

Gib-San Pools: A Titan Of Canada's Pool Building Industry

by Jason Cramp

After working together for more than a decade at Sanelli Pools, Ed Gibbs Sr. and Robert Sanelli envisioned creating their own swimming pool construction company and becoming dream creators themselves. They wanted to make their company different by combining team strength, commitment to training and management with the goal of capturing and transforming their customer's dreams into reality.

In 1972 the two men headed toward this goal by starting their own swimming pool and spa/hot tub company. The name was born out of the two founding family names – Gibbs and Sanelli – thus creating Gib-San Pools.

"Gib-San started as a builder then evolved into a builder/service company," states Edward D. Gibbs, who started with the company in 1981, holding various positions while going through high school and university before becoming the company's president and CEO. "As time moved on, we transformed the company into a builder/service/renovation/retail company."

After 15 years of learning the business from the ground up under the tutelage of his father, Gibbs purchased the business from his father in 1996.

"He (Gibbs Sr.) continues to work part-time in sales and is a great source of experience and knowledge," says Gibbs.

Another key employee that has helped in Gib-San's success is Peter Friis, who has been with the business for 16 years and is currently the company's senior vice-president who oversees the construction and service management division managers.

"We originally offered only gunite pools – but we now also offer vinyl lined pools, hot tubs, landscaping design and installation, and full service and maintenance packages, as well as operating a year-round retail store in Toronto,"

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Gibbs said, referring to the company's successful growth. "We started with 15 employees and we have grown to more than 120 people. Presently our management/leadership team consists of 15 people – ironically, the same number as the entire original staff."

Organized Into Special Divisions

To operate as efficiently as possible – and to offer superior service – the company is organized into special divisions. Gib-San Pools Ltd., for example, covers swimming pool construction and landscaping, while Gib-San Environmentals Ltd., handles swimming pool and landscape design. The Gib-San International division encompasses international swimming pool and landscape construction in places such as the Caribbean and Europe; while the Power General Contracting division handles commercial maintenance and renovation. The final division is the Gib-San Pool & Spa Centre – a 'LeisureScapes' retail store located in Etobicoke, Ontario that specializes in hot tubs, barbecues and swimming pool and spa/hot tub maintenance products with staff members fully trained to give advice on all pool and hot tub operations.

"In 1998 we opened our first independent retail location, which we created to increase customer service and care," explains Gibbs. "The retail store was opened to serve our own clients, however it has developed into a full-service, year-round store sporting Jacuzzi hot tubs, Napoleon BBQs, Bio-Guard chemicals, toys and more."

One example of how efficient these divisions work comes from the company's International division, which enabled Gib-San Pools to successfully bid on and eventually build a massive project nearly 3,500 km (2,175 m) from their head office in Toronto, Ontario. The installation was at the Marriott Beach Resort and Casino located on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, which won Gib-San Pools two gold awards in the National Spa & Pool Institute (NSPI) of Canada's 2003

Awards of Excellence Competition (now known as the Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada.) It also won a 2004 gold award from the NSPI in the United States (now known as the Association of Pool & Spa professionals).

"Building for three years in the Caribbean at the Marriott would be the greatest memory," says Gibbs, referring to the project as one of the company's greatest accomplishments. "The logistics and scope of this international project allowed us to be leading-edge in every way. Shipping equipment, material, products, and of course our greatest asset, our personnel, thousands of miles away provided a depth and experience for our company only very few can say they have."



Company's Team Is Their Strength

Gibbs says that the company's team is their strength, which is why he operates the business year round, which is not the norm in a traditionally seasonal industry. This allows the company to commit to full-time employment for as many members of their team as possible to ensure the continuity of quality service and professional expertise.

The company also commits to continuous professional training on the latest techniques, technology and safety by having their own dedicated training facility that focuses on every aspect of the building and maintenance process. Topics covered include: Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems (WHIMIS); Transportation of Dangerous Goods (TDG); First Aid; Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada Technical Courses; Master Pools Guild Building Technology; Pool Building Process; Pool Maintenance, Opening & Closing; Equipment Operations Training; Project Management and Scheduling Skills.

