

Dealer Profile



George Plumbing Company, That Is!

By Denise M. Roberts

George Plumbing Company, Inc. was established in 1947 by George F. Saliba. He began his career as a plumber in 1920 in San Antonio, TX. With only \$200, a panel truck and tons of courage, he started his business.

Saliba's primary focus was residential and light-commercial plumbing repairs. He built a large and dedicated customer base by offering consistent, high-quality service. Many of those customers are still with the company today, and have been for over 60 years.

The family-owned, multi-generational company is now owned by Master Plumber George L. Saliba. His eldest son Clay, who has worked for the company intermittently since he was 15, is the current General Manager while youngest son Brian, is a Plumber's Apprentice.

The company offers over 90 years of plumbing experience among four technicians. A nine-member, four-truck team serves over 15,000 established customers in the greater San Antonio area. This includes water treatment customers in five outlying counties (about a 100-mile radius), which gives the company greater reach for high-demand water well treatment.

It's all plumbing related

Water treatment has always been part of George Plumbing, and due to the nature of the business, customers often ask for opinions and recommendations on why and how they should treat their water. Oddly enough, many consumers don't know or don't think plumbers handle water treatment.

In the early 1990s, George Plumbing began incorporating water treatment into its advertising, forever changing the company's future. "We remain in the water treatment industry because its fun," said company spokesman, Clay Saliba.

"We particularly like the challenging well water/problem water jobs. Offering water treatment expertise has allowed us to

significantly increase the quality of our customers' lives while making a fair profit."

New activities

George Plumbing's current activities include placing more emphasis on water treatment, creating a marketing plan that highlights water treatment expertise as well as plumbing. The company's biggest market is the educated consumer who has researched and is looking for the best product at the best price.

George Plumbing Company, Inc.

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Vehicles: Four



The biggest seller is the Smart Bottle Home Filtration System, which removes hardness, heavy metals, chlorine tastes and odors, thereby providing bottled-quality water throughout the entire home (a 3-D animation is available at the website).

To maintain a competitive edge, the firm operates each truck like its own profit center or small business. The technicians are given monthly profit-and-loss reports that reflect their truck's direct sales and cost of sales. They also receive monthly gross-profit-margin reports broken down by each job invoice. This shows the technician how profitable each job was, and what they can do to continually improve.

The technician's bonus is based upon his truck's profitability. The company helps the technicians control cost, improve efficiency, as well as anything that helps improve the bottom line of their trucks. This creates a sense of ownership in the company for them.

"Generally, if people feel a sense of ownership and pride, they are more productive in any aspect of life," said Saliba. "Ultimately, our technicians' efficiency and productivity directly correspond with our company's profitability.

Upping the ante

Over the course of the next five years, George Plumbing plans to gain a larger market share in commercial installation and maintenance. In ten years, the company hopes to gain entry into high-purity water treatment applications, such as pharmaceutical plants.

"We plan a steady growth through 2011," said Clay. "Not setting the world on fire, just a persistent, patient, enduring growth deeper into the water treatment industry. We have been here for over 60 years and we plan to stay here for another 60, so there is no rush.

"Within five years we estimate that water treatment will be 65 to 75 percent of our total revenue. Rain-water harvesting, greywater reuse, solar heating—we plan to get into as much green building as possible.

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Smart Bottle Home Filtration System

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"We invested in a solid website, designed to be visually stunning as well as educationally interactive, complete with 3-D animations and videos of our top selling products. We are also currently investing heavily in search-engine optimization.

"These days, when a consumer decides to make a big purchase such as a water softener, they do research online first. A well-designed, functional website that is user-friendly and provides relevant information and interactive features is the foundation of any marketing strategy."

"National awareness of water purity is becoming increasingly important and desirable. Changing US EPA standards to address the continuing decline of water quality will create the need for on-site treatment in every home.

"We believe municipal purveyors will start encouraging POE or POU treatment for certain health-related contaminant issues through rebates or tax credits. A case in point is arsenic. It can be argued that it is more cost effective to install POE devices to treat the entire home, rather than treat the entire municipal supply."

"Water treatment consumers are becoming more educated. With so much information on the Internet, consumers understand the product better," Clay

noted. "This will challenge R&D and manufacturers to redesign or properly design their systems. The industry and manufacturers will have to become accountable for the claims to the public about their equipment."

An enduring legacy

George Plumbing Company's past and current management principles emphasize customer satisfaction and confidence as the single most important philosophy in the organization. The goal is to make every customer as comfortable as possible, whether work is being performed at a customer's home or business.

From the very first contact, George Plumbing wants their customers to rely on them for the rest of their lives. And, although the founder has passed away, his goals and beliefs are alive and well. They continue to be the foundation and the heart of George Plumbing Company, Inc. ♦