

PlumberTM

A man with a beard and safety glasses, wearing a black hoodie with a 'RANSHAW' logo, is using a wrench to work on a pipe. The pipe has blue tape and a red-handled valve. The background shows a blue metal structure.

A PROBLEM FIXER

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A PROBLEM FIXER

Queens plumbing company adapts over 60 years in operation to continue to be a dependable service company for customers

By Giles Lambertson

Photography by Matt Greenslade/photo-nyc.com



Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating, Whitestone (Queens), New York

OWNER
YEARS IN BUSINESS
EMPLOYEES
SERVICES

Rick Bonelli

60 years

25

All commercial heating and plumbing services, all residential plumbing services and numerous residential heating services, including boiler and furnace installation and repair as well as oil-to-gas conversions

SERVICE AREA
WEBSITE

Queens and surrounding New York City metro areas

<https://ranshaw.com/>

◀ Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating owner Rick Bonelli, right, along with his son and company supervisor, Richie Bonelli, stand in front of one of the company's many vans at their company headquarters in Whitestone, New York. Both Rick and Richie are master plumbers.

If you live in Queens, New York — which is to say if you are among the 2 million-plus people living in the largest borough in New York City — or in immediately surrounding areas of the city and have a leaking pipe or a heater on the blink, you might want to call Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating. Or you can call another company and call Ranshaw later after the initial complaint is fumbled into a bigger one.

“We get a lot of calls to fix problems other plumbing companies created,” claims Anthony Carnazza. He should know. As the company’s marketing leader, customer service guy and frequent answerer of the company phone over the last eight years, Carnazza is well-positioned to hear complaints.

A company doesn’t stay in business for 60 years — as Ranshaw has — without undergoing evolutionary change, that is, adapting and growing with the marketplace. Yet neither will a company endure long if certain things do change over time, such fundamentals as dependability, efficiency, responsive service and warrantied work. Customers never seem to tire of them.

“We have used Ranshaw for 20 years and they are always spot on,” reads a testimonial on the company website.

Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating owner and president Rick Bonelli gives credence to the website praise. “Customers can rest assured that, no matter what the need is, a job will be done correctly,” he says of his team’s work. “We train our men to be thorough and never to take shortcuts.”

NO MR. RANSHAW

If you do call the plumbing and heating company, don’t ask to speak to Mr. Ranshaw. No one answers to that. Company founder Rudolph Bonelli hung the moniker on his company along the way as he built out his business.

▶ Supervisor Mike Clemente checks for an output on the motor contact of a Carlin Combustion Pro X 70200 oil primary control while working on a boiler system. The company handles all commercial heating and plumbing services, all residential plumbing services and numerous residential heating services, including boiler and furnace installation and repair as well as oil-to-gas conversions.

The founder got his start in the industry in the 1950s helping convert cold-water flats into apartments with central heating systems, including radiators, fuel-oil boilers and fuel storage tanks. In 1960, Rudolph and his wife Rose decided they had acquired enough experience to launch their own plumbing company.

However, it didn’t become Ranshaw till 1972 when Rudolph Bonelli incorporated a home-heating oil supply service into his business to expand the heating work. The acquired oil company had been named Ranshaw after a town in Pennsylvania. Bonelli liked the name and kept it, thereby creating a conversation starter for first-time callers.

By whatever name, the merged company firmly established itself in Whitestone, New York, in Queens County,



which has the same boundaries as the borough. “Where we are located in Queens, you really don’t feel you’re in a suburb. You feel like you are in Long Island, that’s the feel,” says Carnazza, who grew up in neighboring Long Island.

“Then you have areas of Queens with multifamily buildings and mixed-use buildings that have businesses on the ground floor and apartments above. The multifamily buildings range from three to 20 stories or more. Queens is a mix of building types.”

PLENTY OF SOLUTIONS

To this variety of residential units in the borough Ranshaw brings lots of plumbing and heating solutions. Need an A. O. Smith or Bradford White water heater

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Rick Bonelli

repaired or replaced? Ranshaw plumbers can do it. Has the boiler in the basement of a multifamily unit quit boiling? Ranshaw has trained techs to deal with the situation. Did the home furnace suddenly die? Not a problem. Ranshaw techs can revive or replace it.

They also are licensed to deal with natural gas issues. That’s a critical skill for which the New York Department of Buildings has strict protocols for safety reasons. Certified Ranshaw personnel can diagnose and repair gas leaks or convert a unit to natural gas from heating oil.

To encourage property owners to maintain critical integrity of gas lines and heaters, the company offers a three-tiered gas service plan for single or multifamily installations in Queens. They feature annual tune-ups, emergency service calls and discounted repair and replacement work.

