

POOL NATION

THOUGHTS & INSIGHTS



DILLON BROOKS
PRIMARY POOL SERVICES

MEET BRAD WARD
ATLAS POOL CARE

HERITAGE
PRO SERVICE ACADEMY
JUNE 6TH VAN NUYS, CA

**KELSEY
CRYER**
CLEAR WATER
POOLS

APRIL 2026 | ISSUE 21

POOLNATION

SPOTLIGHTS & INSIGHTS



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WELCOME LETTER

Pool Nation Family,

It is hard to believe we are already five months into the year. The season is moving fast, businesses are picking up speed and pool pros across the country are doing what they do best: showing up, solving problems and serving their customers.

We have had a tremendous start to 2026, and one of the best parts has been seeing so many of you at conferences, boot camps and industry events across the country. Every time we get around this community, we are reminded why Pool Nation exists. This industry is filled with hardworking, talented people who are building teams, growing companies and continuing to raise the standard for what it means to be a pool pro.

This month's issue is special because it highlights that growth in a real way. Through recent events and conversations, we have met pool pros who are making smart decisions, learning through experience and stepping into leadership in their own businesses. Their stories remind us that growth does not always come from one massive move. Sometimes, one small shift, one new approach or one decision to try something different can open the door to something bigger.

We are excited to share these stories with you, and we hope they encourage you in your own business this season. This is a big time of year for pool pros, and we want you to know we are rooting for you. Keep showing up. Keep leading well. Keep building something that matters.

Let's make this month count,
Pool Nation Team



HERITAGE
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JUNE 6TH 2026

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SATURDAY JUNE 6TH

 **Hands-On**

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QUALIFIER
SATURDAY JUNE 6TH

- 1ST PLACE - RAYPAK HEATER & \$500
- 2ND PLACE - \$300
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POOLNATION.COM
8:00AM to 5:30PM

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972-565-5750

16250 Stagg St
Van Nuys, CA 91406

MAIN STORY

POOL NATION BUILDS ON BOOT CAMP MOMENTUM WITH HERITAGE PRO SERVICE ACADEMY

Heritage Pool Supply Group's rise across the pool industry reflects a larger shift in what growth looks like today. For decades, distribution was largely measured by reach, inventory and speed. Those still matter. However, in an industry facing labor pressures, rising customer expectations and increasingly technical demands in the field, the companies creating the most value are the ones helping professionals work smarter, build stronger businesses and stay connected to the people and resources that can move them forward.

Heritage has become one of those companies by pairing scale with service. Its people-first culture has made it a trusted partner to builders, service professionals, manufacturers and industry leaders, while its investment in education and relationship-building points to a broader role: helping strengthen the industry from the inside out. That role will be on display June 6, when Pool Nation launches the Heritage Pro Service Academy at the Heritage/PEP location in Van Nuys, California.

The full-day event will bring pool professionals together for hands-on training, practical education and direct access to manufacturers and instructors who understand the realities professionals face in the field every day. The event will take place from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at 16250 Stagg St., Van Nuys, CA 91406. Lunch will be provided, and the academy is free for attending pool professionals.



Edgar De Jesus, of Pool Nation, said the partnership reflects the kind of industry alignment Pool Nation has always believed in.

“Heritage has always understood that this industry is built by people, not just products,” De Jesus said. “They support the builders, the service pros, the manufacturers and the relationships that make this trade stronger. That is what makes this academy so exciting. We are bringing the right people into the same room, putting real equipment in front of them and giving them training they can take back to the field immediately.”

“Heritage has always understood that this industry is built by people, not just products,” John Flawless of Pool Nation said. “They support the builders, the service pros, the manufacturers and the relationships that make this trade stronger. That is what makes this academy so exciting. We are bringing the right people into the same room, putting real equipment in front of them and giving them training they can take back to the field immediately.”

The Heritage Pro Service Academy is designed to be more than a classroom event. Attendees will rotate through hands-on sessions focused on pump installation and programming, automation installation and programming, heater i





Installation and programming, variable-speed motor installation and programming, and cool deck application for pool decks.

The goal is to close the gap between technical instruction and real-world application. Pool professionals will have the opportunity to work directly with equipment, ask questions, troubleshoot common challenges and learn best practices from instructors and manufacturer representatives.

Featured sessions will include training led by Steve Barnes with AquaStar, David Jones with The Attendant and Kenneth Kauffmann with Raypak, Tim Moore with Nidec and Jeff Moreau Jr with EnCore Brands. Each class is built

around practical education that service professionals can use immediately in their businesses and on job sites. "This is not about sitting in a chair all day and being talked at," John Flawless said. "Pool pros want to learn by doing. They want to touch the equipment, understand the installation, work through the programming and leave more confident than when they walked in. That is what they can expect from Heritage Pro Service Academy."

