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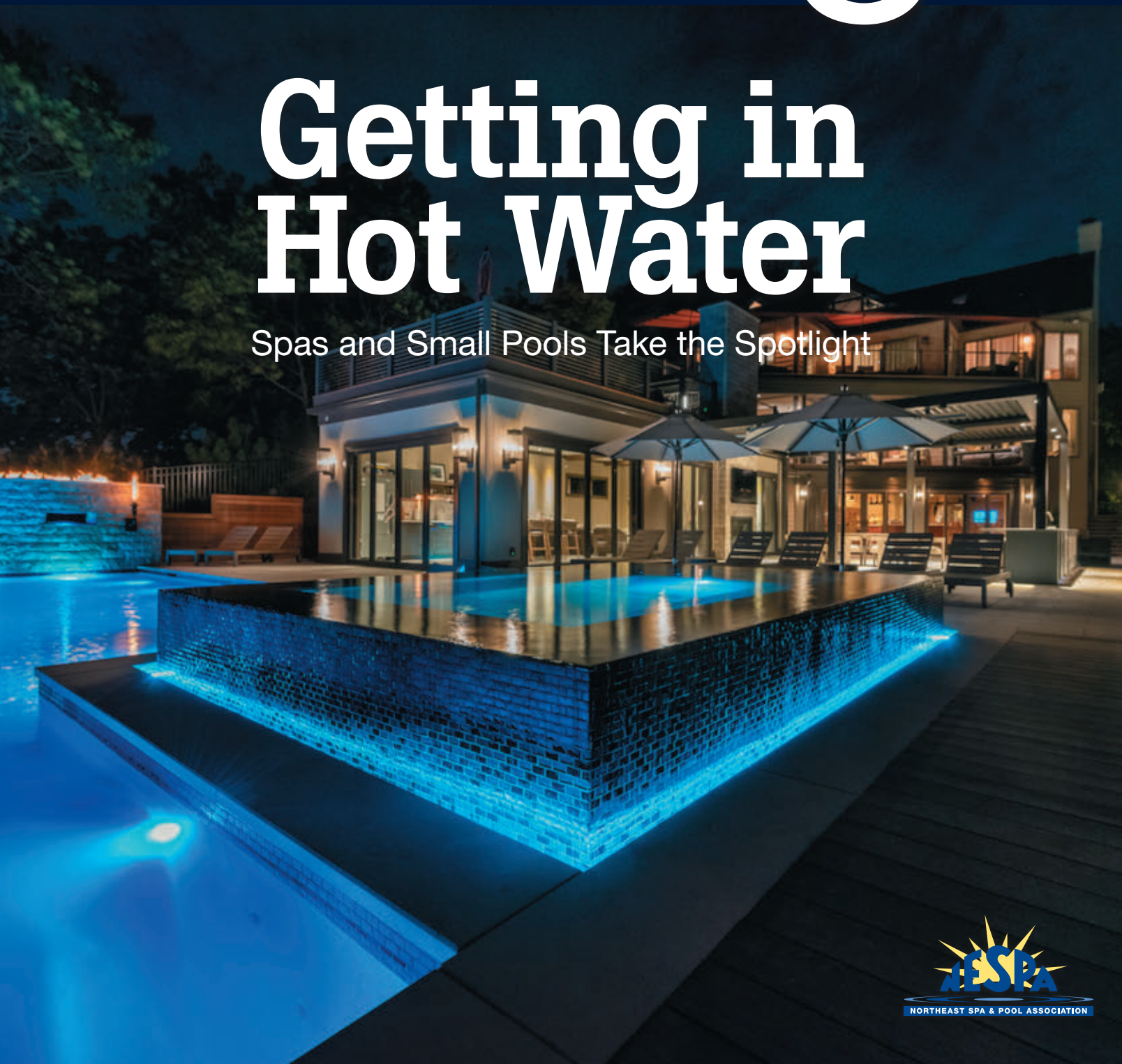
the Edge

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE NORTHEAST SPA & POOL ASSOCIATION

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Getting in Hot Water

Spas and Small Pools Take the Spotlight



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Tap into Your NESPA Network

by Julie Kazdin-Boucher, CBP, CSP, CST

EACH FALL, THE Northeast Spa & Pool Association inducts new leaders to its board of directors and Executive Committee. I'm honored to serve as board president for the year ahead.

As I begin my term, I can't help but think about my unique position as someone who has grown up around and with this organization. About 40 years ago, my father was sworn in as president of NESPA. His volunteerism has not only built up our industry, but it has been foundational to our business and my professional career. He has mentored me and introduced me to many other NESPA members who helped shape my growth in this industry.

Whether you are new to the industry or a veteran, NESPA is the place where you can improve your business and build yourself up. I know first-hand the value of having a group of peers to turn to for support and guidance. Creating your network can start with your local chapter meetings. Held throughout the year, take advantage of this chance to meet new people and build on your existing friendships.

At one of these events, you might sit next to someone you don't know very well and discover ways you can work together to better your businesses. We all have different perspectives, but we share a common goal. Even in disagreement, we can find ways to work together to improve our industry.

Over the next year, I look forward to expanding my NESPA connections by meeting more of you at local events, The Pool & Spa Show and other industry meetings. In getting to know you better, I know I can better serve NESPA and our industry.

NESPA has been a part of my career from the beginning. Having grown up around NESPA has given me a unique perspective. I understand our history while being committed to moving our industry and the association forward.

NESPA is always dedicated to delivering for you. For more than 60 years, the association has been successful because we've never lost focus on our members. We strive to stay one step ahead of our members' needs because we know how fast our industry is evolving. **I**

Julie Kazdin-Boucher is the 2022-2023 president of the Northeast Spa & Pool Association.

Please reach out to me at any time. Let's discuss how you can get more involved with NESPA and your chapter. Let me know if there is a challenge you are facing that NESPA can help you tackle. You can reach me at president@nespapool.org, and you can always call NESPA headquarters at 609.689.9111.

thePOOL&SPAshow

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This is **YOUR** Show! Make the *MOST* of It

FOR MORE THAN 40 years, The Northeast Spa & Pool Association has made the last week of January your most important week.

At the Pool & Spa Show, you'll train your entire team, the folks in the field and the office. You'll secure the products you need and get up to speed on what's new. *And you'll have a lot of fun doing it.*

The next few months will fly by, and 2023 will be here before you know it. Whether you've already registered for the Show or are still figuring out your plans, be ready to hit the ground running by checking out these seven tips for Show success.

1. FOR POOL & SPA PEOPLE BY POOL & SPA PEOPLE

Every aspect was designed with you in mind. Whether in the classroom or on the Show Floor, enjoy opportunities to connect with industry leaders, enjoy time with your team and celebrate your hard work. This year, we have a bunch of new ways to have fun while building your network.

