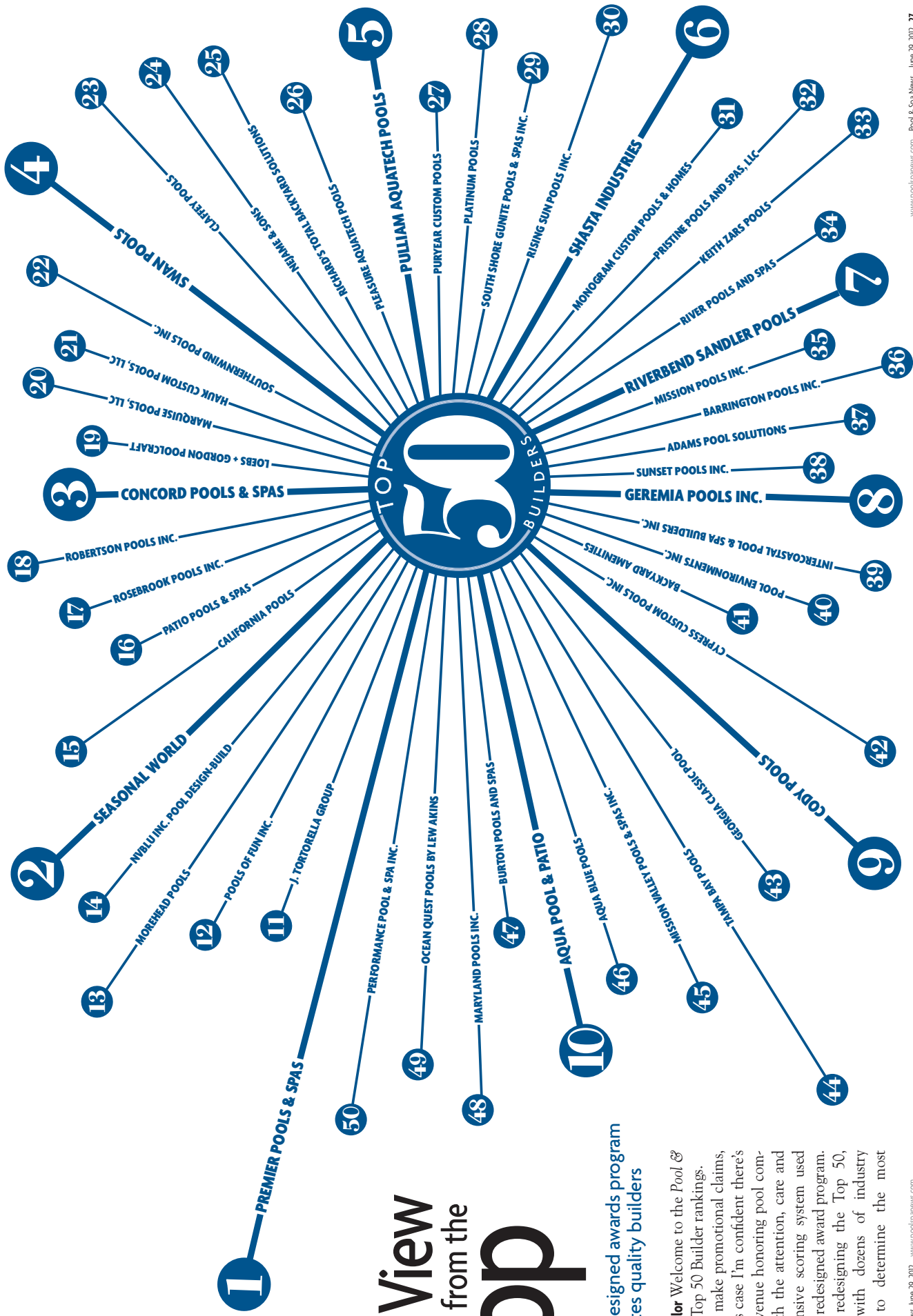


POOL & SPA

NEWS

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A View from the Top

Our redesigned awards program celebrates quality builders

By Erika Taylor Welcome to the Pool & Spa News Top 50 Builder rankings.

