



# Quality Refrigeration: 70 Years of Success

By Karen Robes Meeks

**S**eventy years ago, Jack Appelt used his refrigeration know-how to build a family business that could support the burgeoning demand for refrigeration services in cargo ships, the U.S. Navy and surrounding commercial markets in the Los Angeles Harbor area.

Today, the business that Appelt built, Quality Refrigeration, celebrates seven decades as a go-to service company for marine and commercial HVACR systems for cargo ships, cruise lines, offshore oil platforms, industrial and commercial markets. It boasts one of the largest inventories of certified marine parts in stock on the West Coast.

The business also remains a family affair, with Appelt's grandson, Jeff Hawke, at the helm, and his children — the fourth generation — involved in the day-to-day operations of the company, which includes locations in Wilmington and San Diego.

Hawke, who came into the family business in the mid-1980s, reflected on the two factors that have kept Quality Refrigeration successful after 70 years: his 30 employees and the company's ability to diversify and respond to the changing business economy.

"It's really all about the people for me," Hawke said. "I don't think of them as employees; they're family members and team members, because most of our business is relationship-driven and my team has to have good relationships with our clients and customers."

Quality Refrigeration's  
Wilmington, Calif. workshop.  
Photo courtesy of Quality  
Refrigeration.

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*"The people  
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history of  
success."*

*Jeff Hawke Jr.*



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## Quality Refrigeration

The company's willingness to diversify also played a factor in its success.

"We are a very diversified company; we actually work in a lot of different markets and a lot of different business sectors," Hawke said. "We don't just focus on one market or one industry. We are doing all kinds of different work, whether

it's small restaurants, hospitals, ships or the Navy. We're traveling overseas to Guam, traveling up to Washington or the East Coast working on ships."

When Appelt started his own business in 1950, he saw the need for refrigeration for cargo ships and fishing vessels. Appelt, whose uncle Dave Shannon inspired him into a career in

refrigeration, was known for his work ethic.

"The business was his life and he was dedicated to it," Hawke said. "My philosophy is to lead by example and my grandfather was more of that because he was here to do everything when he started the business."

Appelt was also known as a good teacher and trainer who liked to share his knowledge, Hawke said. That inspired him in recent years to develop a training center with employees.

"We bring in people to do training and keep our employees up to speed with current technology because that's changing all the time, and environmental changes, which affect what we do."

Appelt's daughter, Charlotte Hawke Pesusich, was also dedicated to the business, working for the company for 50 years in various roles before retiring about seven years ago.

Before she retired, Pesusich was able to train her granddaughter, Heather Rule, who started working for Quality Refrigeration in 2014 and is the company's human resources manager.

"It was an honor to be trained by my grandma," Rule commented. "She knows this business inside out. I look up to her a lot, so I felt like that time with her was really special."

Rule's brother, Jeff Hawke Jr., is a newer addition to the company. Like Heather, Jeff Jr. helped out at the company as a youth and spent a summer as a high school intern assisting technicians at Quality Refrigeration.

After garnering experience in software sales in Seattle, Jeff Jr. moved back to Southern California to work for the family business, overseeing the company's parts and equipment division.

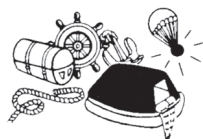
The company's family philosophy extends to the employees and customers, he said.

"It's just a culture that has been built and centered around family and centered around relationships," Jeff Jr. said. "That's why customer service is extremely important to us as well. The people that make up Quality are the reason why it has such a long history of success."

### Evolution & Diversification

Quality Refrigeration has been able to evolve its business through the years.

Another big change for the company took place in the 1990s, when the Long



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Beach Naval Shipyard closed. It not only meant the loss of a major economic generator for the city of Long Beach, but lucrative work for businesses such as Quality Refrigeration.

In response, Hawke spearheaded the plan to open up an office in San Diego where the Navy moved, which has led to a successful operation in San Diego mainly doing refrigeration, air conditioning, service and repair on US Navy and other ships along with parts and equipment sales.

The COVID-19 pandemic also propelled them to seek out other opportunities, such as looking at ways to improve air quality indoors. This led to new service offerings such as sanitizing and sterilizing air conditioning units.

