

# Recognizing Certification Heroes

**S**ince its inception in 1997, the North American Technician Excellence (NATE) organization has worked tirelessly to improve the professionalism of the technicians serving the installation and service sectors of the HVACR industry. To make that happen requires a great deal of work and dedication from the staff, from the technicians who study and take the

certification tests, and from the contractors who support these activities.

But there is more to it than that. The success of NATE requires a grassroots movement to advocate and promote the need for and benefits of certification. Many people throughout the industry dedicate their time, energy, and expertise to help NATE thrive and grow. These unsung heroes needed some recognition themselves, so in 2006, *Contracting Business.com* magazine and NATE joined forces to

create the Golden Toolbox Award.

According to current NATE Chairman Don Frenberg, “At NATE, we greatly value the opportunity to recognize those volunteers who give tirelessly in the endorsement and promotion of technician certification. The continued growth in the number of certified technicians and their recognition by the industry and consumers would not be possible without the work of the honorees and many other committed individuals.”

To be considered for the award, candidates must have a public presence and should exhibit several of the following qualities:

- Support of NATE HVACR technician certification
- Advocacy of advancing industry professionalism by technician certification
- Influence of the industry population with columns, speeches, interviews, public forums, or continual actions to accept, support, and implement NATE technician certification.

If this sounds like a lot, it is. Any grassroots movement requires a high level of enthusiasm and commitment. This is why the first recipient of the Golden Toolbox Award wasn't a big surprise: The inaugural award was presented during HVAC Comfortech 2006 in Nashville, TN, to Matt Michel, CEO of the Service Roundtable.

During that Comfortech presentation, Rex Boynton, then NATE president, said that through his writing, speaking, and other contributions, Michel helped build NATE's reputation and got the word out about the importance of NATE when there wasn't a lot of support for the idea of a single, national certification body ([bit.ly/GTA\\_Michel](http://bit.ly/GTA_Michel)).

It was this type of selfless service that laid the groundwork for the annual Golden Toolbox Award. This award presents an opportunity for the many faces involved in the HVACR industry — consultants, equipment manufacturers, technicians, and others — to be recognized for their consistent advocacy of NATE.



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To date, seven individuals have been awarded the Golden Toolbox. These advocates include:

**2006: Matt Michel, Service Roundtable, Arlington, TX.** Matt is CEO and president of the Service Roundtable, an Internet-based business alliance dedicated to providing small service businesses with the information they need to improve sales, profitability, and business performance. He is a prolific writer, contributing to *Contracting Business.com* as well as to the *HVAC Hotmail* e-newsletter and several other trade magazines. He has authored hundreds if not thousands of articles and has written nine eBooks. These are the platforms he uses to promote the NATE cause. In addition, Matt has been active on the NATE board of directors since its founding, before retiring in September 2012.

**2007: Warren Lupson, Air Conditioning, Heating, and Refrigeration Institute (AHRI), Arlington, VA.** Warren is director of education for AHRI and apprenticeship chairman for the National Capital Chapter of the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA). His focus is on education, and in that role he works hard to promote NATE certification among students, educational bodies, and contractors. Lupson is NATE-certified in all disciplines. He has served on the Technical Committee for 15 years and was chair/co-chair/vice-chair for 12 years.

**2008: Joel Owen, Alabama Power (formerly Southern Company), Verbena, AL.** Joel is a training analyst at Southern Company's HVAC Training Center, responsible for developing and delivering HVAC training to utility markets, HVAC contractors, and building service and apartment maintenance personnel. He holds eight technician certifications and an Alabama State Board of Heating and Air Conditioning contractor's license. In addition, among many other activities, Joel is very active on the NATE Technical Committee and is NATE-certified in four specialties.

**2009: Gary Andis, National Energy Management Institute (NEMI), Alexandria, VA.** Gary is director of certification at NEMI and has 32 years of industry experience, having worked in various aspects of installation, service, and design. He serves as an instructor for adult HVACR education and instructor training programs. Gary holds five NATE certifications and serves on the NATE Technical Committee.

**2010: Jack Bartell, Virginia Air, Richmond, VA.** Jack is director of service and training for Virginia Air, a distributor of York products. He has been in the HVAC industry for 35-plus years, working in service, sales, and training. He's an active member of the Refrigeration Service Engineers Society (RSES) and an active contributor to ACCA, sitting on committees to help rewrite residential and commercial load calculation procedures. He is certified in five NATE specialties and sits on the NATE Technical Review Committee.

**2011: Chris Mohalley, HVAC Dynamics, Racine, WI.** Chris owns HVAC Dynamics, a training company specializing in "making good technicians great." He has nine years of residential HVAC field and managerial experience and four-plus years of experience as a national trainer. Chris' company is a NATE testing organization. He sits on the NATE Technical Committee and is NATE-certified in all disciplines.

**2012: Charles White, Repairs, Inc., South Bend, IN.** The newest member of the Golden Toolbox winners' circle began his career as a technician in 1978

and has extensive industry experience. He holds three NATE certifications and has been an active member of NATE's Technical Committee since 2002.

These seven individuals – with a total of 220 years service among them – represent the best of a selfless grassroots movement to better the HVACR industry as a whole. As we move forward, their work, and the work of many others, will continue to promote the concept of technician excellence and NATE as the answer to creating a more professional and profitable industry.

Says Frenenberg, "Since the inception of NATE, countless individuals, such as those listed above, have tirelessly worked to promote the value of NATE certification in demonstrating the competency of HVACR technicians. We are pleased each year to join with *Contracting Business.com* in honoring yet another valued friend and supporter." ●

Mike Weil is the Editorial Director of *Contracting Business.com* magazine and has been providing a platform to promote NATE as the national certification body of the HVACR industry since its inception. *Contracting Business*, which was an active participant in the founding of NATE, also provides a forum to promote NATE-certified technicians, as well as the Golden Toolbox Award at its annual Comfortech seminar and product showcase event.

