

What's New at Seasonal

by Dennis DiPaolo

If I rush everyone involved, it still takes a month to write a newsletter, get it typed, styled, edited, to the printers, stripped, proofed, printed, folded, to the mail house, addressed, sorted, to the post office, and delivered by standard mail (first class is \$3000 extra). So I'm writing this before the war starts, and I'm not close to guessing how we will all find ourselves when you receive it. I hope and pray that you and yours are safe and well, and that we complete this action with as absolutely little harm to people – all people – as possible. Young Iraqi soldiers, with no education and no vote in an election for leaders who send them to war, do not deserve to die for their country any more than our young people over there deserve to die for ours. I pray for them all.

Thank you for another good year in 2002 – up 10% from 2001. Truthfully, people are not spending the “stupid” money that they spent in 2000, especially since last fall. Fortunately for us, when people shop harder, they are more likely to choose a value leader such as ourselves over a boutique-style store. And, when they shop harder, they notice how competitive we are with discount stores. It's true – I shop at Wal-Mart too, and I respect how they have beaten every store that tries to compete with them. We do not carry the same pool chemicals as they, but if you read the ingredients and adjust for strength, some of them can be compared.

Their prices for small containers were lower than ours the last time I

checked; however, almost none of our customers buy those sizes (the pools that they sell are much smaller than the pools that we sell), and five of their small containers were not cheaper than one of our large containers that was five times the size! I'm not looking to start a price war with Wal-Mart or any other discounter (in our industry, we're considered a discounter), but if you really shop, you'll find we're right in line.

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Take a good look at your pool now. It was a tough winter. If you don't notice any damage until the first week of June, you're going to be behind a long line of people waiting for a repair technician.

What's New at Seasonal (Continued)

Training

We currently have the best staff that we have ever had, and easily the best staff of any pool store in New England. How do you hold and develop an absolutely excellent staff? For starters, you fire the ones who are *only good*. Then, you don't let the others get away. Then you never stop training and developing everyone.

Every year I give you a litany of people that we have sent around the country for technical training. This year Kip, Jeanne, and I went to New Orleans. Kip and Nelson went to Buffalo. Mimi, Jeanne, and Janna went to Chicago. Kip, Patrick, Tom, and Jim went to Atlantic City. Tom and Jim went to Philadelphia, and almost all of the newer staff did two days of chemistry and technical solutions in Natick. That, by the way, was very gratifying. Our first-season people (hired after last summer) dramatically outperformed two and three year veterans of other stores. Mimi, Tom, and Anne-Marie graduated from the Dale Carnegie Course. Mimi and Tom took supervisor training, and practically everyone took Red Cross CPR and other classes.

A big difference this year has been a major improvement in internet-based chemical training available. More important, we hired our new summer help during the winter, rearranged our internal schedules, and brought Tod in full time to teach classes all winter. All of our junior staff and our newer senior staff are light years ahead of any group of trainees I have ever seen.

We're even teaching them about the real world. In school, teachers play fair. Every word problem has every fact required to solve the problem. In a pool store, the customer never gives you all the information that you need, and 20% of what they give you is not accurate. Our job isn't just solving problems – it's politely asking the right questions in a manner that tells us what to believe and what to discard. That's a concept that just blows the mind of a college student. They grew up in a world where the questions are fair, and if you are wrong 10% of the time, you get an "A", and your parents are proud of you. We live in a world where the questions are unfair, and if you are wrong 1% of the time, the customer goes someplace else. You know, these kids should be paying us \$28,000 a year to learn from us!

Using the Customer Pick-Up Door

We have probably not done a good job of communicating how and when to use our Customer Pick-Up Door for heavy chemical purchases. The system has grown over the years, and while it's second nature to long-term customers, it may be confusing to new customers.

Just about every pool supply that weighs more than 22 pounds has at least one sample in the store marked with a pink label that says "Display only: order from the cashier and pick up from warehouse." Generally, there will also be other containers just like it without the pink tag, right next to that one. You choose how you want it. If you wish to carry the product over to the cashier, stand in line, then carry it out to the car, go right ahead. Just take a container without the pink

label. If you would like us to help you with it, then leave the container alone, and just order it from the cashier. We have the exact same product stocked close to the Pick-Up Door with Product Support Team Members waiting to help you with it. If you don't care how you do it, we would prefer to help you at the Pick-Up Door. It's faster, cleaner, and more efficient. However, it's your choice.

