



One of Ron Masse's favorite jobs was teaching plumbing and HVAC at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology in Boston.

BOSTON'S PLUMBER OF CHOICE

Ron Masse and *CRN Plumbing* are big players in the City of Champions

by Allyson Markey

Ron Masse is a plumber. At least that's what he—the Owner of *CRN Plumbing* (CRN), located in Wakefield, Massachusetts—calls himself. However, the truth is so much more than that.

Sure, one can call Ron a plumber; it's an accurate statement. However, Ron isn't just another plumber. He is a recognized Master Plumber, a plumbing mentor, a former professor of plumbing and HVAC at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology in Boston, a sheet metal and pipefitter, a certified (credentialed) high school and vocational teacher, and—to put the cherry on top—a published author. He is the brains and voice behind "Ask A Plumber," a column seen in many publications throughout the United States. It's almost not worth mentioning that Ron is EPA certified. Of course he is.

Also, let's not forget what Ron does in his "off-time." He is a passionate philanthropist who worked with homeless veterans in Boston on a project that was named one of the "thousand points of light" by President George H.W. Bush (and an "interesting" night with Al Pacino, but Ron will have to tell you about that). For the past 15 years, he has been one of the teams that lower the flag at Fenway Park, a skilled and honorable task usually performed by professional riggers. His sons joined him 10 years ago. He also installs the heating and plumbing for Habitat for Humanity homes in Bedford and Lowell, Massachusetts.

"I'm just a plumber," Ron says in a thick Boston accent. "I'm a guy who happens to do what I love, in an industry that I love, and I want to teach others to do it right. It's that simple."

THE BEGINNING OF CRN

The word "simple" can have multiple definitions. The "simple plumber" was born in Revere, Massachusetts, into a traditional Italian family. "We were, and still are, very Italian," Ron says, noting that he recently remodeled his basement into a full professional kitchen complete with a station to make homemade sausages. "Family is the most important thing to me, whether they're blood or not. I call CRN a family business—my brothers and other family members work for the company. Every one of my 15 guys is my family."

“

I'm just a plumber. I'm a guy who happens to do what I love, in an industry that I love, and I want to teach others to do it right. It's that simple."

Ron Masse, Owner, CRN Plumbing

Ron followed a fairly traditional path. He went to vocational high school in Wakefield before heading to the University of Massachusetts Boston. Along the way, he learned to plumb. "I started in plumbing when I was young, maybe 16 or 17. Even when I went to college, I was doing plumbing work to pay the bills," Ron adds. "I kept at it because I liked the connection to the clients. I liked working with my hands, I liked the people and it came naturally to me, so I ran with it."



It was then that he learned that plumbing is really about people. "When I was young, I just wanted to help people. I would look at a project and think 'How am I going to get pipes there? How am I going to run these pipes so that it will help her in the long run?' And I had fun with it and would step back and think about the homeowner's long-term plans, and I wanted to give them the best results."

Results started flowing in around 1984, when Ron opened CRN. Ron's high standards flow down to his team, who take the same pride in providing quick response times and quality services. "We focus on service, maintenance and repair of plumbing, heating, HVAC and drain cleaning systems," Ron says. "Other services include electrical repairs and preventative maintenance contracts. We have done high-end remodels and are proficient in boilers, water heaters and high-efficiency units. We also have a qualified member of our team to do patchwork and painting upon completion of repairs."

Aside from the company's various service offerings, Ron and the CRN team have differentiated themselves from the competition by honing a deep understanding of the nature and philosophy of plumbing. "I realized early on that plumbing is very different from other trades," Ron says. He argues that plumbers have to have an intimate connection with their clients to get the job done right. "First, you're in and out of almost all the rooms in someone's home. You see how they live, what they buy, what they eat, where they sleep," Ron says. "Second, you have to understand their schedules. You have to think about where you put pipes and what the future will bring. If I put a pipe here, will they bang their heads on it when they go to the basement to do laundry? They mentioned they want to have more kids. When they have their second child, will this room be too chilly? They just hired 10 new people. If they add a new employee bathroom, will they still be in compliance with occupancy standards? We think to the future and make sure that the home or business will still fit their needs."

The nature of plumbing led Ron to one of CRN's differentiating factors: a keen focus on real personal relationships. "I realized that we had to differentiate not only on our technical expertise but also on our moral character," Ron says. "You have to be a people person. You have to earn your client's trust and listen to them and have empathy for their situation. You also have to ask the right questions."

In the aftermath of the Merrimack Valley gas explosions, Ron Masse and the CRN Plumbing team made sure the victims' replacement HVAC and plumbing systems were better than they had before the accident.



The CRN Plumbing team helped the victims of the Merrimack Valley gas explosions by repairing and replacing high-efficiency boilers, furnaces and water heaters at residential properties.

COLUMBIA GAS EXPLOSION

Maybe it was because Ron asked the right questions, or perhaps it was because of his reputation in the industry, that he was called to work on what he calls “the project of his career.”

