

Steven Carroll of the Clean Air Quality Service, Inc. staff works to replace a cooling tower in New York City.



Employees apply new technology to an old HVAC system at EF Academy in New York.



APART FROM THE REST

Clean Air Quality Service, Inc.
offers more to staff and customers

by Leigh Thomas



EO Russell Seacor founded *Clean Air Quality Service, Inc.* (CAQS) in 1991 out of a need for something more. He was living in Westchester County, New York, and had purchased his first home in 1989. He recalls that his mortgage interest rate was 10.375%, and the closing attorneys laughed because his monthly payment coincidentally equaled \$1,989. "I wasn't laughing," he says. "It was as much as I made in a month."

Seacor started a family that same year, which also "forced me to want to do something," he says. He was already in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC)

industry, working for Nationwide Mechanical Contractors Corp., and eventually becoming vice president of operations. Out of the basement of his home, he formed CAQS as an HVAC service company for Westchester-based residences and businesses. He later absorbed Nationwide Mechanical Contractors Corp.'s staffing when it retired from business operations.

Today, CAQS does HVAC, refrigeration and plumbing work for commercial and industrial clients. The company's services include maintenance, replacements and installation, plus the design, installation, programming and maintenance of building automation systems. Based

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Clean Air Quality Service, Inc. replaces a cooling tower in New York City.

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Russell Seacor, CEO,
Clean Air Quality Service, Inc.



in Hawthorne, New York, it serves the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Many of its customers are medical centers, hospitals, water treatment plants, nursing homes and commercial spaces such as offices, libraries, municipalities and shopping malls.

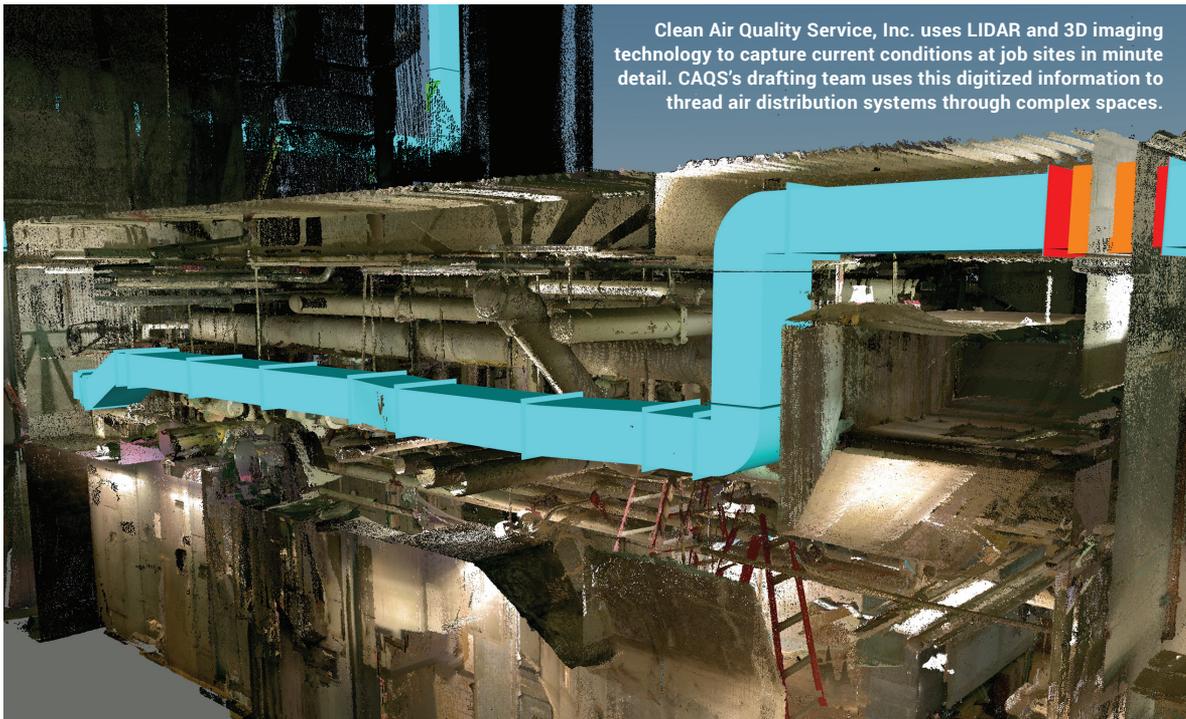
Seacor explains that CAQS is one of the few one-stop shops in his industry, fabricating and installing its own ductwork, welding its own piping, installing and troubleshooting controls

and performing pipe fitting. "We typically do what others can't do or don't want to do. And 90 to 95% of it we do in-house," he says. "There's nothing we can't solve for you. We don't have to call another company; I have all these people on staff."

ESSENTIAL SERVICES FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Seacor takes pride in his company's work. "We provide essential

services for the people who provide essential services for the country," he says. One of his most memorable projects was for the Hudson Valley Transportation Management Center, the Westchester County 911 center that houses the New York State Police, New York State Department of Transportation and Office of Emergency Management. Seacor



Clean Air Quality Service, Inc. uses LIDAR and 3D imaging technology to capture current conditions at job sites in minute detail. CAQS's drafting team uses this digitized information to thread air distribution systems through complex spaces.

