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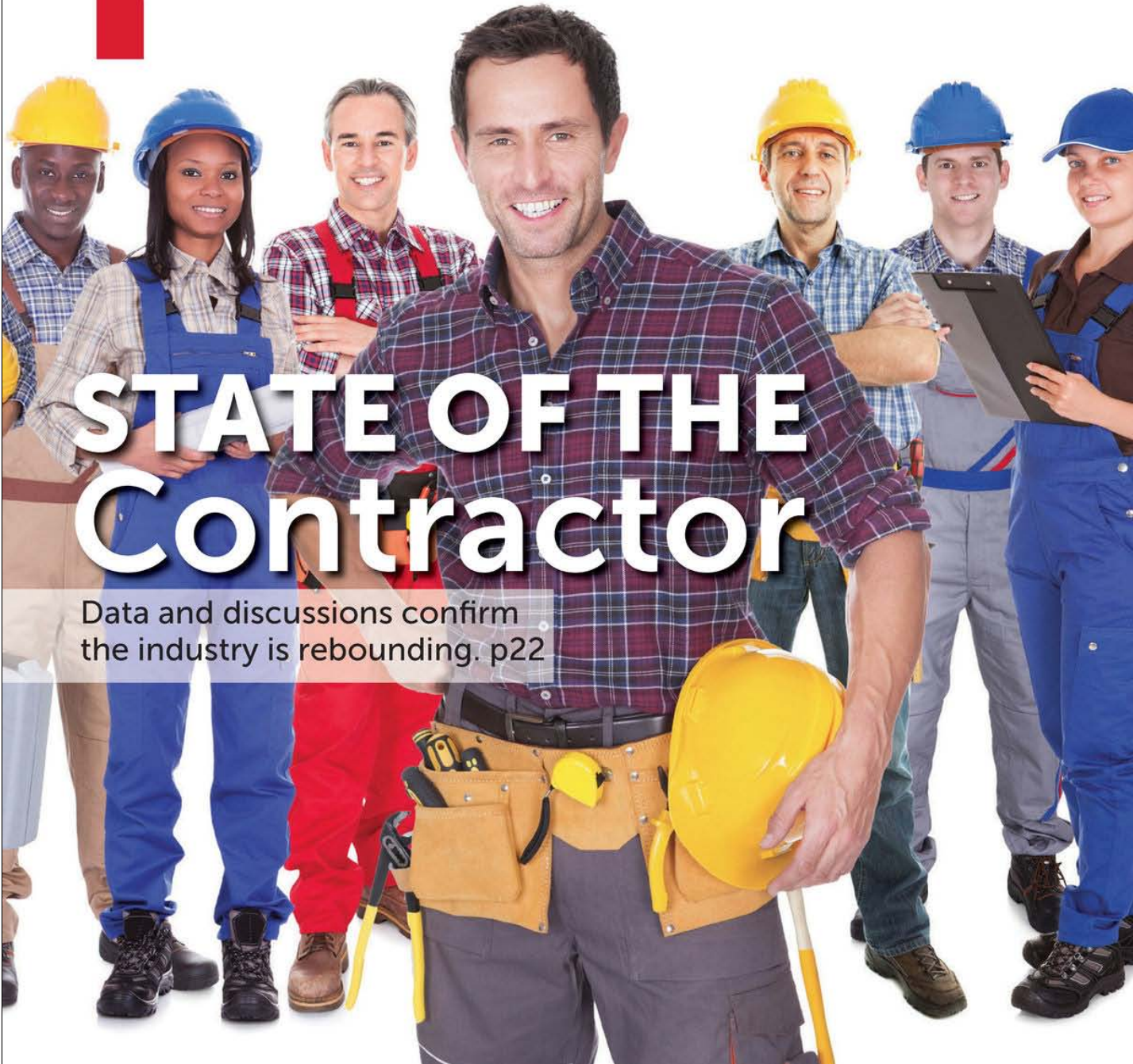
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# state of the contractor

| MOST GENEROUS |

## Jim Godbout Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning

**SPECIAL TO PHC NEWS**

FROM JIM GODBOUT PLUMBING, HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING

*"It's all about community."*

If there were a tagline to Jim Godbout's business, it'd fit. Based in Biddeford, Maine, Jim Godbout Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning – about 15 miles south of Portland – is a soup-to-nuts enterprise. Godbout describes their work as, "building water parks to fixing toilets and everything in between."

