Earlier this year, Nicholas “Nick” Guffre retired as CEO of Bradford White, a water heater and boiler manufacturer based out of Ambler, Pennsylvania. Throughout his 40 years in the industry, he emphasized education and unification through his support of many associations and organizations. His “never say no” attitude helped the industry grow and unite, while building a solid foundation for the company he oversaw. Read how Nick advanced the industry forward, and forged lasting friendships along the way. Story starts on page 36.

SupplyHouse.com Ranked No. 2 in Top Long Island Workplaces

SupplyHouse.com was awarded 2nd place in the 2018 Top Long Island Workplaces honor by Newsday. The list is based solely on employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey administered by research partner Energage, LLC (formerly WorkplaceDynamics). SupplyHouse.com believes the keys to its success include a culture built on respect, and open communication—which fosters a positive environment. “One of our missions is to create an environment where people feel good and are able to rise up and succeed,” said Josh Meyerowitz, president of SupplyHouse.com. “Being recognized as a top workplace gives assurance that we are accomplishing this goal.”

“Top Workplaces is more than just recognition,” said Doug Claffey, CEO of Energage. “Our research shows organizations who earn the award attract better talent, experience lower turnover, and are better equipped to deliver bottom-line results. Their leaders prioritize and carefully craft a healthy workplace culture that supports employee engagement.”

The online supplier of plumbing, heating, and HVAC products strives to offer employees a comfortable workplace which encourages innovation and teamwork. During breaks, employees are able to enjoy ping-pong and pool tables, plus a fully equipped gym consisting of various fitness machines, a half basketball court, kickboxing area, lockers, and showers. Employees can also spend their breaks recharging in the nap room. To ensure quality performance, team members may participate in 20-minute unwind-the-mind meditation sessions led by a guided meditation coach.

(Turn to ... page 4)
How Do You Define a Legend and Icon? ALL-IN!

Nick Giuffre is celebrated as The Wholesaler’s 2018 Person of the Year.

BY RUTH MITCHELL

The love of family and passion for an industry fulfills the spirit of Nick Giuffre, an industry icon. “We have to be there, we have to be present, we have to be involved, no matter what the conditions are because the economic challenges of the industry are certainly never going to change, whether the business environment is strong or slow. This isn’t an industry that’s only for the good times; it’s an industry for all times. That’s what I mean by all-in.” — Nick Giuffre.

How do you define a legend and icon? There are many ways to answer this question, but it boils down to a person’s character. How does a soul guide people to be the best they can be, helping others along the way? They are the change-makers, the fearless leaders who always try to make life or a situation better than when they entered upon it. Add a dash of charm, wit, and magnetism — you know what I mean. It’s when the individual walks into the room and you can feel the energy change before you see who is there. This is how I define a legend. This is how I define Nicholas “Nick” Giuffre, retired CEO of Bradford White Corp, and for all these reasons and more, he is the recipient of The Wholesaler’s Person of the Year.

In July of this year, Nick retired from the water heater and boiler manufacturer after 40 years. Based out of Ambler, Pa., the company manufactures and sells its products for professional installation only and is comprised of a tight-knit group of employees — Nick prefers the term family to employees. His dedication and contributions to the industry are lengthy. But this path would not have been possible if it weren’t for a job interview “family” got him, and the “family” he built along his 40-year journey.

In the late 70’s, Nick was a senior at Bloomsburg State College (now University) and while home on Christmas break, he attended a family wedding. At the reception was his cousin Michael, a successful business man, and Nick’s father walked him over to him and said, “Nick’s getting out of college in May. Do you have anything for him?” It turns out that his cousin, Michael DeLuca, was then an executive vice president at Bradford White. He gave Nick his business card. After following through, Nick landed in the office of Bob Carnevale, who’s direct boss at the time was Nick’s cousin, Michael. I asked Bob if he remembered the interview, and with a smirk on his face, he leaned back in his chair and smiled. “I was told to interview a young man who just graduated from Bloomsburg State College,” he said. “He didn’t have a lot of information on Nick other than that, and he was his boss’ cousin. “This was in the 70’s when double-knit suits were the ‘in’ thing and Nick showed up a good-looking young man, ready to go and smiling eagerly — in a shrimp-colored, double-knit suit,” Bob recalled. At the time there weren’t any open positions within the company, but Bob and others believed in hiring for character and personality, not just talent. “Nick was special — and one of his qualities is that he is a people person.” Bob said. “It looks you in the eye when he talks to you and is very comfortable. We knew he was special and had to find a place for him.”

