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**AIRRITE**  
FORT WORTH, TX

Former CB Publisher Jeff  
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pg. 10

## Inspired Leadership, Progressive Outlook

When you pull into the back of AirRite Air Conditioning in Fort Worth, TX and step out of your car, you're enthusiastically welcomed by the company's official greeter and resident dog, Freon.

Go inside and you'll receive an equally warm reception by president Larry Taylor, wife Linda, and their employees (although it's unlikely that they'll lick your face).

According to Linda, employees are encouraged to play with the dog if they need a break or are having a rough day. Encouraged play breaks are just the first sign that AirRite isn't your typical HVACR company.



AirRite was founded in 1955 by Bill Sweeney, and had been well known for decades in the community for its superior service. However, by the late 1980s, the company was nearly bankrupt, although it still had a solid reputation and customer base.

In 1990, Taylor came in as a partner and gradually purchased AirRite. He carefully restructured the company, found where it could grow and save money, and got AirRite back on its feet.

Since then, the company has grown into a \$3.7 million operation with nearly 35 employees. AirRite serves both residential (80%) and light commercial (20%) markets, focusing on service, retrofit, repair, and a small amount of new construction.

During the last 14 years, both Taylor and the company have gained a widespread reputation in Fort Worth and the HVAC industry as customer focused, technologically progressive, and a terrific employer.

According to Taylor, this success can be directly attributed to his career with TDIndustries, **Contracting Business'** Commercial Contractor of the Year in 1995.

Taylor joined TDIndustries after completing his education at Oklahoma State Technical University and serving active duty in Vietnam with the Naval Reserves. He began as service technician at the company's Fort Worth operations, and went on to become a service supervisor and then vice president of service. Eventually, he was named vice president of operations in the Dallas office.

Although he was extremely happy being a part of the TDIndustries family, the long, daily commute between Fort Worth and Dallas made it increasingly difficult to spend time with his family.

"I owe so much to TDIndustries for my training and career establishment. I could never repay them," Taylor says. "They always drove home the importance of the employee: the employee comes first, then the customer, and then the company. If you take care of employees, they take care of the customers who will then buy from the company. This, too, is our philosophy at AirRite."

### ***A Partnership of Training & Service***

One of the first signs of AirRite's dedication to its employees is the company's commitment to ongoing training. For example, the company holds weekly company and training meetings for its sales, service, and production (retrofit and replacement) departments. Employees also take part in technical and customer service classes offered by the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA), the Better Business Bureau (BBB), Comfort Institute (CI), and by manufacturers and supply houses.

Furthermore, cross-training is highly encouraged, and it's not unusual for non-technical employees to participate in courses on equipment and code changes.

According to Lenny Lopez, service technician, "It's our responsibility to educate customers, which is why the company educates us so well." Fellow technician Junior Powell adds, "Our job isn't just about fixing equipment, it's finding out what our customers want and need. Therefore, strong customer relations and listening skills are a must."

Rick Ehrhardt, service manager, emphasizes how training leads to great service.

"We have to listen to what homeowners really want and need. We can't just sell the knowledge and equipment we know best," he says.

In addition to training, AirRite arms its technicians and comfort specialists with ample resources to help spread the word of comfort and IAQ. "We create our own marketing communication pieces instead of just relying on manufacturer-supplied literature," says Peter Detlef, marketing manager.

For example, the company creates full color brochures and sales fliers that promote the company's strengths in developing comfort solutions. There's also a leave-behind computer CD that includes testimonials from customers, research reports from government and health associations, and purchase tips for consumers.

Further, the company produces personalized invoice covers for its customers that feature a color photo of their service technician, warranty information, tie-in promotions, and coupons for other services.

According to AirRite's field personnel, the continuous employee training programs and marketing pieces are paying off in the form of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

"There are some customers who have been with us for 30 years," says Richard Martinez, service technician. "They have confidence that we will take care of whatever is ailing their system."

Tracy Poor, comfort consultant, agrees. "You truly see the effects of how you can help people."

### ***An Emphasis on IEQ***

For more than a decade, AirRite has taken the "house as a system" approach to diagnosing comfort problems. In fact, you could probably say that whole house diagnostics isn't just a concept but a value shared and promoted by all employees.