2. THE ESSENTIALS

Atlantic City Convention Center will again be the home of The Pool & Spa Show. *The Education Conference runs from January 23-26, and the Exhibit Floor is open from January 24-26.* We've partnered with hotels throughout the city to provide you with the best options for accommodations that include shuttles to the convention center during Show hours.

3. MORE TIME TO FIND THE PRODUCTS YOU NEED

The last few years have proven how vital vendor relationships are to your business. There is nowhere else where you'll be able to meet with trusted brands like Fluidra, Hayward, Pentair, Pool Corp and industry innovators ready to share their latest products. *The Show Floor will open an hour earlier, at 10 a.m. daily.*

4. ASK QUESTIONS, DISCOVER NEW IDEAS, UNCOVER SOLUTIONS

The conference gives everyone a chance to learn together and from each other. All sessions have an interactive format where attendees are encouraged to ask questions and share their personal experiences working in the industry. *Every purchase of an education course or pass includes free access to the Show Floor!*

5. GUARANTEE YOUR SEAT

Arrive knowing exactly what courses you and your team will take. Knowing your team's exact schedule allows you to maximize your training opportunities for every employee. To help you plan and make the most of our full schedule of over 100 seminars, we require every Education Conference attendee to select their courses when registering for the technical and business passes.

6. LEARN ALL DAY LONG

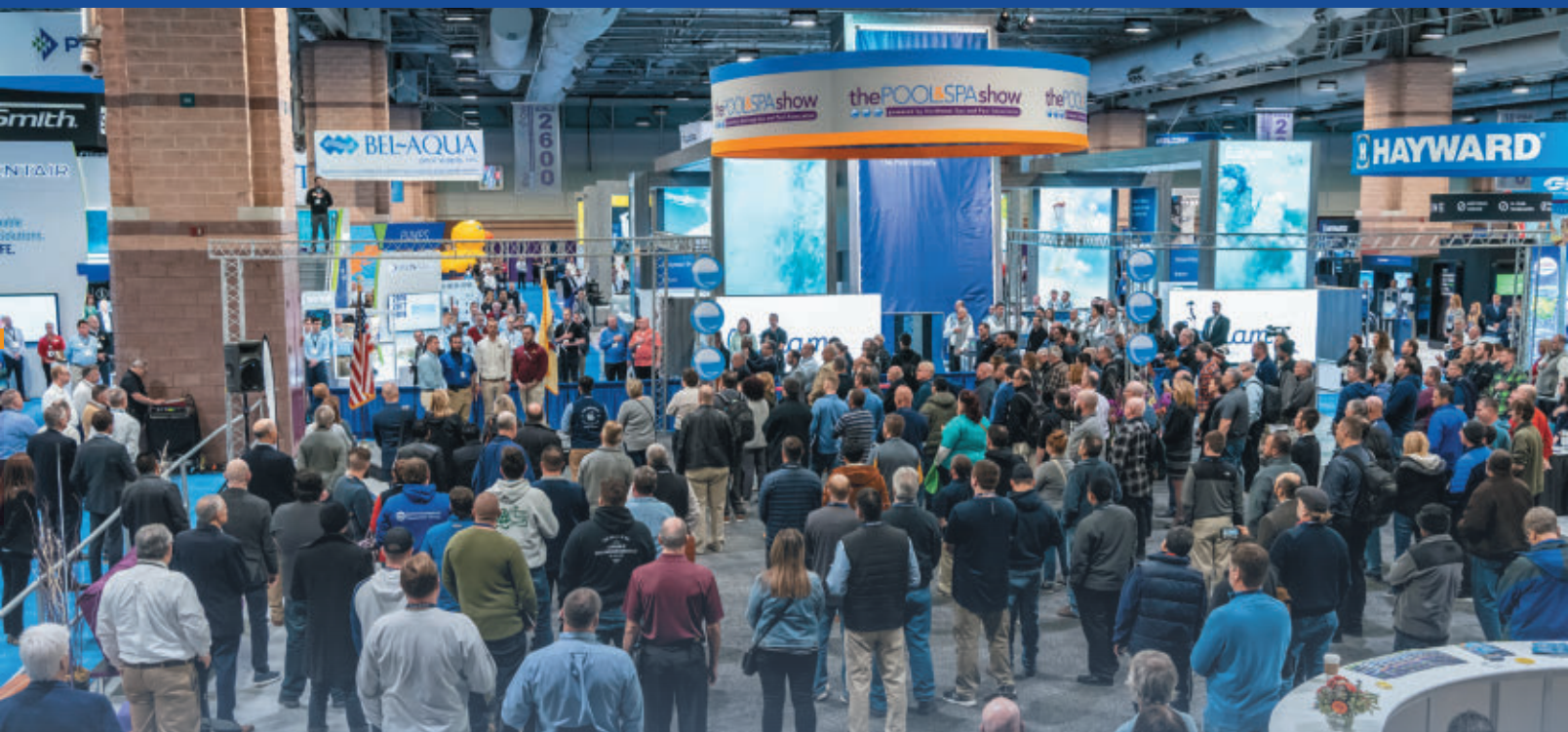
To accommodate the high demand for education at the Show, we are now offering sessions in the morning and afternoon. *More than six hours of learning are available each day!* Choose the times and topics that work best for you. Send your staff to more training while you and your executive team hit the Show Floor.

7. REGISTER TODAY



Seminars will fill up quickly! If you haven't already, go online and get your entire team signed up for this year's Show. Plus, you'll want to get your Welcome Party tickets now. The industry's biggest and best party will happen on Monday, January 23. This event always sells out and is a can't-miss! **Register now at** <https://bit.ly/PSSRegister>.

Have questions? Need help with registration? Think exhibiting at the Show might be a good fit for your company? Our staff can walk you through how to prepare for this year's Show! Call at 609.689.9111 or email info@ThePoolSpaShow.com.



Get the Full **EXPERIENCE**

Enjoy a whole NEW Experience at the 2023 Pool & Spa Show! This VIP Experience Pass includes full access to our technical and business passes, the Welcome Party, a NEW VIP reception, and other VIP treatment on the Show Floor. Plus, after the Show closes, you'll have access for 30 days to our online, On-Demand Show Experience, featuring content from our Show partners and speakers.

This pass is only available to NESPA/PHTA members. Learn how you can join today!

As a VIP, you'll get exclusive access to our education at the Show. The VIP Experience Pass includes the 4-day Business Pass and 4-day Technical Pass. After the Show, you'll unlock even more content and resources you can use to strengthen your business in 2023! VIPs can access on-demand content for you and your entire team. Learn even more from our conference speakers and industry partners, with industry training available nowhere else.

