



A NEW PATH TO THE POOL INDUSTRY

Absolute Pool & Spa Care president plans program to create alternative employment options, support community, and strengthen pool industry

Mark Thompson wants to shake up the way workers start their careers in the pool industry. He's seen two main paths to the pool industry and plans to create a third.

"Either you're raised in a family that has worked in pools or it just kind of fell in your lap," he says. "Nobody looks at the swimming pool industry as a career path. I've always thought that didn't have to be true."

To Thompson, the president and founder of Absolute Pool & Spa Care in Atlanta, Georgia, a career in the pool industry should be seen as just as viable a career path as trades like plumbing or automotives. He believes elevating that perception is not only what the pool industry deserves but also would be good for business.



Before



After



Relentless labor shortages

Finding and retaining sufficient workforce has been a challenge for Absolute Pool & Spa Care.

“June is the month that separates the men from the boys, and the women from the girls,” says Thompson.

Not only is June one of the busiest months of the service season, but the heat makes the strenuous work harder. Absolute Pool & Spa Care inevitably sees a couple of resignations or terminations.

“We always have a shortage around that time,” says Thompson. “Now the labor shortage has made it even more complicated to prepare for the heavy season, but also hard to maintain enough help during the slow season.”

These challenges turned Thompson’s idea to create alternative employment options into a pressing need.

A program to provide opportunities

Several months ago, Thompson began conversations with local community organizations and high schools to plan a program to onboard young adults into careers in the pool service industry.

The program, which is in the beginning stage, will offer participants the chance to ride with Absolute Pool & Spa Care for a couple of weeks and if it is a good fit, they can take the Certified Pool Operator (CPO) class free of charge.

“That way they know, ‘yes, this is a fun job,’ or ‘no, this isn’t for me,’” says Thompson. “Either way, at least we can put them on the right path. And if it’s for us, great.”

Participants who want to continue will work for Thompson for 90 days. After that, Absolute Pool & Spa Care will pay for them to complete the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) apprenticeship.

Thompson plans to source candidates for the program from three areas: the school system, the nonprofits, and the sheriff’s office.

High schools

Thompson’s program will primarily work with the juniors and seniors of the county’s eleven high schools.

“We want them to know when they get out of high school this can be a very good career path,” he explains.

The relationship with the school district started through Thompson’s involvement with the Chamber of Commerce’s Workforce Collaborative Committee. Each meeting presented the opportunity to meet superintendents and principals of local school districts and show what the pool industry can offer.

Over time, he has been able to change the district’s perception of the industry.

“Now all the high schools know there’s an apprenticeship program for the swimming pool industry,” says Thompson, adding that they are introducing the program to students at local career fairs.

“We’ve made the swimming pool business seem a little bit more of a legitimate career path throughout the school system — and not just ‘a bridge until I get a real job.’”

Nonprofits

Thompson is also looking to multiple community organizations as sources for program candidates.

One nonprofit supports teenage boys struggling with homelessness. Another provides those struggling with addictions with housing and rehabilitation support.

“We hope to be working with those boys also,” says Thompson.

Sheriff’s office

Conversations are also underway with Thompson’s local sheriff’s office. The training program would provide a “second chance” to non-violent criminals with short-term prison sentences.

“When they come out of jail, they’ll have potential job openings,” he says.

More than a staffing solution

Thompson’s plan is to get the program up and running early in 2023.

“Everybody we have talked to has been very receptive and excited to introduce this program to the people they’re taking care of,” he says. “We’re set to go full force at the beginning of the year.”

He stresses other businesses can start similar initiatives to foster interest in the pool industry in their communities. Doing so can make a difference for your community and business.

What started as a seed of an idea is growing into a much bigger mission for Thompson. According to him, the alternative employment program is not just a staffing solution for his company, but a way to give back to the pool industry at large.

“What I hope to see happen is that there are so many people coming out of school who want a job in a pool business, I can’t employ them all,” he says. “Hopefully this will bleed out to other pool companies in our area and help feed them some labor as well.”



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