In 1978, Giuffre started in the service department at Bradford White. He exemplifies the “from the bottom up” success story, eventually leading the company.

No Easy Road

“One thing I never did was say no,” Nick said. “If anyone asked me to do anything — inventory work on a weekend — I never said no. I felt everything was an opportunity to show the company that I cared and could work hard. I’ve been in every role — I think I have 18 business cards. And by doing every role, it got easier to become a mentor.”

In 1985, Giuffre heard that a regional sales manager within the company was leaving. With courage and confidence, he walked into the vice president’s office and stated he wanted the job. The VP told him, “You’re too young, regional sales managers are older in this business.” Nick responded, “I know the product inside and out and can outdo anyone.” He had the fire and the drive to advance the company forward. The VP retented, giving him the position, as well as a mentor. To Nick that person was Ted Sikorski, Under Ted’s guidance, Nick flourished. “That was a big turning point — 1985,” he says. “I married my lovely wife Kathy and became a regional sales manager.”

Above: Nick Giuffre, standing on stage at the AIMR Annual Conference, having just received a Lifetime Achievement Award presented by Michael Hobbs, president of Carr Co., and the AIMR Chairman. The stage immediately filled with the names he has worked with — because sometimes a standing ovation is just not enough.
In 1992 a major opportunity presented itself. Bradford White was part of a conglomerate with the parent company headquartered in Australia. To continue growing through acquisitions, the parent company needed to sell Bradford White, Bob saw the opportunity and seized it. They would reinvent Bradford White to manufacture product only in the United States and sell strictly through wholesale distribution. I asked Bob if he ever had any doubt the new model would work. He looked me in the eye and said “On day three I knew it would be successful.” The vision was simple. We were going to have a company to deal with the wholesale trade only with a high-quality product at a competitive price. Nick had a decision to make. Either stay with the parent company and move or join Bob and the others on a vision they all knew could work—with hard work, it all came down to family. “I was an only child of Italian-American parents, and we both lost our first grade child, and I said I’m not moving,” Nick recalls. “I jumped at the opportunity and vision Bob had and moved forward.” It was a decision he knew was right.

In 1992, Bradford White moved from Owego, NY, to what is now their corporate headquarters in Middleville, NY. “We are serious about keeping jobs and creating more jobs. At Bradford White,” stated Bob. The company has grown to three factories — Middleville and Whitesboro, NY, and Rochester, NY. “We continue to create more jobs for the American which is an American success,” stated Michael Hobbs, president of Carry Co., and current Chairman of AIMR.

Forming Partnerships

The company focused on building relationships and partnerships with contractors and wholesalers. A piece of literature created at the time states: “If your contractor or wholesaler you should be celebrating, too.” Bob knew that for Bradford White to succeed, you had to meet and understand your customers. Nick was a natural at building relationships, and so out went on the road. “I have worked with Nick over the years and in the many different positions he held at Bradford White, he is a working man’s guy — approachable regardless of the role he has held. Nick is a Chairman, a counselor, and intuitive benefactor to his friends. Above all, he is a great friend.”

