



The 25 Most Influential Contractors Of The Past Quarter Century

In the plumbing/hydronic/radiant world, these contractors made a lasting impression.



As PM staffers began discussing various story ideas for our 25th anniversary issue, one of the first items we decided on was recognizing the contractors who were the most influential in the plumbing and hydronic/radiant heating industries.

After a lot of brainstorming, we came up with the following people (in alphabetical order) whom we'd like to thank for their service to the industry:

1. John E. "Tripp" Ahern III: Heading up one of the oldest companies in the industry, Tripp Ahern has championed the green building movement. In fact, J.F. Ahern Co. had green in mind when it recently added on to its headquarters building in Fond du Lac, Wis. ([See "Practical Green," August 2008.](#))

We also wrote about Ahern and his company philosophy of "concentrating on the fundamentals" to increase the profitability of his company. This includes a broad training for J.F. Ahern employees ([see "Focused Growth," August 1998.](#))

2. David Allen: An executive vice president at Seattle's McKinstry Co., David Allen has been a vocal proponent of company branding, as well as the green construction movement. He has traveled around the country explaining the concept of branding to contractor firms and showing them how to define their image ([see "Brand Power," July 2000.](#))

Allen has also gone on the road to discuss emerging markets in the green economy for mechanical contractors. (Update: Plumbing & Mechanical named McKinstry Co. its [first Mechanical Contractor of the Year in 2015.](#))

3. John Barba: In recent years, John Barba has made a name for himself as a radiant and hydronics trainer. He has that unique ability to explain radiant and hydronic heat concepts in a way that everyone can understand. He worked for his family's Massachusetts plumbing and heating business before striking out and working with several firms as inside sales/tech support and radiant designer. Barba then transitioned to training, first with Uponor and now with Taco.

He's written many times for PM and our Radiant Heating Report. Here's a sample:

- [“Radiant Alternatives,”](#) June 2006
- [“Snowmelting Q&A,”](#) September 2004
- [“Da Fundamentals!”](#) RHR 2002
- [“Make training classes work for you,”](#) RHR 2014

4. Frank Blau: PM Editorial Director **Jim Olsztynski** said it all in [this article](#).

5. George Brazil: One of the founders of Contractors 2000/Nexstar, George Brazil founded and still operates one of the nation’s largest plumbing-heating-cooling service firms operating throughout Southern California and into parts of Arizona. Among his pioneering innovations was developing a fleet of colorful cube service vehicles bearing the likeness of a youthful, uniformed George Brazil charging with a toolbox. Inventory is systematically arranged within the vehicles.

For those of you with old copies of PM, we ran a cover story on Brazil and his operation in October 1990. (Update: Plumbing & Mechanical wrote about [Brazil’s unique marketing ideas in May 2012](#). He died in 2012.)

6. Jim Curry Sr.: Founder and operator of a Boston-area plumbing company later taken over by his son, Jim Curry Sr. served as a past president of PHCC-NA and spent many years defending consumer and industry interests on the Massachusetts Board of Plumbing Examiners.

7. Mike Diamond: A founding member and past director of Contractors 2000/Nexstar, Mike Diamond left that organization to help start Plumbers Success International. He is also the founder of service-and-repair contracting company Mike Diamond Plumbing, Heating, Air Conditioning and Electrical based in Los Angeles — “L.A.’s most famous plumber.”

He started his business at age 19, and rapidly grew the company by acquiring competing firms. He expanded from one location with 30 trucks to nine locations with 100+ trucks.

8. Mark Eatherton: The 2008-2010 winner of the Carlson-Holohan Award for Excellence (co-sponsored by Plumbing & Mechanical), Mark Eatherton wears many hats: contractor, teacher, writer, speaker. He is a licensed master plumber, he teaches hydronics at Red Rock Community College in Colorado, and writes for various industry publications.

He is also a proponent for green technologies; he spoke at last fall’s ISH North America trade show on the benefits of geothermal heat pumps.

Recently he announced that he would be leaving Denver-based Advanced Hydronics Inc. to increase his educational reach to contractors, wholesalers and owners. He also wants to continue offering his expertise regarding retrofit energy conservation efforts on multifamily buildings, as well as troubleshooting and design services.

For a humorous look at some of Eatherton's more interesting service calls, check out this article from our archives — [“It Can Happen To You!”](#) (Update: Eatherton is now the executive director of the Radiant Professionals Alliance.)

9. Bill Erickson: A third-generation leader of Chicago-area-based C.J. Erickson Plumbing, Bill Erickson did much to keep the business his grandfather started in the forefront of the industry. He also supports his industry where and when he can, most recently promoting green plumbing and mechanical codes as chairman of IAPMO's Green Technical Committee.

The 103-year old company is now headed by the fourth generation — Bill's son Matt. For insight into this longstanding company, and Bill's role in it, read the profile we published in 2006 ([“C.J. Erickson Plumbing Co.: Turning 100 Years In The Big City,”](#) March 2006).

