Since 2019, we've been making continuous improvements, and the digital flywheel for DSG is turning in the right direction. Our team members and customers are finding multiple ways to leverage [DSGSupply.com](https://www.dsgsupply.com) into their workday, making it easier for our associates and customers to do business with us."





Investment and challenges

Investing in website design, functionality and eCommerce is no small feat. Like many distribution peers, the expenses that come with a robust web store, enriched content and a great UI were roadblocks in DSG's digital path for many years.

"DSG has never questioned the value of connecting through digital touchpoints with our customers," Sisson says. "The struggle was getting to the point where we could deliver something of value to our customers with a reasonable investment level."

Sisson says the greatest challenge with this new website and eCommerce launch was finding the right platform and team to facilitate the project.

"We feel very fortunate to have selected [Optimizely](#) for our web store solution and [Xngage](#) for strategy support and implementation," he says. "The next big challenge has been enhanced and attributed product data, and AD has the best data program in the market. AD's data strategy has been incredibly helpful and has afforded us the ability to focus our energy on our digital strategy."

The Affiliated Distributors (AD) buying group first launched eCommerce services to its plumbing, PVF and HVAC members in 2017. **Bryana Kennedy**, director of account management, eCommerce solutions at AD explains the program is anchored in member-driven categorized, enhanced, normalized and maintained content.

"We now have over 6 million enhanced SKUs across over 5,000 manufacturers available to our members. Members have access to their own AD Member Product Information Management (PIM) tool to build their own catalog with flexible exports," Kennedy adds. "Our curated and vetted service provider partnerships help members navigate the unknown and saves them resource time."

AD's eCommerce team hosts an annual AD eCommerce summit, facilitates the AD Digital Community, offers educational webinars and trainings, and performs quarterly check-in strategic calls. According to Kennedy, the main goal is to support members in their digital journey with a strong presence on the team's digital expertise. "At AD eCommerce Solutions' core, our mission is to progress members along their digital path. The AD eCommerce team is viewed as an extension of a member's own team to help them succeed and win online."

Just as Sisson pointed out, AD knows it's often difficult for distributors to know where to begin.

"Before you can navigate where to go, you need to know where you are today," Kennedy says. "It starts with a solid strategy and prioritizing your customer needs and outcomes. It's a crawl, walk and run approach, and AD is here to support our members throughout their digital maturity."





An ongoing approach

As technology constantly evolves around us, there is no real “end point” for a distributor’s digital journey; they must continue to evolve to meet customer demands.

Now that DSG has made it well past the getting started hurdle, Sisson says AD and a small team of specialists work to keep the website and eCommerce platform up-to-date. “We have a relatively small team that develops the UI roadmap and maintains basic issues and technical requests,” he says. “For all the heavy lifting, we feel it is better to rely on our partnerships with Optimizely and Xngage to code any of the larger implementation objectives. AD provides us with our enhanced SKU catalog that is continually maintained and updated.”

Although the PHCP marketplace is still described as a “people business,” Sisson believes it’s important for distributors to prioritize investment in eCommerce and digital solutions.

“I think we are at a point where the customer expects to have the ability to place orders digitally,” he says. “Those that aren’t willing to invest in digital solutions are going to find themselves with a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace.”

Kennedy agrees, saying no matter where a company is at in its digital journey, they should be working to advance. “Your business needs to be where your customers are and will be — know where they want to be. We have members in different stages of digital maturity, from innovating to just starting their journey,” she explains. “If you aren’t thinking about digital for your customers, then my advice is to get started today. Starting with defining your strategy, content, technology, organization alignment and how to measure your success.”

Distributors are navigating a change in customer expectation, due to supply chain issues, the pandemic and the next generation of business leaders emerging. Sisson points out that there are constant conversations circulating about continuous improvement and innovation on the digital front.

“We’re well aware of the need to make things quicker and easier for customers,” he says. “DSG is heavily focused on logistical improvements for our eCommerce platform and website. Offering up logistic elements such as a life-long order history can really make a difference for our customers.”

It’s likely the tide has not completely changed to all or even most customers within the supply chain choosing to engage digitally, so Sisson says the goal for DSG is to have 50% of its customers become digitally engaged with the company’s offerings.

He summarizes the goal of DSG’s digital journey saying, “Our number one goal with our digital strategy is to make it faster, simpler and easier for our customers to work with DSG.”

Before you can navigate where to go, you need to know where you are
today. It starts with a solid strategy and prioritizing your customer needs
and outcomes. It’s a crawl, walk and run approach, and AD is here to
support our members throughout their digital maturity.”

– Bryana Kennedy

It’s all about partnerships

As DSG continues to evolve its own digital presence, Sisson offers up some advice to fellow distributors. “Spend the time to find the right partners,” he says. “The out of the box features and functionality of almost all of the platforms are more than enough to deliver a great experience for your customers. Find a team that you can share objectives and strategies with and then let them do their job. Once you have the platform and the team, then get on the AD data stream.”

Kennedy agrees, noting that digital transformation is about streamlining processes, technology adoption and having the right partners to work through it all.

“COVID-19 forced many to rethink how technologies can help meet internal sales, marketing, business IT and customer needs,” she says. “Distributors should be evaluating solutions to drive efficiencies and prioritize based on their customers. In 2022, AD’s strong community identified four priorities: Enabling digital transitions, investing in data and more automation, expanding partners’ services, and delivering strong community experiences.”

So, taking the plunge to start or advance your digital transformation may not be eliminating the people aspect of business, as it requires the strong relationships and partnerships the PHCP-PVF supply chain are used to.

Kennedy says she loves hearing the success stories from members who have worked with AD to take the next steps digitally.

“The most rewarding part of my job is to hear the success stories and the difference we are making in our member distributor community,” she says. “We’ve heard from so many members that they could not have been able to do this journey without AD and its member and supplier communities. The success stories generated from our members has been inspirational and amazing.”

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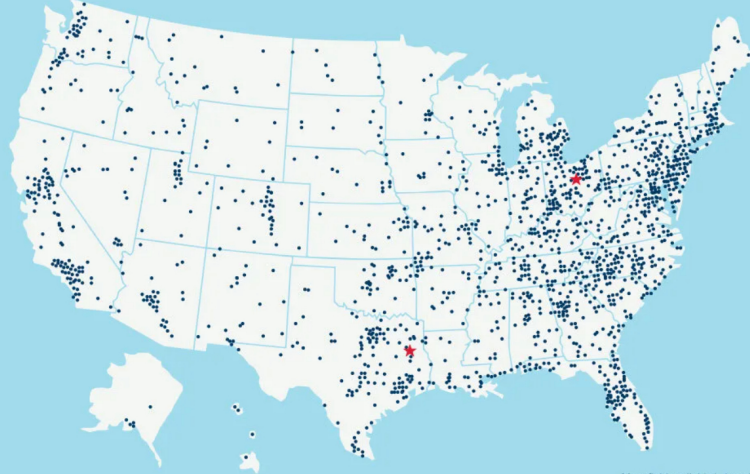


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FROM THE ASA PRESIDENT || CHRIS FASANO



Contact Chris



The value of our industry's trade association continues to amaze

Summarizing a year of wins.

As another year comes to a close, I cannot help but to look back and reflect on how resilient and successful our association was during another year of disruption.

For a second straight year, our world struggled with a worldwide pandemic and unprecedented supply chain disruption. But one thing remains constant. Our association and our dedicated volunteer leaders continue to be the voice of hope for a stronger future for our industry.

It should not be a surprise for you to learn that ASA experienced net growth this year as more industry firms joined our effort toward building one future.

Our advocacy team delivered very strong wins and planted the seeds for future impact at both the federal and state levels. ASA negotiated a compromise to delay implementation of California Bill AB100 — a law that would have limited California distributors' ability to sell certain products that leach more than 1 µg/L of lead.

This agreement extends the implementation period by several years, avoiding what could have been costly losses to our members. ASA also took a position on 99 code proposals and succeeded on 85% of those proposals during the code-change process.

Our business intelligence and economic reporting provided members with 175 economic podcasts, webinars and economic reports with valuable guidance on economic trends impacting our businesses and industry.

ASA received timely data on the rapid changes in compensation with plans in 2022 to provide more information to help members remain competitive with their compensation for key positions.

ASA launched an unprecedented program to help members assess their firm's strengths and their readiness to remain competitive in the future. The VITALITY growth assessment survey is an exciting program delivered by our third-party partner New Edge that will shed light as to where a member is strong and where new investment will be needed so that our member firms will remain the most relevant and successful companies in the future.

We continue to invest in building our industry and our members' brands among potential career seekers as Project Talent and the SupplyIndustryCareers.com website generated impressions seen by millions of potential job applicants. ASA offers marketing tools, images and recruitment guidance at no cost to members so they build momentum and stand out as companies that offer great careers.

In November, NETWORK welcomed more than 725 people, 82 distributor firms, 70 manufacturer firms and 65 manufacturer rep firms to Las Vegas for the industry's biggest gathering of the year. We offered a great lineup of 23 educational and networking sessions over the two-day conference, including three sessions that were live streamed!

It never ceases to amaze me that as the challenges we face grow, so too does the ability of our ASA to grow and to meet those challenges to support our members.



Photo courtesy Getty images

It never has been a more important time to be a member of ASA.

Chris Fasano is president at Waterbury, Connecticut-based Torrco and is the 2021 ASA president. Contact Chris at cfasano@torrco.com.