For Pool Nation, the Heritage Pro Service Academy represents the next evolution of its hands-on training model. What began through Pool Nation's boot camps is now expanding into a branded academy experience with Heritage, creating a more formal platform for technical education, manufacturer access and real-world skill development.



The move reflects Pool Nation's larger mission to strengthen the pool industry through education, connection and practical support. Through its magazine, podcast, boot camps and business education programs, Pool Nation has continued to build resources centered on helping pool professionals grow in both skill and leadership.

The June 6 event comes at a critical time for the trade. As pool season moves into full speed, service professionals are managing packed routes, customer demands and business decisions that can shape the rest of their year. Pool Nation leaders say the academy is designed to meet professionals in that reality, with training that respects their time and gives them tools they can use right away.

“When pool pros show up for a day like this, they are investing in themselves, their teams and their businesses,” De Jesus said. “Our job is to make sure they leave with something valuable. Heritage gives us the platform to do that in a powerful way, and we are excited to bring this experience to Van Nuys.”



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LOOKING BACK

POOL NATION BOOT CAMPS OPEN 2026 WITH A STRONG MARCH

Pool Nation's 2026 boot camp season opened with a strong March, bringing pool pros together in both McKinney, Texas, and Oxnard, California, for hands-on education, business training and the kind of real-world connection that continues to define the Pool Nation community.

The month began with the Pool Nation Heritage Boot Camp 2026 in McKinney, where attendees gathered to learn, connect and sharpen their skills alongside other professionals in the trade. The event reflected what has become one of the strongest parts of Pool Nation's training model: creating space for pool pros to step out of the daily rush, learn from one another and grow together.

"Attending the Pool Nation Boot Camp was an incredible experience," said Jeanette Horn. "As always, I left inspired by the people, the knowledge shared and the strong sense of community in the pool industry. It was a great reminder of the value of learning and growing together."

Later in March, Pool Nation continued that energy in Oxnard, California, with the Pool Nation & Raypak Boot Camp, a two-day training experience built around both technical instruction and business growth.

Day one focused on hands-on technical courses, including pump installation, heater installation and troubleshooting, automation installation and programming, and variable speed motor installation and programming. The second day expanded into business education and additional technical training, with conversations around pricing, profitability, water balance, diagnosing issues before they become larger problems and understanding what a business is really telling its owner.





“The boot camps are one of the biggest things we do,” said Edgar De Jesus. “They put us in the room with pool pros, manufacturers and partners, and that is where real training and real relationships happen. Pool pros need to get their hands on the equipment, work through real scenarios and leave with something they can use right away.”

Together, the two March events showed why boot camps have become one of the biggest heartbeats of Pool Nation. Whether a pool pro is running a few routes, building a team or growing into multiple locations, the goal is to provide practical tools that help them scale smarter, lead stronger and build a more sustainable business.

The events also helped build excitement around the \$10K Pool Pro Challenge, which is already gaining traction as the

first group of qualifiers earned their spots. As Pool Nation continues into 2026, the mission remains clear: bring the industry together, create hands-on learning and help pool pros leave stronger than they came. Later in March, Pool Nation continued that energy in Oxnard, California, with the Pool Nation & Raypak Boot Camp, a two-day training experience built around both technical instruction and business growth.

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HERITAGE PRO SERVICE ACADEMY



POOL NATION & RAYPAK BOOT CAMP



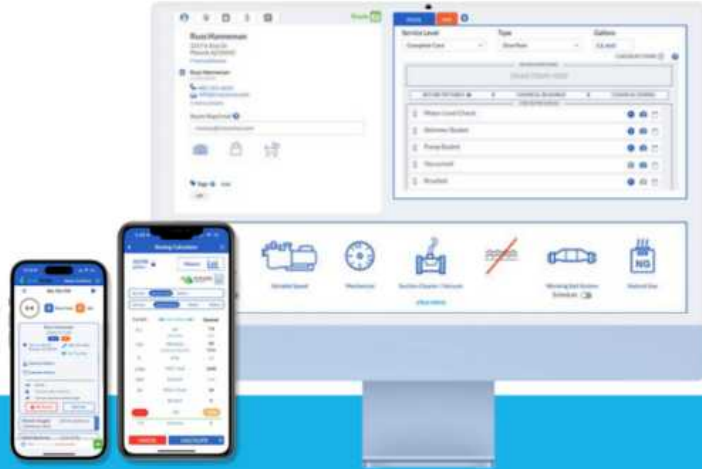
\$10K PRO POOL CHALLENGE EVENTS





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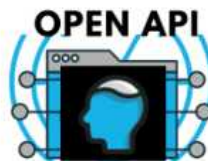
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Auto-dose or adjust for LSI with Orenda built right in



Advanced integration with automatic 2-way sync



Build your own integrations



Get Spin Touch readings into Pool Brain with one tap



Get data and trigger alerts with daily remote monitoring

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHTS

At Pool Nation, we believe one of the best ways to grow is by learning from the people already doing the work. That is the mission behind the Pool Nation Business Matrix, a program designed to help pool pros take control of their numbers, streamline operations and grow with purpose.