10. Dan Foley: An HVAC contractor turned hydronics and radiant master, Dan Foley has embraced the “wet side” of heating so much that he now trains other contractors. He is still a “scorched-air” contractor, but most of his business is installing and servicing high-end residential radiant/snowmelt systems.

In fact, Foley doesn't consider himself or his company, Lorton, Virginia-based Foley Mechanical Inc., as either HVAC or hydronics/radiant — he considers himself a “comfort contractor” (see [“The Comfort Contractor,”](#) February 2006). (Update: Foley is now an integral part of ACCA's Radiant & Hydronics Council.)

11. Patty Frank: The current chairperson of the Quality Service Contractors, Patty Frank has been involved in QSC and the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors association for many years and is a strong supporter of the industry and her fellow plumbing service contractors. She is also one of the few “women in plumbing” who has a prominent position within the industry.

She and her husband, Milton, own Milton Frank Plumbing, Spring, Texas.

12. Mary Garvelink: The first woman to be elected president of the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling

Contractors — National Association in 2004, Mary Garvelink is business manager and co-owner (with her husband, John) of Commercial Design Engineering, Colorado Springs, Colo.

She was elected as the U.S. voting representative to the World Plumbing Council in 2005. Her three-year term ended in 2008.

13. Charles “Chuck” Hiley Jr.: Former CEO of HiMEC Inc. (Rochester, Minn.) Chuck Hiley was a strong supporter of his industry. He was PHCC’s national secretary in 1994-1995 and a board member from 1993 to 1995. Training and education was his passion — he served two terms as chair of the PHCC’s Educational Foundation and was a UA Training Fund trustee.

He also was involved in many committees of the Union-Affiliated Contractors, and was a member of the Mechanical Contractors Association of America.

Hiley died in December 2000.

14. Tab Hunter: A former contractor and now head of franchise operations at Clockwork Home Services (which owns Benjamin Franklin Plumbing), Tab Hunter (no, not the movie star) knows about going it alone in business as well as being part of a growing franchise. He started his business in 1992 when he was 23, focusing on new construction. He switched to service in 1996.

In 2005, Tab Hunter Plumbing, Heating and Cooling (Nashville, Tenn.) was split into two Clockwork franchises: Benjamin Franklin Plumbing and One Hour Air-Conditioning and Heating. Those businesses were sold to Clockwork when he took the Clockwork franchise operations job.

We will be profiling Hunter and [his association with Clockwork Home Services in our May 2009 issue](#), but click here to read about his philosophy on labor ([“How Contractors Beat The Labor Shortage”](#)). (Update: Hunter has left Clockwork and his new venture is the Surfin’ Plumbers in Florida.)

15. R.R. “Dick” Irwin: One of the founders of Farmer & Irwin Mechanical Contractors (Riviera Beach, Fla.), Dick Irwin was a past president of PHCC-NA and a driving force behind the formation of the PHCC Educational Foundation during the early 1980s, and served as its chairman. Dick’s son Steve now runs the company.

16. E. Robert Kent: Co-founder of Baltimore-based Poole & Kent Co., Robert Kent was recognized throughout the industry as a visionary, an intellect, an innovator, a humanitarian, an

environmentalist and a gentleman. He dedicated much of his professional life to enhancing the image of the mechanical contracting industry and to improving the professionalism of the mechanical contractor.

He was a past president of MCAA and the MCA of Maryland. He was honored with MCAA's Distinguished Service Award in 1997 and its Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999. Kent was the first chairman of MCAA's Management Methods Committee; in his honor, MCAA's E. Robert Kent Award for Management Innovation was established in 1990 to set up a mechanism for recognizing the merit of innovations that improve productivity, enhance motivation, increase profits, or achieve cost-effectiveness for the mechanical construction and service industry.

Kent died in December 2000.

17. Dave Kruse: President of 102-year-old L.J. Kruse Co. (Berkeley, Calif.), Dave Kruse is also one of the industry's most fervent advocates of green/sustainable construction. The 2007-2008 president of MCAA, he was instrumental in putting together MCAA's Green Opportunities Conference in 2007, as well as the group's green contractors Web site and other green-construction-related programs.

Key personnel at L.J. Kruse, including Kruse, are LEED-accredited, and the firm's new office is seeking LEED Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

18. Al Levi: One of PM's popular columnists, Al Levi has gone from managing his family's plumbing and heating business to becoming a well-known industry trainer, with expertise in operations, sales, staffing and leadership.

He has conducted many business makeovers, and a few have been explained in the pages of Plumbing & Mechanical:

- ["Making Work...Work," January 2005](#)
- ["Good As Golden," May 2008](#)

19. Foster McCarl Jr.: Founder of mechanical contracting firm McCarl's (Beaver Falls, Pa.), Foster McCarl Jr. was president of the national MCAA organization in 1993. Because of his passion for industry education, he also took the lead in establishing the Mechanical Contracting Education & Research Foundation, which created the Foster McCarl Jr. Philanthropy Award in 2000. The objective of the award is to recognize and celebrate the exceptional efforts of an individual,

company or local association to raise funds in support of the foundation.