You'll get the red-carpet treatment on the Show Floor with new VIP features available only to VIP Experience Pass holders. Gain access to the VIP lounges on the Show Floor and Education Conference, where you can relax and recharge during Show hours.

We will have an on-floor reception available exclusively to VIP Experience Pass holders! You'll enjoy food and drinks in this private event while networking with other industry leaders.

Meet & Greet with Olympian Rowdy Gaines. Gaines is a U.S. Olympic Hall of Fame member, three-time Olympic gold medalist and Step Into Swim ambassador. Passholders can meet with Gaines at an exclusive event on the Show Floor.

Plus, you'll be a VIP at the industry's biggest party! The VIP Experience Pass includes a ticket to this year's Welcome Party at the Saloon Bar in Bally's Casino.

THE **NESPA MEMBER** EXPERIENCE

This is YOUR Show! Meet up with NESPA at the **Member Lounge**, where you can connect with members from around our region. You can preview our upcoming programs, including the Spring Training schedule. Get info not only from

NESPA, but from your local chapters and PHTA. Members always walk the floor for FREE. Plus you can save on seminars and passes in our Education Conference. Need your member number or have other questions? Call 609.689.9111.

thePOOL&SPAshow

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EDUCATION CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

- › **Get Certified!** Five PHTA industry certification courses and the NPC Start-Up Certification.
- › **Learn by Doing.** Take part in new hands-on learning focused on practical skill development and real-world knowledge.
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 - *Heater Hands-on Workshop*
 - *Tile & Coping: Glass Tile Installation & Waterproofing*
- › **Turn Your Newest Employees into Clutch Players.** Get everyone ready to hit the ground running for the opening season and beyond.
 - *From Rookie to All-Star: The Fundamentals of Pool Service*
 - *Pool Opening Essentials*
 - *3 Different Hands-on Workshops*
 - *Plus, dozens of basic and intermediate seminars in our Tech Pass*
- › **Get Next Level Training for Veteran Staff.** Dive deeper into topics that will help your business grow in 2023. Take courses offered by GENESIS, Watershape University and other industry leaders. Dozens of intermediate and advance classes are offered in our Technical Pass.
- › **Attend a Business School for Pool Pros.** Specifically designed to address the challenges you face daily, these seminars offer actionable information you can use immediately.
- › **Expanded Women in the Industry Workshop!** Spend a full day networking with industry peers, participating in technical and professional development training while making connections that will help you build your career! |



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EDUCATION SCHEDULE



That's So 'On Brand'



by Jamie Novak

WHETHER YOU KNOW it or not, each of us is our own personal brand. This is especially important to remember in today's noisy, digital world, where information spreads quickly and often without considering the consequences. Here we'll discuss some personal and business branding tips for success.

Did you know that (according to a 2020 survey from the Harris Polls) 67 percent of employers believe that checking social media accounts is an effective way of screening potential employees? Another survey by Career Builder found that 54 percent of employers had actually ruled out a candidate due to something they saw on the person's social media. You may think that you have your profile "locked down," but chances are there's more information about you out there in the digital world than you expect. These days, we all have a digital footprint that can be traced, and it's critically important that the image we portray online matches our desired personal brand. The same advice goes for managing the reputation of a business.

The biggest tip for success is to be authentic. Don't try to create a persona or brand image online that doesn't align

with who you are in the real world or your company's mission. Be aware that everything you post could have a consequence (positive or negative), and for this reason you should always be thinking a few steps ahead. For example, think, 'If I post this, then it could spark that type of reaction.' This goes for personal pages and on forums, but it's just as crucial for business accounts to consider. You want to maintain a consistent image across the platforms and a consistent message from the business side.

What about negative posts, comments or reviews? Inevitably, your business will encounter negative or combative people at some point. It's essential to try and address their concerns to the best of your ability and, ideally, you will be able to take the conversation off-line. For example, you can ask them to DM (direct message) you their contact information to discuss the details of their concern privately. When people make negative comments publicly on a business account, other followers often watch the chain to see how the business will respond. A straightforward and transparent response will gain respect from the audience, whether they choose to click

"like" on the response or not. Ignoring a complaint or negative comment can reflect poorly on the business, with some followers inferring that the business has something to hide by not responding.

When you think about the brand image you want to convey, try jotting down some words you'd want people to say when asked about your brand. For example, if your company's mission is to build high-end pools, some words you might write down about the desired brand image are quality, luxury, craftsmanship, reliability and trustworthiness. After you've established the type of brand image that you want, it's important to match up the content you post and share to align with the qualities selected. Strive to remain "on brand" with what you post, how you respond to comments and the messaging you put out to your audience. Authenticity is key, so always stay true to your core values and mission while creating consistency around your brand. **I**



Jamie Novak is the director of Pro Brands at BioLab, a division of KIK Consumer Products. She's held multiple positions in marketing and sales for major manufacturers Newell Rubbermaid, Zodiac Pool Systems and AquaStar Pool Products and has more than 17 years of experience in the swimming pool and spa industry. She serves on the board of the Penn-Jersey Chapter of the Northeast Spa & Pool Association. Novak received her MBA with concentrations in marketing and leading organizations from Johns Hopkins Carey Business School. A storyteller by nature, she is passionate about branding and the customer experience.

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YEARS AND
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Getting in **Hot Water**

by Kelly McKelvey

From left: Brandon Fegley, Frank Bennett, John McNally, Tim Jung and Brad Emerson.

FIND A JOB you love and never work a day in your life. While the saying might not live up to all the realities of everyday life, there is something to be said about the value of enjoying your work and the people you work with daily.

With this goal in mind, Frank Bennett launched The Spa Guys in 2018. While he's found a job he enjoys, the company's success comes from developing a team that brings their individual enthusiasm and passion to every project.

Headquartered in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, The Spa Guys is a full-service hot tub repair, maintenance and service company that works throughout New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Focusing on the hot tub and spa repair side of the industry allowed Bennett to bring together his interests in both the electrical and plumbing trades.

"When a plumber marries an electrician, their baby is a hot tub tech," joked Bennett.

"Each service call is a blend of both trades, and I can't think of a better job than hanging out in people's backyards, making them happy and fixing the things that they love," he added. "As far as the trades go, you aren't working in a high-risk, high-pressure environment where you could get badly hurt. But you are still going to be challenged."

DREAMS & TEAMS WORK TOGETHER

The Spa Guys includes a tight-knit team of technicians who have followed their own paths into the spa repair field. But they all knew that the traditional 9-to-5 desk job wasn't for them, and they have the Hawaiian shirts to prove it.

Company veteran John McNally shared, "When I met Frank, I was looking for a job where I could learn a skill and gain some knowledge while working

with my hands. I could tell Frank liked what he was doing, so I happily joined on, and the rest is history."