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ASA thanks its 2021 Supplier Partners

ASA Thanks Our 2021 SUPPLIER PARTNERS

*Supplier Partners as of November 1, 2021



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

The American Supply Association would like to say a big thank-you to the more than 40 member manufacturing and master distribution companies that are part of the 2021 ASA Supplier Partner program.

This added year-round marketing program provides ASA member companies with added exposure through ASA's print, digital and online mediums, plus other benefits connected to ASA live-event programming throughout the year, including NETWORK, the industry's largest event that recently drew more than 700 attendees, including more than 80 distributor firms to Las Vegas.

To learn more about the program and become an ASA Supplier Partner, contact Mike Miazga at mmiazga@asa.net.



ASA thanks its 2021 Sustaining Supplier Partners



New this year, ASA started its Sustaining Supplier Partner for member independent manufacturing representatives.

Like the manufacturer/master distributor Supplier Partner program, ASA Sustaining Supplier Partner rep firms enjoy year-around added marketing and exposure benefits, plus benefits related to the annual NETWORK conference.

In its first year, 27 ASA member manufacturers rep firms participated in the Sustaining Supplier Partner program.

ASA also extends a big thank-you to those inaugural members on the Sustaining Supplier Partner program.

To learn more about how your rep firm can become an ASA Sustaining Supplier Partner, contact Mike Miazga at mmiazga@asa.net.



ASA thanks its Association Partners

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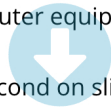


◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

As 2021 comes to a close, ASA also is thankful for the partnerships it has with ASA Association Partners Federated Insurance and Dell Technologies.

Federated Insurance is the recommended insurance provider for ASA member companies, while Dell Technologies is the recommended provider for small business IT and computer equipment solutions for ASA member companies.



Check out Federated Insurance's column later in this second on slip and fall accidents.

For more information on Federated Insurance and all it has to offer ASA member companies, visit www.federatedinsurance.com.

For more on Dell Technologies and the specific savings ASA member companies can realize, visit www.dell.com/supply.



ASA opposes potential ban on press-connect and mechanical joints in refrigeration systems

On Oct. 15, the American Supply Association submitted public comments opposing two Tentative Interim Amendments (TIA) that if passed, would remove the use of press-connect and mechanical joints in refrigeration systems under the 2018 and 2021 versions of the IAPMO Uniform Mechanical Code (UMC). The UMC is not a widely adopted model code however, it is the model code used by California. Additional opposition to the proposed TIAs included the Copper Development Association, AHRI, HARDI and UL.



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

The balloting of the TIAs by the IAPMO Technical Committee was completed on Oct. 15. The Technical Committee members have been provided the public comments received to determine, based on the public comments, if they wish to change their vote. The actual vote of the TC has not been published.

As background, both the 2018 and 2021 versions of the UMC allow for the use of press-connect and mechanical joints in refrigeration systems.

A TIA is intended to be a tool to bypass the normal deliberative consensus process when there is a documented emergency.

HARDI opposed the TIAs based on no documented evidence of an emergency existing, and also lack of technical merit. The next steps in the process is to complete the TC member review of public comments. Following public comment review, the results of the TC ballots along with the public comments will be submitted to the IAPMO Standards Council for final consideration and action. ASA will remain on top of this issue as it moves forward.



ASA member companies report continued sales increases



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

Respondents to ASA’s monthly sales report enjoyed a median sales increase of 19.3% for September 2021 vs. September 2020.

The ASA monthly sales report is prepared in partnership with longtime industry business intelligence partner Industry Insights each month.

Industry Insights reminds members it is worth noting the context of September 2020 as a month in which some states were in the early stages of the pandemic reopening process.

“This is reflected in the strong sales growth figures reported by respondents in this month’s results,” Industry Insights explained. “The year-to-date and trailing-12-month figures remained strong when compared against 2020, a year that had multiple weeks, if not months, of closures or partial closures.”

Worth watching going forward, in comparison to the previous month — September 2021 vs. August 2021 — respondents reported a decline in median sales of -3.0%.

On a year-to-date basis through the end of September, half the respondents reported sales growth of more than 20%. On a trailing 12-month-basis, respondents reports average sales growth of 15.7% and a median of 17.0%. Half the respondents reported trailing-12-month changes between 10.3% to 22.3% for sales growth.

Inventory rose 31% for September 2021 vs. September 2020. The median three-month average days sales outstanding remained at 40 days for September.

“It was another strong month in terms of year-over-year sales performance, but it’s largely being driven by a weak 2020 where much of the country was shut down or operating at reduced capacity,” Industry Insights Senior Vice President Greg Manns said. “It was good to see that it was still relatively strong year-over-year — though September was slightly down vs. last month for most respondents. Supply chain and labor issues continue to be concerns/headwinds.

Industrial PVF

Industrial PVF distributors reported a median sales increase of 20.0% for September 2021 compared to September 2020. Calendar year-to-date, PVF distributors reported a 15.9% median sales increase, while the trailing 12-month figures come in at median growth of 9.2%.

Economic indicators

The advance of real GDP figure for the third quarter of 2021 was released at 2.0% growth. Total wholesale sales for August grew 23.7% year-over-year, while inventories grew 12.3% vs. the prior year.

Supply chain, labor and inflationary pressures continue to present headwinds, slowing the housing figures. Unemployment rates for September fell to 4.8% and initial claims for unemployment continued to decline, remaining below 400,000 for the fourth consecutive month—both figures reached their lowest levels since the beginning of the pandemic.

What ASA members are saying

Here are some comments from ASA member companies that participated in this month's sales report.

- "Business is very robust."
- "Business seems to be slowing, but still strong."
- "Demand remains very strong despite consistent price increases from manufacturers."
- "Inflation, supply chain and people/hiring issues continue."
- "Our YTD results are up slightly on our 2019 YTD results, which was a good year for us, so we are recovering from the COVID tsunami nicely."
- "Prices continue to rise and we're having supply shortages all over, but demand is keeping up, which is allowing us to succeed."
- "Seeing a strengthening in the industry, but having a hard time with finding employees and continually fighting the COVID battles. Supply and demand is a struggle as well as there is a short supply of products right now."
- "We are having problems obtaining qualified employees. We are in better condition obtaining inventory. Prices are increasing in all areas of inventory and supplies. We will have another record year unless there is a major downturn."



Still time to take ASA PROJECT VITALITY's free company growth assessment survey



As part of ASA's Building One Future initiative, ASA recently launched its PROJECT VITALITY initiative that includes the Growth Assessment Tool, a survey aimed at helping ASA member companies assess their readiness to compete now and into the future.

The survey will take only a few minutes for each of your team members to complete, and is absolutely confidential. Only you will see your firm's survey results. Companies that take the survey also will receive a consultation about the survey results with New Edge, ASA's partner in the PROJECT VITALITY initiative.

The survey is free of charge until Dec. 31, 2021 and then ASA will begin charging a fee in 2022. ASA leadership has invested significant resources to support its members' ability to succeed in the future.

To learn more and to receive a survey link, contact **Mike Miazga** at mmiazga@asa.net.



University of Innovative Distribution registration open

Registration for [University of Innovative Distribution](#) March 21-24, 2022 in Indianapolis is now open. ASA is proud to partner with Purdue University, the Association Education Alliance and a strong lineup of speakers to bring this educational opportunity that serves specific needs in the wholesale distribution industry.



Topic areas include distribution strategy, leadership/professional development, management (including HR), marketing, operations and sales.

ASA members receive a \$200 discount on your registration fee! Double your discount if you register by January 2, 2022! [REGISTER](#) here.

Did you know? UID is one of the phases of ASA University's Master of Distribution Management, ASA's premiere leadership program.





Don't risk it all with a slip, trip or fall

By Nate Oland, Senior National Account Executive, Federated Mutual Insurance Co.

It's the time of year again when winter is knocking at the door, and when floors and walkways can quickly turn hazardous.

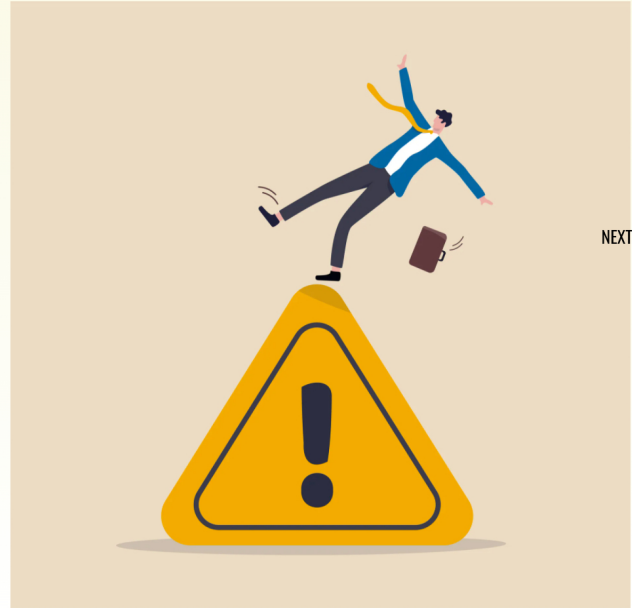
You do your best to keep surfaces clear of clutter, debris and moisture to help ensure that employees and customers have a pleasant and safe experience at your business. Still, someone loses their footing, slip and fall, leading to serious injuries. And even if you live in a part of the country that doesn't get the common risks from cold weather, it's always a good time to reevaluate your workplace safety procedures and take action to prevent unnecessary injuries and claims.