I rarely make promotional claims, but in this case I'm confident there's no other venue honoring pool companies with the attention, care and comprehensive scoring system used in the our redesigned award program.

While redesigning the Top 50, I spoke with dozens of industry members to determine the most

objective and accurate way possible to rate builders.

With their help, we developed a six-pronged scoring template that I believe is a powerful indicator of a company's overall quality. Here's a breakdown of how it works.

Though construction revenue is no longer the only component used to rank the Top 50, it's still the largest single piece of the equation. To be honest, part of me still thinks this is unfair. I know dozens of exemplary pool builders whose businesses are too small to make the list using this model, yet don't they deserve recognition, too? What if a given builder is in Michigan, and therefore builds fewer pools — is it fair to punish them because of where their firm is located?

Yet after giving it some thought, I realized my reasoning was flawed.

First of all, at a basic level, making money is the primary reason we all work. No one enters this business to give pools away for free. Revenue is the cornerstone of every pool and spa business, so it stands to reason that it also should be a key ele-

ment of our ranking mechanism.

Second, a high dollar figure actually is a symbol of something larger.

A business with a lot of revenue requires the owner to keep many more balls in the air than one with less earnings. Larger companies generally have a higher number of digs, which means more sales calls, bids, scheduling, purchases, budgets, staff, planning, strategy and marketing. Doing those things well is the earmark of a successful business, and the Top 50 celebrates success.

But a strong bottom line is only part of the picture.

Stay with me now — recently I purchased a pair of pants from Ann Taylor (a hugely successful retailer) only to have the zipper break almost as soon as I wore them. A similar incident happened with one of Ann's sweaters. If a company skimps on quality, the result will be less business over time, and we wanted to capture that fact in our Top 50 rankings.

To accomplish that, I racked my brains for a way of judging each builder's workmanship and adherence to scheduling, but

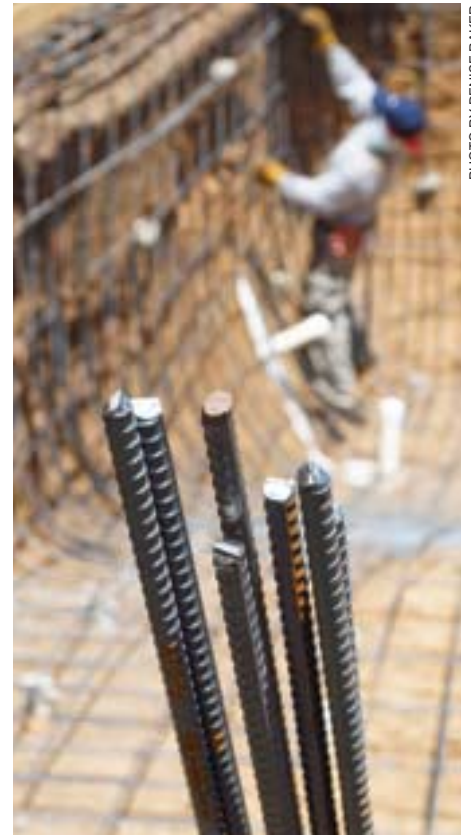


PHOTO BY DENISE BAKER



eventually scrapped that plan as being unrealistic. Instead, we devised a way to judge staffing, and made that the second largest component of a company's overall score. The logic here is that if a pool builder is serious about proper training, his or her investment will clearly show in the final product.

We awarded a smaller number of points to builders with longtime employees.

Next we looked at a less tangible aspect of what it means to be at the "top." To accomplish this, we created a sort of citizenship component composed of a builder's membership in industry associations, nonindustry groups and a separate community service score. While I can't say belonging to a trade group or local BBB contributes directly to a builder's business, I do believe it helps the entire industry grow and should be rewarded. In scoring this section, I was pleased by the large number of builders who are members of multiple organizations. I was also amazed, and moved, by the commitment these builders show to their communities.

