

# POOL & SPA M A R K E T I N G

## FOREST CITY POOL & PATIO:

A business rooted in family

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# Forest City Pool & Patio

A family-owned business providing the complete pool package

By Jason Cramp

Left to right:  
Lukas, Max, Cole,  
Ann Marie, and Markus.

Photos courtesy  
Forest City Pool & Patio

**E**stablished in 1986, Forest City Pool & Patio began as a dream between two partners with growing experience in the industry. Since then, it has evolved into a flourishing business run by the Brunner family in London, Ont. The expansion of its multi-faceted and industry-forward team has allowed the company to branch out beyond pool installation, into complete backyard transformation.

*Pool & Spa Marketing* recently spoke with Markus Brunner, president of Forest City Pool & Patio, to learn more about the shop's culture, some of their recent projects, how they are navigating the industry through the pandemic, and what they see for the future of the business.

**Pool & Spa Marketing (PSM):** What is the history behind your business?

**Markus Brunner (MB):** As with many other pool companies, Forest City Pool & Patio Inc. (FCP) began with a dream between me and a partner, along with a 1981 GMC van and a '78 Ford F-150 pickup truck, after having worked at another pool company. Myself for one year and my partner for several years. We broke away in 1986 to start our own company in London, Ont. I bought out my partner in 2000.

It was a challenge at the start, as it is with most companies. The work was there, but to gain traction in the community and beyond proved difficult for our new company. For the first two years, we had to subcontract for one of the established pool companies in the area to make ends meet. But after a few years in business, we established a name for ourselves. After that time, we had enough of our own new pool contracts for the season and beyond. We also do indoor

pool installations and renovations, which carry through into the winter months.

We initially installed steel-walled pools with walk-in steps, but we quickly realized by installing these pools, it landed us in the same category as all our competitors. We decided that by educating ourselves by means of taking courses and going to trade shows, and by implementing new knowledge and technologies, it would set us apart from our competitors. We continue those same practices to this day, so our clients continue to benefit from choosing FCP. We're also heavily active in our national pool association, The Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada (PHTCC).

Forest City Pool & Patio prides itself with talented staff. Over time, we've built a team of qualified people in all facets of the company, who we consider to be our second family. Without all our loyal employees who have been with us for many years, we would not be where we are today, and for that we're extremely grateful. It has truly become a family business, with myself as president; my wife Ann Marie as general manager



since joining FCP in 2009, after working with her family's pool distribution company for almost 25 years. Our three sons, Lukas, Cole, and Max, now in their 20s, have worked in the construction and service departments since they were teenagers, while completing their degrees in business administration in marketing (Lukas) and construction engineering management (Cole). Everyone is learning, growing, and developing

Forest City Pool & Patio has progressed from pool installation to complete backyard transformation.

A large advertisement for Aqua Creek Products. On the right, a woman in a black tank top is smiling while using a bright pink rowing machine on a patio. The background shows a green lawn and a chain-link fence. On the left, a dark circular graphic contains the text 'CUSTOM COLORS TO MATCH YOUR AESTHETIC' in large blue and white letters. Below this is a QR code and a list of features: '+ Solar Power Options', '+ Best warranty in the industry', '+ Family owned', and '+ Made in the USA'. At the bottom of the circle is the Aqua Creek Products logo, which depicts a mountain range and a river, with the text 'Aqua Creek Products' and 'Leaders in Recreation, Fitness and Ability'. Below the logo is the phone number '888.687.3552' and the website 'aquacreek.com'. At the very bottom of the circle are icons for Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, Twitter, and LinkedIn.



The company's project portfolio varies in size and complexity, and includes pools, fences, decks, and cabanas.

their own set of expertise to allow for company growth, and continuing to build an established foothold in the industry. Together, we're paving the way for the current, next, and future generations to maintain and grow through life and business at Forest City Pool & Patio for years to come.

