

Pool Company Adds Nine Locations

By John Miles In a time when firms are being forced into contraction and layoffs, ASP Franchising is adding nine locations to its family of pool service companies this year.

The new franchises are in Georgia, Tennessee, South Carolina and Florida.

While franchising has a mixed record of success in the pool and spa industry, ASP has grown to a total of 29 franchises since 2005.

“We’re able to show [continued sales] and people can see that the service sector — even in the worst times — is always going to be needed,” said Stewart Vernon, founder of the Macon, Ga.-based company.

Though ASP has traditionally targeted franchise operators outside the pool industry, it recently has been in conversations with builders looking to add service arms to their firms. ASP recently completed its first conversion franchise, where an existing company in the field takes on a new brand and business model.

Conversion franchises are generally considered a more difficult enterprise than teaching franchisees new to the industry.

“It’s not going to be an easy task because they’ll have to go out and re-educate the individuals who are already taking care of their pools,” noted Dick Rennick, founder of Palm Springs, Calif.-based Team Rennick and former chairman of the International Franchise Association. “Sometimes it’s easier to teach a new dog an old trick than it is an old dog a new trick.”

Franchising in the pool service industry has been limited because it’s traditionally open to anyone with a truck and the right equipment, Rennick added. Yet he believes there’s still potential for the right company.

Some, however, remain skeptical of such ambitions.

“There was a market for that when they got in it, and it probably helped them take off a little bit, but I don’t see any [future] in this area,” said Bill Haskins, owner of Mid State Pools & Spas in Warner Robbins, Ga.

Meanwhile, ASP is on the heels of its highest-grossing month ever — a fact Vernon attributes to a spring marketing campaign that included 300,000 pieces of direct mail. And ASP is preparing for accelerated growth down the road.

“We’re able to provide a lot more infrastructure from day one than we have in the past,” Vernon said. “I feel like we’ve just gotten started.” ■

At your service: Employees of ASP Pool & Spa Co. gather for an annual meeting in February 2008. CEO Stewart Vernon (front, third from left) has since grown the firm to 29 locations.



ASP FRANCHISING / KEN KRAKOW