To integrate the wholesale distribution-only philosophy, it was essential to get the word out. The internet wasn’t as available or sophisticated as it is now. “The biggest thing I did at that time was create what we call kick-off dinners.” Nick recalled. “We had to figure out a way to tell our story to the contractors. We took the entire philosophy, quality features, breadth of product line and created a presentation, and called it a kick-off dinner.” And, they were legendary. These dinners helped the manufacturers’ representatives deliver the message to the wholesalers; who in turn delivered it to the contractor and then ultimately to the consumer. The events were a huge hit and helped to achieve the same consistent message throughout the industry channel — just as Nick had intended. He would spend countless days each year traveling on sales calls with Bradford White’s reps.

“This industry is very fortunate that we had Nick Giuffre devote his career to it. His ability to command a room and sell is legendary. More so is his willingness to step up and volunteer. A tip of the cap to you, my friend, who is most deserving of The Wholesaler’s Person of the Year award. We salute you, thank you, and wish you, Kathy and family all the best and more in the years ahead.”

Kara Neupert Hockley, President, Consolidated Supply Co.

Calls to Bradford White’s reps. “Every day, and throughout hundreds of presentations, Nick always demonstrated enthusiasm and passion for the professional installer; our industry and the wholesale supply channel,” noted Kelly Michel, president of Michel Sales Agency. Our nickname for him was ‘Prime Time’, and when he came in for a presentation, the lights turned bright, the noise grew loud, and guests started clapping and cheering... “Prime Time” has started his show!” During those early years, it was important for members of Bradford White to involve themselves with organizations supporting the sales model. “We recruited the entire Bradford White family for industry involvement to constantly tell the same story without waiving,” said Nick. “Twenty-six years later, no matter how you market it, it’s the same story Bradford White is all-in.”

“Of the primary sources of passion for Bradford White comes from their management team. Nick created such a high level of passion for the company as a rep, you would run through a wall for both him and Bradford White.” stated Hobbs.

When it came to the wholesaler audience, Bradford White knew that once you had confidence and support of a wholesale distribution, it would help spread the word to its contractor customer base. “Karl Neupert of Consolidated Supply — no one did more diligence than him.” Nick said. “After he saw the Bradford White product and its features, and how contractors grew to love it, he became one of our biggest advocates.” Not only did Karl Neupert become an advocate, but he, along with the Neupert family became close friends of Nick.

Kara Neupert Hockley, president of Consolidated Supply Co. shared the same sentiment. “My greatest industry honor came in 2011, when I presented Nick with the Fred V. Keenan Lifetime Achievement award during the ASA Convention. It was remarkable to see someone recognized for his lifetime achievements, yet still have another decade to contribute and make a difference.” She went on to say “His stewardship and leadership within the industry are unparalleled. Consolidated Supply Co., the Neupert family and my late father, Karl, are all the richer for having Nick and his talents in our industry.” More important than his industry legacy are the countless lifelong friendships he has made along the way.”

Nick became actively involved with the American Supply Association (ASA), serving on several committees, including the Executive Committee and the Education Foundation. When its foundation formed an endowment — ultimately renamed to the Karl E. Neupert Endowment Fund — Nick went “all-in” and Bradford White was the first water heater company to donate. The $250,000 contribution set the cornerstone for other companies in the industry to step up and in to build a healthy future for all.

Nick was actively involved in the organization. He served as Chairman of the ASA Vendor Member Division. He went on to become a board member of ASA and the ASA Education Foundation. He chaired the ASEA Investment Committee. He worked tirelessly...
Bob Camerle, chairman of the board; Nick Guiffre, retired CEO and board member; and Bruce Camerle, president and CEO.

to incorporate everyone in the industry and become an advocate to include manufacturers’ representatives into ASA. “I am very proud that we got more people involved, including adding representation from AMIR, the ASA Women in Industry and Young Executives to have a seat on the ASA Board.” He became actively involved in supporting the plumber and the Plumbing, Heating, Cooling Contractors—National Association (PHCC-NA). Nick is a fearless supporter, guide and sounding board for the professional installer. After all, it is through their input that a professional’s job site becomes Bradford White’s “working lab.” Engineers can build a product, but without working together with the professionals who install the product, one cannot build a better machine. He learned this wisdom from Bob, to always keep your ears open. Bob told a story about a meeting with a contractor in California, who had to troubleshoot one of Bradford White’s heaters. There was a challenge with the placement of valves on the water heater. The contractor looked at Bob and said, “Mr. Camerle when was the last time you installed a water heater in California?” His answer was never — and he understood that the company needed contractor input, and the importance of keeping open the accessibility to reach any executive in the company was essential.