The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that at least one third of the nation's workforce is exposed to hazards that could cause slips, trips, or falls (via 2021 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). There are plenty of ways to recognize what can lead to them at any workplace. Several main causes include:

- Wearing improper footwear
- Weather hazards, such as rain, ice and snow
- Uneven surfaces, wet or slippery areas, or loose flooring and mats
- Uncovered hoses, cables or extension cords in walkways
- Poor housekeeping, clutter and debris
- Dim lighting
- Unsafe use of ladders
- Improperly mounting and dismounting vehicles and equipment

Consider your business. Are any of these items ones that you know pose a risk to your employees or clients? If you or an employee notices one or more of these hazards, make it a top priority to remedy the situation. Few things halt a successful business faster — or dig deeper into profits — than preventable injuries. Several important safe work practices can include, and are not limited to:

- Conducting a baseline slip, trip and fall evaluation at your workplace
- Holding refresher training courses on safe work practices
- Documenting problematic areas and keeping detailed records of accidents
- Ensuring employees take their breaks on time to stay alert and refreshed
- Having cleaning supplies on hand and cleaning spills immediately
- Maintaining well-lit facilities



- Following building codes
- Hanging up warning signs as needed
- Using correct tools and ladders for designated jobs
- Keeping walkways, entrances and exits free of obstructions
- Installing non-skid surfaces
- Encouraging employees to keep work areas clean

Although it can be easy to remind others to stay safe in the workplace, don't forget to apply those rules to yourself too. Remember — keeping an eye out for risks at all times is everyone's responsibility. With a little planning and some simple steps, your actions can go a long way toward reducing the risk that a slip, trip, or fall will occur.

This article is for general information only and should not be considered legal or other expert advice. The recommendations herein may help reduce, but are not guaranteed to eliminate, any or all risk of loss. The information herein is not intended to cover or identify all risk exposures and may be subject to, and is not a substitute for, any laws or regulations that may apply. Qualified counsel should be sought with questions specific to your circumstances and to develop policies and procedures for your business. © 2021 Federated Mutual Insurance Company.



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Contact Mike



How bad is the current labor situation?

Stay up-to-date on the status of today's labor market with resources and tools from ASA.

◀ PREVIOUS PAGE The topic of labor has been front and center for quite some time now inside and outside of this industry. NEXT PAGE ▶

But it wasn't until the recent Thanksgiving holiday break that it really hit home as to just how bad the current situation is.

While waiting for my daughter to finish a recent fitness class, I decided to run a quick errand to mail a package. While driving down this road in an industrial park setting, business after business had roadside signs looking for labor — virtually every business on this busy road.

One of the local grocery stores was offering next-day pay for new employees (I hope current employees are afforded the same benefit there). The ice cream parlor that churns out a rather good product in the Chicago area had reduced Sunday hours — not opening until 2 p.m. due to lack of help.

The office supplies store we were at on a Saturday night to get the family Christmas card produced, one day later was no longer accepting any inbound orders, only pickups, due to lack of staffing. That same ice cream parlor I just wrote about — its affiliate next to the office supplies store had a sign at the front desk apologizing to customers for lack of employees. The adjoined burger joint up the stairs was offering either a \$150 or a \$500 gift card for coming to work for them.

The gas station in town with the fancy car wash is offering a \$1,000 sign-on bonus, while the school bus depot by the house is now offering a starting wage as high as \$22 (it was \$15 probably 18 months ago) with a \$2,500 sign-on bonus.

I could go on and on and on.

At our recently completed NETWORK2021 event in Las Vegas (a big thank you to the more than 700 attendees who joined us), labor again was a frequent conversation topic.

ASA's monthly sales report (a free benefit to our distributor members) has a section where members can leave a brief synopsis on how they see the current business landscape.

From the most recent report (again, available in the MyASA section at ASA.net for ASA member distributor companies free of charge):

"Inflation, supply chain and people/hiring issues continue."

"Seeing a strengthening in the industry, but having a hard time with finding employees."

"We are having problems obtaining qualified employees."

And these comments are in the midst of most companies in our industry reporting they are having robust and even record-performing years.

How can ASA help?

ASA has been hard at work on a variety of initiatives tied into this current labor conundrum. At the forefront is our PROJECT TALENT careers recruitment platform part of ASA's Building One Future long-term strategy.

When ASA was in the infancy of getting Building One



Future off the ground, we asked a small group of volunteer leaders what will be the three biggest challenges facing the industry in the next 10 years. Labor was one of them, more so on making sure we replenish the droves of employees who will exit the industry due to retirements and with it take their decades of industry knowledge/expertise with them.

Thus, PROJECT TALENT was born. Two key pieces to this: ASA member companies have the ability to post open jobs on an industry-specific SupplyIndustryCareers.com website. That site (created by ASA PROJECT TALENT partner Harger Howe, a well-known careers recruitment marketing agency out of Boston) is then turned around and strategically blasted to places where sought-after job seekers tend to congregate (folks who have recently left the military, people looking for second careers, etc.).



 Photo courtesy Getty images

The second piece here is access to a free recruiter toolbox that arms ASA member companies with the marketing assets needed to help them in their hiring journey. Say you saw a competitor using social media to hire to folks. Maybe you don't have it in the budget to hire an outside firm or don't have someone on staff to execute something like that. The toolbox will give you the assets/templates needed to get that social media hiring campaign off the ground. Again, free to ASA member companies.

Two other areas where ASA can help. In the fall, ASA commissioned a pair of special industry compensation/benefits studies. The results of the first survey already have been released — free if you contributed data to it and \$299 if you are an ASA member company that did not contribute data (the study is available to non-ASA member companies at a higher cost).

The first report focuses mainly on warehouse and driver compensation levels, and also hits on inside, outside and showroom sales positions.

Another key ingredient to this first study is data on what companies are doing in terms of incentives for hiring employees (sign-on bonuses, etc.).

Data collection for the second study started earlier this month and the report will be available to folks the first week of January.

If you would like information on how to obtain the first study or how to participate in the current one, contact me at mmiazga@asa.net.

The other item I would like to mention is ASA's PROJECT VITALITY company growth assessment tool. This free and confidential survey assesses how ASA member companies are in terms of readiness for future growth. For example, is your company great at long-term strategic planning? The survey will let you know. There are questions to be answered by C-suite/executive management folks and questions to be answered by frontline employees, giving your company a great cross-section of responses/data.

I would highly recommend taking advantage of this survey. To hire an outside firm to conduct a study like this would cost thousands. ASA has invested significant funds into this project so member companies can take the survey free of charge through the end of 2021 (In January there will be a fee involved to take the survey).

For more details on how to access the survey and how to set up your confidential post-survey consultation with ASA partner New Edge about your individual company results, contact me at mmiazga@asa.net.

This survey could very well help your unearth intel that can help you make your company even more attractive to perspective employees.

My gut tells me this labor thing isn't going away anytime soon, so the more we can put our heads together as an industry and come up with potential solutions to this, the better off we will all be moving forward.

Happy Holidays from everybody here at ASA!

Mike Miazga is vice president of sales and membership at the American Supply Association and former longtime chief editor of Supply House Times and group editorial director of BNP Media's Plumbing Group. Reach him at mmiazga@asa.net.



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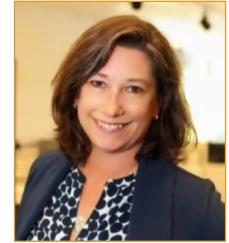
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WOMEN IN INDUSTRY || MEGAN OWEN AND TRACIE SPONENBERG



Megan Owen



Tracie Spenberg

Creating a culture of caring

What does a “culture of caring” mean?

It means if you have a culture of caring, you have an environment where people feel valued, and value others, displaying kindness and concern every day, in every interaction, in every way.

Companies that have been able to create a culture of caring may be rare, but we have several in our industry — including ASA members Eastern Industrial Supplies and The Granite Group.



PREVIOUS PAGE **Megan Owen:**



Culture seems to be all the rage in the corporate world today, or maybe that’s just because I read a lot about it, and because we really focus on it being real. At Eastern, we have a healthy desire to have a positive impact on the lives of people we come in contact with. One of the ways we foster this is through our 28 Fundamentals, or as we call it, The Eastern Way.

Each week we go over a fundamental and really focus on it by discussing it at the beginning of each meeting, in emails, and occasionally as a soft jab to our fellow associates when we catch each other in areas where there is room for improvement.

For example, are there times when you blame shift? I know I do. Actually, I must model that behavior pretty well because I constantly see it in my kids and have to remind them often that we should accept responsibility instead of pointing the finger in another direction.



Our 18th fundamental is to, “Practice Blameless Problem-Solving: Demonstrate a relentless solution focus rather than pointing fingers or dwelling on problems. Take 100% responsibility and make zero excuses. Identify lessons learned and use those lessons to improve ourselves and our processes so that we don’t make the same mistake twice. Get smarter with every mistake.”

These fundamentals help us to put our desired behaviors into words that help us proactively practice because we are seeing them and hearing them on a ritualistic basis.

We recently focused on our 28th fundamental, which is to “Keep Things Fun: While our passion for excellence is real, remember that the world has bigger problems than the daily challenges that make up our work. Stuff happens. Keep perspective, don’t take things personally or take yourself too seriously. Smile and laugh every day.”

This is a good one for me because I can become so focused on my work that I forget that I also need to have fun doing it. In fact, I was reminded of that early in my career when our senior vice president of sales mentioned to me that I should enjoy the journey and not take things so seriously. I was a very young branch manager at the time, with little experience and managing all men. It was intimidating, to say the least. I learned from it and began to enjoy the little things that came my way, because why would anyone not want to have fun doing what they spend most of their time on?

But fun isn’t always to one extreme or the other. There is a balance.