Hydronics is a specialty; after all, this is Maine. And, wait'll you see their recipe for heating systems built for the rigors of winter. They know a thing or two about how to prevent midwinter discomfort unique to that part of the world.

Godbout's opinion is that the company wouldn't have a leg to stand on if not for the relationships they've built in the 50-mile coastal territory they call home. It's one thing to recognize this; it's another entirely to build a business strategy that embraces it fully.

So it's no surprise that "home" is where it all began. Jim Godbout's family moved from Canada to Biddeford, Maine, in 1950. At the age of 8, Jim was a "lead-melting



Jim Godbout, owner of Jim Godbout Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning.

boy," helping his grandfather solder cast iron pipe. With each year, Jim's responsibilities and skills grew. In high school, he opted for the co-op program so that he could learn carpentry. By this time, his parents had split, so he was an early bread-winner for his mother and two young brothers.

Carpentry work put Jim in close proximity to plumbing and mechanical

subs. In their work, he saw a niche that he liked. He also saw that he could help to elevate the oft-maligned, iconic "butt crack" image of the plumber. By '85 and '86, in his mid-20s, Godbout helped found the Mechanical Trades Association (MTA) of York County, Maine, and served as their president for seven years. He was also involved with PHCC, and served as the state association's president.

"There were up to 50 members in MTA at one point," he said.

According to Godbout, the impetus to start the MTA was chiefly to bring the plumbing and heating trades together in preparation for the state's gas licensing requirement. After that was accomplished, the group gradually frittered away.

"But, we had about \$25,000 in the coffers," he added. "A few of us decided to split the funds between the Biddeford Athletic Association for team uniforms, and the local food pantry, still in operation today."

With these good deeds, a light went on for Godbout. Helping others in the community felt good. Through the years, this became a recurring theme as he offered his time and resources to others in need.

### Hiring the best; mentors, too

During his first years as an independent trade pro, Godbout was employed by other firms as a sub. In 1987, he opened his own firm, acknowledging early-on that customers and employees must be treated alike. He also paid close attention to the work of tradesmen dedicated to the craft; among them, good friend Rich Trethewey. Success also stemmed from a lesson he learned quickly – to install the best products and technology.

"If I was to do my very best work for clients, why would I settle for anything less from manufacturers?"

Six years after starting his firm,

In the heart of Maine, generosity and empathy are good partners to hard work and professionalism.



Godbout hired Todd DeMeule and, the following year, Jeff Tardif; both of whom are still with him and whose roles and responsibilities with the company grew steadily and considerably.

During those years, Jim and Lynn Godbout's son Jon grew up in the business, too. From 12 to 21, Tardif and DeMeule were Jon's mentors as he learned the value of hard work and long days. Jon was hired by IBM before he graduated Colby College in '08. His role with the global corporation grew steadily, something Jim attributed to a



Jim Godbout "dotting i's and crossing t's" at a job site.

work ethic he learned "in the trenches."

"We learned so much from each other back in those days," Godbout reflected. "We still do, and that's rewarding."

Employee appetite for learning, and staying abreast of the latest technology, has also meant steady investment in training and trade show travel. Each year, Godbout tours the AHR Expo. He's also been to the big ISH show in Germany. Employees are paid to attend regional trade shows and they welcome manufacturer and rep training for employees.

"Our number one rep is Emerson Swan," said Godbout. "Jimmy Simas and his crew do an absolutely fantastic job at introducing us to new products and with training."

Godbout's company now employs 20 people and their location in Biddeford includes an upscale showroom.

And, thanks to Norm Roy, one of the most motivated and fastidious

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warehousemen on planet earth, their inventory of tools and supplies defies easy description. Copper, cast iron, and PVC pipe and fittings of all variety are precisely arranged, as are jobsite-specific cubby racks, filled with products and components for the next day's work. In the midst of it all, Norm steadily brings order to chaos. The floor is cleaner than a Marine boot camp barracks.

Asked how he finds qualified trade pros to hire, Godbout says that their most recent hires were a carpenter and a mason.

"We can teach the necessary skills, but we can't create a strong work ethic or instill the sort of curiosity and aptitude that develops into strength in mechanical work," he said.

