

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: BOB HELBING

President
Air-Tro Inc., Monrovia, Calif.
ACCA Commercial Contractor of the Year



Quality Installation Sets Contractor Apart From the Competition

The Helbing family has always had a strong desire to succeed. Each member looked for an opportunity to be successful and each started in a different field, but eventually they came together to build up Air-Tro as a successful company.

Before starting the business in 1969, John Helbing was a chemical engineer with the United States Navy. His children started their own careers, with his oldest son, Tony, selling office equipment in New York City before joining the business in 1985, and his youngest son, Bob, working as an aerospace engineer until joining in 1987.

Tony brought his strong marketing skills to the company and started using cold calling to build up the commercial sector of the company. It was a hardcore marketing plan and continues to be a key factor in the success of the business. Bob's strong technical skills built upon the existing strengths within the company. With both of them on board, the company was able to focus on making customers realize that they needed their services.

"Our backgrounds really helped the business prosper," said Bob, president. "We realized that with having our own business, we had more opportunities and freedom of choice. In turn, we had already cut our teeth in other very difficult fields, so we had the knowledge to get things done right."

The company takes a lot of pride in the fact that they are locally owned and operated, because according to Bob, "It's a great way to do business, and it's remarkable that we have been able to continue doing it this way for so long."

GETTING INVOLVED IN QI

One of the reasons why the company is so successful is that it adopted the ANSI-



Being able to follow the QI standard takes a lot of dedication and training on the part of the company, which includes (left to right) Jim Hunter, service manager; Anthony Helbing, vice president of sales; Bob Helbing, president; and Donn Capps, installation manager.

ACCA approved Quality Installation (QI) Standard. "We've always taken pride in taking care of our customers," noted Bob. "We found there was a lot of defective work out there, and we found tons of problems based on testing. We didn't want to be a part of the problem, and QI was just an easy way for us not to fall into that."

To some it may seem to be more expensive to follow the standard, but to Air-Tro, the investment really pays off in the end. They are able to show customers that units that are properly sized and installed work more effi-

ciently and longer, which, in turn saves them money in the long term. "We know there is a lot of value in delivering a better product," added Bob. "Following QI lets us show our customer that value through their cost savings and the cleaner package that we provide."

Bob is adamant that QI is the best way to meet the needs of customers, not only because it is just a good, solid business practice, but it is also recognized by utilities and local and state governments. And he sees QI as a collaboration, not just a single entity program.



Air-Tro employees include (from left to right): Ruben Gamez, field supervisor, and Dave Maldonado, senior technician; Michael Bernstein, telemarketing; Kevin Berry, HVAC consultant; Timothy Miller, accounts receivable clerk; Jarren Guzman, HVAC consultant; and Maldonado, Bob Helbing, president, Gamez. COVER AND FEATURE PHOTOS BY TIM BERGER.



Bob Helbing believes QI is the best way to meet the needs of customers, not only because it is just a good, solid business practice, but it is also recognized by utilities and local and state governments. He also sees QI as a collaboration, not just a single entity program.

“The Department of Energy has taken notice of the Quality Installation standard, and when that happens, state and local entities start to take notice,” said Bob. “It’s so important to understand the standard, because once it is required, you will need to implement it to stay in compliance.”

QI is not just a passion for the business though; Bob has been a part of making QI a bigger part of the way things are done in the HVACR industry by serving as a member of the Western HVAC Performance Alliance, chairing its ACCA-QI commercial committee.

TRAINING TO MEET THE NEEDS

Being able to follow the QI standard takes a lot of dedication and training on the part of the company as well. Untrained technicians are not going to be able to work to the quality standards that are set forth, and that is why Air-Tro has built a culture of learning and growing.

“We built a training room in our office to help facilitate training for our employees, and we always encourage them to seek outside training as well,” said Bob. “We encourage all of our people to become NATE certified or

to get other certifications. We constantly tell them to go out and learn more.”

The training pays off for the company, because almost 50 percent of Air-Tro’s employees are NATE-certified.

GETTING INVOLVED

Bob also believes that being involved in various programs and groups is an important factor in his company’s success. Air-Tro has been active in association activities, a MIX group, and even local government. He credits his MIX group with helping him move his company forward, because it gives him ideas from outside his company.

“I’m really lucky to have been asked to join the MIX group I am in,” said Bob. “It gives me the opportunity to learn from other people’s challenges, and it has made me set much more ambitious goals for the company.”

Bob also thinks that by working through the Institute of Heating and Air Conditioning Industries Inc. (IHACI), local contractors can have a voice in what is happening in the California legislature. “It gives contractors credibility with the state to work with groups like IHACI and gives us a stronger voice,” added Bob.

“We have always been actively involved to ensure that contractors are protected,” Bob said. “Sometimes the local government thinks they are doing the right thing, but they just don’t really understand that what they are doing may have unintended negative effects on the people they are trying to help.”

Air-Tro continues to see success year after year and continues to strive for more. By having a strong sense of doing the right thing, focusing on following set standards, and being involved at many levels, they feel they will have no problems achieving the goals they have set. 