



Riverbend Sandler Pools



Travis Bain and Charles Barnes

Charles Barnes left his sales and marketing job at a Fortune 500 company in 1982 and founded Riverbend Pools in Plano, Texas, about 20 miles north of downtown Dallas. "Using ideas learned during my first career, I developed a sales and marketing strategy and tailored it to the pool industry," he says. "The result was that Riverbend experienced one of the most consistent growth patterns of any pool company in the area."

The company grew throughout the 1980s, despite poor economic conditions and high interest rates.

"Our strategy was to build a high-quality product and sell it for a fair price, to be professional, treat customers with respect and exhibit honesty and integrity in all things," Barnes says.

That strategy paid off, as the company went from 37 pool sales in its first year to more than 200 by the end of its fifth.

In the 1990s, the company continued to grow, as did its

reputation among customers looking for high-quality custom pools.

"We started to develop our own software to help manage the business more effectively," Barnes says. "Lead and quote modules were refined and we built a large indoor sales showroom."

Barnes applied what he'd learned in the world of big business and placed special emphasis on sales. Each new salesperson had to spend three full months in training and had to learn Barnes' sales system. By the end of 1998, the company was selling almost 500 pools a year, all without advertising, and grew to become the largest custom pool builder in the Dallas-Fort Worth market.

Five years ago, Riverbend merged with Sandler Pools, another AQUA Hall of Fame company in the area. It's owner, Travis Bain, was a Fortune 500 CEO before getting into the pool business, so the two saw eye-to-eye in many areas.

By 2000, with sales and construction synergies in full swing, sales for both companies had exceeded 900 pools, a 30 percent increase from pre-merger sales the two companies combined.

The two businesses were run separately until 2002, when they combined to form Riverbend Sandler Pools. Both Bain and Barnes give much of the credit for the company's success to their salespeople, who are well-trained by two men who know a thing or two about the subject.

"The pool sales department is key to any builder's success," Barnes says. "Remember, your customers' decision to buy a pool is made based on the impression your salespeople make."

RIVERBEND SANDLER POOLS

Location: Plano, Texas

Principals: Charles Barnes, president and CEO; Travis Bain, chairman of the board

Founded: 1982

Outlets: 2

Employees: 200 year-round, 200 in-season

Products Sold: custom gunite pools/spas