The tight labor market has been a challenge across the pool and spa industry. Bennett has found success by giving his team the freedom to explore their talents and find their niche within his business.

Joining the team just a few months after graduating from college last year, Tim Jung was drawn to working in the field and learning a trade, but the company culture sealed the deal.

"After graduation last December, I really didn't know what I wanted to do, but I knew working behind a desk wasn't going to be right for me right now. I've known John for at least 10 years, and he's been working with Frank for a few years now," added Jung. "Knowing the type of guy Frank is, I quickly accepted when he offered me the job."

THE MAKING OF A SPA GUY

To get each new hire up-to-speed, The Spa Guys take a two-prong approach that includes both in the office and out in the field training. A genuine interest and the right attitude are the first steps, but practical training is key to delivering quality service.

Bennet believes flexibility is critical because he recognizes not everyone learns the same way. There is mentoring and hands-on work, but the library of reference videos his team developed has helped the most.

“We do a lot of video recording here. We record our jobs so we can use it for teaching so that they can see what exactly they’ll be doing,” said McAnally. “Then we throw them out with the crew so we can show them how we do things – everything from customer service to actual repairs to cleaning up and making sure the yard looks better than when we arrived.”

Bennett explained, “John and I complement each other well. I’m more of the theory guy, and he’s more of the field trainer. It takes time, but you go from watching to doing over a few months, and then you might be ready to go on your own.”

SPA CONTROLS: THEN & NOW

Built from the marriage of the electrical and plumbing trades, spa diagnostics and repairs offer unique challenges. In the market that The Spa Guys operates, the team is often called in to work on spas that have been working faithfully for years, if not decades. They must be familiar with older models and how to repair them and give them a second life by updating them with the latest systems.

“What I love the most is refurbishing an old, like 1970s, hot tub. The kind that was built into the house with their own special room and an equipment room similar to a pool set-up” shared Bennett. “I love ripping out all the old equipment, putting in everything new, and modernizing the whole thing. The tubs are usually high-quality ones built strong, but the electronics need to be updated.”

To help his team better understand older systems, how to repair them and



The Pool Guys show off their “uniforms.”

when it’s time to replace them, Bennett has acquired a collection of spa controls past and present. His collection will hit the road in January and arrive in Atlantic City at The Pool & Spa Show.

The Spa Guys will present “Electric (Spa) Control Packs: From Then to Now” at the Show. The course will give an overview of hot tub electrical components, including electrical and safety requirements.

Attendees will learn how to identify different control systems and diagnose corrective repairs at the session. Time will also be spent looking at the latest technology to offer clients.

“We are going to take it all the way back to the analog systems of blow tubes from the 70s and 80s because there is a good chance techs might run into these in the field today,” shared Bennett. “Then we will look at what’s available

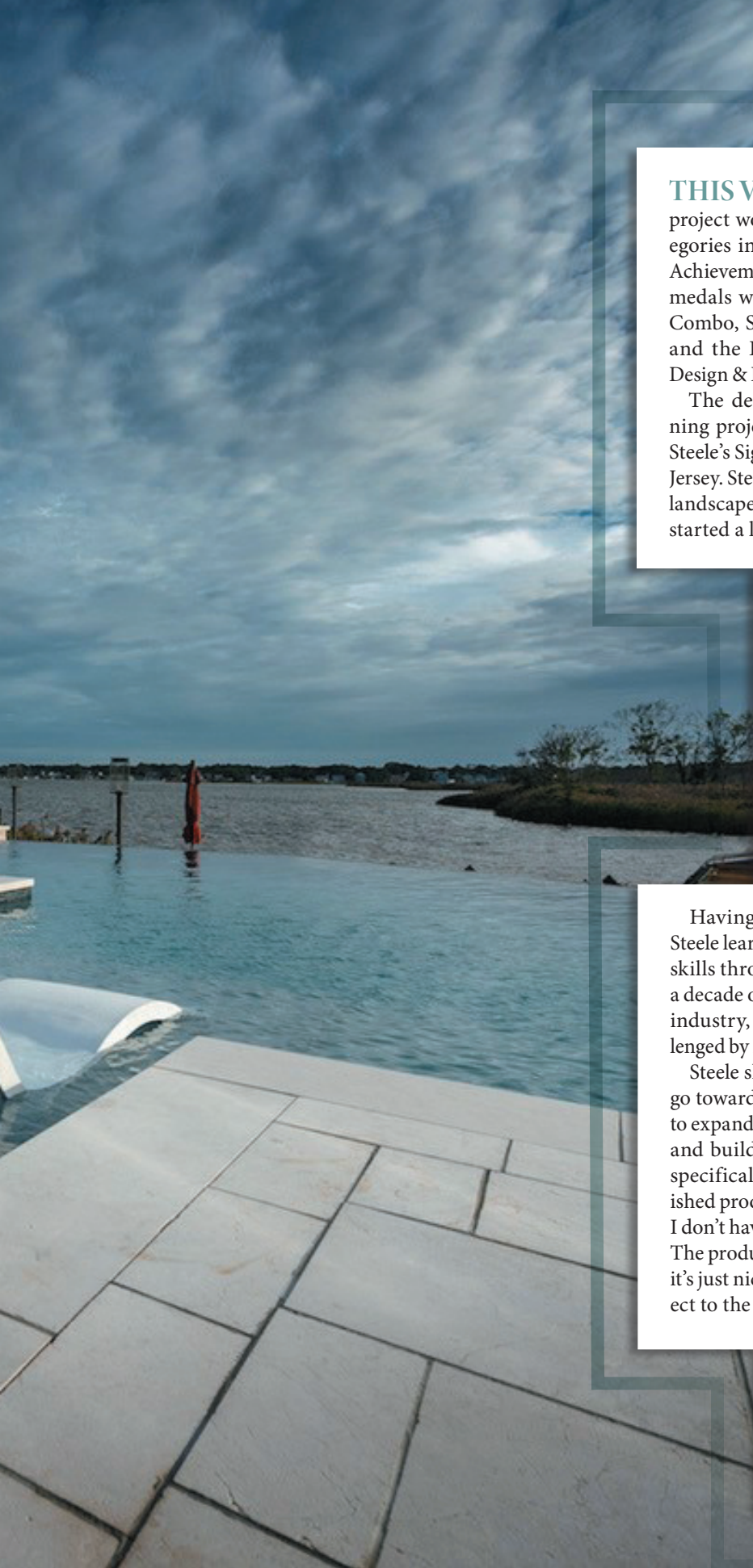
now, from low to high flow systems up to what we’re doing today. We’ll also talk about how to transition from an older system into what technology is available now.” ■

Join The Spa Guys for their session at The Pool & Spa Show – “Electric (Spa) Control Packs: From Then to Now.” The Pool & Spa Show will take place at the Atlantic City Convention Center from January 24-26. Visit www.ThePoolSpaShow.com for details about the entire Education Conference and Show Floor.