“Combating COVID-19 and other airborne pathogens is extremely important to our company and customers,” Hawke said. “The company has installed hundreds of devices in HVAC systems onboard ships and buildings which greatly reduce the chance of spreading pathogens, and has other benefits for better indoor air quality.”

Quality Refrigeration is currently working on various projects, including a nearly \$2 million contract with the U.S. Coast Guard that the company provided engineering design and support. The company, which has received a five-year extension on its contract, provides new refrigeration and air conditioning equipment for one of their classes of cutters.



The Quality Refrigeration management team. Pictured from left: Jeff Hawke, Jr.; Heather Rule; Jeff Hawke, Sr.; and Alby Rule. Photo courtesy of Quality Refrigeration.



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## Quality Refrigeration

The family business also has a long-lasting relationship with maritime air conditioning and refrigeration technology provider Carrier Marine, and has been a Carrier Marine dealer since 1973. The companies work in tandem on various shipboard, naval and offshore HVACR projects.

A few years ago, Quality Refrigeration started delving into ammonia refrigeration and other heavy industrial refrigeration to much success. Hawke's son-in-law, Alby Rule, runs the company's service department and handles a variety of tasks, including fielding customer inquiries, quoting and scheduling jobs, caring for the company's vehicle fleet and serving as safety coordinator.

Rule, who is married to Hawke's daughter Heather, said long-time customers are loyal to Quality Refrigeration because they trust the company to do right by them.

"And I think the proof is in the

pudding," Rule said. "To have a successful company, you need to take care of your customers. And I think that customer longevity is the No. 1

***"To have a successful company, you need to take care of your customers. And I think that customer longevity is the No. 1 thing that is a testament to how well the company is being run for four generations."***

*Alby Rule*

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Quality Refrigeration continues to maintain a steady offering of diverse services and offers its talents for free to community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club in the Harbor

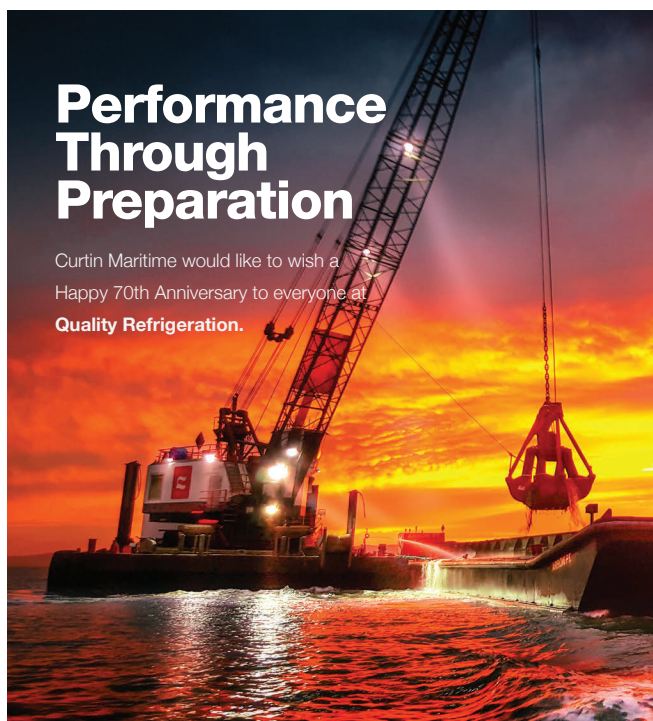
area and the Ronald McDonald House in Long Beach.

"Quality Refrigeration has been a great partner of Boys & Girls Clubs in helping us keep our buildings comfortable for the 2,500 members served per day," according to the organization's facilities committee. "They have been a valuable partner to us with the replacement of units down to the routine maintenance of all of our HVAC/R equipment."

Hawke, who was able to grow the company from 12 employees when he started in the 1980s to a staff of over 30 today, said he sees his company continue on its upward trajectory while keeping the long-standing tradition of what made the company successful.

"I'm so proud to have such a great customer base and great employees," Hawke said. "We've had steady organic growth, which has contributed to our company's success for the last 70 years."

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