According to Sharon Liles, customer service representative, "We don't just replace parts and pieces; we look at the whole environmental package."

"We strive to provide customers with the ultimate whole house, clean air solution," says Taylor. "This means looking beyond the box of the HVAC system, and examining the insulation values of the house, duct leakage, air changes per hour, fireplace safety, CO levels on gas appliances, and everything that could have an impact on indoor environmental quality (IEQ) and energy efficiency."

Therefore, AirRite offers services such as duct cleaning, duct sealing, insulation, and emphasizes IEQ improvement through HEPA filtration, fresh air ventilation, and separate humidification and dehumidification systems. The company also has three highly trained comfort specialists equipped with the right tools to find out whatever is ailing the home and the customer.

In their vans, comfort consultants carry infiltrimeters, duct blasters, infrared thermometers, sound

meters, flowhoods, other diagnostic equipment, and a special console outfitted with a computer and printer.

Each computer includes PowerPoint and video presentations that enable comfort consultants to easily promote the IEQ services that AirRite offers.

“To determine comfort and energy efficiency issues, we run a load calculation on the home and complete an airflow survey with the customer,” says Mike Pempsell, comfort consultant. “We measure the room areas and the grille sizes, and use a flow hood to determine supply and return air.”

According to Pempsell, the survey helps customers understand concepts of positive and negative pressure and proper airflow. It also shows how larger equipment replacement isn’t usually the answer. “Even if a customer complains of insufficient cooling, many systems are often oversized,” Pempsell adds.

The comfort specialists also educate customers on the woes of a leaky duct system and how AirRite can solve them.

In 2002, the company purchased an AeroSeal duct sealing franchise, complete with all the equipment to determine the amount of airflow being lost due to leaky ductwork and then to seal it.

“Using the AeroSeal diagnostic computer, we connect one hose from a pressure port to a duct zone such as the attic and another hose is open to the home,” Kevin Lipscomb, comfort consultant, explains. “We then test each grille, and all the data is entered into the computer. The pressure change from the attic to the living area indicates the percentage of leakage.”

According to Lipscomb, even 15% duct leakage can lower system efficiency by 50%. “Nearly 50 to 60% of the homes we test don’t need new equipment,” he says. “Instead, duct sealing and perhaps some added attic insulation are often all that’s needed.”

If the duct system needs to be sealed, the AeroSeal computer-controlled injection machine sends small particles of aerosol sealant through the duct system to plug the holes. It deposits small adhesive particles directly on the edges of holes in ducts to bridge the cracks and create seals.

According to Taylor, customers are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of duct sealing and are requesting the service. So are other HVAC contractors.

“We subcontract our duct sealing services out to other local contractors. This way, they can offer this value-added service to their customers, without the large investment of purchasing a franchise,” he says. “We even offer training to their employees so they know how to look for duct sealing opportunities. It’s definitely a win-win partnership.”

Finally, AirRite offers air monitoring using devices from AirAdvice. The units monitor humidity, temperature and particulate count, and then download data to an Internet site. AirRite is e-mailed a report on the findings.

Lipscomb adds, “Because we have so many IEQ services available, we can provide customers a complete picture of what’s happening in their homes, make them as comfortable as possible, and save them money.”

### ***Unique Opportunities for Growth***

During the past several years, the housing boom in the Dallas/Fort Worth region has led to concerns

over energy usage, and to a push for builders to build tight, energy efficient homes, particularly those with an Energy Star certification.

In order to obtain that certification, the home must receive an 86% HERS (Home Energy Rating System) rating, an objective, standardized evaluation of its energy efficiency.

“Along with this push for energy efficiency, the local utilities were encouraging companies and individuals to become HERS raters,” says Toby Taylor, general manager. “With our whole house comfort system approach, offering HERS services seemed like a natural fit.”

In 2002, they sought the necessary training, accreditation, and licensing from RESNET (Residential Energy Services Network) to become both a HERS rater and provider.

“We set up an independent company called the HERS Raters of Texas,” adds Taylor. “As a rater, we offer HVAC system leakage testing, building envelope leakage testing, house problem diagnostics, HERS inspections for new and existing homes, Energy Star home certifications, subcontracting of IEQ services, and energy incentive programs.”

If work needs to be done to bring up the HERS rating in a new home to qualify for Energy Star certification or to increase comfort in an existing home, this division can refer builders and homeowners back to AirRite.