RESORT LIVING

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BACKYARD



THIS VAST WATERFRONT

project won a gold medal in three categories in NESPA's 2021 Outstanding Achievement Awards Competition. The medals were awarded in the Pool/Spa Combo, Specialty Pool/Negative Edge and the Exceptional Recognition in Design & Building (concrete) categories.

The designer/builder of this stunning project is Adam Steele, owner of Steele's Signature Pools, Medford, New Jersey. Steele graduated with a degree in landscape architecture, and soon after started a landscape company.

"For the first two years, we were strictly landscape, and then we added in some pool work for the next two years," explained Steele. "We went strictly pools after that. And little by little from there, we just grew our business."

Each year the company constructs around 30 swimming pool projects. Steele offers maintenance services to his construction clients and routinely maintains 100 pools during the high season.

Having always worked for himself, Steele learned by doing and growing his skills through every project. With over a decade of work in the swimming pool industry, Steele continues to be challenged by increasingly complex projects.

Steele shared, "What really made me go toward pools was that it allowed me to expand my creativity. I like designing and building backyards, but the pool specifically allows me to create a finished product. Once I'm done, it's done. I don't have to wait to let plants mature. The product is there the day I leave, and it's just nice to give that completed project to the client."

THE PROJECT

Located in Ocean County, New Jersey, the client's property sits directly on the bay with a very steep incline toward the water.

“This backyard looked like it hadn’t been touched in at least 10 years. There was a small, out-of-date kidney-shaped pool that wasn’t even where we wanted to locate the new pool,” described Steele. “That was ripped out to make room for the pool house and the new pool.”

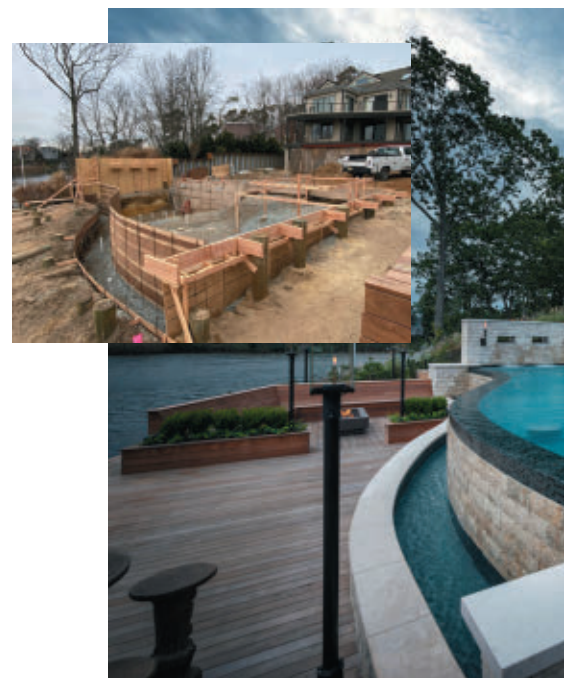
Calling this a backyard update would be a massive understatement. The entire space was reimagined to meet the year-round outdoor life-style of Steele’s clients. The project included an addition to the home,

necessitating adding an architect to the project team.

With an architect involved from the start, the team looked at the entire space – the pool, patio, landscape and space for a pool house.

After the architect designated the space needed for the addition, Steele used the remaining space for the patio, pool and spa.

The design includes a 65-foot negative edge pool, a year-round spa with 52 jets, an 8-foot-tall waterfall and a 25-foot fire feature. The pool is illuminated with



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1,300 fiber optic star lights, creating a star field effect. The placement of each element, including a sundeck and submerged barstools, was done with the water views in mind.

The soft, sandy soil necessitated a lot of structure work and pilings to get the property ready for construction. The project included 30 pilings, 14 tons of rebar, and over 220 yards of shotcrete to ensure a strong foundation for the swimming pool.

Limited access to the backyard and the soil structure are obstacles that Steele routinely deals with when working in coastal communities. Working in coastal communities also brings with it permitting challenges.

This project is in a CAFRA zone, meaning permitting was regulated through the New Jersey Department of Protection. The Coastal Areas Facilities Act (CAFRA) was enacted in 1973 by New Jersey to protect shore areas of the state from overdevelopment. CAFRA covers the coastline of eight counties in New Jersey.

“Our biggest challenge with any project along the Jersey coast, and it’s not unique to us, is CAFRA. Going through that process can be tough, tricky, and long,” explained Steele. “Even just the start of the project, trying to get the approvals from the state level, then down to the township level, it just prolonged the permit process for this job.



With permits taking nearly eight months, Steele was thankful that his client was familiar with the process and knew going into the project that it would take time to get going.

“Luckily, we didn’t have to manage expectations with timing. But with most clientele that has never worked with CAFRA or towns with an extensive permitting process, managing expectations is one of the biggest parts of our job,” he added.

Steele oversees each project, and each team member has specialized skills, whether it be plumbing, tile installation or excavation.

When you think of waterfront homes on the Jersey Shore, you might think the summer months are the focus, but homeowners are spending more and more time enjoying their homes year-round, including access to the spa, whether it be June or February.

“We separated the spa with a wall all the way around it, so this client can keep it open and run it on its own. The option of keeping the spa open year-round determines how we plumb and lay out the system’s hydraulics. We usually do a floating cover if they keep it open through the winter. We also look at the chlorination and how we sanitize because when you put that cover on, every time it lifts off, you don’t want a huge odor of chlorine or any kind of

sanitizer. So, we use a lot of ozone and AOP systems to help reduce that odor.”

The spas are running year-round, and so is Steele’s Signature Pools. While mother nature controls the schedule, the company typically stops construction work for about six weeks each winter due to frost and temperatures. But that time is used to prep for the upcoming season and sharpen the team’s training.

“Even on those cold days, we take time to learn new things we can implement in the following year,” added Steele. ■

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Small Pools

MORE BACKYARD OPTIONS

by Annie Brock

Wading pools offer opportunities for exercise and entertainment.

LET'S FACE IT, backyards are getting smaller. Type 'small backyard design' into any search engine and dozens of ideas will surface from Houzz, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *House Beautiful* and more. Savvy builders have recognized this trend and are now designing outdoor living spaces incorporating smaller pools to allow more room for firepits, outdoor kitchens, patio seating and hot tubs so that homeowners can enjoy their outdoor living spaces year-round. Selling and installing smaller pools with the features consumers want is a must for pool builders.