"I have experienced two extremes when it comes to having fun at work," says **Melissa Davenport**, accounts payable representative for Eastern. "With one employer, the management team felt that if you were having fun, then you were not working hard enough. Another employer tried too hard to make things fun, and as a result our department felt constantly behind and not able to meet deadlines. Eastern has a wonderful balance between working hard and having fun. The average person will spend a quarter of their lives working. Why not enjoy it! We have a lot of fun here in the corporate office, whether it's decorating someone's cubicle for their birthday, having a healthy competition between coworkers or celebrating after achieving a goal. I love working in an environment that is filled with a spirit of fun."

At the end of the day, we hope that our culture is true to what we say. We want our words to be followed with action, and I've heard it said that your culture isn't what you say but how your associates really behave. If you really want to have a culture that positively influences others, you have to put action to it and make it happen, and that starts at the top.



Tracie Sponenberg:

At The Granite Group, culture can be seen and felt. As a company, we have our own unique people-first culture. As our CEO **Bill Condron** (incoming ASA president) says, our purpose is our people. As a wholesaler, what we sell can be bought elsewhere. So we don't view ourselves as being in the wholesale business. We're in the service business. And when you are a service business, you have one differentiator — your people.

I remember my first time stepping foot into The Granite Group's central services office just over six years ago. As I sat waiting for the interview, I observed people walking by, smiling and saying hello to each other and to me. A simple thing — but rare in my experience. Throughout the next few hours, I got to meet with a number of people on the team, and I had the same experience. You could see how much people enjoyed working with each other. You could hear the passion in their voices when they spoke about their jobs and their company. Six years later, the passion is still there — and I have it too.

When you start with a foundation of trust, add in teamwork, some fun and core values of PRAISE (professionalism, respect, aggressive, integrity, service and entrepreneurial), you have a recipe for an incredible culture that you can see and feel.

Where does caring fit in? Literally everywhere. It's woven into the fabric of who we are. It's our people caring about our customers and making sure they have what they need to take care of their customers, all the time, without question, even after ours.

It's our CEO visiting all of our locations so regularly, he greets everyone by name. It's our teams at our branches rallying around one of their own going through a tough time and making sure they know they aren't alone. It's our people team following their north star of creating an incredible, individual people experience for every one of our team members. It's everywhere, every day. It's part of who we are.

Caring is so much a part of who we are, that we created a "TGG Cares" Committee a few years ago. Led by **Monica Apgar**, our people experience manager, the committee is made up of people from each of our regions who lead the charge on giving back and supporting others.

"Getting involved with TGG Cares has allowed our team to dig in, in our own communities and give back," Apgar says.

They organize fundraisers several times a year. They create fun opportunities for team members to get together, virtually or in-person (including a cooking class taught from Mexico City, many 5Ks and a virtual ghost tour), and they combine fitness and fun, and giving back in regular challenges. Most importantly, they pass on the culture of caring to local communities through volunteering and financially supporting organizations that are important to our people.

At The Granite Group, our culture of caring was always a part of who we are, but it's also something that can be created intentionally if the right pieces are in place. How do you do that? Well, a caring culture is a healthy culture, one where people feel valued and value others. There's a lot that goes into that, but here are three things to start with:

Get to know your people. Really get to know them. What motivates them? Who they are, inside and outside of work? If you have direct reports, make sure you know the names of their kids and/or pets. A simple thing, but missed by so many! Start every meeting or conversation by asking how people are doing (or a variation), and then really listen. Make learning a priority for all, but especially your frontline managers. They are so critical and are often not given enough opportunities for learning. Create listening opportunities for leadership and executives. It's really important for your people to have a direct line to decision-makers in some form, whether town halls, visits, a suggestion system or something else that works for you. Hire right. Invest in your talent team or training for your managers who hire. Hire the right people, for the right jobs, at the right time. Embrace diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. We are all better when we work with others who aren't exactly like us.

Meagan Owen is vice president of organizational effectiveness at Greenville, South Carolina-based Eastern Industrial Supplies. **Tracie Sponenberg** is chief people officer at Concord, New Hampshire-based The Granite Group. Both are members of the ASA Women in Industry Executive Council.

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Contact Dan



Adventures in pumping

The evolution of pumps, circulators and radiant heat.

I read somewhere that the most prevalent machine in the world is the electric motor. I thought about that for a while and it made sense. Just look around. But then I began to wonder what the second-most prevalent machine in the world is. Turns out it's the pump! And most pumps are connected to electric motors of one kind or another, so there you go. Throw a rock and you'll hit a motor. Or a pump. They're everywhere.

← PREVIOUS PAGE But that wasn't always the case, which brings me to a story. Back in the days of gravity-hot-water heating, before we used pumps, a contractor would install big pipes to keep the resistance to flow at a minimum. The boiler would heat the water, which would then flow languidly upward and toward the radiators. It would nudge the colder water that filled the pipes and radiators above the boiler downward, creating a wonderful Ferris wheel of heat. What goes up, shoves what goes down out of the way, and if you're using gravity, you can rest assured that it will be dependable. Hard to get away from gravity. → NEXT PAGE

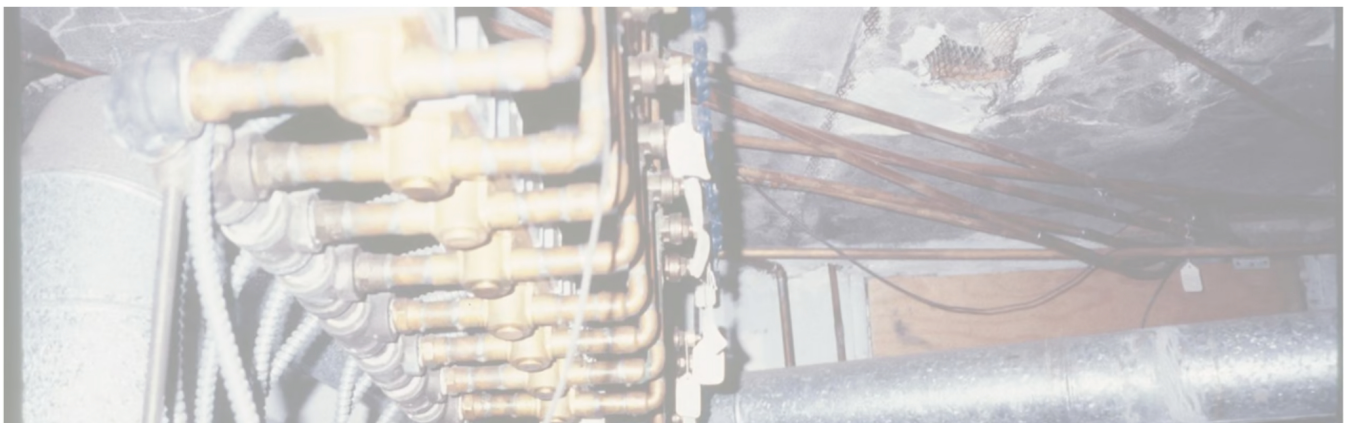
If the contractor followed the rules of gravity-heat piping, the big wheel of water that is a hydronic system would turn like a Ferris wheel and the customers would say, "Ahh!"

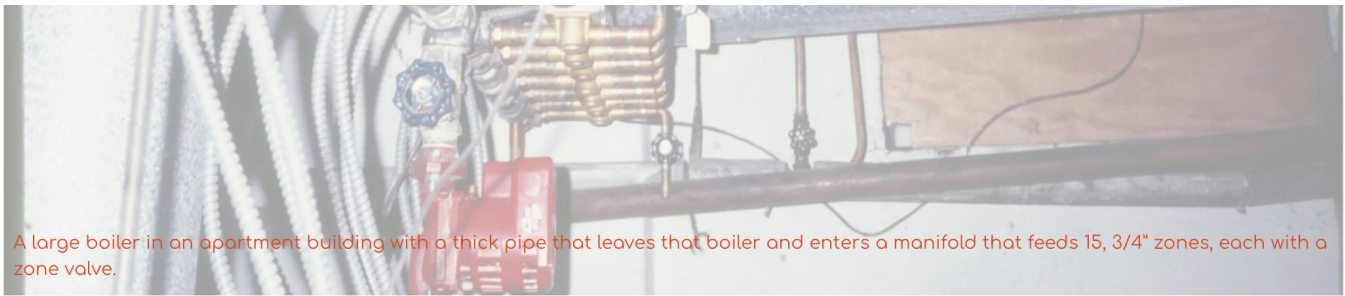
But then 1928 arrived, and with it came the simultaneous introduction of the hot-water circulator in both the US and Germany. Homer Thrush introduced his Thrush circulator to America US. Louis Opländer did the same in Germany with a company he dubbed Wilo. Let's hear it for paradigm shifts.

These new-fangled pumps sped up the water that flowed in gravity systems, and when combined with a flow-control valve, gave the contractor a way to control the flow of hot water between a boiler and the radiators by having one of those new gizmos they called a thermostat start and stop the pump.

Those early pumps were able to move a lot of water against a relatively low resistance to flow because the pipes in a gravity-hot-water system were large. That kept the resistance to flow to a minimum. The Dead Men didn't need much of what we came to call pump head in those days. They did, however, have to get used to the fact that pump head didn't refer to the height of the building, but rather to the resistance to flow that the piping offered as the water flowed around the big loop. The height of the building doesn't matter because the weight of the water going up balances the weight of the water coming down. Think about the motor on a Ferris wheel and you'll understand how a pump in a closed system really works. It's not lifting; it's turning.

