

## Employees make the company at Applewood Plumbing

[Candace Roulo](#)

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DENVER — As their 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary nears this year, Applewood Plumbing Heating & Electric, [www.ApplewoodFixIt.com](http://www.ApplewoodFixIt.com), has evolved into a company that sets industry standards for recruitment, training and business best practices. Applewood has more than 116 employees and more than 70 service trucks on the road daily to service customers with plumbing, heating and electric needs.



“From the very beginning we wanted to be a company that held high standards for our employees, the work we do and the service we provide,” said John Ward, president of Applewood Plumbing Heating & Electric. “I think we’ve enjoyed a great deal of success as a result and we continue working on those core principles.”

Ward started the company in 1973, focusing solely on new construction plumbing.

“We did 20 years of new construction before we switched to service work,” said Ward. “Now we focus on plumbing, heating, cooling, electrical and drain cleaning service and replacement work mainly for homeowners.”

### **A close knit company**

Applewood was named one of the Denver Post’s Top Workplaces in 2012. The company was also named *Contractor Magazine*’s Contractor of the Year in 2009, and the company has also received the Nexstar Select

Service Award of Excellence for ten years running, plus other awards. Ward believes high standards and expectations attract top trade professionals to the company.

“This is the first time we are on the Denver Post’s Top Workplaces in 2012,” said Ward. “We are proud that we won this award and are recognized in the community. We have employees of the highest caliber, they are happy they are working here and we are proud of the job they do.”

“We really are close knit and we encourage employee growth with the 500 for Life recruitment program,” said Josh Ward, John’s son and vice president of Applewood Plumbing Heating & Electric. “For employees that refer a new employee, we give that referring employee \$500 every six months for the time the referred employee stays at the job. We use our employees to do as much recruiting as possible. We have been doing this for about 19 years now, and recently we have done a much better job of promoting it and really utilizing it. Right now we have about 117 employees.”

The first step of the hiring process for technicians is the screening process, filling out an application and interviews. A background check is also done along with a drug testing if hired. Applewood also utilizes Wonderlic tests, and potential employees complete a personality profile and an IQ test.

“We try to do everything possible to ensure we are hiring truly the best people,” said Josh Ward.

The business looks at structure and processes to support employee needs, such as state-of-the-art technology and facilities, fully-equipped trucks and on-demand warehouse access to fulfill customer requests.

Ward noted that they train their employees and give them the necessary tools in order for them to be successful. For example, all the technicians, managers and dispatchers utilize iPhones to stay in touch with one another. Regarding training, technicians are paid to go to training, and the company purchases the necessary tools needed.

“With the proper tools, when technicians are done with training, they can do what they went to the training for,” said Ward.

Applewood also has a full-time trainer, which Ward believes is unique to the company. He schedules all the technical training and does all the new hire training. A new hire goes through eight working days of training and regular field employees take part in daily training and additional trade specific classroom technical training a couple times per year.

## **Setting standards**

A testament to Applewood’s business model is the unprecedented growth annually for the past five years. Ward attributes this growth to management’s vision and their employees.

“I think businesses have an obligation to set high standards to ensure strong ethics and personal trust is at the foundation of their customer and employee relationships,” he said.

Ward also attributes much of Applewood's success to being a Nexstar member.

"We use many of Nexstar's programs, and we do a lot of training in general and with our technicians," said Ward. "Just recently we had Kenny Chapman out here, riding with the technicians to help them. We also do technical training at the local Johnstone Supply. Half of our HVAC guys went through two days of classes just two weeks ago. We spend a lot of time on this type of training."

### **Community outreach**

Applewood is a regular and generous supporter of the community. Several programs offer financial support and community resources. The longest running program, the Caring Community Giveaway, monthly awards \$1,000 to local, small nonprofits. This program has donated more than \$95,000 over the past eight years, impacting thousands of residents across the Denver metro area. The money has funded school programs, women's shelters, open-space trails, animal welfare organizations and delivery resources for those facing tragedy.

For families in crisis, Applewood House, [www.ApplewoodFixIt.com/applewoodhouse](http://www.ApplewoodFixIt.com/applewoodhouse), is a source of comfort. Funded privately by Applewood's ownership, the home is available free-of-charge to families needing extended stays while caring for hospitalized loved ones facing medical trauma and illness. Applewood House works in tandem with local hospitals and has provided housing for family members from New Mexico, California, eastern Colorado, Kansas, Michigan and other states.

"If we can ease a family's burden during a difficult time, then we have had a real impact," said Ward. "We can alleviate some of the stress and financial burden which allows a family to focus on the healing process," he said.

In other community efforts, Applewood has been a primary sponsor of the Wheat Ridge High School Farmers 5000 for more than a decade, the Belmar Elementary Science Fair, Denver Old House Society's Old House Fair and the Denver Browns, a local semi-pro baseball team. These contributions have helped support education, resources and community programs.

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