Jason Branco, owner of Aqua Med Pools in Dighton, Massachusetts, says most of his clients work with smaller backyard spaces. However, they have done their research and established their favorite designs based on what they have seen online. He says that with the popularity of more functional outdoor setups, most homeowners already have an idea of how they would like to lay out their backyards based on what they have researched online.

"Not only do my clients want to have multiple features and entertainment

areas in their outdoor living spaces, but they are also attracted to the lower price point of smaller pools, which gives more of their budget to other features like spas and exercise options, patio areas and firepits," he says. As a result, Branco now offers multiple smaller pool options to fit into these smaller outdoor living spaces.

THEY MAKE BACKYARDS FEEL BIGGER

Branco installs fiberglass pools, which he started offering a few years ago to stand out from his competitors, who primarily offer vinyl liner pools. At least 50 percent of the pools Branco installs for his clients are smaller models. These pools are 9.5 ft. wide by 19.5 ft. long, have a constant depth of 4.5 ft. and hold approximately 4,300 gallons of water. Consumers are attracted to the consistent standing depth because it makes the pool ideal for socializing, playing games and lounging in the water.

"These pools also have elongated benches on their left and right sides, which extend out from the steps, making them ready for all kinds of entertaining for kids and adults," says Branco. "The seating areas can even

be outfitted with therapy jets for a spa-like effect."

Smaller pools can also accommodate automatic covers, which attracts clients looking for an easy open and close. Additionally, automatic covers help ensure no one will enter the pool without knowing the code to unlock it. This makes the pool safer and lowers the need for maintenance, as the cover will keep debris out of the pool when it is not in use.

In terms of placement, most builders recommend during the design stage that the pool be placed at the farthest edge of the property to help make the backyard look as big as possible. This also allows the design to accommodate spas, fire pits and seating areas, making the configuration more functional, especially in the winter when the pool might be closed.

THERE'S ROOM FOR SPAS OR HOT TUBS

Incorporating a smaller pool into the design allows the builder to suggest including a spa in the backyard. This can be very attractive to homeowners looking to enjoy their outdoor living space year-round. For areas with colder winters, pools are

usually closed, while spas or hot tubs can remain open. Most builders agree that when they design the outdoor living space it makes the most sense to put a spa or hot tub closer to the house so the client does not have to go too far from their back door. Branco says he has also been installing many fiberglass spas because they match the look of the pool and are built into and flush with the patio, giving the space a more finished look.

THEY'RE GREAT FOR EXERCISE

Some active consumers are looking to get more fitness benefits from their pools. As a result, they have been asking builders about including lap pools in their backyards. Much of this demand comes from those between 50 and 70 years old. However, many of these clients are also empty nesters with smaller backyards. Due to this constraint, installing a true lap pool is rarely possible, as it would take up too much space and become costly to heat and maintain. As an alternative, builders are offering to install swim jet systems on smaller pools to provide the same exercise benefits of lap pools at a fraction of the space and cost.



With faster installation, clients are ready to swim quicker and builders can add more jobs to their schedules.



Smaller pools can be incorporated into modest backyards.

Branco says requests for exercise swim jets have increased in the last few years. They are an ideal option for clients looking to add an exercise feature to their smaller pools. Many older, active adults are being told to swim for rehabilitation or to vary their exercise routines since swimming is not as stressful on the body. The system also includes a built-in light-emitting diode light (LED), giving the pool an added selling feature.

These exercise jets must have their own dedicated pumps, separate from the rest of the pool equipment. In most pump applications, there can be at least one 45-degree angle from the pool pump to the pump house. But, in the case of the jet system, the pump will need to be less than 25 ft from the pool's edge so the pressure on the jets is not compromised.

THEY'RE LIGHTER ON THE WALLET

Savvy builders are also informing their clients of these compact pools' cost and energy benefits, in addition to their lower price point. Their smaller heating systems, along with simpler and smaller filters and pumps, make these models more energy efficient and cost-effective. They are also easier to landscape around, which helps reduce the expense of hiring a landscaper.

THEY HELP BUILDERS MAXIMIZE THEIR INSTALLATION SCHEDULES

Fiberglass pools are quickly becoming the pool of choice, especially for busy pool builders or service professionals who want to start installing pools. With smaller fiberglass pools readily available to builders, they can easily take on more with just a small crew and an excavator. The quick installation of these smaller pools will have clients ready to swim faster and allow builders to add more jobs to their schedules.

The growing demand for functionality has inspired clients to make the most of their outdoor living spaces. Incorporating a smaller pool into the design will allow builders and homeowners to maximize space and budget and include other must-have features – regardless of the backyard size. |



Annie Brock has helped independent pool dealers grow and thrive for more than 27 years. Her pool industry experience includes positions in retail merchandising, design and executive management. She is currently the director of business development for Thursday Pools and helps existing dealers achieve their growth goals while also onboarding new independent dealers. She can be reached at a.brock@thursdaypools.com.



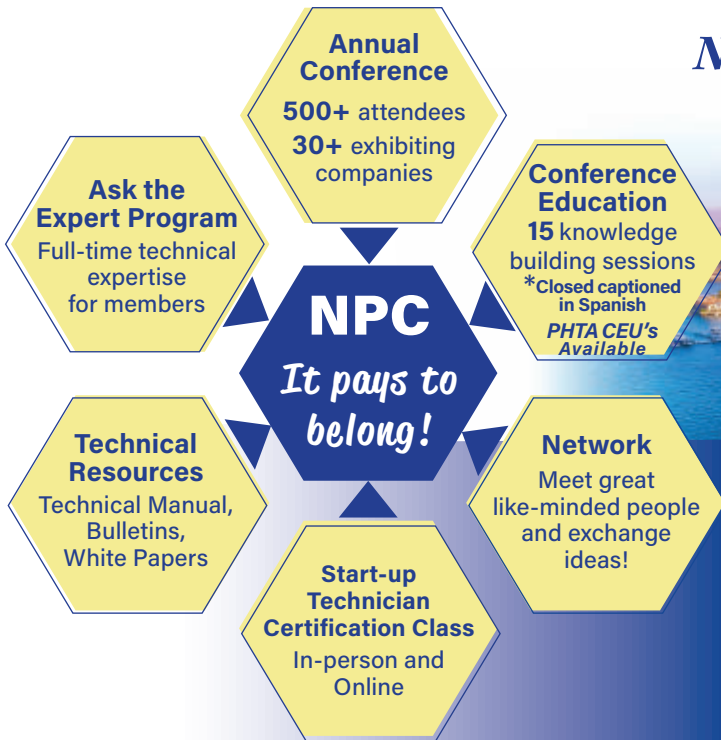
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TREND ALERT:

Auto Covers on Spas and Swim Spas

by Mike Shadoan

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUTOMATIC POOL COVERS

AUTOMATIC POOL covers have long been considered a top convenience product for pools. There is no better option for ease of opening and closing pools safely, making them ideal for maximizing the use of the pool.