McCarl died in January 2007.

20. Roger Peugeot: Long before “Joe The Plumber” made his public debut during the 2008 presidential campaign, there was Roger The Plumber. Owner of Overland Park, Kan.-based plumbing service firm Roger The Plumber, Roger Peugeot has been a staple in the industry since he bought his father’s plumbing business in 2001.

He has been extremely involved in industry organizations, including QSC (served as trustee) and PHCC (served as board member). He also has served on several plumbing advisory boards for A.O. Smith, Delta Faucet, Kohler and In-Sink-Erator.

Peugeot was also one of the hosts of “The Home Ranger” syndicated radio show, along with partner Tim Carter. They have appeared on many national and local radio shows, and also published several “Home Ranger” books. (Update: Peugeot is now the executive director of the PHCC Educational Foundation.)

21. Bill Raymond: Co-owner and vice president of Frank & Lindy Plumbing & Heating Service Co., Peekskill, N.Y, Bill Raymond is also a board member and popular business trainer for Nexstar (the former Contractors 2000).

Hiring, retaining and training first-rate service technicians are challenges for all service firms in the industry. Raymond is passionate about passing on his successes in those areas to the industry through speaking engagements at Nexstar meetings and other industry events, including PM’s Innovative Thinking 2006: Hiring-Training-Retention program in June 2006.

22. Paul Ridilla: If PM gave an award to its writers for longevity, one of the first would have to go to Paul Ridilla (the first, of course, would go to Editorial Director Jim Olsztynski). Ridilla’s Practical Management column appeared in Plumbing & Mechanical very first issue — “How To Find Good Help” — and he’s been a contributor ever since, drawing on his vast industry management experience to help contractors hire and retain the best employees.

23. Richard Trethewey: Well-known for his work on PBS’s “This Old House,” Rich Trethewey has brought the world of radiant heat to the masses. In fact, Editorial Director Jim Olsztynski called Trethewey one of radiant’s pioneers in his June 2000 editorial: “Radiant heat is catching on with a

large enough segment of the public to make it a vibrant industry in its own right. I think one person who deserves a great deal of credit for this is Rich Trethewey. Television is an enormously powerful influence. The repeated exposure given to radiant heat by Rich on the ‘This Old House’ program may be the single most important factor in the rising popularity of radiant heat.”

Trethewey used to write for Plumbing & Mechanical back in the 1980s, during the early days of TOH. At the time, he worked for the family business — Trethewey Brothers Inc. He is now the president of RST Inc., a manufacturers rep firm that provides training for the skilled trades. And, of course, you can still see him on your TV screen.

24. Jo Rae Wagner: The second woman to be named president of PHCC — National (2006-2007), Jo Rae Wagner is president of CTO Inc., the plumbing business her father started in Harlingen, Texas. She took over her father’s firm after her husband died and found out first-hand how women in the industry can be perceived.

Wagner believes that attracting women to the plumbing industry is essential to supplying the skilled workers that the industry requires. And that doesn’t mean just the field work. The plumbing and heating industry needs estimators, project managers and middle managers, too — jobs that Wagner says women are well-suited for.

25. Dave Yates: Another strong supporter of green/sustainable construction is plumbing and radiant heating contractor Dave Yates, owner of F.W. Behler Inc. (York, Pa.), one of the industry’s oldest firms. His enthusiasm for the industry he serves is evident in his writing and his fundraising, as well as the programs he presents around the country.

Yates is the 2006-2008 recipient of Carlson-Holohan Award for Excellence. The award recognizes an outstanding industry volunteer who contributes to the education of others, raises funds for industry events, and provides mentorship to youth who have made career choices to be in the hydronics and steam business. Check out Dave's 2015 RHR [article on electric snow melt](#).

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**2015 Mechanical Contractor of the Year:
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Kelly Faloon is editor of Plumbing & Mechanical as well as the BNP Media Plumbing Group's Integrated Content Development Specialist. She also is editor of the Radiant Comfort Guide the Radiant & Hydronics Report — both official publications of the Radiant Professionals Alliance — and twice-monthly Radiant & Hydronics eNews, an newsletter for anyone interested in the world of heating with hot water.

Her editorial specialties include women in plumbing, recruiting for the trades, green construction techniques, water conservation, water treatment, hydronic heating, radiant heating and cooling, snow melt, solar thermal and geothermal.

After a 3½-year stint at sister publication *Supply House Times*, Faloon joined the PM staff in December 2001 as senior editor. She was named PM's managing editor in 2006 and editor in 2013.

Previously, she spent nearly 10 years at CCH, a publishing firm specializing in business and tax law, where she wore many hats — proofreader, writer/editor for a daily tax publication, and Internal Revenue Code editor.

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