



BILL RILEY STILL A HYDRONIC AND RADIANT TO RECKON WITH FORCE

Special to Radiant Living



Bill Riley, owner of William J. Riley Plumbing & Heating, Warwick, R.I., is proud of a recently completed hydronics installation.

Back in the 1960s, Bill Riley was the force to reckon with as the local billiards champion in smoky parlors near his home. And to young and old contenders in the Norwich, Conn., area, he was known as the one to beat. With pool cue in hand, and a regulation table, Bill was smokin' hot. And just about unbeatable.

"All through high school I played pool. I got pretty good, too," says Riley.

He's being modest, though. At just 16, in 1965, he played the great Hall-of-Famer, Willie Mosconi in Norwich.

"He trounced me good," recalls Riley.

But Mosconi was amused, in a good way. And, lucky for Bill, there was no money on the table.

"When I graduated high school without a job, my father urged me to let go of billiards and get one."

Being a pragmatic guy — even in his youth — Riley saw wisdom in that advice.

And while he still plays a mean game of pool, it wasn't long after his Dad uttered those words of advice that he found the path that led him to a life-

time in the plumbing and mechanical trades. As it was with the game of billiards, he mastered the art of plumbing — to the appreciation of customers and competitors alike.

Riley's first job was at Electric Boat, the submarine division of General Dynamics Corp., where he worked on subs as a pipefitter. There, he gained all kinds of experience, not only piping, but reading blueprints and obtaining basic trade knowledge. Shooting pool had taught him to master angles and to think outside the box. He grasped everything quickly. But, months later, because of a major company strike, Riley was looking for work.

So he began an apprenticeship with a local plumber in Warwick, R.I. Because of his ability to easily understand mechanical things, and with soaring leadership skills (yes, even as an apprentice), Riley was promoted to foreman within a year. He continued there for another six years.

It was the next job, however, with an industrial/commercial plumbing company, where he got real exposure to the trade.



Riley (center) and Mike Muzzy, supervisor (back), show Charlie Bursey, F.W. Webb salesman (front), how a mixing valve is installed.

“It was in ‘77 that I decided I wanted to be in business for myself,” Riley says. “So I started a company right out of my basement.”

Work, with a Sprinkle of Romance

Riley’s wife, Corinne, has been his strongest supporter from the start. They met on a blind date in the spring of ‘65. Recalling that evening, Riley says, “A friend of mine was working with Corinne in a testing lab in Rhode Island; he set us up. Needless to say, it certainly went well.”

Bill and Corinne married in January of ‘66. A dozen years later, as their new business began to flourish, Corinne left her daytime job as a draftsman and went to work at home, taking care of the growing firm’s bookwork. Her industrial draftsman background made her a key addition to the team.



Riley installs a Taco iSeries mixing valve for radiant floor heating at his 2,400-sq.-ft. shop in Warwick, R.I.

Thirty-seven years later, William J. Riley Plumbing & Heating Co. Inc., based in Warwick, R.I., is a solid enterprise. Even during the recession, they held the line steadily, having grown into residential, commercial and industrial work.

“We took a hit when the economy went down in 1990,” he explains. “We were up to 22 people, but when the market dried up, we had no choice but to let people go. It just tanked, and we dropped down to two people.”

Now, with seven full-time employees and an economy that’s strengthening nicely, Riley’s firm serves clients throughout the entire state, from Woonsocket to Westerly. They also have licenses in Massachusetts, when they’re called to nearby jobs there.

The company remains a family-run operation. Bill enjoys taking care of the larger estimates for the firm. He also keeps the computer systems and inventory up to date. Corinne continues to manage the bookwork. Their daughter, Elizabeth, is the operations manager; she tackles the day-to-day business duties and will one day become president of the company. As a part of Business Networking



Harry Grattage, foreman, installs a Taco variable delta T pump in a customer’s home.

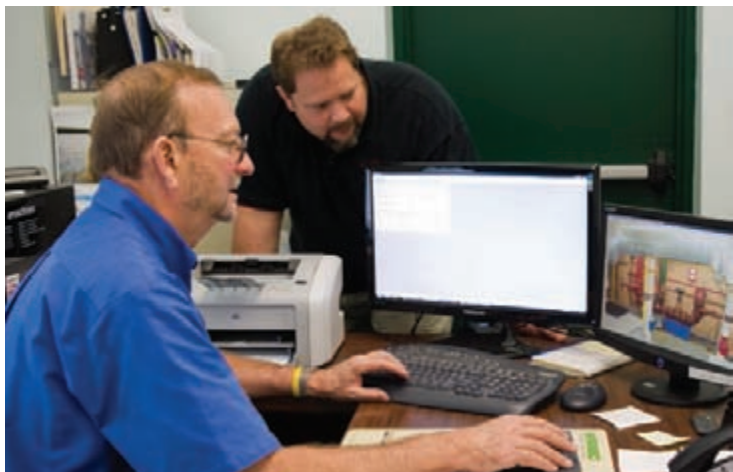
International (BNI), Elizabeth attends weekly meetings to hone her entrepreneurial talents and gain business referrals.