Indeed, this section was one of the more

difficult to score because so many builders have woven charitable activities directly into their corporate culture.

The next category ranked the Top 50 Builders' online efforts, and included the strength of their Websites and social media presence. Sites were awarded points for completeness, design and functionality. Extra

Construction revenue is no longer the only component used to rank the Top 50.

points were given for a firm's regular participation on Facebook and other social media. Personally, I remain skeptical that Facebook provides enough ROI for pool companies to devote a lot of resources there. But the jury's still out. Meanwhile, I believe participation on Facebook and other social media is a

measure of a company's ability to embrace new marketing outlets.

Finally, there were the reference checks. As part of the application process, we asked builders to supply us with two different types of industry-related companies we could call. First, we wanted firms where the pool builder is the customer, such as tile companies and plasterers. We talked with those folks about the reliability of each builder in terms of scheduling and paying bills. Second, we asked for a list of firms that employ the pool company, including home builders and landscape architects. The idea here was to get a sense of each contractor's professionalism and ability to deliver what was promised on time.

We didn't publish the reference scores for confidentiality reasons, but it was an effective way to learn more about each firm.

On a final note, though this was truly a group effort, the redesigned Top 50 benefited greatly from the tireless work, insight and expertise of our design and construction editor, Rebecca Robledo. ■

An Eclectic Mix

With the new judging criteria for the Pool & Spa News Top 50, a mixed group of builder profiles are represented

By **Rebecca Robledo** It's been quite a ride.

Since its inception in 2003, the Pool & Spa News Top 50 Builders list has been determined solely by residential construction revenue. In this, the ninth year, we have decided to make the list more indicative of the best of the best by changing the judging criteria to include, in addition to revenue, factors such as staff training, Web presence, industry involvement, professional references and community service.

Many of this year's Top 50 Builders are familiar names, with 36 companies carrying over from past lists. But the additional criteria have allowed 14 new builders to join this elite group. And several companies placed in the upper ranks when they may not even have obtained a spot on the list under the old format. In fact, even in the top 10, companies that generated less than \$4 million in residential construction revenue co-mingle with firms that did significantly more business.

Here, we examine who's on the list and take a look at their strengths.

POWER GROUP: in the past, Top 50 winners were chosen based on residential construction revenue. But this year's new judging criteria include factors such as staff training, industry participation, Web presence, community service and references. The chart shows each company's total score on a scale of 0 to 100, as well as their rankings in each category against other builders. Often, individual scores were tied. Reference scores, which remain confidential, are not shown.