**PSM:** What makes your company unique?

**MB:** What makes our company unique is the people who make up our team. The majority of our department leaders come from entrepreneurial backgrounds, which gives them the knowledge to complete all aspects of our projects with the utmost care, quality, thought, and respect.

We've always strived to push the limits in vinyl pool construction, whether that be the latest technology, pool features, or construction practices. For example, we built a vinyl pool in 1989 with a tiled concrete stair and bench. We've also built concrete spill-over spas within a vinyl pool.

Due to our quality workmanship, we've found our customers to be extremely loyal to us, with the majority of our projects being generated by referrals. In some cases, we've built three or four pools for the same family over the past 35 years. We're now building pools for the children of our earlier customers.

The combination of our staff, their backgrounds, and their commitment to quality creates a company culture and product our employees take pride in, and our customers are able to enjoy and be 100 per cent confident they

made the right decision when contacting Forest City Pool & Patio to complete their dream property, repair their pool, or keep their waterscapes clean, clear, and safe.

**PSM:** How large is your shop?

**MB:** Our facility in London, Ont., is approximately 743 m<sup>2</sup> (8000 sf), which houses our offices, showroom/retail, and storage for all three of our divisions. In the last 20 years, we have averaged 20 to 35 full-time and part-time employees.

**PSM:** What type of pools and hot tubs do you primarily install?

**MB:** We primarily build custom polymer wall vinyl liner pools, as well as steel wall vinyl liner pools and concrete pools. We also build custom concrete spas, stainless steel spas, and offer conventional spas. We pride ourselves on building a quality, long-lasting, and well-functioning space for our clients to enjoy for years to come.

**PSM:** Do you perform renovation work?

**MB:** Our company does perform renovation work. This can range from a simple liner replacement all the way to a complete backyard restoration. We take immense pride in seeing the satisfaction of our customers when they see the transformation of their backyard from a dated, tired space to a fresh, new, and up-to-date oasis.

We also complete commercial pool renovations, both for concrete pools with tile or marbelite and 60 mil membrane pools.

**PSM:** What type of projects have you been working on recently?

**MB:** Recently, our focus consists of complete backyard transformations of various size and complexity, including pool installation, fences, decks, and cabanas. We're also completing various commercial pool renovations, including a therapy pool for horses.

Over the last few years, we're seeing more of a trend that people are wanting to make their spaces unique to their family. To achieve our customers' visions, our projects incorporate vinyl over steps and benches, as well as various water features, patios, and retaining walls, depending on our customers' specific wants and backyard needs.



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Forest City Pool & Patio takes pride in building quality, long-lasting, and well-functioning spaces for clients to enjoy.

On top of our construction projects, we have a full-service department which handles pool openings and closings, weekly maintenance, equipment upgrades, and any other general service our customers may need.

**PSM:** How much of the pool installation process is handled in-house?

**MB:** We handle the complete pool installation process in-house. We handle everything from initial concepts and designs, right to the finished hardscaping on each project. We have close relationships with qualified landscapers we work with to complete the softscaping on our projects.

**PSM:** What equipment do you currently have in your fleet to complete projects?

**MB:** We currently have a fleet of approximately 15 trucks to cover our construction, service, and carpentry departments. We also have a few skid steers and trailers to support our other various needs on each project. A fleet of between 16 to 18 vehicles, and four Bobcats with various attachments to perform all required duties.

**PSM:** What does your planning and design process involve?

**MB:** The initial planning and design process is so important. Not only does this process help to determine a proper budget for the project, but this is also the client's first look at seeing their vision start to come to life. It's exciting for them, so it's just as important to have the proper design elements incorporated into the layout as it is for the design to

actually function and to be situated in such a way that maximizes the property and the budget.

By way of using a provided site/grading plan or measuring existing elements, we create a base map for the property. At the same time, grade shots are taken to evaluate any changes in grade, which helps to determine our pool height in relation to the house and the need or negation of retaining walls.

We then move forward with the overall design elements and determine proper pool size, shape, as well as various other areas, to create a design that is completely functional. We try to capture all the design elements the client has requested.