“Nick is truly a lion within the PHC industry and his commitment has always been all in,” noted Michael R. Copp, executive vice president, PHCC-NA. “His clarity, consistency of purpose and personal courage are the same attributes that PHC professionals exhibit who understand that they play a leading role in our movement to protect the health and safety of society and the environment. Nick has continued to be an activist for professionalism and excellence within the PHC industry. Coming full circle in the being all in in the industry channel is supporting the manufacturers’ representative. When AMIR was formed, the group looked at Bradford White. “They came to me and said they were trying to make the reps better businessmen and women,” Nick said. “They talked about CMPR (Certified Professional Manufacturers’ Representatives) the accreditation for the business. It is an MBA program for manufacturers’ representatives allowing them to serve their customers and the industry with high standards of professionalism.” He wrote a letter and called on all Bradford White’s rep agencies. “I said it would be wonderful for all our reps to be members of AMIR.” He added, “They are professional firms — part of the Bradford White family — and being a part of AMIR gives them an advantage of professionalism. We hold our reps to a high standard for they represent and deliver our message and story day in and day out.”

A year after he started making the calls, Bradford White significantly increased its manufacturers’ representative participation in AMIR. Moreover, many of BW’s reps are CMR-certified — a feather in the cap of Nick who so values in promoting avenues of excellence in each portion of the channel. Nick is so passionate about AMIR, he was the first manufacturer speaker at its convention. He has worked tirelessly to forge the industry forward. So, when the nation went through the Great Recession in 2007 through 2009, it was all-hands-on-deck to send the message to industry members to continue partnerships within their respective organizations. “We needed to continue to support the organizations that were the voices of the industry,” Nick explained. “People go into survival mode, and our message was we have to have a strong industry during good times as well as during tough economic challenges. The stronger the industry is, the stronger all of us will be.”

Honors and Accolades
ASA honored Nick in 2011 as the recipient of the Fred V. Keenan Lifetime Achievement award in recognition of his lifetime contributions and achievements in the plumbing, heating and cooling industry. Nick was very sentimental when he spoke about receiving the award, his strong stature softened and humbled at the same time. “That award meant so much to me,” he said. “It solidified the efforts we as an industry (he includes the past recipients before him) put into during the tough times. Anyone can step up to the plate and put money into the church basket when times are good. But when giving’s a little painful and a little inconvenient, then you know you are contributing. I look at all the associations that way. We have an obligation.”

In 1997, he was awarded the prestigious Golden Eagle Award from AMIR, and earlier this year at its annual conference, he was presented a special Lifetime Achievement Award. Attendees jumped to their feet when he took the stage, and the applause was deafening - the show of adoration and respect for him was electrifying.

“His unselfish support of our industry with donations and time is legendary. I’m sure he holds the world record for the most PHCC meetings attended,” noted Stew Chaffee, president of Rich-Tomkins Co. “What our industry folks don’t know is that Nick and his wife Kathy are just as generous and influential in many worldwide causes outside of our industry.”

“Nick Guiffre is exactly what Horatio Alger was writing about,” said Michel. “Modest beginnings to the leadership of a large company. Nick is the single greatest influence, personally and professionally, in Michel Sales 82 years in business.”