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was hired to build the HVAC systems for the center prior to September 11, 2001. When the terrorist attacks of 9/11 occurred as the job was in progress, Seacor says the job morphed into a “safe house,” and he was tasked with building specialized air systems for two additional underground floors. CAQS, in addition to performing the complete HVAC installation, designed the building automation system for the site and continues to service the building today.

Seacor says CAQS’s work for various medical facilities ranges from the design and installation of ventilation

systems for a single critical care room to the design-build of HVAC systems for an entire medical complex. CAQS services various mechanical systems for Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, New York, and recently completed installation of a medical gas system for the new ambulatory care pavilion addition. The company has also performed all HVAC work for The Osborn senior living facility in Rye, New York, since the early 1990s, including the HVAC systems design for various building alterations.

Outside of emergency response and medical services, many CAQS customers are in the public works arena, such as the wastewater treatment plant in Westchester County, the Hunts Point Water Pollution Control Plant in the Bronx and several school facilities. One recent job was the new student center at the Word of Life Bible Institute at Schroon Lake in Pottersville, New York. Seacor describes this job as a design-build where he was able to undercut the customer’s budget by reconfiguring the original design.

Another important project for CAQS was at the EF Academy, an international boarding school in New York. The school had recently acquired an older building that needed \$7 million in mechanical work completed in four months, in time for the start of the 2015 fall semester. “They gave me the job in May, and the kids were in there by September,” Seacor says.

SUCCESS STARTS FROM WITHIN

Seacor values his staff, their dedication and the service they provide to customers. He describes Austin, a special needs adult who has been on staff for more than 25 years. Austin has a unique talent for memorizing addresses and numbers, and has used this ability to fit right in at CAQS. "He's a fixture," Seacor says.

How employees are treated and staff morale can have a significant impact on their contributions and, in turn, the company's success. Seacor says that he has seen greed elsewhere in the industry that did not pay off for other companies, and it made him want to do things differently. The biggest factor that sets CAQS apart, he says, is the conversion to an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) in 2015. Seacor took 100% of the company and converted it into an ESOP for his employees. Today it is valued at more than \$900 per share.

Seacor sees this as the right way to do business in exchange for the value his people bring to the company. "I've always had good people who want to work for me. It's a family atmosphere, and their dedication is second to none. They know they're a part of the company." For example, his sister, Sharon Abrams, joined the company 30 years ago and now owns company stock. "When she retires this year, she'll be the first to walk out the door with a seven-figure check," he says.

CAQS gives back to the community as well, donating drain pans for local fire departments and building custom boxes for police car trunks. "I take care of these guys because they



CEO Russell Seacor (far right) speaks on behalf of local ESOPs about giving back to the workforce.



Clean Air Quality Service, Inc. employees work with the Con Edison energy company to solve natural gas issues at Mastercard world headquarters.

take care of the community," Seacor says. A mission near and dear to the company is the Ossining Microfund, a nonprofit organization offering interest-free loans to individuals and families who encounter unexpected financial obstacles. Seacor recalls, for example, a young man

who couldn't afford his college textbooks, and the Microfund loaned him the money needed to buy them. "It's just a way of helping people out of difficult situations they're in," Seacor says. "They pay back the loan, and the money is passed forward to the next person who needs help."

CAQS is also taking steps to adapt and assist with regard to COVID-19. When alcohol-based sanitizers became in short supply, employees Bob and Amanda Macedo purchased the components to make a distillation device and began producing their own alcohol for use in hand sanitizing. CAQS fabricated a control panel with a Honeywell controller and temperature and pressure sensors to begin the distillation process.

By using an all-electric heating setup, CAQS reduced the risk associated with the distillation process and has the ability to distill in a conditioned environment and maximize production efficiency. As a result, CAQS will provide hand sanitizers to the entire CAQS workforce, family and friends, and will donate the remainder to first responders. In addition, Seacor's sister Sharon is making masks for the CAQS employees to wear while they navigate through these difficult times.

WITH TRAINING COMES SUSTAINABILITY

CAQS is no stranger to innovation. In 2010 the company received the Big H Award from Honeywell for its 20-year commitment to the automated controls industry. In the late 1990s, CAQS began to equip itself with the knowledge and training needed to provide customers with automatic temperature controls and building management systems, focusing on Honeywell products. "To take care of my customers, I needed to branch out to direct digital controls, which involved the programming of specialized computerized parts. We were the tip of the spear when it came to learning, testing and using new products," Seacor says.



Ruby, the Clean Air Quality Service, Inc. mascot.



Sharon Abrams, Clean Air Quality Service, Inc. employee and sister of CEO Russell Seacor, makes masks for employee use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The future of the HVAC/Refrigeration industry is in training, Seacor explains. "The industry moves at lightning speed. You have to have good people. Train the individuals you have and acquire people to handle all the new technology that comes out." One example is the company's Safety BBQ, an annual safety orientation involving the entire company. Seacor brings in product manufacturers to educate all staff in the proper use of products such as ladders, hard hats, gloves and harnesses. "Some of our guys never see each other because their jobs are different. So we use the common platform of safety to build camaraderie."

Seacor says that training, his people and the service they offer will carry CAQS into the future. "I have never missed a beat. My company, no matter what's going on in the world, has always maintained market share. It's because of our people and our level of service. If things break, we fix it. We're always getting it done." 🐾

Leigh Thomas is a corporate communications professional and a freelance writer and editor who enjoys helping people and businesses share their stories.