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AQUA


The Business Magazine for Spa & Pool Professionals

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Curtain Call

A look back at 20 years of the AQUA 100





LAST FALL, AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION, AQUA DECIDED to lower the curtain on the AQUA 100 program and put in its place an annual State of the Industry issue, which we think will better serve a broader portion of the industry. It debuts next month.

Before we say goodbye, though, we'd like to thank the thousands of companies that entered over the years. Each entry provided us with valuable insight into the workings of successful spa and pool builders, retailers and service professionals, and special knowledge was gleaned from the select group of winners each year. In many cases, the owners and executives of those companies have become friends and allies whose opinions and expertise we seek often. And that's something we don't plan on ending.

This year we induct six new companies into the AQUA 100 Hall of Fame, which recognizes companies who've been honored five consecutive years or eight overall. And although that select group will no longer grow, we will continue to seek the advice and input from the companies that make it up. In a way, they'll be our eyes and ears, our advisory board, and you'll continue to see their names in the magazine addressing a range of issues.

All told, more than 500 companies made the list at least once, with 48 of the 50 states represented (West Virginia and Wyoming are the exceptions). The companies ranged in size from \$100,000 in gross revenues to over \$20 million; from venerable old retailers and builders to upstart service companies. As different as they were, they shared the same commitment to customer service, product knowledge, design and overall professionalism, qualities that can be hard to explain, but are easy to recognize.

So a very special thank-you to the judges who pored over entry packets each year, and an even bigger one to the people who put them together. ~

BY BARRETT KILMER

2010 AQUA 100 Hall of Fame



INDUCTED

Above-Ground Pool & Spa Company	2004
Anchor Aquatech Pools & Spas	2002
Aqua Pool & Patio	2004
Aqua Quip	1996
Aqua Spas & Pools	2001
Aqua-Blue Aquatech Pools & Spas	1996
AQUA-Liberty Pool, Spa & Hearth	2004
Aqualand Pool, Spa & Patio	2007
Aquarius Pool & Spa Service	2003
Arkansas Pools & Spas	2002
Bachmann Pools & Spas, LLC	2005
Backyard Amenities	2004
Backyards of America	2002
Branch Brook Co.	1998
Browning Pool & Spa	2002
Budd's Pool Co.	1998
Burnett Pools	1996
California Pools & Spas	2002
Carlson Pool & Spa	1996
Charlottesville Aquatics	2004
Colley's Pools & Spas	2007
Concord Pools Ltd.	2002
Crystal Pools	2003
Custom Pools	1996
Dolphin Pool Supply & Service	2002
Dover Pools & Supplies	1996
Downes Swimming Pool Co.	2003
Eastgate Pools & Spas	2010
Easton Pool and Spa	2004
Essig Pools	2001
Family Pools & Spas	2003
Flohr Pools	2008
Gohlke Pools	2003
Great Atlantic Pools, Spas, Patio, Fireplace	2005
Greenwood Swimpool Co.	2001
Gym & Swim, "A Master Pool Builder"	2003
Hot Spring Spa of North County	2001
Intermountain Aquatech	2003
International Hot Tub Co.	2002
JABCO Master Pools	2002
Knickerbocker Pools & Spas	2001
Lifestyles Hot Spring Spas	2002

Long Island Hot Tubs	2002
Luther Stern Pools & Spas	2009
Maryland Pools	2005
Master Pools by Patio Pools of Tucson	1996
Mermaid Pools & Spas	2002
Mission Pools	2004
Mountain Hot Tub	2004
New England Spas & Sunrooms	2003
Ocean Spray Hot Tubs and Saunas	2009
Olympia Pools	2010
Olympic Hot Tub Company	2002
Oregon Hot Spring Spas	2005
Paddock Pool Construction Co.	1998
Palmer Pool Sales	2004
Paragon Pools	2009
Performance Pool & Spa	2004
Perry Pools & Spas	2002
Pettis Pools & Patio	2002
Piper Pools	2002
Platinum Aquatech	2010
Polynesian Pools	2008
Pool & Patio Center	2006
Pool & Spa Outlet	2003
Pool Doctor of Rhode Island, The	2003
Pool World	2000
Poolman of Wisconsin	2010
Pools Plus	2000
Poolside	2008
Pulliam Aquatech Pools	2002
Rainbow Pools & Spas	2001
Regina Pools & Spas	2000
River Oaks Pools, LP	2006
Riverbend Pools	2004
Royal Pools & Spas	2001
Sabine Pools & Spas	2009
Sandler Pools	2003
Seasonal Specialty Stores	2002
Shasta Pools & Spas	1996
Southwest Pools & Spas/A Master Pool Builder	2003
Spa Palace	2002
Teddy Bear Pools and Spas	1998
Texas Blue Lake Pools	2002
Thouin Enterprises	2002
Tubs of Fun! The Family Recreation Superstore	2010
Ultra Modern Pool & Patio	2001
Valley Pools & Spas	1999
Vaughan Pools & Spas	2010
Walnut Ridge Pool & Patio	2002
Watson's of Cincinnati	2000
Westport Pools	2009
Wildwood Aquatech Pools	2005
Wise Pools	2002
Wolter Pool Co.	2009



Platinum-Poolcare Aquatech



James D. Atlas and Terry Smith

HEADQUARTERS: Wheeling, Ill.

PRINCIPALS: James D. Atlas and Terry Smith, principals

FOUNDED: 1988 | **LOCATIONS:** 1 | **EMPLOYEES:** 40 year-round, 120 in season

PRODUCTS & SERVICES: gunite pools, indoor pools, commercial pools, renovations, residential service, commercial service

IT SEEMS MORE often than not a second-generation pool builder finds him or herself getting into the business only after trying a few other things first.

That's what James Atlas, co-owner of Platinum-Poolcare Aquatech did. He traded options in Chicago for a while after college and, not finding that to his liking, started a commercial swimming pool management company.

"We got up to about 75 facilities and had over 300 employees," he recalls. "But, like with the options trading, that didn't really suit me. I didn't like having a lot of kids to manage and I didn't like relying on a 16-year-old who didn't really care

about it to dictate my future."

Unsure of what to do next, Atlas sold the business and stated working for his dad, Ronald Atlas.

"I spent some time estimating commercial products like water-parks, competition pools, which is sort of how I learned the business," he says. "I got a lot of inquiries about residential pools from builders or contractors that wanted to build pools in their own homes.

"So I'd ask my dad, 'can we do this job?' and he'd say, 'We're just not set up for it. We couldn't be competitive.'

"Finally, after about two or three years of browbeating, I convinced him to let me do it," he says.

Atlas got a lot of help from Terry Smith, a man who'd started working for the elder Atlas in 1974, eventually working his way up to partner.

"Terry and I put our heads together and sort of felt our way through it, and before long we were doing 30 pools a year," he says. "We built the highest-quality pools available at the highest prices and we flourished.

"And that feeds our service business, which is substantial at this point, accounting for about 75 percent of our revenue."

A few years ago, the two bought out Ronald, who'd been the majority shareholder in both his son's and Smith's affiliated businesses, and became 50-50 partners in Platinum-Poolcare Aquatech.

"I'm very optimistic for both the near-term and long-term," Atlas says. "We've managed to do well in a very poor economy because we're thoughtful about our approach both in terms of how we acquire customers and how we treat them." ~