“We have a decent number of residential service contracts, mostly for heating systems and plumbing,” Carnazza says. “The biggest upside to a service plan is that



▲ The Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating service technicians, plumbers, helpers and supervisors stand in front of their fleet of vehicles at their company shop in Whitestone (Queens), New York. From left, Arnold Kleinman, Joe Quirk, Josh Maldonado, Brent Banks, Bill Bitel, Rick Bonelli, Matthew Maldonado, Angel Carranza, Peter Klimaszewski, Rickardo Dean, Hing Lai, Angel Muyudumbay, Richie Mann, Juan Carlos, John Perakis, Richie Bonelli, Sean Lecator, Michael Clemente.



- ▲ From left, plumbers Sean Lecator, Arnold Kleinman and Brent Banks get their trucks cleaned out and loaded up for the day before heading out to their first service calls.
- ▶ Plumber Hing Lai makes use of the company's storage system it has in its service vans. All 10 of the company's vans and trucks are designed with an intelligent storage system, allowing for easy storage and convenient access to a complete inventory of plumbing and heating tools and parts.



Plumber Profile



▲ The company's fleet of cargo vans and box trucks sit in the company's parking lot at the shop in Whitestone, New York. The company services all of Queens and the surrounding New York City metro area.

a customer gets priority service. If you have a situation, we're coming. If you have a question, a friendly customer service rep is just a phone call away — and we always return calls. Being a priority customer can be critical, especially in an emergency. Some people learn that the hard way."

While most residential customers are in Queens, the company's commercial work crosses over into the Bronx and Manhattan and as far north as Harlem. Ranshaw technicians can install or repair commercial heaters and boilers. They can set up and are licensed to perform official inspections of backflow devices. Fire sprinkler monthly inspections? Check. Annual boiler inspections? No problem. In short, all commercial plumbing and heating services are covered.

Commercial customers include large apartment complexes, mixed-use buildings, numerous branches of New York Community Bank and, in Carnazza's words, "a lot of churches." Specifically, Ranshaw is depended upon by managers of numerous ecclesiastical properties including church buildings, convents, rectories and schools, all of which need dependable heat in winter and leak-free pipes year-round. Other regular commercial customers include offices of leading health care providers.

What Ranshaw no longer provides commercial or residential customers is heating oil. Though the acquisition of the oil business almost 50 years ago gave Rudolph Bonelli's plumbing company a huge boost, the company dropped the service in 2017.

"At the height of our success with oil, we had more than 5,000 oil delivery customers," says Rick Bonelli. "But we sold the business

Continued ►

A Small-Town Feel

Working in an environment like Queens, New York, where residents are numbered in the millions, might seem overwhelming to a non-urban visitor. Yet the enormous number of moving parts seem to come together in ways very similar to places where only handfuls of people live and work.

Example: When Anthony Carnazza hired on at Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating to do some marketing, what online or app resource did he use to get the real story on his new company? None. He chatted with folks in the area surrounding the office, which pretty much is what he would have done in Dubuque. "In speaking with people in the neighborhood, I heard nothing but positive things. They said it was a good place to work."

It turns out "word on the street" informs New York borough residents just like it does people in Topeka. Company reputations are built on such chatter because good customer service is best validated by word of mouth. "We actually hear people say, 'Wow! We appreciate that you even called us back.' But we are very conscientious about returning calls. It's part of our DNA." And the word gets around.

Another urban constraint can be union rules that impose artificial barriers on workers. In NYC, plumbers in new construction are unionized, but Ranshaw and many other private service companies are not. This means in practice that company technicians are able to cross over in their service calls.

"Mostly, plumbers plumb, heating techs do heat and installation crews install," Carnazza says of work assignments at the firm. Yet a company heating technician might diagnose a water-leak issue and inform the property owner and then call one of the company's licensed plumbers to do the work. Or, while a plumber might do a tune-up on a heating unit, he would not try to repair a boiler. This flexibility creates a cohesive service team.

In city apartment buildings, another kind of partnership has developed. A resident maintenance person generally takes care of minor fixes, but Ranshaw gets the call when larger issues loom. "If it's gas work, they aren't certified to do that certainly. It has to be a licensed plumber, so they call us. Generally, we help whenever the maintenance man doesn't have the technical knowledge or the license for a job."

This small-town feel to big-city relationships was tested when COVID-19 struck Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating as it did most every other community and business. The company altered its interaction with customers to reflect the infection threat and, for a while, things came to a standstill. The stunned community of customers hunkered down.

"Few calls were coming in. Everyone was putting things off. We were doing emergency work only," Carnazza says. Then people started reaching out to one another again. "In June, we got back into full swing, with the full staff back. Now we are very busy again. While our strict health and safety protocols remain in place, you wouldn't even know the COVID thing is going on."

