

FROM THE FIELD

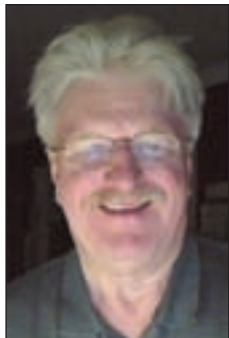
Q&A with Derek Moore, owner of Reissmann Plumbing

BY DAN FOLEY CONTRIBUTING WRITER

One of the things I love most about this business is the people I meet. Some of my best friends are fellow contractors, reps, manufacturers, consultants, and others in this industry that I have had a chance to get to know over the years and during my many business travels. I see these friends at industry events, trade shows, manufacturer trainings, seminars, etc. We compare notes, trade stories, discuss business and technical issues, and generally have a good time.

One of these friends is Derek Moore, owner of Reissmann Plumbing, a very successful plumbing and heating company located in Chester, N.J. Derek is one of those friends I have known for so long that I have forgotten exactly how and where we met. My best guess is that it was more than 10 years ago at a Wirsbo (now Uponor) convention, over a hazy week in Las Vegas. Since that time, we have crossed paths many times at various functions. I am always sure to make time for a long conversation with Derek, many times over a cold beer at the bar catching up on his latest and greatest projects.

The first thing that struck me about Derek was his enthusiasm and positive attitude. This business can get you down at times when things don't go your way. Derek deftly



Derek Moore now



Moore, front left, with his progressive rock band Nektar.

handles the curveballs thrown his way and takes them on as challenges. His attitude is infectious. One lesson I learned from a mentor a long time ago was to surround yourself, and associate with, positive people who are smarter than you. That's how you get ahead and advance yourself. Maybe that is why I gravitated towards Derek.

One detail that I did not know about Derek when we

first met is that he has had two successful careers. I learned through a mutual friend that Derek was an international star. Not only was he a "rock star" in the mechanical contracting world, he was also literally a rock star!

Derek Moore was born in Yorkshire, England,

"I knew straight away, after working on my first hot water heating system, that I wanted to work on and specialize in hydronic systems."



and after completing his studies he went into the music business at age 18. He traveled to France, and lived in Germany for 11 years where he founded the legendary progressive rock band Nektar (www.thenektarproject.com). Nektar released multiple albums and toured the world playing arenas and the largest stages. The group even released a music video 10 years before the advent of MTV. They pioneered the idea of the concept album and were one of the first bands to incorporate a light show into their live concerts. Below is a portion of the conversation in which I learned all of this information.

DF: How did you go from the music business to the mechanical contracting business?

DM: In 1978, my music career was on hold due to a contract dispute with the record company. I was offered the bass player gig with Foreigner but I turned it down as I would not have any creative input. I would just be the hired gun. I had spent the last 10 years on the road living out of Holiday Inns, not knowing what town I was in. I was ready for something different.

My father-in-law ran a plumbing company and wanted to take a vacation. He asked me if I would watch the company while they were away, as I was doing nothing else at the time. The week went well and I enjoyed the work. One week turned into six months and 35 years later, here I am.

DF: Can you tell me about Reissmann Plumbing?

DM: We are based in Chester, N.J., about 10 minutes from Morristown. We have 14 employees, including my wife Nicki who is the business manager and takes care of the books. I also have a construction division that builds custom homes.

DF: What are you company's specialties?

➔ Turn to FOLEY on p 46

| FROM THE FIELD | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

DM: If it involves water, we do it. We do plumbing, water heating, water conditioning, water services, gas piping, hot water heating, steam heating and our specialty radiant floor heating and snowmelt. We have dabbled on solar projects as well, both solar thermal and PV.

DF: How did you come to specialize in radiant and hydronic heat?

DM: I knew straight away, after working on my first hot water heating system, that I wanted to work on and specialize in hydronic systems. I attended an I=B=R seminar back in the 1980s and it just clicked for me. From



Moore enjoys shooting sporting clays and spending time outdoors when he isn't working 70-hour weeks.

there, I became interested in radiant heating systems and wanted to know more about it. I met John Barba and attended his one-week radiant heating seminar in Apple Valley, Minn. From there, it has grown to become a big part of what we do. We do more radiant than steam.

DF: What are some of the products you like to use on your projects?

DM: We use Uponor radiant tubing, manifolds and controls on our projects. We also use Taco pumps, tekmar

controls, Buderus boilers and Energy Kinetics EK boilers. EK's manufacturing plant is 15 minutes from my office. Next time you are in town, I will take you by for a tour.

DF: I'll take you up on that offer. We work on similar projects. I'm curious — how do you generate work?

DM: Primarily by word of mouth and doing quality work. Our website also generates business for us. We have also run an ad in our church bulletin for the last 30 years.

We once had a booth at a home show in the dead of winter. We built a working radiant system on an 8 by 8 foot platform powered by a small electric water heater. We were in T-shirts sitting in lawn chairs as the attendees walked by in winter coats. We gave them the opportunity to actually feel radiant heat and that generated numerous leads.

This fall, I am going to install snowmelt in my driveway and parking pad. I am going to install a sign at the end of the driveway. After it snows, anyone driving by will see the clear driveway and our sign and see what they could have in their own driveways.

We have received publicity for our charity work. We recently installed a radiant heating system in our local senior center. We donated the Uponor radiant tubing and manifold. Buderus donated a boiler and tekmar provided the controls at cost. We have done several other charitable

projects in the past. These projects show that we are more than just a plumbing company but rather a contributing member of the local community

DF: How do you find and keep good staff?

DM: Most of my employees have been with me for 15 plus years. My wife, Nicki runs the office. I handle all of the estimating, sales and design. One of my key employees recently retired at age 67. We ran an ad on Craigslist and got six qualified applicants from which we hired two. So far, they are doing great.

My customers know and trust us. Many times, both [customers in the home] work so they will leave a key, or leave a door unlocked. The technicians I send into my client's homes must be trustworthy.

DF: Sometimes things don't go as planned. People make mistakes, things get broken, white carpet gets tracked. How do you handle these situations?

DM: First, don't pretend it never happened or try to hide mistakes. Explain to the client what happened, apologize and ask what we can do to make it right. I make sure my technicians know this as well.

DF: Back to your music career. What rock royalty have you rubbed shoulders with?

DM: Mostly we headlined shows. We did tour with Frank Zappa, Gentle Giant and Blue Oyster Cult, among others. Elton John and Vangelis were friends of the band.

DF: Do you know Lemmy?

DM: I do! He used to wander around the streets outside London wearing a T-shirt that said "Lemmy a quid till Friday."

DF: I'm sure you work too much. What do you do for fun?

DM: I do work too much, like you. I work about 70 hours a week, but I try not to work on Sunday. When I'm not working, I enjoy shooting sporting clays for fun and in competitions. I enjoy writing and contribute regularly to a publication called *Clay Shooting USA*.

I also like to travel with my wife. We have a home in Cancun and [have vacationed] there every August for the last 30 years. This past April, we spent 20 days in Hawaii.

DF: Thank you, Derek for taking the time out for this interview. Hope to see you soon.

DM: Any time, my friend. ●



Moore in his career as bass player before his father-in-law, a plumbing contractor wishing to take a vacation, asked him to manage the business for a week. That week turned into 35 years and counting.

Dan Foley is president and owner of *Foley Mechanical, Inc.* based in Lorton, Va. FMI specializes in radiant, hydronic and steam systems, as well as mechanical systems for large custom homes. He can be reached at 703-339-8030, dfoley50@verizon.net or www.foleymechanical.com.