Whether you are just getting serious about your business or ready to expand, the Matrix gives pool professionals a roadmap and a community of support to help them build smarter, stronger companies.

In this issue, we highlight three pool pros with three different business growth stories: Dillon Brooks of Primary Pool Services in Ventura County, California; Kelsey Cryer of Clear Water Pools in Huntsville, Texas; and Brad Ward of Atlas Pool Care in Bakersfield, California.

Through their stories, we look at how they got started, what they learned the hard way and the decisions that helped shape their businesses. Their paths are different, but each one offers practical insight for pool pros who want to lead better, operate with more clarity and build a business that lasts.

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHTS

Celebrating pool professionals who inspire, innovate, and make a difference in their communities.



REAL STORIES

Highlighting pool pros who are building stronger businesses



SMART GROWTH

Lessons learned, challenges overcome, and strategies



STRONGER TOGETHER

A community of support and collaboration helping pool pros

DILLON BROOKS BET HIS BUSINESS ON A CARTOON TURTLE.

NOW PRIMARY POOL SERVICES IS ONE OF VENTURA COUNTY'S MOST RECOGNIZABLE BRANDS

Dillon Brooks was delivering bags of chips to convenience stores across Ventura County when he realized he was ready for something new. He had a truck, an entrepreneurial mindset and the drive to build something of his own, but he had no clear picture of what came next. So he did what any reasonable person with a truck and a little restless ambition might do: he started Googling business ideas.

A decade later, that search has become Primary Pool Services, LLC, one of the most recognizable pool companies in Ventura County. The company now services about 175 residential accounts with a seven-person team, including a virtual assistant who handles onboarding, phone calls, urgency reports and payroll support. But Brooks is quick to say the business did not get there through a straight line or a perfect plan. It came through pressure, mistakes, debt, growth that nearly broke the company and one major decision to stop measuring success by the number of pools on the route.





“It was the same four or five pools each time,” Brooks said about shadowing a pool pro. “I was really just kind of trying to network and see if I would like it.”

He liked it enough to take a risk. Brooks found a 42-pool route listed for about \$40,000, negotiated \$20,000 upfront with the balance financed and asked his girlfriend, now his wife, to take out a \$25,000 personal loan to help make it happen. “In hindsight, it probably wasn’t the best idea,” Brooks said. “But I did it.”

“I knew how to run a route,” Brooks explained. “So I was like, let me look into this.” That curiosity led him to a CPO certification course, where he passed the test but left knowing very little about the actual day-to-day work of servicing pools. What he did receive was one piece of advice that mattered: go to an IPSA meeting and ask someone if he could shadow them. Brooks took the advice seriously. He introduced himself to local pool pros, found someone willing to let him ride along and spent the next few months learning the trade a few days a week while still running his chip route, working at Trader Joe’s and picking up catering shifts on the weekends.

GROWTH IS NOT THE SAME AS PROFIT

Brooks entered the pool industry the way many service pros do, with a willingness to work, a route to run and a belief that more accounts would eventually solve the problem. For a while, that seemed true. He started the business with his best friend as a partner. Neither of them took a paycheck for the first six months, then slowly began pulling a few hundred dollars, then a little more, as the company grew.

Then COVID hit, and the home services industry exploded. Brooks sold the chip route, bought roughly 30 more pools and

gave himself a six-month runway to make the pool business work. Eventually, Primary Pool Services reached about 230 accounts. On paper, it looked like momentum. Inside the business, it felt very different.

More pools meant more employees, more trucks, more chemical costs, more repair issues, more scheduling pressure and more financial complexity. Brooks had done what many growing pool companies do in the early stages. He bought older trucks to save money. He accepted accounts across inefficient routes. He kept growing before the systems were fully built to support that growth.

“I did all the things they say not to do,” Brooks said. “Pools over here and over there. I’m driving. I have inefficient trucks that were breaking down because I went with the old trucks.” The deeper issue was not just operational. It was financial. Brooks said the company did not have clean enough books to know exactly what was working and what was not. The business was growing, but he was still making decisions by instinct. He knew some accounts were too cheap. He knew some pools were not profitable. But without clear numbers, it was difficult to know how much to raise prices or where the business was actually leaking money. “When you’re going through that growth, there’s so much chaos that you’re stuck in the chaos,” Brooks said. You have that instinct that something’s not working.



