

THE MAGAZINE FOR LEADING CONSTRUCTION EXECUTIVES

USBuildersReview

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Custom Air Inc. & Bob Rizi Plumbing

Keeping it Cool in Sarasota

Produced by Chuck McKenna & Written by Jeanee Dudley

Custom Air Inc. & Bob Rizi Plumbing (CAI) are conjoined businesses offering plumbing and HVAC services in Florida's Sarasota and Manatee counties. Joey Schwab, vice president of CAI, is the former owner of S&S Plumbing. "My father founded S&S Plumbing," Joey explains. "I went to University of Florida and graduated in 1992. We were in the midst of a mini recession, and I only had one job offer. I didn't want it so I came to work with my dad. In 1996, I started to take over the business. We bought out Bob Rizi Plumbing in 2005; however, that business dates back to 1987. In 2012 we merged with Custom Air Inc., which was founded in 1986. My father retired during the merger, and my new partners and I now own and operate the company."

The former S&S Plumbing worked largely with new construction projects, but Joey notes that the merger has allowed his team to expand its customer base. Today, CAI is able to offer a wider range of service and retrofit options to customers.

"It's not too common in the South to see these kinds of mergers," Joey explains. "But, it seemed like a natural fit to merge. Plumbing and HVAC go hand in hand. We have not rebranded yet, so we still operate under both business names."

A Broader Reach

Additionally, the combined companies bring the added benefit of carry-over customers. Over the years, Custom Air, Bob Rizi Plumbing and S&S Plumbing had attracted a large following of repeat customers. Due to high quality service, the three companies' clients continue to do business with the combined company. According to Joey, it is because of these enduring reputations that it has become easier to reach out to new customers, as well. The added bonus of serving as a one-stop shop also means lower operating costs. The savings and quality control offer major benefits to customers with changing needs.



“Right now a large portion of our business is in air conditioning change-outs,” Joey says. “A lot of that is residential, but we have many commercial clients. With new systems, technology has emerged to make operation and diagnosis even easier. One of our partners recently obtained certification in Niagara Controls building automation. It allows us to go into the larger buildings and set them up on desktop dashboard software that can identify problems in the buildings, pinpointing where the issue is. We have one ongoing project where we are setting up that platform.”

CAI is looking to the future, participating in a growing trend of sustainable technology. “We are going green and ramping up our recycling,” Joey says. “Our building automation is a big part of that, and helps us increase efficiency in a number of ways. A property manager who manages 15 buildings can look at all of them instantaneously to see how efficiently they are running and identify problems.” Faster diagnostics ensure that systems are repaired sooner. The longer a system functions inefficiently, the more energy is used, affecting the environment, as well as customers’ wallets.

Taking Care of Business

The recession and slow recovery have been difficult for many contractors; with the housing market struggling in Florida, the effects are more prominent in Joey’s area. Maintaining relationships and staying flexible have kept CAI afloat even in the tough times.

“The reason that our companies have weathered the storm is because of our reputations,” Joey explains. “These were already strong local companies and we rode our reputations to get through the worst of it. We are still plugging away and trying to do what is right for our customers. Diversifying has really benefited our business. We’ve shifted our focus in all divisions to service and remodel because for a while, new construction had really dried up.”

Pursuing new technology is helping the business continue to grow. “I trained with Green Plumbers of North America,” Joey elaborates. “I am a licensed green plumber, and I’ve even taught classes for them. We have made a move more toward LEED certification for plumbing with water conservation and reuse. We’ve become a local expert on green technologies in our industry.”



CAI also excels at building and maintaining relationships across the board. With suppliers, subcontractors, employees and customers, the business has established a trusted reputation for quality and innovation. “I am very confident in the people we have working for our company,” Joey explains. “We do good, thorough work. CAI is not a place to make a living; it is a place to make a life for our employees. We are aggressive about getting more work. We had to scale back our operations with the downturn, but we are starting to see new construction, and as long as that continues to pick up we will see an increase in business and our size as a company.” Together, Custom Air Inc. & Bob Rizi Plumbing are moving up in the industry, continuing to provide quality products and services that make life a little easier and a lot more comfortable for businesses and homeowners in Florida.

For more information about Custom Air Inc. & Bob Rizi Plumbing, please visit: www.customairinc.com.

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