“We are a very well-organized outfit and the quote speaks volumes. We believe our customers benefit from how well-prepared we are as a company.”

Rick Bonelli

to focus our resources and attention solely on plumbing and gas heating services.”

Though, of course, the company kept the name.

EFFICIENT EQUIPMENT

Most of Ranshaw Plumbing & Heating’s work is above ground. If a water pipe in a backyard or under a sidewalk needs repair, the excavation side of the job generally is outsourced. Consequently, there is no mini-excavator or some other digger in the company’s equipment yard.

Company jettlers are General Pipe Cleaners JM-3055 units. They have 48 cc Briggs & Stratton engines that push out 5.5 gpm at 3,000 psi. To see what’s going on inside lines, the company employs General Gen-Eye SD inspection cameras that are suitable for pipe interiors ranging from 2 inches to 10 inches in diameter.

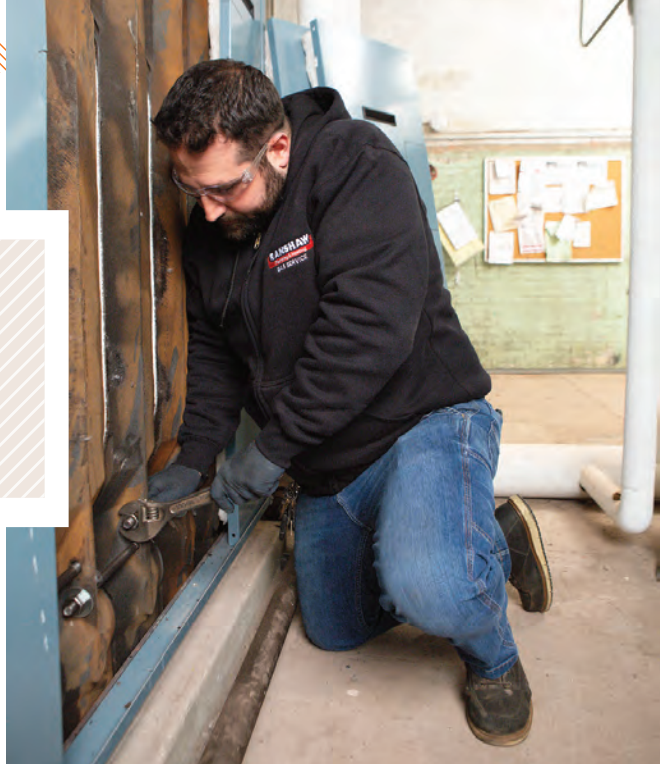
Perhaps the most impressive pieces of equipment, though, are the company’s ten “custom-outfitted service vans,” says the company president. The trucks are uniformly white-and-red branded.

“We believe an organized, well-designed service van allows us to be as efficient as possible on service calls. With that in mind, our vehicles are designed with an intelligent storage system, allowing for easy storage and convenient access to a complete inventory of plumbing and heating tools and parts. We arrive prepared for any job. Despite all the storage, there’s still ample room to maneuver and work productively.”

The highly-organized vans reflect the company’s operating philosophy, which Bonelli terms this way: Plan your work and work your plan. “We are a very well-organized outfit and the quote speaks volumes. We believe our customers benefit from how well-prepared we are as a company. This especially holds true on jobs that involve administrative coordination — like permits and inspections — with local governmental agencies and utility companies.”

SUCCESSFUL TRAJECTORY

Bonelli also cites a favorite aphorism of his father — work smarter, not harder — which he still finds instructive.



▲ Mike Clemente performs maintenance on an H.B. Smith (Ferguson Waterworks) 28 HE cast iron boiler while at a commercial job site.

“It makes you stop and think. Have I thought out the best approach to a problem? You don’t want to just rush in blindly to do a quick fix.”

These are not theoretical scenarios for the company president, who as a licensed plumber frequently makes commercial service calls. He is a second-generation family member keeping the company on its successful trajectory. A third-generation Bonelli, Rick’s son Richie, also is a licensed plumber and has been a member of the Ranshaw team since 2000.

“We’re not a transient company,” Carnazza says. “The average tenure of our staff is, maybe, five or ten years but one of our office employees has been here about 40 years, and one of our technicians more than 25 years. That says a lot about the company ownership.” ■

Featured Equipment

A. O. Smith Water Heaters
800-527-1953
www.hotwater.com

Bradford White Water Heaters
800-523-2931
www.bradfordwhite.com
Ad on page 59

Ferguson Waterworks
ferguson.com/waterworks

General Pipe Cleaners, div. of General Wire Spring
800-245-6200
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