With a surge in demand for spas and swim spas, there is also a new demand for automatic covers for these products. Customers are also looking at the benefits of instantly opening and closing their spas without lifting traditional heavy covers. Auto covers for spas and swim spas appeal to new owners and existing owners who have struggled with cumbersome, traditional covers. Despite their higher price point, the automatic spa cover provides not only convenience and safety, but also an esthetically pleasing cover solution.

INCREASED DEMAND

As automatic pool covers are one of the premier cover options for pools, it is not surprising that consumers want the same type of cover for their spas and swim spas.

“Almost 100 percent of the pools we build have an automatic pool cover,” says Matt Harms, general manager at Modish Pools. “Our market is very familiar with the convenience, safety and beauty of this product, and we believe this familiarity has fueled the demand for auto covers on spas.”

Putting an auto cover on a spa or swim spa was an anomaly in the past, but now it has become a regular request from new and existing owners. In fact, there appears to be an untapped opportunity for pool professionals who want to start selling

auto covers to their spa and swim spa clients.

In comparison to a traditional spa cover, an auto cover for a spa may seem expensive; however, consumers who want automation and convenience will pay a premium for an auto cover to be installed on their spa. As installers face increasing requests for these types of covers, many manufacturers are experiencing a steady upward trend in demand for smaller auto covers for installation on spas, swim spas and smaller pools. Some builders and installers report consumers are investing in larger spas and swim spas with TVs, stereos, lights and a multitude of jets, and will spend \$40,000 on the spa itself. Spending another \$8000 to \$10,000 on an auto cover no longer seems outrageous.

SELLING AUTOMATIC SPA COVERS

One of the biggest selling features of the automatic cover is that it makes it easier to use a pool or spa in the winter. Many spas are used year-round, so installing an auto cover is a logical choice for some, as opening and closing the spa can be done easily and quickly during cooler months.

If the owner is in their home dressed to jump in the spa or swim spa, the last thing they want to do is wrestle with a

cumbersome cover while standing in the freezing cold without shoes or a coat before they can get in. They would much rather push a button next to their patio door, wait one minute for the cover to pull back, walk out and immediately get into their spa.

INSTALLING AUTO COVERS ON SPAS

Space is the most significant difference between installing auto covers on a spa versus a pool. When planning for

an auto cover on a new spa installation, the challenges are primarily aesthetics.

"On a spa, we have more design flexibility than a pool because it can operate with a smaller motor mechanism," says Harms. "Most customers like the spa to look as though it has a 'picture frame' around the perimeter. We can do this easily because the cavity for the cover box doesn't need to be as big. This allows us to integrate the auto cover in a manner that is visually appealing."

Auto covers can be placed on spas that are flush with the deck or sit above the deck. If the spa is set at grade or deck level, the auto cover box will need to be placed below grade. The coping that sits over the box will sit flush with the rest of the deck. If the spa sits above the ground, typically it is raised about 18 to 20 inches above the deck, so the cover box must also sit above the deck. To make the auto cover mechanism a part of the spa design on new installations, most builders will usually incorporate the auto-cover box into the spa wall to integrate it with the overall footprint of the spa.

Depending on the size of the spa, the additional space needed for the mechanism box may only add about one foot to the length of the spa. When Harms is building a gunite spa, he says the walls he constructs are typically 12 inches thick.

"For example, if the water dimension of the spa, from side to side, is 8 feet, then our build dimension, or overall footprint, is 10 feet around the perimeter of the spa," says Harms. "When planning, we make sure the motor unit fits within the 10-ft. area, giving us the room we need for the motor unit as well as the electrical box supplying the power to the unit; it can get tight, so we plan and design in a manner that allows us to shift the system one way or another to increase our available space."

The situation is often different when builders are looking to install an auto cover on an existing spa installation. Although there is less fabric that needs to roll up in the housing, there tends to be less available space around a spa compared to a pool. Often, the reason someone has decided to install a spa is

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF AUTOMATIC POOL COVERS

because they have limited space in their backyard, so they may have had to really squeeze it in. This makes it hard to find the necessary space to place the housing for the cover mechanism.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Determining which type of cover to put over this box is a balancing act of aesthetics and functionality.

“It’s very important to set expectations for the practical functionality and demands of that box cover with the aesthetics and use of the space around the spa the customer might want,” says Harms.

As with an auto cover for a pool, there is a standard ‘lid’ from the manufacturer to cover the mechanism box for the auto cover. Typically, this lid is made of aluminum and designed for easy removal to service the auto cover mechanism and fabric. However, it is not designed to bear weight, so the client cannot walk, stand or sit on the lid.

“Especially with spas, we find consumers want to be able to use all the surrounding space,” says Harms. “They usually want a limestone, pre-cast concrete or poured concrete lid over the auto cover box because they want to be able to walk around the spa and because it is more esthetically pleasing.”

To accommodate the spa owner’s desires, installers need to use a heavy-duty bracket that will support the weight of a stone lid. However, this does not mean the client can walk on a lid the way they can walk on the other three sides of the spa. Take the time to explain to the client the stone cannot be mortared in and should not be walked on as it can shift and move; it’s just gravity holding it in place. Most auto cover installers agree they should set the expectation that the stone will need to be lifted for regular maintenance of the mechanism.

Cover service technicians have to be able to lift the heavy stone to maintain the mechanism and the cover.

It is also important to plan enough space for a service technician to perform necessary maintenance on the auto cover. Not only do installers need to consider the access by a service professional, but they should also consider how the homeowner will approach the spa. Always take the time to consider how users will walk up to and around the spa. In some instances, it might be wise to move a path to ensure users won’t sit or walk on the lid cover of the mechanism box. ■



Mike Shadoan has more than 25 years of experience working as a service tech in the field. In 2013, he worked his way into the position of vice-president of sales for Automatic Pool Covers in Westfield, Ind. Shadoan has been an integral part of the company’s rapid growth. He can be reached via email at mshadoan@apc-mfg.com.

Understanding Salt Chlorine Spa Systems

by Scott Lenney

SALTWATER systems and chemical automation have been evolving for almost 30 years. Newer, more modern systems are the result of miniaturizing technology which has been available for pools and larger spas for decades. This technology allows users to add salt to the water, and through the process of electrolysis, sodium chloride is split into low levels of sodium hydroxide and chlorine. Once the chlorine has sanitized the water, it combines again with sodium to revert back to salt and re-cycles.

Today, salt chlorine systems are also available for small hot tubs and spas – either inline or drape-over units. These units are easy to install and make spa maintenance easier, require a minimal amount of salt, and simplify water care to ensure client loyalty and additional revenue for businesses.

