



# BRUCE DUNN Thinks Big

Using his formal education and on-the-job experience, he has made Mission Pools one of the most well-respected companies in the industry

**By Rebecca Robledo** Harvard-educated Bruce Dunn has a long-standing reputation as an astute businessman. He grew Mission Pools, which he bought as a young man, into a *Pool & Spa News* Top Builder (No. 10). The Escondido, Calif.-based company brought in nearly \$35 million in 2004.

He's also not afraid to try new things as a member of the Master Pools Guild and SPEC.

#### PERSONAL BESTS:

After purchasing Mission Pools, Dunn put himself through a rigorous continuing education business program. First, he joined the board of directors at North County Bank, which has since been acquired by Wells Fargo. Today, he sits on the board of Community International Bank. The position has given him firsthand exposure on how the best businesses run.

Dunn's peers from the boards served as mentors and led him to one of his most distinguished achievements in the pool industry: He attained an Owner-President Management Certificate from Harvard Graduate School of Business. He also became chairman of SPEC, the California pool and spa industry's most visible government advocate.

#### LESSONS LEARNED:

As a result of his experience with the banks, Dunn set up his expanding company so that each branch belongs to its manager. The individual establishes the office's culture, serves as its face and bears responsibility for all parts of the financial statement that he or she can control.

"[The managers] run it like it's their business," Dunn explains. "Then you let those people who are running the day-to-day activity get all the kudos they can because you're going to put them on the point for any and all problems that seem to be going on in that area." Companywide costs such as general liability insurance and bulk purchases are managed through the corporate office.

In the early '90s, Dunn and his brother and partner, Jeff, tried



to bring the vinyl-liner market to Southern California. The venture didn't pan out, but other opportunities arose from it. Dunn ended up working with manufacturer Fort Wayne Pools to develop pebble-patterned liners, helping to open the floodgates for the creative high-end designs of the past decade.

The Dunns also realized that vinyl-liner pool installers are more generalists than gunite builders. As a result, they brought building in-house and cross-trained crews to perform more than one phase of construction.

"We wanted a super crew that would go out and, once the pool was excavated, camp out on the site — and that's what they'd do until the pool was done," Dunn says.

#### **BEST DECISION MADE IN 2005:**

Dunn hired a new manager for Mission Pools' Large Construction Division, which handles government and commercial projects. "He came with a substantial building background, not in pools but in large commercial-type construction," Dunn says. "We would say without a doubt it was an absolute success."

#### **BEST DECISION EVER MADE:**

Expansion and diversification are a core part of his strategy. That's why the Dunns expanded the company to serve Riverside and Orange counties as well as San Diego, and opened their own Commercial Division.

The diversification process extends beyond the pool business. After the '90s recession, Dunn wanted to branch out, so Mission Pools purchased a movie theater complex and food court, and invested in other real estate.

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## **CONSTRUCTION CEO: AS GOOD AS IT GETS**

### **ED GIBBS Moves Forward**

Under Ed Gibbs' stewardship, Toronto-based Gib-San Pools Ltd. by Master Pools went from earning \$1 million annually to \$13 million, growing \$1 million each of the past 10 years. He has taken the company to the Caribbean and Middle East to build pools. What's more, he chairs the Master Pools Guild.

Gibbs made history as the first North American pool builder to become certified by the International Organization for Standardization, based in Switzerland. The ISO-9001 certification states that all Gib-San pools are built in the same method, with the same standard of quality. The firm recently achieved the ISO Occupational Health and Safety Module 18,001, signifying that its methods will safeguard workers and customers alike.

Achieving this level of standardization requires a cohesive staff. So Gibbs built a watertight corporate culture. He looked for higher-educated employees and placed even more emphasis on character. "In interviewing to hire the key people around me, I interviewed them as if they were going to be part of my family," Gibbs says. "You hire people who have the same values and mind-set that you have."



## **RON COKER JR.** **Spurs Communication**

After graduating with a degree in speech communications, Ron Coker Jr., gradually moved up the ranks at Master Pools by Artistic Pools Inc. in Atlanta. He went from digging to selling before becoming an officer in the firm and its vice president. By 2004, he had absorbed most of the day-to-day management.

This year, the third-generation executive reached a well-deserved milestone. He was named president/COO and will manage most of the operations, while Ron Coker Sr., now CEO, concentrates on commercial accounts and public relations.

Though Artistic Pools had already established itself as a force in Atlanta, earning more than \$6 million by 2003, Coker fine-tuned the operation. He conducts weekly meetings with the sales and production teams to help projects run more smoothly. At the sessions, the sales staff, production manager and superintendent discuss upcoming projects, the status of current ones, and develop ideas for improving performance and communication.

“Salespeople aren’t always aware of the problems that go on,” Coker says. “If we discuss and dissect them, it helps them know what they can and can’t do as they’re talking with a customer rather than make false promises.”

If a salesperson wants to try something new, he or she will bring it up at the meetings. That way, the production staff can talk about how to build it before putting it on the contract. Several new company practices also have begun at these sessions.



PHOTO BY TONY BENNER