And that fact of life was so important to the dead men that they even changed the pump's name to circulator. They wanted to distinguish what is in a closed system from what's in an open system. Fire pump, anyone?





A large boiler in an apartment building with a thick pipe that leaves that boiler and enters a manifold that feeds 15, 3/4" zones, each with a zone valve.

Fast-forward 20 years to 1948 or so and we now see packaged boilers. These showed up because boiler manufacturers realized that if they included the circulator and the controls on the boiler, they could make more money while making the contractor's job easier. The circulators that came with those early packaged boilers all had the ability to move a relatively large flow against a relatively low head. Larger pipes were the norm in those days, and all of those early circulators ran on 1,750-rpm motors. Their flow versus head performance curves were nearly identical, regardless of the manufacturer.

This brings us to the 1970s, a time when the price of fuel soared. People became more aware of efficiency, and that led to the birth of the smaller, water-lubricated circulators. These ran at much higher speed, used less power, and cost less to buy. They soon replaced the 1,750-rpm, oil-lubricated circulators that had been on the packaged boilers for years.

And that's when things got interesting because the little circulators wound up on packaged boilers that ranged in size from small to pretty darn big. And since the boiler manufacturer was providing them, many contractors began to think in terms of one-size-fits-all when it came to the tiny circulators. And that led to problems.

I have this delicious photograph someone sent me years ago. It shows a rather large boiler in an apartment building. A thick pipe leaves that boiler and enters a manifold that feeds 15, 3/4" zones, each with a zone valve.

Here comes the good part:

"Dan," the sender wrote. "I have a serious problem and maybe you can help. I'm sending you a photo of the boiler and the piping that I installed."

I looked at the photo again and noted that the circulator was one that Bell & Gossett called Little Red. That circulator was indeed both little and red.

"Dan," he continued, "when I'm running just a few zones, everything is fine. But when I try to run all 15 zones at the same time, most of them don't get hot. The tenants are complaining. Do you think the boiler is too small? I didn't do a heat-loss before I put in the boiler. I sized the new boiler by what was there before. I don't know what to do now. Help!"

Clearly, he didn't have enough flow, and since heat travels on the flow like a passenger on a train, he didn't have enough heat at the radiators. I asked him why he had used that tiny circulator and he told me he had taken it off another boiler because his customer didn't care for the color red. The contractor didn't want to waste the circulator so he used it on this job instead. Waste not, want not, right?

I asked him if he remembered that scene in *Jaws*, when they realize they're going to need a bigger boat.

"Yes."

"You're gonna need a bigger pump."

He asked how much bigger and we sized it together. And then he asked me who was supposed to pay for that larger pump? I told him that he was because he is the contractor and the contractor is supposed to know more about heating than the people who hired him.

He thought that was terribly unfair.

Not enough flow leads to not enough heat. But too much friction loss through the piping can also lead to not enough heat because too much friction leads to slower flow. Or even to no flow at all.

Here, imagine a large rectangle of pipe that stretches for hundreds of yards. Install that tiny circulator in that rectangle.

Got it?

Good. Now, do you think the water's going to move in that circuit?

I don't either. The circulator will sit there with its impeller spinning, but that will be the only thing moving. There's just too much resistance to flow in that huge circuit. The pressure drop of the circuit will act like two closed service valves, one on either side of the circulator.

Someone will come along and try to purge that circuit. I guarantee that. But purging won't work for them because this isn't an air problem; it's an adventure in hydronic pumping.

Like another example of this? Back in the 1980s, when hydronic radiant heating was catching the attention of contractors, a guy called to ask what size circulator he needed.

"What sort of job is it?" I asked.

"Radiant," he said. "I put a thousand feet of 3/8-inch PEX in a slab. What size pump do I need for that?"

"What's your longest circuit?" I asked.

"A thousand feet. I just told you."

"There's just one circuit?"

"Yeah," he said.

I told him he was gonna need a bigger pump.

"Maybe call your local fire department," I suggested. "They have really big pumps."

To which he said, "Huh?"

Dan Holohan can be reached at dan@heatinghelp.com. He loves hearing from you!

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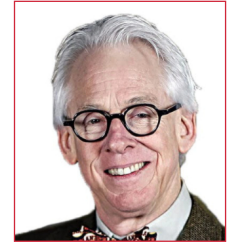
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SHOWROOM DOLLARS AND SENSE || JEFF VALLES



Contact Jeff



Time to bury the past

In 2022, we expand the image of decorative plumbing.

We're almost through the second year of the pandemic and vendors and showrooms are boldly sharing what they think will be popular in 2022. A common thread in many of these predictions is that people are starting to work bold colors and patterns into rooms. This simple prediction tells me it is time for the decorative plumbing industry to move outside — way outside — the chrome and white box.



As I have written quite often, people know that beautiful bathroom fixtures exist and function flawlessly. It's not often a customer enters your showroom and utters, "I had no idea that bathroom faucets could be so lovely." We have changed that mindset. Bravo. Now, let's retool and work to move our showrooms' products to the next level. Let's start to motivate the design world to think of all plumbing fixtures, from faucet to toilet, the same way they think of a fine piece of furniture. Can you imagine if every couch you sold was white with chrome trim? Our products should be on the same level as designer furniture, fabrics and wall coverings. We have the products, we have the talent and we certainly have the style. We have been awarded a hot market with clients craving new, unique options.

We have been awarded a hot market with new clients craving fresh, unique options.



Where do we begin?

Our vignettes must stop a person in their tracks. They must be on par with a retailer's window on 5th Avenue. The days of simply presenting a coordinated selection of products on a soft blue wall are over. That space is too valuable in both rent and opportunity.

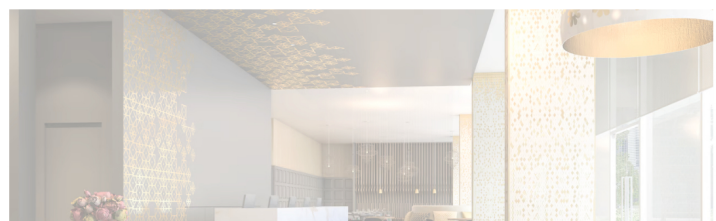
To my earlier point, if people see a faucet they immediately know that the brand also offers a complete selection of coordinated fixtures to complete a 21st-century bathroom. These new luxury showroom vignettes must grab the client's mind and change all they think they know about bathroom design. So do something "crazy." Create great vignettes that could never exist in the real world.

For example, think back to the birth of boutique hotel in the 1980s. Before that time, hotel lobbies had grown predictable. Developers realized they needed to separate their brands from the Hilton, Sheraton and Holiday Inn models. All of a sudden, hotel lobbies became interesting places to see and be seen. Today, boutique hotel lobbies are great places to work by day and places to socialize after five. They are unique, eclectic and memorable. They are not places we could live but we will steal some design ideas for our home spaces. That is the fundamental foundation of designing and presenting show-stopping showroom vignettes.

Your new vignettes should be full of inventive applications in fixture placement, colors and combinations. Here is a simple example. Present an elegant, tarnishing raw brass exposed thermostat shower system installed as an outside shower on a Tiffany Peacock Blue concrete wall with a wild pink blooming bougainvillea vine winding its way through the pipes with a hose bib replacing the showerhead. Add an all matte black shaker vanity, top and faucet.

This collection tells a number of stories:

- Unlacquered brass will tarnish, elegantly;
- Unlacquered brass and matte black are popular;
- Shaker is still popular;



- Plumbing fixtures can be installed outside;
- Your showerhead can be just about anything you want; and
- You can and should shower outside on a beautiful day with your beautiful bougainvillea.



Today, boutique hotel lobbies are great places to work by day and places to socialize after five. They are unique, eclectic and memorable.

Is it practical? Heck no. But, since when have the wealthy been practical? Since when have captivating retail windows been deportations of real-life? Decorative plumbing works can be installed just about anywhere on anything and is versatile in application. Challenge your clients, remove their limited bathroom application norms and replace them with wild ideas. If you dream it, we will source it.

Let's go one step better, "crazy" vignettes play well in social media. Innovatively merchandised vignettes can be imaged from many angles with lighting from anywhere. Posts of displays like these will slowly separate your business from the other plumbing showrooms and give you greater reach into your target market. Bathrooms are not boring, they can be amazing!

This takes dedication. When you start presenting experiential vignettes, customers will gravitate to and remember your creations. This can decrease their "WOW" factor over time. A normal cabinet, toilet, faucet and mirror vignette can last for years because it does not stand out and your professional trade clients will only recall it if they need that look. The rule here is that each dynamic vignette should be replaced every six months. You can stretch it to nine months but that is the maximum, in my opinion. If a high design vignette remains on display for too long it will become yesterday's news and work against your creative imagine in the market.

This does not have to be difficult. Setup a design team. You can leverage your more creative employees and reach outside to a good designer client, an eclectic architect, local art professors and students.

This is not a simple task, but when carried out effectively will elevate your showroom's image above your competition and offer a reason for designers, builders and design engaged homeowners to close their laptops and visit your showrooms.

The premium and luxury remodel markets are on fire and people are looking for design partners that can help them create their look. They do not want a matchy-matchy collection for their bathrooms. People and professionals are looking for multi-line showrooms and brands that will both challenge their view of design and help them create looks that are unique and amazing.

Jeffrey Valles is a Decorative Plumbing and Hardware Association Lifetime Fellow. Contact Jeff at jwvals@gmail.com.

Racking safety

Knowing your flue space requirements.

There are very few work-related emergencies that carry more risk and danger than fire events. Many regulations related to fire prevention have been developed to protect workers and facilities with the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) being responsible for many of them.

