

Duo Takes Contracting to Loftier Heights

December 24, 2007

2007 HVAC Newsmakers

The look of HVAC contracting will be very different in the coming decade. That is, if you believe the prognostications of two of the more well-known Texas HVAC contractors in the business, Larry Taylor of Aire-Rite Air Conditioning Co., Fort Worth, and Steve Saunders of Tempo Mechanical, Dallas. Because Taylor and Saunders have been at the forefront of treating HVAC systems as “living entities” capable of delivering energy savings and efficiency in an environmentally friendly way, they are being recognized as top newsmakers for 2007.



Larry Taylor (left)

FRIENDS CALL HIM L.T.

Taylor is the past national chairman of the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) and a member of several leading industry organizations. He is a familiar face at regional and national contractor meetings, representing the HVAC trade in business and industry forums. He has long been an advocate of contractor professionalism, and spoke about this topic after the tragedy of 9/11.

“In a 2001 speech I made after 9/11, I commented about our industry and made a challenge for the real HVAC industry to stand up against poor workmanship, shoddy business practices, and unfair business practices by becoming involved in industry organizations,” he said. “Today I issue a new challenge — that the real HVAC industry wake up and work toward saving energy for our nation.

“We as an industry install systems that use or waste more energy than any other products in the home and are afraid to tell the customer the whole-house as a system story. Why? Because we don’t know and have too much of an ego to admit it.”

But the pressures from higher energy prices and global turmoil will have a large impact right here at home and homeowners will take stock of every system they own to maximize their comfort, security, and budget. “Homeowners will start to demand that the HVACR systems be installed and commissioned properly, not just cheaply, that their home be checked and evaluated for energy usages, and recommendations with solutions to their energy issues be presented,” said Taylor. “They will start demanding validation of our work, stronger performance guarantees, energy promise guarantees, and then the recourse methods from our legal system when the contractors fail to deliver on these promises.”

The staff of Aire-Rite Air Conditioning takes the commitment to the whole-house approach very seriously. “We have been promoting this approach within our company as part of our normal culture, and our folks do not know any other way of doing their job,” Taylor said.

“We have been promoting the equipment as an accessory to the sale and it not being the main reason we are out at the customer’s home or business. Since we have a history of this type work in our marketplace, we have developed the reputation of being the problem solver when others have given up.”

HEADING UP EMPLOYEE-OWNED BIZ

Saunders is the CEO of this employee-owned business, a residential service and replacement company that has won several awards, making its employees proud and striving to achieve greater heights. “There are many defining points about Tempo,” said Saunders. “We do a lot of things well, such as information management, human relations, training, process improvement, employee ownership, servant leadership, etc.

“In addition, we always have a sense that the more we know and do — the more we are aware of how much room for improvement we really have.”



Steve Saunders

He said his company’s involvement with the energy and environmental issues is “an involvement with buildings and building occupants.” Saunders noted that all types of buildings have energy and environmental challenges. “Our efforts have been to understand the basics of building science and how that impacts and interacts with the comfort, air quality, energy expense, and environmental issues in the structure,” he said. “This knowledge is widely spread throughout our organization and helps us understand and solve problems.”

Saunders jokingly said he was “stopping selling air conditioning to sell more air conditioning” which may sound strange but makes sense when he explained that he has basically stopped selling HVAC equipment and been selling energy and the environment. “I can build us into a stronger company in service, replacement, and new installation markets by concentrating on energy and the environment,” he said.

Saunders believes that not all HVAC contractors will turn into energy and environment consultants. “It may be stretching people beyond their interest level or desire — it is for those folks who want to enhance their skill sets and offer a broader range of services for their customers,” he said.

In the current economic climate, Tempo Mechanical is looking to make a difference, carve out a niche, and continue to progress. “During this current housing downturn, it is valuable to have a point of differentiation and expertise in areas where consumers have interest,” he said. “Some contractors wake up every morning knowing that they are good. Others wake up hoping to get better. We fall in the second category.”

— John R. Hall

The Facts:

Name: Larry Taylor

Title: Owner

Company: AirRite Air Conditioning Co.

Location: Fort Worth, Texas

Notable Quote: “...the real HVAC industry [should] wake up and work toward saving energy for our nation.”

Name: Steve Saunders

Title: CEO

Company: Tempo Mechanical

Location: Dallas

Notable Quote: “I can build us into a stronger company in service, replacement, and new installation markets by concentrating on energy and the environment.”

Publication date: 12/24/2007