Everything changed for Ron on Sept. 13, 2018, the day of the deadly Merrimack Valley gas explosions. The explosions were caused by construction that led pipelines in the Merrimack Valley of Massachusetts to over-pressurize. The accident caused a series of explosions and fires in as many as 40 homes, with over 80 individual fires in the Merrimack Valley, including the towns of Lawrence, Andover and North Andover. One person was killed and 30,000 were forced to evacuate.

Almost immediately after the explosions, Ron was contacted by the Chief Recovery Officer, who was appointed by the Governor of Massachusetts, Charlie Baker, to help restore the communities. “Because of my reputation in the

field, I was contacted to be the mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP) expert for the Columbia Gas Recovery project,” Ron says. “As a consultant, I worked directly with the Chief Recovery Officer to vet the contractors working on these homes.”

During this project, Ron scrutinized the quality of plumbers and electricians based on their references, background and expertise. “Many of these homeowners went through a very scary, horrific experience and I was not going to let just anyone enter these homes,” Ron says. “I made sure that everyone that was going to help these people was held to a very high bar, and I personally inspected their work.”

Ron was so committed to this project that he opened a CRN office in the Merrimack Valley to stay on top of the work. “CRN never missed a step while I was in the field. I found a way to be committed to the recovery effort and stayed on top of CRN at the same time. Multitasking is a specialty of mine, apparently.”



CRN Plumbing doesn't just work in residences—its expertise extends to commercial projects as well.

Ron walked in and out of almost every home, checking to make sure the work was up to his specifications. He also made sure that the victims were being treated with respect and care. "I wanted everyone's systems to be restored to better than what they had before. We asked a lot of questions about the existing heating, electrical and plumbing, and when we found areas to improve, we improved. For instance, when we heard that a hallway didn't get as hot as other rooms, we made sure the new system fixed that. My goal was to do anything in my power to help make their lives easier."

CHARACTER DRIVEN

Ron's philosophy boils down to one word: character. "I have a huge poster on my wall about what character means. To us, it means doing the right thing for the client even if it's not the right thing for the business. We have an ad that says 'If you have plumbing and heating issues, you're gonna get wet. Call CRN, you won't get soaked.' And you know what? We mean it."

Ron is incredibly proud of the team he has built at CRN. "Many of the guys that work with us were my students at the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology," he says,

noting that teaching plumbing to college students and high schoolers are one of his favorite activities. "I think our team is great because we start by looking at someone's character, and then we train. And we train, and we train and we train some more. I care a lot about our plumbers being well educated and very knowledgeable about plumbing. However, character is No. 1."



Ron Masse (left) is a passionate advocate for the next generation of plumbers. Ron is shown here with Scott Brown (middle), the current U.S. ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa, presenting an award to one of his plumbing students.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CRN PLUMBING

While talking about his philosophy, Ron recalls a story that underscores his point. “The Chief of Police needed some plumbing work at his home, so he called one of the ‘big names’ in plumbing. A snazzy-looking salesman comes out, looks around and quotes him a price. Everything’s good until the next week when the plumbers show up. It turns out they both had active warrants, and the chief arrested them on the spot!” says Ron, laughing. “Now, think about it—these two guys would’ve been all over the chief’s house for three days, by themselves. They weren’t exactly the kind of people you want in your house alone. The chief was sold a bill of goods. We don’t operate like that. The person who shows up the first day for a quote is the same person who will be doing the work. End of story.”

Ron mentions that he still has many of his original clients calling him personally to do work in their homes. “It makes me so happy when someone I’ve known for 30 years calls me up to work for them,” Ron says. “And it makes me even happier to hear that we have clients who call up and ask for a specific technician. They’ll call and say ‘Nick worked on my house last year, can he come out?’ That’s how I know it’s working.”

THE CRN DIFFERENCE

In the end, it’s easy to look at CRN as an extension of Ron himself. “Whether it’s a large commercial project or preventative maintenance in a small home, we’ll be there on time, on schedule and work within the budget. We do what we say and say what we do,” Ron states.

“Character keeps you doing the right thing for the customer even if you’re not making money. You do the right thing, and you give back to your community, and the future opens up to you.”



Ron Masse is a “plumber’s plumber” who is passionate about his clients, family, and students.

Overall, he says that CRN is continuing to grow at a pretty good clip. “If we keep doing what we’re doing, we’re going to continue to gain new customers and new friends,” he says. “I don’t think we’re going anywhere for a long time. I’m 60 and feel like I’m 40. With the training we give our plumbers and the way we’re approaching the business, we’re going to be here for a while.”

Ron stops and gets quiet. “Plumbing still hasn’t gotten boring or old. I think we’ll just continue doing what we’re doing and we’ll be just fine.” 🐼

Allyson Markey, with an academic background in geology, writes both technical and inspirational articles that create an emotional connection between a firm’s brand and its audience.



Ron is incredibly proud of his team at CRN, and is excited about the future of the company.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CRN PLUMBING