But we didn’t have numbers in our books in order.” That realization forced a major shift. Brooks moved the company to a plus-chemicals model, separating the base service rate from chemical costs so customers paid for what their pools actually used. He let go of bad-fit accounts, cut a property management company that was hurting the numbers and raised prices to where they needed to be. It was not a small decision. At that point, Brooks knew the company might lose customers. But he also knew the existing model was not sustainable. “I’m going to do it the right way and actually build a business that makes money, or I’m not going to do it,” Brooks said. “I might go out of business anyway, so I might as well give it a shot.”

The route count dropped from 230 to about 170, then climbed back to 195. More importantly, the company started becoming healthier. Brooks began to understand one of the most important lessons of his career: account count can make a business look impressive, but profit is what determines whether it can survive.



THE BRAND HAD TO BE BUILT FOR THE CUSTOMER

After the pricing shift, Brooks faced another turning point. He and his business partner decided to split. The decision was emotional and difficult, especially because the partnership had started as a friendship. Brooks took the debt, the newer trucks, a

and one employee who chose to stay with him. His partner took the rest.

The split left Brooks with about 115 pools, a significant financial load and a third chance to rebuild the company with everything he had learned. “The partnership has to make sense, not just personally, but financially.”

Brooks said. “By the time it gets to the point, the emotions are higher. You have more on the line.” Starting over forced Brooks to look differently at the company’s identity. In the early days, Primary Pool Services had used a cartoon shark as part of the brand. Customers liked it. Brooks remembered getting compliments on it. But at some point, he moved away from that playful look and replaced it with a cleaner, more corporate logo because he thought that was what a “professional” company was supposed to look like. Nobody noticed. That taught him something. The brand he thought looked professional did not make the company memorable. The character people remembered did. “I realized I need to build a brand for my customers, not for my ego and my insecurity with other professionals,” Brooks said. “I need to be remembered by the community.”

So he went all in on a turtle. It's bright green, blue and orange. It's fun, visible and impossible to miss. Around the same time, a remodel project brought in roughly \$25,000 to \$30,000. Brooks did not use the money to pay himself. He wrapped trucks, bought uniforms, invested in advertising and hired ahead of the growth he believed was coming. "By the time the work came in, I was prepared for it," Brooks said.

"That's what I did differently."

The turtle changed more than the company's look. It changed how customers perceived the business, how employees connected to the mission and how the market recognized Primary Pool Services. Brooks said customers began seeing the trucks before they ever called. By the time he arrived for estimates, many already recognized the brand. His team leaned into it too, joking about being the "Ninja Turtles" and taking pride in standing out at industry events.

The branding also helped support the company's pricing. Brooks said Primary Pool Services is often more expensive than competitors, and that means the customer experience has to match the rate. Wrapped trucks, uniforms, a professional website and consistent communication all reinforce the message that the company operates at a higher standard "If you're going to be more expensive, and you're not going in their uniform, you don't have a brand, it breeds something," Brooks said.

"We are the company. We have a professional website, professional wraps, and professional uniforms."

For Brooks, the lesson for other pool pros is not that every company needs a cartoon turtle. The lesson is that customers remember what stands out. They also pay attention to trust, consistency and presentation. In a trade where many companies still rely on generic trucks, inconsistent communication and word-of-mouth alone, a strong brand can become a competitive advantage.





"I needed to be remembered because it's a lot of money to pay for ads," Brooks said. "Before, when I went to a client to estimate, they didn't know who I was. Now, everybody has seen my trucks."

The more Brooks talks about Primary Pool Services, the more the conversation shifts from pools to leadership. The company has become more profitable with fewer accounts than it had at its peak, and that has changed how Brooks thinks about growth. He no longer sees success only as reaching 500 or 600 pools. He sees it as knowing what kind of company he actually wants to build, what role he wants to play and what profit he wants the business to generate.

A business mentor helped him see that more clearly by asking a simple question: how much money do you want to make? Brooks first answered, "a lot." The mentor pushed him to be specific. Brooks eventually said \$20,000 a month in personal income would be life-changing. From there, the mentor helped him reverse-engineer the business by asking how many pools, employees, routes, roles and systems would be required to reach that number.

That conversation changed the way Brooks viewed the company. Growth was no longer just about adding pools. It was about designing a business around a clear financial target and building the structure to support it. "Now I try to measure it in money and profit," Brooks said. "We measure things in pools, and every time you have an issue, your mindset goes, 'I need more pools. I need more pools.' Instead of saying, 'Am I making money?'"



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crews. Others may want a leaner operation with strong margins and less stress. Both can be successful, but only if the owner is honest about the goal and willing to make decisions that support it. His message to other pool pros is not wrapped in easy motivation. It is practical, earned and blunt.