Let's say that you are afraid that you'll forget what you wanted by the time you get to the cashier. You're not as afraid as I am! We have a "cheat sheet" in the Pool Chemical Department called **Warehouse Order Form** that lists every likely item. If we were helping you in the department, we checked off what you wanted. Giving that to the cashier prevents mistakes, eliminates CRS, and is a little faster for the cashier. Just ask us to help you, or look for the form along with a pen at the end of every short aisle in the Chemical Department.

Our goal is to make your shopping experience faster, easier, and complete the first time in.

Baquacil Ultra Report

The details are in the special newsletter sent to the Ultra users who signed up for it. Roughly, last year's experiment with shock timing was only a little better than traditional monthly shocking – not enough to warrant confusing people by changing systems. There is a new shock extender in Beta testing this year. I declined to join the consumer test, though we might be allowed enough of the new product to use it in one of our test pools.

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Look for Non-Seasonal Items

- **Beautiful Wood Bars**
by Walton, Beach and Olhausen
- **Custom Bar Stools**
by Trica, Whitaker, Beach and others
- **Therapeutic Saunas**
by TheraSauna from only \$2999.
- **Hot Tubs** by QCA and Nordic,
starting from only \$2499.
- **All New 2003 Model Marquis Spas.** Coming in May.

What's New at Seasonal (Continued)

Price Tags

I can't read them either. You would think that since I own the place, I could get them fixed two years ago. Guess again! Our retail software is one of the oldest, most expensive, nationally-distributed programs made; but every time I ask for something, someone says, "It doesn't do that. No one ever asked for that."

Anyhow, supposedly they found the bug that wasn't letting us make the words and numbers the size we want (everything had to be either too big or too small). I've redesigned every price tag style to be readable by someone with an AARP card in their wallet, and we expect to switch to them by April 1st. We are also throwing away about \$1,000 worth of the "permanent" adhesive tags that took forever to remove, and buying all new "temporary" adhesive tags that will probably fall off when you look at them. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be cynical. Actually, we've been experimenting with the new tag adhesive all winter, and they seem to work great.

Puppy Report

Dixie, Jeanne's Boston Terrier show dog had six beautiful puppies. Odds are they will all be sold by the time you read this – Jeanne normally turns down as many people as she ultimately accepts to buy her puppies. Gaitor, one of Valentine's descendents (grandpuppy?) won the First Award of Merit at the Westminster Dog Show this spring. I'm not sure what that means, but it seems to be a real big deal to dog show people. I'd expect to see Vito, Valentine, Dixie, or Jada in the store more often with Jeanne this summer.

New Products

The future of Proteam Supreme was pretty questionable this winter as the manufacturer was shopped around and eventually sold. We already had the exact same product in the store with the Bioguard label, so anyone looking for Proteam Supreme should pick up Bioguard Optimizer. If the new owners of Proteam lower the price, we'll probably go back to it next year. If it's the same or higher than Bioguard, we'll probably stay with Bioguard.

In pool supplies, look for some new inexpensive solar reels, and a really

cool new automatic pool cleaner for above ground pools called the Great White 8000. We let other Target Buying Group stores try it for three years to see how they liked it, and we used it in one of our test pools all last summer. Not only does it work really well, you can attach your vacuum pole to it and use it manually. Why would you? Because the party starts in an hour, or you want to put it away because you're working in the yard right now, and it hasn't cleaned that one corner of the pool yet. Instead of waiting, or pulling out your manual vacuum, you just hitch your vac pole onto the Great White 8000 while it's still running, guide it over to the corner, clean that up, and then unhitch the pole or just stop right then!

And, did I say that we're running it as an introduction for a little bit cheaper than the Kreepy Krauly EZ Vac and the Polaris Turbo Turtle?

Price Increases and Shortages

Speaking of pricing, though, I was just talking to a friend of mine who owns a large factory. A shortage of resin pellets (the raw material of most plastic items) caused by several factories closing, is starting to push material costs up. Add to that real and perceived shortages of oil (what they make resin out of), legitimate and illegitimate price increases in oil, and a chance for the resin manufacturers to raise prices that were too low (which is why those factories closed). We might see shortages and price increases in plastic items in mid-summer.

I've already committed to a normal year's worth of accessories, so I don't see that as a problem unless there is a big increase in pool sales this year. The pools shouldn't go up, but liners might, and ladders and steps definitely will, by around 20%.