He admitted they hire few people in their 20s.

"We're looking for and willing to invest in people with a lot of experience, even if they're new to our trade. I work daily in the field beside my men, doing every task they do," he said.

"Our employees need to shine. They have confidence and sharp social skills, too," Godbout added. "It's important that they can easily hold a pleasant conversation with wealthy homeowners, listening to all concerns. Which emphasizes the importance of training, and a work ethic that's evident in everything an employee does, from neat work to clean-up. Even their own appearance, and an ease with people at many social levels."

Godbout's firm today is 80 percent residential, and of that it's 10 percent service and 90 percent new and remodeling construction. The remaining 20 percent of overall revenue is attributed to commercial work. Two employees do plumbing/heating service work almost exclusively.

"One weekend last year we responded to 100 service calls," Godbout said. "In January and February, we're busy round the clock."

Godbout said that – given their northern location – hydronic system work remains a mainstay for the firm's installation and service crews, even with new construction. For new homes, often constructed where an older home stood, Godbout's hydronic recipe includes "tried n' true" components.

"We typically install a multi-zone radiant heat or radiant panel heating system with a Viessmann boiler and indirect, Taco Zone Sentry zone valves, a Viridian ECM pump, Taco i-Valves, autofill and 4900 air sep," he said.

The job will be impeccably connected

with ProPress. For air conditioning, they've come to appreciate split-system heat pumps and air conditioners.

"No job follows a formula – as we're always attentive to difficult challenges that others may not want to do. And we hang our reputation on products and technology that work each and every time," Godbout said. "And we also watch for the latest advancements offered by manufacturers. That attentiveness is what introduced us to the new, ECM-driven, Viridian circulators, and the Zone Sentry's. Now we carry them in every truck and stock them in inventory. Correction: Norm stocks and tracks 'em!"

### Community at the core

Giving back to the community that sustains them is at the very core of their success. Tying to it is the work ethic they've developed, the drive that motivates them through each new day and the relationships they build and

community bike shop which mentors youth, and the food pantry . . . with a list that expands each year. The firm's work at York Co. YMCA – with donated equipment and installation work – is impressive," he said.

At a nearby trade school, the Rotary supports a beehive of activity. Godbout toured an 800-square-foot modular home under construction. Hammers and pneumatic staplers cracked at all corners of the elevated structure as teachers mingled with and guided students.

"The idea is for these students to be exposed to and learn many trade disciplines and for the home to sell upon completion, supporting bigger and better opportunities for the students," Godbout explained.

### Giving back

According to Godbout, Rotary members also work closely with local welfare, code enforcement, police and

fire departments to help reach elders in the community, many of whom may be reluctant to ask for help.

About five years ago, they developed a fund for people in need who were having trouble purchasing fuel oil, or maintaining heating systems. In some instances, it's as easy as emptying a tank of fuel oil at a home converted to gas, and transporting that fuel to the tank of a person in need.

"One story last winter that hit me very hard was that of a retired veteran of

WWII," Godbout said. "This man, who fought for our country decades ago, was without water for several days and had no money to pay for repairs because he needed to buy medication."

Godbout heard about the vet's plight through a community service organization. They made the decision quickly and dispatched a service technician to repair his heating system free of charge.

"After the work was done, the man was so appreciative he was trying to give me the title to his 1986 Ford Explorer to pay for the work," Godbout added. "It nearly broke my heart; I told him to keep his car and that we were very happy to help him out."

In the heart of Maine, generosity and empathy are good partners to hard work and professionalism. It may be bitter cold outside, but there's plenty of warmth where it counts most of all. ●



The team of Jim Godbout Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning hard at work.

maintain with every interaction, locally and nationally.

Godbout estimated that they gave away about \$100,000 worth of (mostly) time and materials for community projects in 2014.

"The 'community' – and by that I mean those businesses and families in the greater Portland/Biddeford-area – will reciprocate. Every good deed is eventually returned," he said. "I've learned this, and teach it too: Life's too short. I won't allow money consume my life. Wealth is measured in many ways."

Godbout's been involved with Biddeford's Rotary Club since '98. Many of his contacts among business and civic leaders in the area stem from involvement with the 60-plus member Rotary Club, which promotes ethical awareness, integrity, and supports and encourages younger people.

"We're also involved with and support the YMCA, trade schools, the

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