

Harry Eklof & Associates is now in its fifth decade of operation. Eklof has three locations, including its headquarters in Landover, Maryland, and represents lines in the PHCP industry.



BY DAN VASTAYN  
Photos by Whistling Wind Photography

# HARRY EKLOF & ASSOCIATES CELEBRATES MORE THAN 50 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

## Boots in the field and empowerment of employees continue to drive Maryland-based manufacturers rep.

What does it take to open, sustain and grow a successful manufacturers representative firm over a half-century? Durable, well-nourished relationships, unrivalled support, attentive and honest leadership, empowerment of employees, and dedication to the trade. These are some of the reasons the company’s 50-year anniversary celebration and open house last year was so well-attended.

Held at the company’s Landover, Maryland, headquarters last fall, the event drew more than 150 manufacturers, contractors, engineers, current and past associates, and friends of the Eklof family. The crowd spoke, literally and figuratively, of the vision and passion initiated by **Harry Eklof** in 1968, and carried forward by his son, **Gary**, and the firm’s management team.

Harry Eklof started the company with three employees. Today, Eklof is three locations and more than 60 associates strong. It represents many lines across the HVAC, plumbing, refrigeration, sewage, turf and irrigation industries.

Its Landover headquarters was the first, followed by the addition of Richmond, Virginia in 1978 and Moorestown, New Jersey in 1995.

Steady growth over the years is indicative of the quality of representation provided by the company at all levels. The utmost commitment to the

customer has been unwavering throughout Eklof’s history, from the time Harry Eklof started the firm, through the transition of leadership in 2005, and under Gary Eklof’s guidance since.

### A HERITAGE OF SERVICE AND SUPPORT

“Gary paid homage to his father at the anniversary event,” says **Jon Rector**, Southeast regional sales manager at Modine, a line Eklof has carried for 20 years. “He spoke to the founding initiatives of integrity and honesty. From personal experience, I can say they live up to it. The people at Eklof do what they say they will.”

Even before he started the company, Harry Eklof witnessed that the most successful salesmen made it a point to work closely with installers. This was the groundwork and foundation of the company.

“Harry wanted this to be an agency that was keenly in tune with contractors, engineers and wholesalers, and that’s what it has always been,” says Vice President **Jack Schulz**, who has been with company since 1976, and vice president since 1983.

“We’re one of the few remaining agencies that doesn’t sell direct to



Harry Eklof & Associates Vice President Jack Schulz (left) and Gary Eklof address attendees of the company's 50th anniversary.

contractors," says **Brian Adkins**, Eklof's HVAC sales manager. "As a result, Eklof associates must know their lines inside and out, and the technology that each of our manufacturers offer."

Eklof associates are known for their can-do attitude. If an associate doesn't have what a customer needs, they either get it or help their customers find it. To become a resource, they invest more time in customer service and in relationships than they might otherwise need to. And that initiative does not go unnoticed.

"Eklof takes the time and effort to strategize with us, and they know their market well," Rector says. "When we come up with events and initiatives, they don't take a back seat. They're all-in, whether that means personnel or funding. They partner with us for big events and have always done more than their fair share."

Fujitsu General America Mid-Atlantic Regional Sales Manager **Dennis Stinson** agrees. He explains Eklof excels at being an extension of the manufacturer through educating customers and being a liaison in the field.

"We can count on Eklof's performance and so can its customers," Stinson adds. "To installers, they offer a level of confidence through support and training. That's invaluable. They're the perfect catalyst between the manufacturer, the customer and the wholesaler."

Rector says: "Eklof associates are quick to solve challenges on their own. It's rare that they need to rely on us."

"Much of our growth has come by way of Harry's original vision of 100%



From left, Gary, Michael, and Tracy Eklof along with cousin, Geoff Chambers, and sister, Jen Eklof Oakland.

wholesale while maintaining a close tie to engineers and contractors," Schulz explains. "A big part of that is because we try to be great listeners. True to his top-down leadership style, Harry was the best listener in the world. That often means listening to our own people."

## POWER IN PEOPLE

"Eklof hires great people, teaches them to absorb what the manufacturer is saying and gives them rein," Rector says. "When I joined Modine 19 years ago, Eklof already represented us in Maryland. After seeing the level of service they provided, I hired them for Virginia as well."

While speaking at the 50-year anniversary event, Gary Eklof was quick to attribute the company's strength to its associates and the relationships they maintain. But the appreciation went both ways. From his associates, Gary received a No. 50-emblazoned Baltimore Ravens football jersey.

"There's a rare atmosphere of coaching at Eklof," says Stinson, who has a unique, insider's perspective of Eklof. He was with Eklof for 20 years before joining Fujitsu.

"There's humor in the fact that, as an Eklof associate, you never get an answer to your questions," Stinson notes. "Rather, you get homework. It was considered lazy to simply tell someone what to do or how to handle a situation. The right thing to do was ask questions so the advice seeker could collect enough information to make the best decision and hopefully make that decision independently in the future."

"In any decision, all stakeholders — the manufacturer, the distributor and the contractor — need to benefit," Stinson continues. "If one comes up short, all come up short. This mindset requires great patience and more often an even greater sense of humor. If you were slow on the uptake, you could expect some good-natured ribbing."

Stinson also speaks of the company's culture of generosity. At Eklof, doing the right thing is not the exception. It's the expectation. This mindset has historically attracted good people to the firm. And good people tend to stay where they are when they're appreciated.

Schulz had a newborn son when he began his career with Eklof. That infant is now 43 years old. The ranks of the organization are filled with other long-standing members. **Geoff Chambers** has been with the company for 40 years and many for more than 35.

Associates are treated as family. They naturally take interest in each other's lives. It's a flexible atmosphere, and it works well.

"There's an uncommon level of empowerment and trust," Stinson says. "The leadership at Eklof teaches associates to be independent thinkers. The strength of a rep agency lies in its staff."

## GOING FORWARD

"Our associates' enthusiasm has been essential to our growth," Schulz explains. "A 50-year anniversary is a big deal for a rep firm. We've accomplished a great deal, built outstanding relationships and served to the best of our ability. This momentum will continue."

The foresight and adaptability that has driven the organization to the half-century milestone (along with Harry Eklof's vision of diversification) also has helped it through rough economies and market transitions. The shift to electronics, both in the form of equipment controls and warehouse inventory programs, is a good example.

"We've maintained great flexibility and adaptability," Schulz says. "Going forward, that can't change. As markets shift, we must shift with them and always retain the ability to serve the customer." 