PHCC’s Copp added: “No matter who you are within this great profession, you have been influenced by the good work of Nick Guiffre. We need more mavericks like him in our profession who think independently but who collaborate respectfully in duty to this critical industry.”
PERSON OF THE YEAR

“Contractors love him because they believe, rightfully so, that Nick is on their team,” noted Sig Schmal- hofer, founder and chairman of the board of Signature Sales. “Wholesale- ers love him because of his sincere, enthusiastic interest in their business and his dedication to addressing their issues. Reps love him because Nick is their friend at the factory and their advocate. And his Bradford White colleagues love him because of his steadfast loyalty and passion that is impossible to squelch. If there is a man who is loved more than Nick, I haven’t met him.”

Nick has also been involved with the Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigerating Institute (AHRI). Nick served for many years on its Executive Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee, and a member of its Board of Directors and the Rees Scholarship Foundation. “To know Nick is to know a kind and generous soul with a wicked sense of humor, who doesn’t suffer fools but who is always available when called upon — to mentor, to advise, or to contribute the expertise and experience that comes from decades in the industry,” noted Francis Dietz, vice president, public affairs, AHRI. Nick was the recipient of the AHRI Richard C. Schule Award, for his many contributions to AHRI. Dietz went on to say, “for that reason, among many others, his counsel is sought and revered.”

Words of Wisdom

Nick discussed how the customer base is changing, and that while a company needs to keep up and even go one step ahead, it also should blend the old and the new.

Bradford White makes it easy for its customers to connect with the company — online and with its 24/7 live phone center. Calls are answered by a live person — not a machine, who directs callers to the proper department or personnel. Nick gives a nod to Bob Carnevale, “That was all driven by Bob and he is right. I believe technology with old-school respect is a nice blend for a company, but you cannot ignore trends,” said Nick. “Our structure and foundation are embedded into this industry — what’s left now is the challenge of change.”

He talked about the “knowledge transfer” to Bruce Carnevale, who has taken the helm as president and CEO of Bradford White. “You have to be prepared, and that’s Bruce’s strong point.” Nick noted. “He operates with an intelligence level that is intuitive and is able to see the overview of all things. He understands products, patterns, changes, and trends. He is hiring all the right people — industry specialists, industry veterans and people who will help Bradford White remain relevant and strong for its employees, customers and busi- company’s new independence in 1992.

And like when Nick was at the helm, there is always a mentor to assist if needed. The company’s former executives — now includ- ing Nick — sit on the board and serve as mentors to both current and future generations of Bradford White’s leaders.

According to Jim McGoldrick, Bradford White’s vice president of sales, what may be more important than Nick’s “knowledge transfer” is his “culture transfer.” Nick has things for people and making people happy,” he said. “There are so many things you’re taught in life, but it all comes down to being kind and gen- erous.”

Nick plans to fill his time with philanthropy and giving back to the industry he loves. The motto, “all in” applies in work and life. He and Kathy are actively involved in their community and give of their time and money. He is actively involved in the Boy Scouts in Chester County, Pa., as well as a board member of the J. Foundation, which supports terminally ill children and their families. The Guffres also have generously raised more than $350,000 for the Eastern Pennsylvania Chapter of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.

In February 2016, through a generous personal gift, the Nicholas J. Guffre Center for Supply Chain Management in the College of Business at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania was dedicated. The gift will provide students and executives with leadership training and education in supply chain management. The Guffre’s gift also endowed the Nicholas J. Guffre Distinguished Professor in Supply Chain Management to support the university’s supply chain management major and experiential learning opportu- nities for students.

“I want everyone to know I’ve enjoyed every association and relationship within our industry,” Nick stated. “It’s a damn special in- dustry. If you get in there and give, this industry will give back 10 times what you put into it.”

At the end of the interview, I looked at Bob Carnevale and Nick Guffre. It was apparent the relationship between the two is close — more like father and son. If you ask anyone about the character of either individual, it is always the same — a genuinely nice man, personable and one who truly cares and ALWAYS has your back. The family roots run deep, and they do not need to be blood. Because after all, once you are in it, you will forever be woven into the fabric of the industry.

Here’s to you, Nick Guffre, The Wholesaler’s Person of the Year. You are forever a shining light, and have made a difference in this industry and the lives of so many.”