The company's commitment to support and service is not lacking in any respect either – as their mission statement on their Web site states: "To deliver our clients dreams."

In doing this, the company gives their customers, after the pool is built, step-by-step operations training as well as information on their other support services.

Another way they deliver their superior service to their customers is through the 'Gib-San Clubhouse' – an online feature where their customers can register and become members to receive operating tips and manuals for easy referencing. They also offer 'Pool Maintenance Programs' with weekly, bi-weekly or monthly options available. Gib-San offers one of the largest and most qualified service fleets in the industry, with over 50 service vehicles now in operation. The company also offers online booking for swimming pool openings and closings as well as offering year round emergency service, seven-days-a-week, 24-hours-a-day.

"We open/close, service and maintain residential and commercial clients and the retail store provides year-round service for our hot tub clients," says Gibbs. "Our operation is open year round – we build year round and maintain a variety of indoor commercial and residential properties as well. In addition to the 'Clubhouse' and online scheduling that we offer on our Web site, consumers can also order services and chemicals as well as pay for these services online."

Numerous Rewards Received

In addition to the numerous design and business achievement awards the company has collected over the span of its existence – Gib-San Pools and its president and CEO, Gibbs, continuously strive to make the company and its offerings the best they can be.

This drive for success did not go unnoticed by the Master Pools Guild, which in 1986 asked Gib-San Pools to join their organization – an international group of elite gunite swimming pool and spa/hot tub builders based in Richmond, Virginia.

The Master Pools Guild represents over 100 pool builder members throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Spain, Aruba and the United Kingdom. For over 40 years, members of this guild have played a crucial role in building and maintaining some of the most beautiful pools and spas/hot tubs in the world.

Gaining entry into this brotherhood, where members attend three meetings held annually around the world to insure that they are kept up-to-date on the very latest

*Edward D. Gibbs,
president and CEO of
Gib-San Pools.*



technologies in pool and spa/hot tub construction, is not easy. Member companies of the Guild are selectively recruited based on their skills and ability to bring high levels of craftsmanship to the organization. Each year a number of builders apply for membership and only a handful are accepted.

"Being a member of this Guild gives Gib-San Pools a cutting edge, giving us access to shared technologies and common experience worldwide," says Gibbs, who will begin a three-year commitment to the Master Pools Guild by holding the distinctive honour as vice-chairman of the board in 2005, chairman of the board in 2006 and past-chairman in 2007 – positions very few Canadians have held. "Being able to talk to any Guild member worldwide gives us added dimension and depth. The spirit of exchange of knowledge and experience shown among our members is our greatest asset."

Out of over 100 member companies worldwide, Gib-San Pools is one out of a total of eight Canadian companies in the swimming pool and spa/hot tub industry to be a member of this organization.

Gibbs states that another great challenge for the business was becoming the first swimming pool and spa/hot tub company in the world to achieve International Organization for Standardization (ISO) compliance, which he says is a tribute to their staff.

Gaining compliance began in 2001, and took a lot of hard work and money. It is a process that is really never over, states Gibbs, as techniques and technologies are constantly improving.

Gibbs says that the reasoning behind their decision to become ISO compliant was to raise the bar in terms of customer satisfaction and excellence in products and services. By raising this internal bar, Gib-San Pools is more capable of delivering an increased level of customer satisfaction to better suit their customer's needs.

Currently the company has ISO 9001:2000 registration – a standard that specifies requirements for a quality management system within an organization. The company is in the process of conforming to ISO 14000, a management system that focuses on minimizing harmful effects on the environment caused by an organization's activities, as well as 18000 standards, which is an occupational health and safety management system.

"The biggest benefit of ISO registration is having a more systematic, customer-driven company that is capable of measuring its positives and negatives to better serve its clientele," explains Gibbs, who is also a very active member of the Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada's Toronto Chapter. "We see the next decade as a new era within the pool industry – with higher demands for excellence in products, design, and quality building that will transform this industry for the better." □