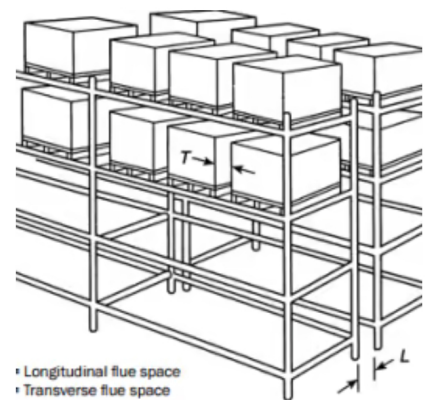
Today's article focuses on an area of fire safety that many are unaware of, flue space requirements. If you're unclear what this is, or have never heard the term, you're not alone. This article will provide you with an understanding of flue spacing and why it is so important when installing industrial racking systems.



Flue spaces are clear vertical lines of sight from the floor up to the ceiling within rack storage areas. There are two types of flue spaces; transverse flues and longitudinal flues. Transverse flues are the spaces between rows of storage in the direction of loading. Longitudinal flues are the spaces between rows of storage perpendicular to the direction of loading that are less than two feet in width (longitudinal flues greater than that are defined as aisles). See the picture below to better understand the difference between them.

Flue spaces are necessary for rack storage arrangements to allow heat from a fire to vent vertically. Without them, ceiling-level sprinklers cannot operate effectively because they may not operate as effectively or quickly as they should.

Proper flue spacing slows down the horizontal fire spread within the racking system by allowing sprinklers to disperse water through the established vertical spaces between stored product and the racking themselves. Flues spaces are also necessary to allow sprinkler water to reach the base of the fire down through the racks. Without adequate water reaching the burning materials on lower levels of racking near the ground, the fire may not be controlled. Unless in-rack sprinklers are installed below every storage tier, maintaining flue spacing is a critical requirement for overhead sprinkler systems to work as intended.



Keeping flue spaces clear of blockages is an important consideration for warehouses that use industrial racking. Poor racking design, oversized products/pallets, and how material is placed on racking are all potential pitfalls for maintaining transverse and longitudinal flue spaces.

According to the NFPA, there must be a 6-inch transverse flue space between loads within a rack structure. Snap-in dividers and rack spacers can help create and maintain this spacing. Without these engineering controls, it puts the responsibility on machine operators to stage material on racks in a manner that maintains the six-inch spacing.

For longitudinal spacing, NFPA requires a minimum longitudinal flue space of 3 inches to allow fire ventilation along with water penetration from the sprinkler system above. When placing racks back-to-back, 3 inch spacing is required for both installations resulting in the need to have at least 6 inches of space. The images below provide examples of spacers that can be used to ensure proper spacing.





Another factor to consider is the depth of your loads. The common pallet/load depth is 48 inches deep. However, if longer pallets/loads are being stored in a rack, an alternative longitudinal flue spacing may be required. For example, if you have pallets that overhang the racking by 3 inches, your flue spacing requirement must account for the overhang. The calculation for this is straightforward (3-inch overhang x 2 pallets front and rear + 6 inches Longitudinal Flue = 12 inches of spacing needed between rows.)

In addition to the racking spacers mentioned above, load stop beams can be used. They are very effective in maintaining flue spacing as the load stops prevent pallets/loads from overhanging the back of racks. Rack straps and safety nets are also products that help to maintain spacing.

In addition to the NFPA guidelines for flue spacing, your local municipality may have additional requirements to be adhered to. Before installing any racking, check with local authorities (i.e. fire marshall, fire departments, etc...) to ensure your racking installation meets regulatory requirements specific to your location.

Michael Place is the safety and compliance officer for Dakota Supply Group. Each month, a member of ASA's Safety Committee writes about a safety-related topic relevant to the PHCP wholesale industry.

PVF BEAT



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶



MRC GLOBAL ANNOUNCES THIRD QUARTER RESULTS

MRC Global announced company sales were \$685 million for the third quarter of 2021, which was consistent with the second quarter of 2021, but 17% higher than the third quarter of 2020, the Houston-based industrial PVF distributor noted.

Sequentially, the U.S. segment experienced modest growth led by the downstream, industrial and energy transition (DIET) sector offset by the international segment, which declined due to delayed maintenance, repairs and operations and project activity, MRC Global explained.

As compared to the third quarter of 2020, broad economic recovery drove improvement in sales across all sectors, it said. Net loss attributable to common stockholders for the third quarter of 2021 was (\$17) million, or (\$0.21) per diluted share, as compared to the third quarter of 2020 net loss of (\$3) million or (\$0.04) per diluted share.

“Our third-quarter results reflect solid execution and good cost control as we achieved adjusted EBITDA margins of 5.7%, the highest for our company in two years,” MRC Global President and CEO Rob Saltiel said. “Our U.S. business grew 2% sequentially while our international segment experienced revenue declines due to delayed MRO and project activity. We expect double-digit revenue growth next year based on our growing backlog and increased customer activity.”

MRC Global's third quarter of 2021 gross profit was \$95 million, or 13.9% of sales, as compared to the third quarter of 2020 gross profit of \$114 million or 19.5% of sales. Gross profit for the third quarter of 2021 includes \$32 million of expense in cost of sales relating to the use of the last-in, first-out (LIFO) method of inventory cost accounting as compared to the third quarter of 2020, which reduced cost of sales by \$11 million. Adjusted gross profit, which excludes the impact of LIFO was \$137 million or 20.0% of revenue, for the third quarter of 2021 and was \$115 million, or 19.7% of revenue, for the third quarter of 2020.





MIDLAND INDUSTRIES ACQUIRES CENTURY BRASS

Midland Industries announced the acquisition of Century Brass Products, a distributor of primarily machined brass fittings and valves to the plumbing industry across the US.

"The acquisition of Century Brass strengthens our team and product offering while expanding our customer base and footprint in the plumbing wholesale space," Midland CEO John Gerber said. "We welcome Terry Klein and his team to the Midland family and look forward to learning from their years of history and deep product knowledge, enabling us to continue providing our customers a distinct advantage in the marketplace."

"We are excited to be part of the Midland family," said Klein, vice president of Century Brass. "We're thrilled to leverage the technology and product offering to our customers, and to utilize the connected network of inventory across the United States."

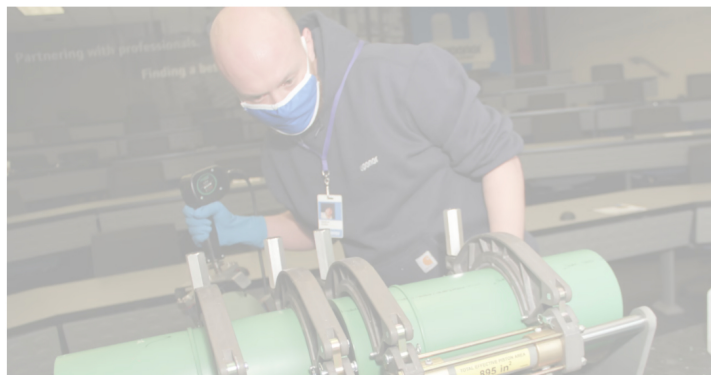


AD BUYING/MARKETING GROUP CONTINUES RECORD-SETTING SALES

The AD buying and marketing group reported member sales in the first nine months of 2021 were \$44 billion, an increase of 34% across its 13 divisions and three countries. Same-store sales were up 19%. Member companies' purchases from AD supplier partners grew 31%. Net distributions to its members were up 41%.

AD's Chairman and CEO Bill Weisberg underscored that these performance measures are a powerful illustration of the commitment the group's members and supplier partners have to each other's success and mutual growth.

Despite remarkable results, Weisberg assures members that the AD team is not resting on its laurels. "Every day, we're out there advocating for our members, negotiating for the best programs and imagining new programs and services to bring value to their businesses," Weisberg said. "Just like our determined, purpose-driven independent members, we're not about to let up now. We have more mountains to climb."





UPONOR ANNOUNCES NATIONAL DISTRIBUTION AGREEMENT WITH WINSUPPLY

Uponor North America announced a national distribution agreement with Winsupply to stock Uponor PP-RCT piping, fittings and accessories at select Winsupply local companies and two distribution centers across the U.S.

"We are excited to announce this new partnership with Winsupply, as they are committed to broadening polymer piping offerings into their channels with strategic partners like Uponor," said **Chris Budion**, vice president of sales at Uponor North America. "We are confident this agreement will create growth opportunities for both companies, as we work together to provide customers with the convenience and efficiency of a complete polymer piping solution from one trusted source."

"Winsupply is eager to help Uponor pioneer this product line," added **Bruce Pilbeam**, product manager, rough-in plumbing, Winsupply. "PP-RCT has shown enormous growth potential in the commercial sector. Winsupply and our local companies are excited to support bringing Uponor PP-RCT to market."

In addition to stocking Uponor's PP-RCT piping system, Winsupply is already leveraging Uponor's commercial training team with hands-on instruction, as well as virtual learning, through Uponor Academy Online. "We are setting Winsupply up for success by ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to confidently sell the benefits of PP-RCT, and safely instruct their customers on proper installation," Budion said.

Available in sizes from 1/2-inch to 12 inches, the Uponor PP-RCT piping system is ideal for use in hydronic heating hot water, chilled water and industrial applications, including condenser water, geothermal, compressed air and vacuum and direct-burial applications.

Uponor offers a 10-year limited warranty on all PP-RCT products. For hybrid Uponor PP-RCT and PEX-a systems, the company offers a 10-year limited warranty on PP-RCT to complement the 25-year transferable limited warranty on all its PEX-a pipe and ProPEX fittings.

