

The PSP Expo Plans to Celebrate the Economy's Return

Show attendees include builders, retailers and more from the outdoor living industry.

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Atlantic Water Gardens attended its first Pool|Spa|Patio Expo as a test two years ago, and it was a rousing success, said Bill Lynne, CEO of the Mantua, Ohio-based company.

Organizers of the Pool|Spa|Patio Expo expect more than 400 vendors to exhibit and close to 10,000 industry professionals to attend the show. One component of the PSP Expo is the educational conference, featuring more than 70 programs. The PSP Expo features products, materials, equipment and services for the backyard industry, including ponds and water gardens. Returning this year are the Power Panels, where industry professionals give an overview of one market segment. "We are in the water garden industry, but we have product offerings that are attractive to pool companies and landscapers as well," Lynne said. "They're interested in our colorfalls, fountain bases and outdoor lighting. We found that we started expanding our customer base at the show. Now we have active pool customers, and we'd like more."

The PSP Expo features products, materials, equipment and services for the backyard industry, including ponds and water gardens. Companies that attend the show include pool and spa builders, retailers, service companies, waterscape designers and landscape architects that specialize in outdoor living spaces.

The broad scope of the PSP Expo draws many companies, including Health Mate Sauna in Buena Park, Calif. "This is one of the biggest shows in our field," said Tracy Lopez, domestic sales manager. "That's why it's one of the best-known shows in the pool-spa-patio industry; it fits the whole category."

The PSP Expo has two components. The educational conference, scheduled for Oct. 31-Nov. 5, offers more than 70 programs designed to fit a wide variety of industry issues. The show itself will run Nov. 3-5.

Planners think the event will draw more than 400 vendors in 1,000 booths. Donna Bellantone, expo director, said she expects attendance to take an almost 10 percent jump this year. Last year, 9,118 industry professionals attended; she expects close to 10,000 this year. Bellantone said she credits the attendance jump to the early signs of economic recovery.

"Companies are seeing that the economy is getting better, and they want to be ready when it really comes back," said Bellantone, an employee of Hanley Wood Exhibitions in Dallas.

Natural Structures in Baker City, Ore., reported cutting back on show attendance, but it plans to attend the PSP Expo, said Ted Hausotter, general manager. "It's a good show for meeting with our established customers and finding new customers," he said.

The PSP Expo's educational component enters to help businesses understand the post-recession customer, said Tracy Beaulieu, conference manager. "People in our industry want to get back to business, but they're having to deal with the changing face of the customer, which is a huge thing we're addressing with the conference," she said. "The recession has taken a toll on all of us and how we spend our discretionary dollars, and it's never going back to the way it was before."

Industry leaders will present seminars on every aspect of the backyard water industry, from sales and government regulations to training employees and water design. These seminars are available through the Executive Academy, the Association of Pool and Spa Professionals Builders Institute, the APSP Technical Service Institute and Genesis 3 Design Schools.

Last year's Power Panels, where a cross section of industry professionals gave an overview of one market segment, will return. In addition to the panels for builders and retailers, organizers added two new panels: the Service Power Panel and the Hot Tub Power Panel.

"The combined conference and expo provide a powerful education experience," said Michael Reed, APSP's director of professional development. "Participants can learn new techniques right on the show floor in the Live Workshop area. During the conference, they can choose a variety of quality technical and business presentations that will improve their businesses and make their employees more effective."

Chris Warhol, marketing director for Clearwater Spas in Woodinville, Wash., said the PSP Expo provides an opportunity for networking. "We're looking forward to meeting with our dealer base and meeting a lot of potential dealers," he said. "We're hoping to sign a lot of new business at the Expo."

On the vendor floor, attendees can check out new products for the water industry. Past water-garden-related products included fountains, pumps, filters, water features, pond kits, pavers, water and fire features, underwater lighting and water treatments, Bellantone said.

Another water garden vendor is GAME, which will feature lights and fountains in its booth. Mitch Smith, national sales manager for GAME, said he plans to scope out the other industry product introductions.

"The Expo is our industry's primary expo, and it provides us the opportunity to showcase new products and marketing strategies," Smith said. "It also allows us to see what other suppliers with similar product lines are doing in terms of new products, packaging, marketing efforts, etc. in one location when they have most of their items on display."

While the PSP Expo marketplace will showcase a wide variety of products and equipment, along with the latest developments in technology, Bellantone emphasized the show's celebratory tone. The PSP Expo will open with a Party on the Patio, where vendors can break out the grills, shade structures, spas and other items so visitors can sample their wares.

"We're generating traffic with a free beer garden, so it should be a popular place," Bellantone said. "We're doing this because people are tired of the doom and gloom. Everyone wants to move on. That's why it's important to have fun at this show; it's time to celebrate our industry."