As a provider, HERS Raters of Texas trains and validates the work of other raters across Texas. “We have raters in Waco, Houston, and even Dallas-Fort Worth,” says Larry Taylor. “In fact, last year’s **Contracting Business** Residential Contractor of the Year, Tempo Mechanical, and AirRite work as partners in promoting our IEQ services.”

In addition to the company’s involvement as a HERS rater and provider, AirRite works with the Oncor program, which provides rebates to consumers for energy savings measures such as duct improvement and high SEER equipment. In 2003, the company saved a total of 750,000 kWh of electricity and was one of the leading contractor participants in the program.

The company also works with the American Home Shield warranty program, and handles repairs for agreement customers on certain covered items. If the equipment repair isn’t covered or if a duct renovation or sealing is needed, these customers can, and often do, turn to AirRite for assistance.

“Although we’re involved in several programs, it takes nothing away from our core business of providing customers comfort,” says Taylor. “Instead, all of these divisions enhance it and help build our customer base.”

### ***The Power of Networking***

When you talk to Larry Taylor, it becomes clear that he’s just a bit passionate about the power of networking and association involvement.

For example, Taylor has a long history of being active with the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA), where he served as national chairman for the 2001-2002 term. He also has served as president for the Texas Air Conditioning Contractors Association.

At the same time, Taylor is a founding member of the Comfort Institute, Service Nation, and the Texas Home Energy Raters Organization, where he serves as the organization’s first president.

“It’s unbelievable what you can accomplish and learn from your peers by being a part of an HVAC-related association,” he says. “It also leads to life-long friendships.”

Taylor also stresses the importance of networking with other local businesses, and has been a part of the Cowtown Executives for several years. He relates how helping out a fellow member surprisingly led to increased business at AirRite.

“One of our members who is a florist always faces a delivery crunch on Valentine’s Day, so a few years ago, we offered to help him deliver flowers in our service trucks,” says Taylor.

They created signs that featured both AirRite’s and the florist’s names and logos, and technicians delivered flowers instead of running service for a day. The outcome was positive for both parties.

“Some of our technicians were reticent about doing this at first,” Taylor says. “However, they ended up really enjoying themselves. In fact, they have never seen so many customers so glad to see them!”

This partnership has become an annual event. “Not only has it been great to help a colleague, but the exposure for AirRite has been quite valuable,” Taylor says.

### ***Do the Right Thing***

In addition to its involvement in local and national associations, AirRite takes community outreach and corporate citizenship seriously.

For example, the company is a member of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) of Fort Worth and works with them on the Cornerstone Community Center Project. For its part, AirRite takes care of the HVAC maintenance for the daycare center for students from Nash Elementary School, a local school in a low-income neighborhood. “If significant repairs or replacements are needed, we turn to the BOMA Community Services Committee Foundation for help in offsetting the school’s costs,” Taylor says.

AirRite also participates with North Texas ACCA for the Santa’s Helpers Program that provides needy children in Dallas-Fort Worth with Christmas gifts.

Finally, the company is actively involved in ACCA’s Heat the Town program, and has served as the host company in Tarrant County. “All companies have the civic duty of giving back to the community,” Taylor emphasizes. “Although we’re proud of our corporate citizenship, and it does lead to new business, we’re involved with these programs because it’s the right thing to do.”

### ***A Good Dose of Inspiration***

In AirRite’s training room, there’s a sign that says: ***In life change is inevitable. In business, change is vital.*** Ask any employee, and he or she will tell you it’s that philosophy and Larry Taylor’s passion for excellence that makes AirRite so special.

“There’s no complacency here. Between his progressive thinking and innovative ideas, Larry is our number one asset,” says Linda Taylor. “Everyone strives to follow his vision.”

“Larry has a unique way of challenging people to be our best. It inspires us,” says Tinker Bennett, customer service/parts. “Everyone is treated fairly, and we feel like a family.”

When asked what drives AirRite, Taylor says it all goes back to taking the best care possible of your employees and customers.

“I strive to make AirRite represent what I feel we should be doing,” says Taylor. “I always tell employees, ‘If I treat my customers and employees with dignity and respect and run the company in an honest, ethical matter, I can sleep well at night.’ That’s how I know I’m on track.”