DOWN THE PIPE



◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶



PLUMBING AND HEATING WHOLESAL ACQUIRES IOWA DISTRIBUTOR

Mike Plasier, president and CEO of PHW stated: “We are excited to have the Wigman company join our team. We have long wanted to better serve the industrial market in our footprint. The addition of **Dan Hartnett** and his team will allow us to better serve those customers throughout our territory. We will continue to provide the high levels of service that Wigman customers have come to appreciate, and we plan to add services that will ultimately better serve the industrial community throughout the territory we serve”.

Wigman will initially continue to operate in its current location under the same name. Plans will be made in the future to identify a new home for Wigman Co. and the industrial team. The combined companies will offer a variety of product unmatched in the markets PHW serves. The acquisition closed on November 22.





THE GRANITE GROUP ANNOUNCES TWO EXECUTIVE PROMOTIONS

The Granite Group has promoted **Chris Ploss** from chief operating officer to president and **Amir Rosenthal** from chief financial officer to COO. The promotions come as the company lays the foundation for its strategic growth plan.

“The ongoing success of The Granite Group is built upon the talent and commitment of our team,” said **Bill Condron**, CEO of The Granite Group and incoming American Supply Association president. “Chris’s tireless work ethic, creativity and drive over three decades have made him a highly respected leader of our team. Amir, over the past several years with the company, has proven that his talent and contributions reach far beyond finance. They are tremendously valuable partners to me as we steer our business forward.”

Ploss began his career in distribution 33 years ago at Goulet Supply as a sales management trainee. Through a series of acquisitions, Ploss became part of the company known today as The Granite Group. Over the course of his industry career, Ploss has held a number of positions that collectively prepared him for the role he steps into now, including outside sales representative, branch manager, regional director, director of sales, VP of branch sales and operations and, most recently, COO. As Ploss assumes the role of company president, he is looking forward to the growth opportunities he can provide to people across The Granite Group. “At this stage of my career, helping our people take the next steps in their careers is both personally rewarding and a huge benefit to the company,” Ploss said.

Rosenthal, who joined The Granite Group in 2018 as CFO, began his career as an attorney before moving into finance. Despite holding the title of CFO for most of the last 20 years, Rosenthal’s experience is diverse in terms of the types of companies he has been involved with and the issues they faced.

“I did not come up through the traditional finance path. I believe strongly that my experiences have put me in the unique position of being able to see business challenges and solutions comprehensively and from different perspectives,” Rosenthal said. “In my new role as COO, I look forward to driving a variety of important initiatives which cut across the entire organization and are key to supporting our growth.”

The Granite Group has expanded its footprint and the scope of its business in recent years, adding numerous branches, investing heavily in its technology stack and e-commerce capabilities, and adding market disciplines such as propane equipment and supplies; well and water systems; and government and institutional sales.

The search for a CFO is underway.



LIBERTY PUMPS HOSTS GROUNDBREAKING CELEBRATION FOR NEW MATERIALS CENTER

Liberty Pumps hosted a groundbreaking celebration at the site of its upcoming Materials Center. State and local partners as well as Liberty employees attended the event. The 107,000-square-foot expansion will provide additional warehousing and added manufacturing space, the company noted. It is anticipated to support 30 additional jobs at the family- and employee-owned manufacturer.

“Our growth continues to be very strong and we are simply running out of space once again,” said **Randall Waldron**, Liberty Pumps’ vice president of sales and marketing. “This expansion will provide more efficient material storage, as well as provide additional manufacturing space to accommodate our continued strong growth. The added capacity to our

facilities will put us in a position to better support our customers.”

Since opening in 1965, Liberty Pumps has become a manufacturer of sump, effluent and sewage pumps and systems for residential, commercial, municipal and industrial applications.

The project breaking ground will be the third expansion by Liberty Pumps since 2000. Upon completion, Liberty Pumps will have about 350,000 square feet of facilities at its corporate campus in Bergen, New York.



BRADFORD WHITE ANNOUNCES EXPANSION OF FOR THE PRO PLATFORM

Bradford White Water Heaters announced the expansion of the For the Pro platform to include a newly branded training option, For the Pro Training Academy.

The For the Pro Training Academy combines the company’s existing in-person training programs with a new, self-paced e-learning option for Bradford White’s valued contractor customers, the manufacturer explained.

“We have always been known for our commitment to hands-on training,” said **Dustin Bowerman**, senior director – field services for Bradford White Water Heaters. “Now, we’ve extended our training to accommodate the varied and evolving needs of our professional customers.”

Since 2012, Bradford White has trained tens of thousands of plumbing and heating technicians through live, hands-on training in the field or at the International Technical Excellence Center (iTEC) in Middleville, Michigan.

According to Bowerman, the For the Pro Training Academy e-learning also broadens the 24-7 access that pros have to Bradford White.

“We have been providing live, 24-7 technical support through iTEC for more than a decade,” Bowerman said. “Now, our customers can also avail themselves of our training 24-7.”

The first learning path, entitled “Bradford White’s Knowledge Series,” will include topics such as venting, heat transfer principles, water heater essentials and product introductions.

“Providing world-class training is a critical part of our commitment to the professional contractor,” Bowerman said. “It was important for us to evolve and update that commitment in terms of how we deliver our training to the current and next generation of pros.”

For more information regarding all of Bradford White Water Heaters training, please visit www.bradfordwhite.com/training.





OATEY CO. HOSTS CAREER EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Oatey Co., a manufacturer in the plumbing industry since 1916, hosted a career education workshop for Northeast Ohio Girl Scouts at its Oatey University training facility in Cleveland, welcoming nearly 30 Girl Scouts to learn about careers in manufacturing and STEM.

The program was organized by Oatey's Women's Resource Network, an associate resource group dedicated to the professional, personal and leadership development of women. Oatey developed the event as part of the Girl Scouts' BADGE BOSS program, which connects local professionals with Girl Scouts to share their expertise, advice and passion, while enabling the Scouts to earn a relevant Girl Scout badge.

Attendees at Oatey's workshop, which took place in late October, gained hands-on exposure to careers across manufacturing, while also exploring their own interests and passions, Oatey explained. Key components of the two-hour workshop included:

- A personal-reflection exercise to help Scouts identify how their interests connect to real-world careers;
- A panel discussion in which Oatey associates explained their role in the development and delivery of Oatey products;
- A tour of the Oatey University training facility with hands-on demonstrations of Oatey products; and
- An interactive tower-building team competition, using Oatey Plumber's Putty and spaghetti.

All Girl Scouts who completed the workshop qualified for their STEM Career Exploration Girl Scout badge.

"It was a privilege for Oatey to host this group of energetic Girl Scouts and share more with them about the many career paths available in STEM and manufacturing," said Amber Deighton, co-chair of Oatey's Women's Resource Network and manager of Oatey University. "Our Women's Resource Network is passionate about supporting girls and women in our communities, and we are thrilled to establish this partnership with the Girl Scouts."

Oatey plans to host another BADGE BOSS workshop in 2022 and expand the program to other cities in which it operates, it said. For more information about Oatey University or opportunities to partner with Oatey, visit www.oatey.com or email hello@oatey.com.



OBITUARY: MATCO-NORCA COFOUNDER DOV MATZ

Matco-Norca announced the death of its cofounder **Dov Matz**, who passed away on Nov. 8, after a two-year battle with Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. Matz was 76 years old and is survived by his wife, Elizabeth, and daughters, Nora, and Melissa. He is preceded in death by his son, Michael, who worked alongside him for 20 years at Matco-Norca.

Matz cofounded Matco-Norca in 1952 and spent most of his career leading the company as it grew to the trusted and respected brand it is today. He was treasured by his employees, customers, sales reps and suppliers throughout the industry. He retired from Matco-Norca in 2018, but would often stop by to catch up and see how the business was doing.

"The toughest thing to do with Dov was to attend an industry function," remembered **Jack McDonald**, president and CEO of Matco-Norca. "Dov was so well known and respected that attending a trade show was like walking the floor with a celebrity — everyone knew him."

Matz was an active member of the Mount Kisco Hebrew Congregation and served as president for many years.

"He will be greatly missed by everyone who knew him," the company said.



RWC ACQUIRES EZ-FLO

Reliance Worldwide Corp. entered into an unconditional agreement to acquire all the issued shares of EZ-FLO International for \$325 million. The business is being acquired from interests associated with EZ-FLO's founder **Saleem Lahlouh**.

EZ-FLO is a manufacturer and distributor of plumbing supplies, including plumbing specialty products, appliance supply lines, flexible water connectors, gas connectors and other accessories. Established in 1980, EZ-FLO has grown rapidly by continuously expanding its product range, RWC noted. In 2000, EZ-FLO acquired the EASTMAN brand, a leading brand in large appliance connectors in the U.S. The EASTMAN brand will immediately position RWC as a leader in supporting all those who service major appliance installations, including plumbed appliances, gas, hot water and dryer venting, RWC added.

RWC explained that about half of EZ-FLO's revenues are generated from products manufactured at its plant located within the Ningbo Free Trade Zone in China, with a further 20% sourced from exclusive third-party manufacturers in China. In the U.S., EZ-FLO has a network of seven distribution centers from which its extensive product range is distributed through 5,000 channel partner outlets.

EZ-FLO's executive management team will remain with the business following completion.

RWC Group CEO **Heath Sharp** said the acquisition of EZ-FLO aligns with RWC's growth strategy, and will enhance the company's market position.