HOW THEY WORK

Unlike traditional chlorine and bromine treatments, which lower alkalinity and pH, salt chlorine generators for spas use a process that increases the pH of the water and ultimately protects equipment

against corrosion. This is vastly different from earlier systems, which required 3,000 to 5,000 parts per million (ppm) of salt, making the water highly corrosive. Now, certain systems only require 1,500 ppm of salt, which is almost considered fresh water. It is also beneficial to keep water hardness at 250 to 300 ppm for salt levels of 1,500 to 2,000 ppm and 300 to 400 ppm for salt levels of 2,000 to 3,000 ppm to help protect against corrosion.

As most service professionals know, salt chlorine generators make very pure chlorine and truly improve the spa soaking experience. Traditional chlorine and bromine products contain compounds that build up and inhibit the chlorine's ability to oxidize and sanitize the water. As a result, service professionals will frequently need to drain these spas to keep the water clear. Without draining, the water produces conditions that can lead to cloudy water, skin rashes, dry and itchy skin or worse. Not only do salt chlorine generators provide better water for users' health, but they also reduce the use of expensive chemicals. So spa and hot tub owners will spend less, use

less water, be more satisfied with their purchase, and be more loyal to their spa service provider.

Jason Minor of Spatacular Hot Tubs in Medicine Hat, Alberta, says his company started looking for sanitizing alternatives about two or three years ago when the use of bromides was banned in Canada. Through this search, he discovered the ease and convenience of the salt chlorine generator.

"This product is easy to sell and install," says Minor. "We really cannot recommend the old chlorine pucks in a dispenser to anyone, as it feels like suggesting horse-and-buggy technology. Not only do you have to load the dispenser once a week, but as the pucks dissolve, cyanuric acid is released into the water, which builds up and makes the water's pH go way down. Then you find yourself fighting low pH and trying to balance the water chemistry, which is a time-consuming, never-ending battle."

Kevin Brakebill of KNS Hot Tubs in Redmond, Ore., had a similar experience when he sought out substitutes for traditional chlorine at the onset of the recent chemical shortage. Brakebill has always had concerns about using chlorine and bromine floaters in spas because they make water caustic and do not measure its need for sanitizer.

"I find the bromine tablets cannot keep up with demand, while the chlorine tablets keep adding chlorine, even when the spa water does not need it," he says. "The salt chlorine generator not only generates chlorine using regular table salt, but it also measures the chlorine levels in the spa water, turns off automatically, and stops making chlorine once the spa water has enough chlorine sanitizer."

EASIER MAINTENANCE

Salt chlorine generators benefit spa and hot tub owners because they make water maintenance much easier between service visits. In most cases, a saltwater hot tub can be maintained with just salt for sanitation, white vinegar for pH control and a phosphate remover. Service professionals installing salt chlorine generators on spas will find their maintenance visits will run smoother, and the spa can be left unattended much longer between service visits. The system will ensure the water remains clear for weeks with little to no attention.

Hot tub maintenance with a salt chlorine generator requires a pH adjustment once a week, as well as a monthly inspection of the cell to help prevent scale buildup. If scale is present, it is recommended to soak the cell in white vinegar for 20 to 30 minutes. Muriatic acid should not be used unless it is diluted with 10 parts of water per one part of acid or the cell will be damaged.

Salt chlorine generators can be especially helpful when installed on spas and hot tubs in semi-private rental homes, says Brakebill. Rather than scheduling frequent professional service visits, homeowners can leave a note for renters to hit a button on these intuitive devices at the end of each day – a much more realistic option than asking them to test the water and add chemicals to ensure there is enough sanitizer.



SIMPLE INSTALLATION

Installing a salt chlorine generator on a spa or hot tub is simple. With an inline system, it is possible to use a compression fitting to install the cell in the filter compartment, which keeps it out of the way while making it easy to inspect and service. Connecting a drape-over system involves draining, refilling, and adding salt plus a small amount of liquid chlorine and acid or white vinegar. It will be necessary to get power to the unit, which is often taken from the spa pack, or by installing a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlet.

Minor's company sells and installs salt chlorine generators for new and existing spa and hot tub owners. He says the systems are easy to mount to the side or a nearby wall, plug in and place the probe into the water.

When determining the best system to sell and install, the first element to consider is a 'boost' function. This feature will help bring chlorine levels up after use, as needed. Another vital component is an automatic chlorine detection feature, which will help prevent over-chlorination of the spa or hot tub water. Brakebill explains most spas typically need about six cups of salt added to the water.

"The salt chlorine generator has an easy-to-understand panel with indicator lights, so users know when to give the spa water a boost after heavy use," he says. "It also indicates when table salt needs to be added to the water so that the device can generate chlorine."

Brakebill explains most spas typically need about six cups of salt added to the spa water. "I like to warm up the water, add the salt, drape the cell into the water and watch it start to work. It is interesting to see the process in action."

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Building customer loyalty is important for specialty retailers and service professionals. Businesses can differentiate themselves from their competition by selling and installing salt chlorine generators on spas and hot tubs. The goal is to make clients happy with their purchase by minimizing maintenance so that they can maximize their relaxation and hydrotherapy.

"We spend time talking to our clients to help determine the best system to help them maintain their spa water," says Minor. "We find some clients are really savvy when it comes to testing and maintaining balanced spa water, while others really do not want to be testing every week. This latter customer is the perfect candidate because the system generates chlorine, has sensors to test the level of chlorine in the water and makes automatic adjustments."

Clients also want to feel like their spa or hot tub is a good investment rather than an expensive money pit to maintain. Brakebill makes sure he explains the additional cost benefits of salt chlorine generators.

"I have been around a long time, so I know which systems require too many expensive replacement parts or chemicals," he says. "I can buy a 50 lb bag of table salt for \$10 to be added to the spa, making it an affordable and easy-to-use water maintenance system. My clients appreciate that I am providing a great system that is also affordable and good for the environment."

Service professionals and retailers looking for a product to help build customer loyalty should consider these simple salt chlorine generators for spas, as this technology will simplify spa water maintenance while providing spa clients with amazing water quality. |

Scott Lenney began his career in manufacturing chemical automation in 1997, with his company *Acu-Trol*. In 2005, he launched *ControlOMatic* and a line of saltwater chlorine generators for spas and pools. Lenney also invented chlorine detection technology, which allows controllers to start and stop producing chlorine automatically, for a simple solution to water maintenance. He added this functionality to his chlorine generators in 2014. Lenney received a Master of Science in electrical engineering from the California Institute of Technology, as well as a Master of Business Administration. Before founding *Acu-Trol* and *ControlOMatic*, he worked for Hughes Aircraft Company on the Galaxy class satellites, along with various companies developing electric vehicles, including General Motors, Systronix, Enova and US Hybrid.

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