Elizabeth’s husband, Mike, is the supervisor and dispatcher, a job he also shares with Liz. He takes care of the routine estimating and trains technicians.

Bill and Corinne’s son, Michael, works in the field, testing backflow preventers — another niche the company has. He also has joined another chapter of BNI to get the company referrals.

Sometimes, when they need a few extra pairs of hands in the office or shop, Riley’s grandchildren, Robby and Michaela, come in to help. In fact, Robby has helped at jobsites routinely. Last spring, Robby took a job with one of Riley’s customers in the maintenance department of a local historical mansion. His plumbing knowledge was his ace up his sleeve.

Also working at Riley’s enterprise are journeymen Harry Grattage, Charlie Nichols, David Palmer and Jim Ferrandi.



Riley (front) and Mike Muzzy, supervisor (rear), go over photos of a project.

Steady as She Goes

Business continues to solidify as the economy improves.

“Last winter was a monster,” adds Riley. “It seemed to us like the winter of ’13/’14 was worse — and better for business — than any we can recall. Now that we’re in the warmer months, our workload is much more balanced with a good mix of plumbing and mechanical work; we prefer it that way.”

According to Riley, these days they mostly split their time between commercial and residential work. Most of the work stems from remodeling and service work, but they occasionally do new construction projects. And, loving radiant work, they jump into it whenever possible.

“I always try to stay ahead of the learning curve. I’m constantly updating our systems to the latest software. I want the best for my company,” says Riley.



David Palmer, technician (left), and Dan Field (no longer w/the company) install radiant tubing.

The same can be said for his technicians’ training.

“Laws are strict here in the New England states,” Riley says. “You need licenses for just about everything — pipefitting, plumbing, electrical work — they all require different licenses. Then if you’re working out of state, you need licenses for those states too.”

Riley serves as chairman of the Rhode Island Plumbing Board, and



Riley stands before the shop’s “Taco-green” mechanical room, dedicated to Taco’s Johnny White.

with their local PHCC chapter, runs two apprenticeship schools — a plumbing apprentice school and a pipefitting school.

“Everyone at the company knows how much hard work it takes to complete the apprenticeships. We want to help the younger generations to enter the trade as much as we can,” says Riley.

Most apprenticeship courses are four years, with 8,000 hours of on-the-job training. Once complete, an apprentice is eligible to take the journeyman exam. If the journeyman wishes to become a master plumber or a master pipefitter, he has to plow through many more hours of school plus on-the-job training.

With their technicians trained to be top-tier installers, it should be no surprise that the company uses products and technology from top-tier manufacturers for the work that they do.

“We’re loyal to our suppliers and the manufacturers who’ve stood behind us through the years,” says Riley. “We’re glad to have Taco as the supplier of choice for all things hydronic. In fact,” he grins, “we built a working shrine for them at our shop.”

The mechanical room at the 2,400-sq.-ft. shop they constructed in 2009 was built to show off their hydronic and radiant expertise. An entire wall of hydronic components serves as the command and control center for the hydronic and solar thermal-assisted radiant heat system.

Though, the Apricus solar thermal arrays’ key responsibility is to meet the shop’s DHW needs.

“In our new shop, which we moved into five years ago, we installed an extensive, multi-zone radiant heat system with Taco’s pumps, radiant mixing blocks, circulators, zone valves, thermostatic mixing valves, switching relays, shutoff flanges — just about every hydronic component they produce. I mean, why wouldn’t we? They’re right here in Rhode Island; we’re neighbors.”

Clearly, Riley and his team put plenty of planning into the business of retrofitting the old, 2,400-sq.-ft. block structure modernized into their



Riley, owner of William J. Riley Plumbing & Heating (2nd from right), his wife Corinne, vice president (right), their daughter Liz Muzzy, operations manager (2nd from left), and son-in-law Mike Muzzy, supervisor (left), in front of the shop.



Michaela Muzzy, Riley's granddaughter who occasionally comes in to file paperwork (left), with Corinne Riley, vice president (center), and Liz Muzzy, operations manager (right).

new headquarters. From the front entrance, visitors in winter would immediately experience snow-melted walkways (in addition to a snow-melted delivery slab out back) and

two 30-tube solar thermal arrays. They were generous with insulation, too. On a winter day, they need only 40,000 Btuh.

“We install Bradford White water



Emerson Swan Salesman, Frank Melberg (front), explains the solar control setup for the Caleffi solar control to Riley (center) and Liz Muzzy, operations manager.

heaters exclusively and especially like their new eF series commercial systems; we installed some of them at the Swarovski jewelry headquarters,” adds Riley. “A few of us went to the Bradford White plant in Michigan a few years ago. After we aced their service test, they asked if we’d be their territory service reps and sent us a huge inventory of Bradford White service parts ... most of which are still here because we repair their water heaters so rarely.”

“We also use Modine, Watts and Laars technology,” he adds. “We have excellent results with them every time. We install a lot of Apollo ball valves and Josam drainage products, and we use Viega ProPress fittings a lot, too. In all, the manufacturers whose products we work with are reliable and provide us with the support we need whenever it’s called for. Sort of like our promise to customers!”

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