TOP 50 BUILDERS

COMPANY NAME		OVERALL SCORE	RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION REVENUE RANKING	STAFF RANKING	INDUSTRY RANKING	WEB PRESENCE RANKING	COMMUNITY SERVICE RANKING
1	PREMIER POOLS & SPAS*	74.1	1	18	2	4	5
2	SEASONAL WORLD	58.7	10	6	1	5	10
3	CONCORD POOLS & SPAS	57.2	25	2	1	6	4
4	SWAN POOLS	54.4	11	5	2	10	9
5	PULLIAM AQUATECH POOLS	54.3	15	8	2	7	1
6	SHASTA INDUSTRIES	53.8	4	11	5	2	6
7	RIVERBEND SANDLER POOLS	53.4	7	11	2	5	10
8	GEREMIA POOLS INC.	52.1	47	3	2	5	8
9	CODY POOLS	50.6	3	17	3	1	7
10	AQUA POOL & PATIO	50.4	44	1	1	12	9
11	J. TORTORELLA GROUP	50.3	19	9	1	11	2
12	POOLS OF FUN INC.	50.2	28	4	4	4	8
13	MOREHEAD POOLS	48.6	34	7	3	6	5
14	NVBLU INC. POOL DESIGN-BUILD	47.8	49	7	3	3	9
15	CALIFORNIA POOLS*	47.5	2	18	5	4	7
16	PATIO POOLS & SPAS	47.16	18	6	4	6	8
17	ROSEBROOK POOLS INC.	47.14	23	8	3	7	8
18	ROBERTSON POOLS INC.	46.1	12	10	3	8	12
19	LOEBS + GORDON POOLCRAFT	45.6	45	6	1	15	12
20	MARQUISE POOLS, LLC	45.1	20	7	3	11	12
21	HAUK CUSTOM POOLS, LLC	44.7	37	10	4	1	6
22	SOUTHERNWIND POOLS INC.	43.8	40	4	7	4	10
23	CLAFFEY POOLS	43.3	8	19	1	9	6
24	NEJAME & SONS	41.9	29	10	3	10	8
25	RICHARD'S TOTAL BACKYARD SOLUTIONS	41.5	31	6	6	6	11
26	PLEASURE AQUATECH POOLS	41.4	43	7	4	10	10
27	PURYEAR CUSTOM POOLS	41.3	22	7	6	8	7
28	PLATINUM POOLS	40.5	9	20	4	1	4
29	SOUTH SHORE GUNITE POOLS & SPAS INC.	40.1	21	8	5	10	11
30	RISE SUN POOLS INC.	39.4	38	13	4	4	6
31	MONOGRAM CUSTOM POOLS & HOMES	39.3	48	9	4	9	9
32	PRISTINE POOLS AND SPAS, LLC	37.9	32	8	5	11	11
33	KEITH ZARKS POOLS	37.6	6	18	4	12	9
34	RIVER POOLS AND SPAS	37.4	41	10	7	3	3
35	MISSION POOLS INC.	36.6	14	17	2	11	8
36	BARRINGTON POOLS INC.	36.58	16	16	4	2	11
37	ADAMS POOL SOLUTIONS	36.53	5	20	3	13	11
38	SUNSET POOLS INC.	36.51	35	12	3	13	9
39	INTERCOASTAL POOL & SPA BUILDERS INC.	36.4	36	11	3	14	12
40	POOL ENVIRONMENTS INC.	35.6	30	12	6	4	10
41	BACKYARD AMENITIES	35.2	46	12	4	10	9
42	CYPRESS CUSTOM POOLS INC.	35.0	24	14	5	5	10
43	GEORGIA CLASSIC POOL	34.8	50	11	4	13	5
44	TAMPA BAY POOLS	34.4	17	17	3	9	9
45	MISSION VALLEY POOLS & SPAS INC	34.2	26	12	4	14	10
46	AQUA BLUE POOLS	34.1	33	15	5	3	11
47	BURTON POOLS AND SPAS	34.0	27	13	4	11	11
48	MARYLAND POOLS INC.	33.7	13	18	3	10	10
49	OCEAN QUEST POOLS BY LEW AKINS	32.69	42	12	5	9	11
50	PERFORMANCE POOL & SPA INC.	32.61	39	9	6	14	10

* DENOTES A COMPANY WITH LICENSE LOCATIONS

WHO'S ON THE LIST



Premier Pools & Spas
Headquarters: Rancho Cordova, Calif.
Area Served: Multiple branches in 16 states and reportedly the first and only U.S. pool builder to enter the market in India, the firm completed more excavations last year than any 2012 Top 50 Builder.



Seasonal World
Headquarters: Clarksburg, NJ
Area Served: Central NJ
Highlights: The only New Jersey-based firm has an extensive training program and a social media campaign that includes sweepstakes prizes such as a cruise.



Concord Pools & Spas
Headquarters: Latham, NY
Area Served: Northeast
Highlights: One of the most reputable vinyl-liner builders in the country, the firm is a multiple-year Masters of Design winner and actively supports numerous charities.



Swan Pools
Headquarters: Lake Forest, Calif.
Area Served: California
Highlights: Thanks to a comprehensive training program that incorporates landscape design, and an average employee tenure of 17.5 years, this firm was a top scorer in the staffing category.



Pulliam Aquatech Pools
Headquarters: Fort Worth, Texas
Area Served: DFW, Houston
Highlights: Co-owner Debra Smith is an APSP Certified Building Professional and active in many industry and charitable organizations. Pulliam has been in business since 1916.