"Prepare to suffer," Brooks said. "People think they're going to be their own business owner and that's great. But when it's raining over you and you're soaking wet, nobody's pulling out the umbrella to be like, 'Let me help you.' You've got to do it on your own." Primary Pool Services became recognizable because of the turtle. It became stronger because Brooks learned to build the company around the right things: the numbers, the customer experience and the kind of leadership required to sustain both.



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splash!



REVDUP
APPAREL

FROM COLLEGE SOFTBALL TO CLEAR WATER POOLS

HOW KELSEY CRYER TURNED A CHANCE JOB INTO A GROWING COMPANY

Kelsey Cryer did not grow up planning to own a pool company. She was a college softball player at Sam Houston State University, studying kinesiology and criminal justice, when the plan she had imagined for herself started to shift. Softball had been the dream, the thing she had worked toward her whole life, until a back injury changed the direction of her future.

Then the pool industry found her almost by accident. Cryer was fishing one day with her brother and one of his friends, who happened to own a pool company. He mentioned that he needed to hire a pool tech. Kelsey had been thinking about getting a job. The timing worked, and Cryer started the next week. "I had never done anything with pools," Cryer said. "It kind of fell in my lap."

What started as a job quickly turned into something more. Cryer learned the work, enjoyed the rhythm of it and began to realize she was good at it. After she moved on from that first company, a few customers tracked her down and asked



where she had gone. They did not want the other company; they wanted her! Cryer said, "I went and bought just the bare minimum tools and chemicals, and that's kind of where it all started."

That small beginning became Clear Water Pools in Huntsville, Texas, a word-of-mouth company with about 150 accounts, three technicians and Cryer still leading from the front. She never expected to run a business, but like many pool pros, she learned by doing, adjusting, making mistakes and figuring out the next step only after she had already taken the first one.

BEING A WOMAN IN A MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY

Cryer's background as an athlete shaped the way she entered the industry. She was used to pressure. She was used to proving herself through performance instead of talking. That mindset became especially important as a woman entering a trade still heavily dominated by men. In the beginning, she said, some customers assumed a male tech would be showing up. When she arrived with her long braided ponytail instead, there were questions. "They're like, 'Can you really do that?'" Cryer said. "And I was like, give me a chance and you tell me in the end."



That response became part of her approach. Cryer did not waste much time arguing for credibility. She earned it in backyards, pool by pool, by showing customers she knew what she was doing and could solve the problem in front of her. "I was an athlete, a power hitter, and a dominating catcher that ran the field. "I didn't just talk the mess. My respect was earned on the field. That's what I took into this field too. Let me prove myself."

That proof began to travel. Clear Water Pools still relies almost entirely on word of mouth, something Cryer does not take lightly. In a small town like Huntsville, reputation moves quickly. A customer tells a neighbor. A neighbor tells a friend. Before long, cleaning a few pools becomes a business with a name, a DBA and more work than one person can handle. Cryer said she began to see the company as something long term once she reached about 20 accounts. As the company grew to around 50 pools, she knew she needed full-time help and brought on her first employee. It has definitely grown from there and we are excited to see how big we can grow.

GROWING WITHOUT LOSING THE SMALL-TOWN STANDARD

Clear Water Pools is now around 150 accounts, but Cryer is not chasing growth just to say she has more pools. Her goal is to grow carefully, protect quality and stay

connected to the kind of service that built the company in the first place. "I don't really want to get too, too big," Cryer said. "I want to stay small so I can provide the quality of customer service that is the root of my company."

For her, that does not mean staying stagnant. It means staying intentional. Huntsville is personal. Cryer's family is from there. Her grandparents are from there. The company operates in a community where people know one another, and she wants Clear Water Pools to keep that down-home feeling as it grows. "I don't want to get any bigger than 200 accounts," Cryer said. "I like the smallness."

That philosophy may shift as the company's systems mature, but for now, Cryer is focused on building the right way. She is taking on new accounts while letting go of work that no longer fits. She wants to make sure the team can deliver the quality customers expect before pushing for more.

Cryer shared that, "One of the biggest challenges of growth is finding and managing people who truly want to work and who can uphold the high standards as you. It's very hard to find people to do the work with the same level of passion the way the owner would.



The business side has also been a learning curve. Cryer did not come into the industry with a business degree or a background in operations. She came in with work ethics, field knowledge, and a willingness to learn what she did not know. “My degree is in kinesiology and criminal justice,” Cryer said. “I have very limited business knowledge.”

That reality will sound familiar to many pool pros. The trade often attracts people who know how to work, solve problems and serve customers, but then asks them to become business owners, managers, trainers, schedulers, marketers and financial decision-makers almost overnight. Cryer is learning those pieces in real time. The company recently moved out of a rented shop and into its own space on family land.

She calls it a barn, but to her, it represents something bigger: ownership, stability and the next chapter. It is my happy place,” Cryer said. “That’s the place that I like to go every afternoon. I’ve built that. I’ve earned that. I’ve made that happen.”