Through the presented budget and allotted space, things are slightly tweaked to develop the final design, utility, and construction drawings, as well as any drawings necessary for permit requirements. This may include a certified grading plan, structural cabana drawings, and of course, a pool fence or pool permit site plan.

**PSM:** How is technology changing the business?

**MB:** Technology is advancing, especially in the pool industry, in many ways. Business was a lot harder 35 years ago when we didn't have computers and had to rely on two-way radios, pagers, pay phones, and answering machines to stay in communication with our customers and employees. Thankfully, those days are behind us.

Also, sometimes envisioning the potential of the backyard space can be particularly challenging for our customers. With the help of technology, we've found our design software helps to aid in this process. Our design software allows our team to show our customers a 3D drawing of the completed space to help them visualize the full remodel. The changing technological advances don't just stop with ensuring everyone is on the same page. We're able to create these visions in a timely manner. Technology also allows us to work on various projects simultaneously to ensure customer satisfaction. With COVID-19, our team has seamlessly transitioned to video conferencing to ensure clear communication and uphold our standards, allowing customers to see 3D renderings of their space and make changes in the moment to ensure complete satisfaction.

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Their own fleet of vehicles covers the construction, service, and carpentry departments.

Once our customers' dream vision has come to life, technological advances make their pool operation experience the best it can be, with the use of the most current automation systems. These systems also allow us to program our customers' pools to run as efficiently as possible, while programming specific speeds and schedules to take advantage of hydro rebates at certain times of the day, making the pool experience relaxing and enjoyable.

Our service department also benefits from technological advances, with regards to tracking water chemistry results, customer requests, and service calls. Our service team can easily see pool records and compare results after each visit, ensuring proper dosing of chemicals. Our software also helps our office staff. If the customers have any questions, we can pull up their profile and see what work has been performed on their pool. Before our service techs go to a call, we can see the customer's system on our computer and identify any simple problems we might be able to diagnose over the phone to get their pool back to normal operation as quickly as possible.

**PSM:** What is the key to staying successful in this industry?

**MB:** The key to staying successful in the pool industry is performing quality work, along with customer satisfaction and loyalty. To keep up with the current demand, as well as all the challenges in the industry through the pandemic, we find clear communication has been key both within our team as well as our customers.

A homeowner's decision to build a pool is a substantial investment, probably the second biggest investment next to their house. When you

do invest in a pool, you want value, quality, and most importantly, a final product that meets your expectations. One of the most important keys to being successful is having a good team. Without our employees, we wouldn't be able to complete the incredible backyard spaces or service our customers' needs, whatever they may be.

We also feel staying up to date on current trends—whether that be in the design department, material choices, or even technology—gives our customers the best feeling when they choose to use our company to create and build their backyard paradise. Our team's dedication to quality design, and construction has left us with a lengthy list of satisfied customers.

**PSM:** What are your future plans for the business?

**MB:** Our future plans for the business are to continue to grow in all our departments—construction, service, and carpentry—while continuing to provide the best quality product and service for our customers. We also pride ourselves on giving back to the same community that supported us for more than 35 years by sponsoring team sports and different charities, including St. Joseph's Hospice, which holds a special place in our hearts. We will continue to make this a priority.

**PSM:** How has your business handled the surge in homeowners looking to create a backyard staycation? What is being done differently now in terms of business operations to handle the increased number of projects compared to pre-pandemic?

**MB:** We think it goes without saying, the pandemic has been quite a challenge in our industry. We're certainly thankful we've been able to work through the pandemic the majority of the time and the interest continues to be strong for new construction and renovation. As a company, we feel each other's health is the first priority. With that being said, we made the decision to maintain the number of employees instead of hiring more people. We decided we wouldn't take on too many projects and over-promise, so we could ensure delivery and the quality of our work. We continue to prioritize customer satisfaction and we feel this is the best way to go about it. 💧



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