Increased container costs won't affect expensive chemicals much, but it might affect cheap chemicals, especially liquid chlorine shock. If you only had 1000 buckets left for the year, would your factory fill them with \$18 pH plus or \$80 chlorine? We'd like to buy up a year's worth of chemicals right now, but the amount of safe storage space here cannot be changed.

What should you do? Buy plastics and things that come in plastic containers

earlier rather than later. If there is a shortage of liquid chlorine shock, buy a powdered version and make your own.

New Ducane Gas Grills

If you do not have a Ducane grill, then you will eventually be buying parts or a new grill. At that point, buy a Ducane, and it will be the last grill you'll ever buy. Lifetime warranty means that hardly anything ever breaks, and if it does, you call the 800 number, give them the serial number, and they send you free parts. The details are here at the store, and when you see how they are built, you'll see why they are the best grill made. However, that has never meant the most expensive grill made: our most popular models are only \$500 to \$600.

This year Ducane added some models in the \$1500 to \$2000 range that are easily the most beautiful grills you have ever seen for that money – patterned on their \$6000 Meridian models. Just come look at the grills, see how they are made, pick up some literature, let us show you if you want. They are on display just past our Coffee Shop on the Design Center side.

Bars and Barstools

Our newest major product department has caught on big time. While our display is the largest around, it's nothing like what is truly available in our special order books. There are hundreds of off-the-shelf bar designs and styles. We do lots of customizing, too.

For barstools, the available selection is in the thousands. It appears that the regular furniture stores don't like to be bothered with barstool orders. It's true that they involve the same amount of work for the salesperson and buyer as ordering a custom sofa, loveseat, chair, and ottoman. Except, three barstools could be easily under \$350, while the typical indoor furniture order is closer to \$5000. For us, though, we're happy with a \$300 sale (or even \$100 for one stool), and we don't have straight commission salespeople who cannot afford to take the time to help someone with a small purchase. Come have a look. The main display is near the solarium, just past the pool tables. The special order books and samples are at the Design Center. We'll be happy to help.

Our goal is 100% customer satisfaction.

It is always our intention to have all advertised items readily available for sale. Occasionally, an advertised item may not be available because of sales above anticipated demand or circumstances beyond our control. Whenever reasonable and possible, rainchecks will be issued or a comparable value will be offered.

While we do our best to avoid printing errors, we do reserve the right to correct any inaccurate prices or descriptions at the point of purchase. All items are not necessarily sale items or mark-downs, but all represent significant values.

Warranty information is kept at the store for your inspection. It is our advice never to buy an item strictly on the basis of the warranty alone, but to consider the product's quality and reputation.

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PRE-SEASONAL SALE

Every Pool Supply is on Sale

Save 20% to 50%

Take 20% off the lowest marked price on any swimming pool chemical, supply, accessory or part in the store. That's right – if it's already marked down 40%, you can still take another 20% off that! The only exceptions are above ground pools themselves, and things that have nothing to do with pools – like patio furniture, pool tables, hot tubs, etc.

- Chlorine
 - Bromine
 - Liners
 - Decks
- Auto Pool Cleaners
 - Solar Heat Systems
 - Sand or DE
 - Solar Covers
- Cover Pumps
 - Solar Reels
 - Ladders
 - All Chemicals
- Bioguard
 - HTH
 - Target
 - Robelle

Come to Pool School – it's FREE

Let us help you to make pool care safe, easy, and fun. All classes are held in the store. Seats are limited, so please call or come in to register in advance

Introduction to Pool Care – Pool School 101

New to pool care? Learn about the best and easiest ways to maintain your pool.

Wednesdays 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. April 30, May 14, June 4, June 25

- Filtration
 - Safety
- Circulation
 - At home testing
- Chemical Systems:
Chlorine – Bromine – Baquacil – Others
- Water Conservation
 - Vacuuming

Easy Pool Opening – Pool School 202

Tricks and tips to get your pool opened and operating quickly, safely, and easily.

Wednesdays 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. April 23, May 7, May 21

- Proper Timing
 - Opening Chemicals
- Easy Cover Removal
 - Annual Conditioners
- Filter Assembly
 - Balancing
- Cover Cleaning
 - Water Conservation
- Filter Cleaning

Pool closing classes will also be available in August and September.



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