

Contractor Retains Family Feel As It Grows

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“Everybody Pulls Together As A Team,” Employees At Calvert-Jones Say.

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — When a company starts out with a handful of employees, everyone has to struggle together in the trenches, doing whatever it takes to be successful. A strong camaraderie can quickly develop. As the company grows and prospers over the years, those feelings can fade away, replaced by systems to ensure efficiency.

The best contractors don't let the family atmosphere diminish. They know their business is their people and they work hard to maintain the openness, fellowship, and mutual respect that propelled the company to the top.

Commercial contractor Calvert-Jones Co. Inc., Alexandria, Va., has grown significantly in recent years, adding about 100 people since 2002. But employees still praise a company environment where everyone looks out for one another. President Stanley Peregoy still keeps his door open to helpers, technicians, and anyone else who wants to talk. And the company works hard to find and retain the best employees, and rewards them with good pay and comprehensive benefits.

For these reasons, Calvert-Jones has been selected as winner of *The News*' 2004 “Best Contractor To Work For” contest for the North Mid-Atlantic region.

Attracting Techs

To accommodate its growth and find the service technicians it needs, Calvert-Jones has been “aggressively recruiting and also working hard to be the employer of choice in northern Virginia,” said Chris Elder, general manager, service.

Realizing there's no one best way to find techs, Peregoy said the company uses a variety of methods, including radio ads, newspaper ads, four recent open houses, and job fairs in Fairfax County. The company has also hired a recruitment specialist.

“We talk to high school students, and have taken them on field trips,” said Don Ripley, vice president, construction. “Guidance counselors have been very receptive,” stated Peregoy.

“I serve on the advisory council of a vocational college, which keeps me in contact with graduating students and the placement director,” said Elder. The contractor is also involved with military placement programs, apprenticeship schools, community colleges, high school vocational programs, HVAC Agent, and local agencies that help place people into new careers.

Calvert-Jones sponsors both HVAC and plumbing apprenticeship programs. “Many of our technicians have graduated and gone on to obtain their journeyman and master licenses,” Elder said.

“Our people talk to other people” to help recruit qualified employees to the company, commented Chris Hankins, special projects manager. A hiring bonus is paid both to the new employee and the person who recruited them. “Word of mouth is a good way to bring in people,” said Norman Carter, field supervisor.

To help keep employees on-board, Calvert-Jones offers a comprehensive benefits package and extensive training. Benefits include PPO medical, dental, vision, 401(k) with company match, life insurance for self/spouse/dependents, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), short-and long-term disability, paid vacation, sick time, eight paid holidays (last



Service manager Eric McAllister (left) talks over a job with Scott Roux, service supervisor. (Photos by Mike Olliver.)



Service tech Tommy Jackson (left) checks his clipboard while tech Will Dean finishes loading a service van.

year because everyone was working so hard Peregoy gave employees two extra days so they had 10 paid holidays), and tuition reimbursement. The company also offers Flexible Spending Health Care Accounts and Dependent Care Accounts.

A full-time human relations manager, Carrie Carr-Maina, is dedicated to employee development. An OSHA outreach trainer on staff is authorized to teach the 10-hour and 30-hour safety classes. Every employee receives the 10-hour card; field supervisors receive the 30-hour training.

In addition, there are regular safety meetings, such as the recent session on fall protection. Various technical training is offered throughout the year.

“Stan [Peregoy] has been proactive with training,” said Dwayne Hardbower, job supervisor. “They are always offering something,” Craig Flint, sheet metal tech, said. “And if you want something, just bring it up,” added Ricky Holloran, sheet metal tech.

Keeping Things Clear

Elder noted each service tech is given a Service Division Operations Manual upon hiring that details such items as reporting requirements, service work order procedures, how to properly complete a ticket with a sample, and other procedures. The manual also explains the company’s Levels Program for techs, which spells out position requirements and what it takes to advance to the next level.

Positions include Apprentice, Maintenance I and II, and Tech I through V (or Lead Tech). Each incoming employee has in writing what his/her responsibilities are, so there are no ambiguities about what their job entails and how they can move up.

Employees are reviewed annually and have the opportunity to earn merit raises based on their job performance. Techs are encouraged to advance to the next level as fast as they want. “Anybody who’s accelerating will get reviewed more often,” Peregoy said. “Those who put something into it will get something out.”

Prospering After Consolidation

Calvert-Jones was purchased by consolidator Blue Dot in October 1998. While many consolidated companies struggled, Calvert-Jones continued to do well.

“The thing that is most incredible about the last several years is how much we’ve grown and the fact that we are stronger now than ever, despite the fact that we went through a lot of changes after being purchased by a consolidator,” said Elder. The company has achieved double-digit growth during the last six years, said Elder, and has added about 100 people since 2002.

The company left Blue Dot and became part of Fort Pitt Group LLC in February 2004. Fort Pitt also owns two other locations.

Keeping The Family Feel



The Calvert-Jones management team: Seated (left to right): Stanley Peregoy, president; and Don Ripley, vice president, construction. Standing (left to right): Carrie Carr-Maina, human relations manager; Chris Elder, general manager, service; Debi Walker, controller; and Chris Hankins, special projects manager.

Elder said, "The company culture is truly one of family," and she supports that statement by pointing to a low turnover rate and a large number of long-term employees. Twenty-three people have been with the company for more than 20 years, while 25 have been there 15-19 years.

Calvert-Jones employees agree that there is a definite family atmosphere. Field supervisor Chris Ward helped an employee fix his boiler. Ken Polk, plumbing/fitting, said some employees installed his new A/C unit for him.

Employees also note the firm's open door policy, respect for employees, and added perks.

Management is "very receptive to feedback" and "very respectful of everybody," remarked Carter. "They offer a whole lot more benefits," said Polk, compared to other contractors in the area. The company pays for uniforms and for repairs to tools. "If you break a tool, the company will pay for it," added Polk.

Peregoy goes on fishing trips throughout the fishing season and takes any employee who wants to go along. A number of employees have taken advantage of this. The company also has Christmas parties each year, one for families and another in the shop for employees.

Ward noted, "I gave up a job as service manager at another company to work here as a service tech." Said Carter, "I've spent 30 years in the trade and this is the best company I've worked for."



Gerry Rodino (center), training coordinator for Calvert-Jones, provides some chiller training tips to Norman Carter (left) and Chris Ward, both field supervisors.

Sidebar: Just The Facts

Winning contractor: Calvert-Jones Co. Inc.

President: Stanley Peregoy

Location: Alexandria, Va.

Years in business: 58

Bulk of market: Commercial

Total sales for 2004: \$34 million

Total employees: 200

Total service technicians and installers: 160

Average hours employees spend in training: 75

Benefits offered beyond medical/dental insurance: 401(k) with company match, life insurance for self/spouse/dependents, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), short-and long-term disability, paid vacation, sick time, eight paid holidays, tuition reimbursement, state-approved apprenticeship program, Flexible Spending Health Care Accounts, and Dependent Care Accounts.

Industry association and contractor group members: Mechanical Service Contractors Association (MSCA), American Subcontractors Association (ASA), Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC), and Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors—National Association (PHCC).

The News selected this contractor because: Calvert-Jones takes a multi-pronged approach to finding and retaining techs and, even with significant growth, has been able to find the people it needs. The company provides extensive safety training as well as technical training. It provides a comprehensive benefits package. Even though the company has grown to 200 employees, its employees still cite a family atmosphere where people look out for each other. And management's open door policy allows everyone, from helpers on up, to walk in and talk to the president.

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