THE POWER OF GETTING IN THE ROOM

For Cryer, the next stage of growth is not just about more accounts or more trucks. It is about access, education, and relationships. Her first Pool Nation Boot Camp showed her how valuable those connections can be. “I love it so far,” Cryer said during the event. “I’ve only been to two of the classes so far, and it’s already blown me out of the water. The connections that I’ve already made are huge.”

That matters because growth can feel isolating, especially for younger owners, women in the trade and pool pros building in smaller markets. Boot camps and industry events give owners like Cryer a chance to step outside the daily demands of the route and see what is possible through training, mentorship and manufacturer relationships.

Cryer is already becoming known in the industry. At the event, manufacturers and reps recognized her name, her company and the reputation she is building in Huntsville. For a business that has grown almost entirely through word of mouth, that recognition says something.



HERITAGE

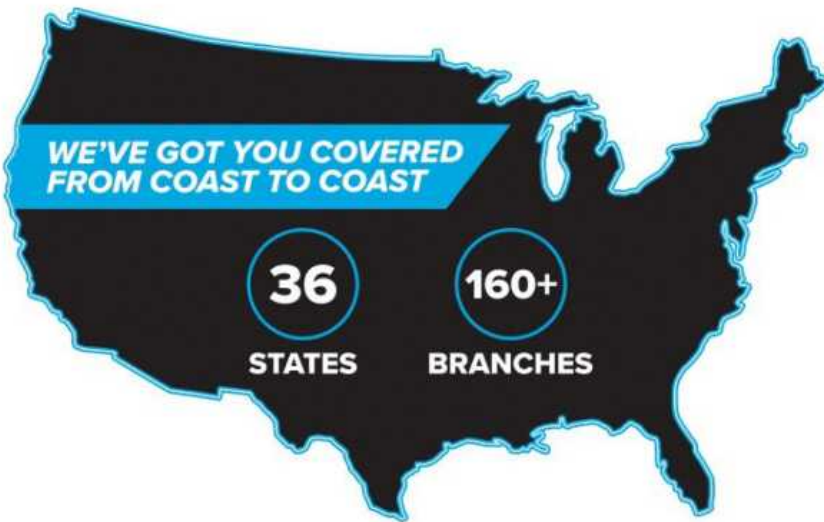
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WATER FEATURES |



FIND YOUR LOCAL BRANCH TODAY!

“It just warms my heart to meet new people who also share my passion for the pool industry,” Cryer said.

Her story is a reminder that not every rising pool pro is trying to build the biggest company in the market. Some are building something more personal, a company rooted in trust, quality, community and steady growth. Cryer’s advantage is not only that she knows pools. It is that she understands the value of showing up, proving herself and paying attention to the details customers remember. She knows what it feels like to be underestimated, and she has turned that into fuel instead of frustration.

Clear Water Pools may have started with a few previous customers tracking her down and asking her to clean their pools, but it has grown because Cryer kept saying yes to the next step. She said yes to learning the trade. Yes, to starting the company. Yes, to hiring help. Yes, to building a space of her own. And now, yes to growing into the kind of leader her business needs next. The future of Clear Water Pools may stay close to 200 accounts, or it may eventually grow beyond what Cryer can see right now. Either way, the foundation is clear. It is built on reputation, relationship and the same competitive spirit that once carried her onto the softball field.

She is still proving herself, just in a different arena now.



BRAD WARD BUILT ATLAS POOL CARE BY LEARNING WHEN TO GROW, WHEN TO TIGHTEN AND WHEN TO GET OUT OF THE TRUCK

Brad Ward was rebuilding pool sweep heads before most kids his age were thinking about a summer job. His father owned a pool retail store in the early 1970s, and by the time Ward was 10 or 11, he was earning \$2 a head rebuilding old G-79 pool sweep heads. A couple of years later, he was rebuilding motors for \$10 apiece, pulling end bells, replacing bearings, changing capacitors and learning the kind of hands-on trade knowledge that stays with a person for life.

"I'm a second-generation pool dude," Ward shared with a smile. That line explains a career that has moved through retail, service, construction, economic collapse, reinvention and large-scale operations. Today, Ward leads Atlas Pool Care Inc., a Bakersfield, California-based company with roughly 700 to 800 pools on service, including about 100 commercial accounts. The company has 12 service routes, more than 20 employees, dedicated repair techs, tile cleaning crews, filter cleaners and office support. But Ward's story is not simply about getting big. It is about learning how a pool company changes at every stage, and why what works at 200 pools will not carry a company to 500, 800 or 1,000.



GROWTH NEEDS STRUCTURE

Ward started his own pool service in 1989 as Executive Pool Service. Over time, the company evolved into construction, including new builds and tract home work. Then the economy collapsed, and the work nearly stopped. "We were doing new construction, and we were doing a lot of tract homes," Ward said. "Everything virtually just stopped."