"The acquisition of EZ-FLO is strongly aligned with RWC's strategy of adding complementary products that broaden the depth of solutions offered to end users and expand our market presence in aligned sectors," he said. "Together, we manufacture some of the most trusted brands in the industry, including SharkBite, HoldRite, John Guest, Speedfit, and Cash Acme. With EZ-FLO and EASTMAN, the No. 1 brand in the U.S. appliance connector market, we will be positioned as a leader in supporting all those who service major appliance installations.

"The combination of EZ-FLO's product portfolio, manufacturing and sourcing capabilities, distribution footprint, customer service, performance track record and future growth prospects makes it an important and attractive addition to RWC," Sharp continued. "We will be seeking to leverage our extensive channel partner network in North America to expand the distribution footprint for EZ-FLO, while at the same time benefiting from EZ-FLO's strong relationships with retail merchants and OEM customers.

"Customers will benefit from more top-quality products and trusted brands, enhanced fulfillment capabilities and improved service, thanks to a more extensive national warehouse footprint," Sharp added. "Our combined supply chain capabilities will help ensure products are available where and when our customers need them, strengthening customer service across every channel. Our 'first-time-right' performance commitment provides end users with products they can count on, protecting customers' hard-won reputations."

Completion, subject to customary conditions, is expected to occur this month.



Build With Purpose

PRIER PRODUCTS EARNS SUSTAINABILITY AWARD

PRIER Products was honored with a sustainability award for its efforts to reduce unnecessary waste and implement ways to protect the planet via this yearly Kansas City Industrial Council program that recognizes local businesses.

PRIER was among seven organizations receiving an award, including Bayer CropScience, Kansas City Testing & Engineering, Metropolitan Community College, The RMR Group, J. Reiger & Co., and Kansas City Water.

“We work hard to reduce waste and take necessary steps to create a cleaner and more sustainable company,” PRIER Vice President of Manufacturing Brady Poskin said. “Our team and partners identified ways we could make a significant impact. We began implementing changes and quickly realized the results from our efforts.”

Efforts that led to the award include:

- PRIER installed solar panels on each of its buildings, allowing the company to significantly cut its carbon footprint. Motion-detected LED lighting is used throughout the warehouse and offices to further reduce energy costs. PRIER saves more than 330,000 kilowatt-hours per year; enough to power 30 houses for more than a year;
- In the past year, PRIER recycled more than 150 tons of brass, 6 tons of copper and other metals, and 25,000 cubic feet of cardboard. PRIER’s products are manufactured in the heartland of the United States, reducing the transportation costs and minimizing environmental factors associated with shipping, especially from manufactures based outside the U.S.; and
- All of PRIER's products are designed to the highest standards developed by the American Society for Sanitary Engineers (ASSE). Through engineering and design modifications, PRIER reduced the number of SKUs stocked by customers by more than 50%.

“We’re on a mission to help people, protect the planet and make a profit,” CEO Joe Poskin said. “We’ve dedicated resources to ensure we hit our goals each year, which include utilizing renewable energy, recycling and sustainable design and manufacturing techniques. It’s wonderful to be recognized for the difference we’re making, not only in the Kansas City area but across all of North America for our various customers and distribution channels.”

MOVERS AND SHAKERS



KNIEPS



GREENE



BARNES

◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

PEOPLE NEWS

▶ **PMI** announced the election of **Martin Knieps** as president of the 2022 PMI Board of Directors during PMI's 67th Annual Meeting of the Membership yesterday. The senior director of operational excellence at Viega, Knieps succeeds **Todd Teter**, senior vice president and general manager of the Professional Plumbing Group House of Rohl North America, a division of Moen. Teter will remain on the board as immediate past president. The meeting was held during the PMI21 Manufacturing Success Conference in San Diego.

In addition to Knieps and Teter, the other members of the 2022 board will be board vice president **Sal Gattone**, LIXIL; board secretary/treasurer **Chip Way**, Lavelle Industries; and at-large directors **Daniel Gleiberman**, Sloan Valve; **Cambria McLeod**, Kohler; **Bob Neff**, Delta Faucet; and **Belinda Wise**, Kerox, Ltd.

In his acceptance remarks, Knieps said he was honored by the confidence placed in him by the membership. He emphasized PMI's abundant room to grow by embracing the opportunities created by products using Internet of Things and artificial intelligence technology and by addressing challenges posed by climate change. "Nobody does the work alone and your participation makes all the difference," he said.

Knieps thanked Teter for his contributions as the 2021 PMI board president by presenting him with a California state flag flown over the capitol in Sacramento. He also announced that the 68th Annual Meeting of the Membership will be held as part of the PMI22 Manufacturing Success Conference from Oct. 24-27, 2022, at the Omni Louisville Hotel in Louisville, Kentucky.

In remarks summing up 2021, Teter recognized PMI member companies that joined during the year — Brasscraft, Elkay and Dornbracht, announced the acceptance of Uponor as a new manufacturing member in 2022, and welcomed prospective new members and 16 first-time conference attendees. He presented the PMI President's Award to Pete Jahrling, director, design engineering, Sloan Valve Co., and former two-term PMI board president.

Teter also praised PMI volunteers and member companies for stepping up during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect public health and safety and to assure that PMI could accelerate value to members during a difficult time. In 2022, as PMI members begin a new initiative to address climate change by setting a goal of zero waste, Teter said, "none of us has the solution to climate change but each has a part to play."

In his state of the association report, PMI CEO/Executive Director **Kerry Stackpole** congratulated Teter for his leadership during a challenging year and expressed his delight in seeing all the attendees in person. "The success of PMI is found in three things – people, process and products," he stated. Stackpole held a moment of silence in memory of Paul Patton, a former PMI board president, and spoke of his distinguished contributions to PMI and the plumbing manufacturing industry. He also reviewed PMI's accomplishments, its coalition partners, and the issues the association tackled during 2021.

DDI System, a provider of ERP and eCommerce software for wholesale-distributors, announced **David Greene** has stepped into a new role with the company as director of business development. Greene, founder and former partner

of a market-specific ERP for foodservice equipment and supply dealers joined DDI System as a dedicated foodservice market specialist in January 2020. Greene's wealth of industry expertise and trusted relationships strengthened DDI's focus and growth in the foodservice equipment and supplies industry over the past year and a half, the company noted.

Greene is now responsible for growing the company's business in all markets, finding new business opportunities and helping to build a strong, recognizable brand alongside the marketing and sales teams. His extensive distribution experience and interpersonal relationships will drive his ability to spot new growth opportunities and solidifying current customer, buying group and association relationships, the company explained.

"David has proven to be an extremely valuable member of the DDI System management team. His experience and unique ability to build lasting relationships has resulted in new opportunities and greater software enhancements to serve foodservice equipment dealers and dozens of other distributor markets," DDI System CEO **Adam Waller** said.

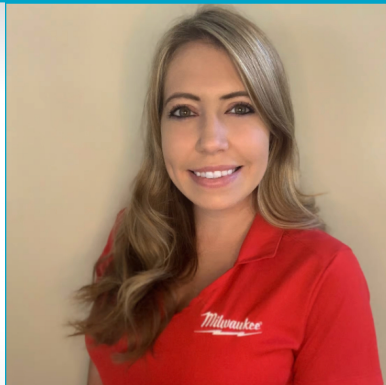
Greene's prior experience includes vice president of business development at AutoQuotes, where he assisted in sales, product development and implementation of the leading quoting software for foodservice equipment and commercial kitchen design.

Barnes joins Centrotherm Eco Systems

Centrotherm Eco Systems, manufacturer of the InnoFlue brand of polypropylene vent systems and accessories, announced a key addition to the sales team.

Jason Barnes joins Centrotherm as regional sales manager covering the Western territory of the United States. Barnes joins Centrotherm with almost two decades of experience. Previously, Barnes worked in the waterworks plant and industrial industry where he helped improve the United States' outdated water infrastructure, while supporting domestic manufacturing and American jobs, Centrotherm noted.

"It was an easy decision to join Centrotherm," Barnes explained. "The company exemplifies commitment to the betterment of the HVAC/plumbing industry. I look forward to supporting American jobs, manufacturing and continuing to promote and sell cutting-edge products that will greatly improve the industry."



GIBSON-THOMAS

Milwaukee Tool recognized Hermitage, Pennsylvania-based Preferred Sales as its agency of the year within the plumbing and HVAC channels at its national sales meeting this fall.

Milwaukee Tool recognizes several agencies and individuals for outstanding achievement within the plumbing and HVAC channels. Award recipients are measured on consistent year-over-year sales growth, product knowledge, product conversions, promotional and merchandising execution.

"We are relentlessly committed to serving the PHVAC industry by delivering disruptive solutions that drive best-in-class performance and enhanced productivity and safety for plumbers and mechanical users," said **Nick Mathiowdis**, national sales manager for plumbing and HVAC channels at Milwaukee Tool. "We are proud to partner with manufacturer reps that clearly understand and share our vision."

Milwaukee Tool also congratulated the following award-winners this year:

Agency of the Year: Preferred Sales Inc.; covering western PA and OH

Power Tool Accessory / Hand Tool Agency of the Year: Snider Inc.; covering NC and SC

Sales Person of the Year: Jessica Gibson-Thomas, Preferred Sales Inc.; covering western PA and OH

Power Tool Accessory / Hand Tool Salesperson of the Year: Paul Grothaus, Rich-Tomkins, Inc.; covering eastern PA and DE

Inside Salesperson of the Year: Bev Howell, Preferred Sales Inc.; covering western PA and OH.

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◀ PREVIOUS PAGE

NEXT PAGE ▶

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