By then, the company had sold off its service routes and was primarily operating as a construction company. In 2009, Ward went back to what he knew best. He still had contacts. He still had a pickup truck. He started with about a dozen residential pools, took side jobs and did whatever it took to keep moving. He ran catering trucks. He worked as an inmate monitor at a minimum-security prison. As the service business picked up, he added employees, then trucks, then a location.

By 2013, Atlas had grown to the point where Ward could no longer run the business from his house. “We worked up to about five trucks, and that basically maxed out my parking area at my house,” Ward said. “So we had to get a location.” That move helped Atlas grow to seven or eight routes. Later, the company reached nearly 1,000 pools before Ward made a decision many growing companies eventually face. He tightened the service area. The team realized many of its problems came from outlying accounts. A small issue that would normally be easy to cover became a 15- or 20-minute drive each way, making the work less profitable and harder to manage. The lesson was clear: not all accounts help a business grow. Some stretch it thin.

“You’ve got a lot of money coming in and a lot of money going out,” Ward said. “It’s just like a small service, but with bigger numbers.”

BUILD THE BUSINESS BEHIND THE ROUTE

One of the biggest differences at Atlas is the way Ward has built verticals inside the company. Atlas does not rely only on weekly service. It has two people dedicated to tile cleaning, one person focused on drains and startups, three repair techs and multiple people in the office. Each part of the operation functions like its own revenue stream. The tile cleaning side started naturally. Apartment clients kept asking for it. Ward saw the need and decided the company could fill it. “It was kind of an organic evolution,” Ward said. “We started seeing the need, especially with our apartment pools.”





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Now, with hundreds of pools on service, Atlas can cycle through water changes and offer tile cleaning while the pool is drained. That creates another revenue opportunity, but it also requires equipment, training and process. The same is true on the repair side. Atlas has techs who can handle control panels, heaters, underground repairs, skimmer replacements and other work that keeps revenue flowing beyond weekly maintenance. Jobs are managed through Pool Brain. When a customer calls, the office creates the job, assigns the date and time, and the tech can complete and invoice the work from the field.



That structure protects time, improves communication and keeps the customer experience consistent. Ward said the company is adamant about sending quotes on-site and having customers formally accept through email so the entire team is alerted and aligned.



The office team is a major part of that process. Ward knows many owners hesitate to hire administrative help because it can feel like a cost instead of a direct revenue producer. But he sees it differently. If an owner is still answering every call, chasing billing and stuffing envelopes at 2 a.m., the company is already telling them something. “If you’re stuffing envelopes at 2 a.m., it’s a good sign you probably need some help,” Ward said. At Atlas, office support helped produce cleaner financials, manage insurance certificates, reconcile payments, organize billing and keep the operation moving. Ward said his office manager began as part-time help and grew into a full-time role with what he jokingly describes as “400 job descriptions.”

That evolution is part of what every growing pool company has to face. At some point, the owner’s job is no longer to prove he can clean the pool. It is to build a company that can operate when he is not the one holding the pole.



IT DOES NOT GET EASIER, IT GETS DIFFERENT

Ward sees growth in stages. First comes the first employee. Then comes the location. Then office help. Then, eventually, comes the moment when the owner can take the pole out of the back of the truck and not touch the tool bag for a week. That does not mean the business becomes easy. It means the owner has moved into a different level. "This business never gets easy," Ward said. "It just gets different." That may be one of the most important lessons for pool pros deciding whether they want to scale. A 40-pool company has one set of problems. A 200-pool company has another. At 700 or 800 pools, the problems become more complex, and the owner's role becomes less

about technical skill and more about leadership, structure, efficiency and customer service. "What works for 200 pools is not going to work for 500 pools, and what works for 500 pools isn't going to work for 1,000 pools," Ward said.

Today, Atlas is focused on building a stronger corporate structure, including job descriptions, workflows and systems that allow the business to operate more efficiently. Ward said there are really only two ways to make money: raise prices or become more efficient. Since Atlas is already near the top of its local price range, the company is focused heavily on efficiency.

That includes making each role easier to perform by clarifying responsibilities and improving processes. Ward wants the office manager's job easier. He wants the repair manager's job to be easier. He wants service techs to have the information they need to succeed. The goal is to keep growing without depending on chaos. At its core, though, Ward said the pool business is still a customer service business. Technology has changed. The equipment has changed. The route apps and office systems have changed. But the basic expectation has not.

"If we don't perform, we don't get paid," Ward said. "So that's what it's all about. We do whatever it takes to clean the pool." Atlas has considered expanding into nearby markets, especially as management companies request service in other areas. For now, Ward is focused on healthy, organic growth in the greater Bakersfield area. He said he could see Atlas reaching 1,500 pools in five years, but only if they are the right pools: profitable, vetted and aligned with the company's systems. His advice to pool pros sitting at 200, 300 or 400 pools and wondering whether to keep going is simple. Know your comfort level. Growth can be rewarding, but bigger numbers bring bigger problems. Owners have to answer the phone, show up when something goes wrong and accept that the business will demand more from them at every stage.

Still, Ward clearly loves the work: the problem-solving, the daily unknowns and the process of building something that can last beyond one person in one truck. "I'm a pool dude to the core," Ward said. "I don't know what else I'd do."



10

BUSINESS LESSONS FROM THIS MONTH'S POOL PRO SPOTLIGHTS

1 MORE POOLS DO NOT ALWAYS MEAN MORE PROFIT

This is probably the strongest lesson from Dillon Brooks' story. He grew Primary Pool Services to 230 pools and still was not making the money people would assume a company that size should make. The lesson for pool pros is huge: account count can become a vanity metric if pricing, routing, trucks, chemicals and labor are not dialed in. His advice? Stop asking, "How many pools do you have?" Start asking, "How profitable is each account?"

2 GROWTH EXPOSES EVERY WEAK SYSTEM

Dillon felt the chaos when his company grew too fast. Brad Ward said what works at 200 pools will not work at 500 or 1,000. Kelsey Cryer is already feeling the pressure of managing techs, standards and expectations at around 150 accounts.

3 THE OWNER'S JOB HAS TO EVOLVE

Brad's clearest lesson is that, at some point, the owner has to get the pole out of the truck. That does not mean the owner becomes less important. It means the work changes from cleaning pools to building structure, training people, watching numbers and leading the company. The goal is not to prove you can still do every job. The goal is to build a company that does not collapse when you stop doing every job.

4 YOUR SERVICE AREA MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK.

Brad's company reached nearly 1,000 pools, then tightened the service area because outlying accounts were costing too much time and creating too many inefficiencies.

This is a lesson many pool pros miss. A pool may look profitable on paper, but if it stretches the route, pulls techs too far away and creates extra trips, it may be quietly costing the company money. Not every account is a good account.

5 **BRANDING IS NOT DECORATION. IT IS TRUST**

Dillon's turtle is funny and memorable, but the deeper lesson is strategic. He realized customers remembered the playful brand more than the "professional" logo. The wrapped trucks, uniforms and bright colors helped customers recognize the company before he ever showed up for the estimate. For higher-priced service companies, branding supports the value proposition. If you want customers to see you as premium, the business has to look, feel and operate that way.

6 **WORD OF MOUTH STILL MATTERS, BUT IT HAS TO BE EARNED.**

Kelsey's growth came almost entirely through word of mouth. Customers called asking where she went, then referred her to others. That says something about quality, trust and consistency. For smaller companies especially, word of mouth can

be to keep evolving from pool guy to operator to leader of a larger organization. Scaling a pool company is not only a business challenge. It is a leadership test, and the business grows only as much as the owner is willing to grow. More powerful than advertising, but only when the service is good enough for people to attach their name to the referral. In a small market, reputation is marketing.

7 **HIRE BEFORE DESPERATION FORCES YOUR HAND**

Dillon talked about hiring in desperation and ignoring red flags. Kelsey waited until she could afford a truck and real help. Brad built specialized roles as the operation grew. The shared lesson is that hiring cannot only be reactive. The wrong hire can cost more than waiting, but waiting too long can burn out the owner and weaken service. Growth requires people, but the right people matter more than simply filling a seat.

8 **OFFICE HELP IS NOT OVERHEAD. IT IS INFRASTRUCTURE**

Brad's point about stuffing envelopes at 2 a.m. is one of the most practical lessons in all three stories. Dillon also added a

virtual assistant to handle calls, onboarding and payroll support. A lot of pool pros think admin help is a luxury, but these stories show it can become the infrastructure that allows the owner to sell, manage, train and lead. If the owner is missing calls, chasing invoices and doing paperwork at midnight, the business is already asking for a new system.

9 BUILD REVENUE STREAMS AROUND WHAT CUSTOMERS ALREADY NEED

Brad's tile cleaning, drains, startups, repairs and commercial work did not come out of nowhere. They grew from customer demand and operational opportunity. He saw what clients were asking for and turned those needs into structured verticals inside the business. The next revenue stream may already be hiding inside the calls your customers keep making.

10 GROWTH IS PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

This might be the quiet lesson behind all three stories. Dillon had to confront fear around pricing and profit. Kelsey had to prove herself in a male-dominated trade and learn business as she went.

Brad had For smaller companies especially, word of mouth can be more powerful than advertising, but only when the service is good enough for people to attach their name to the referral. In a small market, reputation is marketing.



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