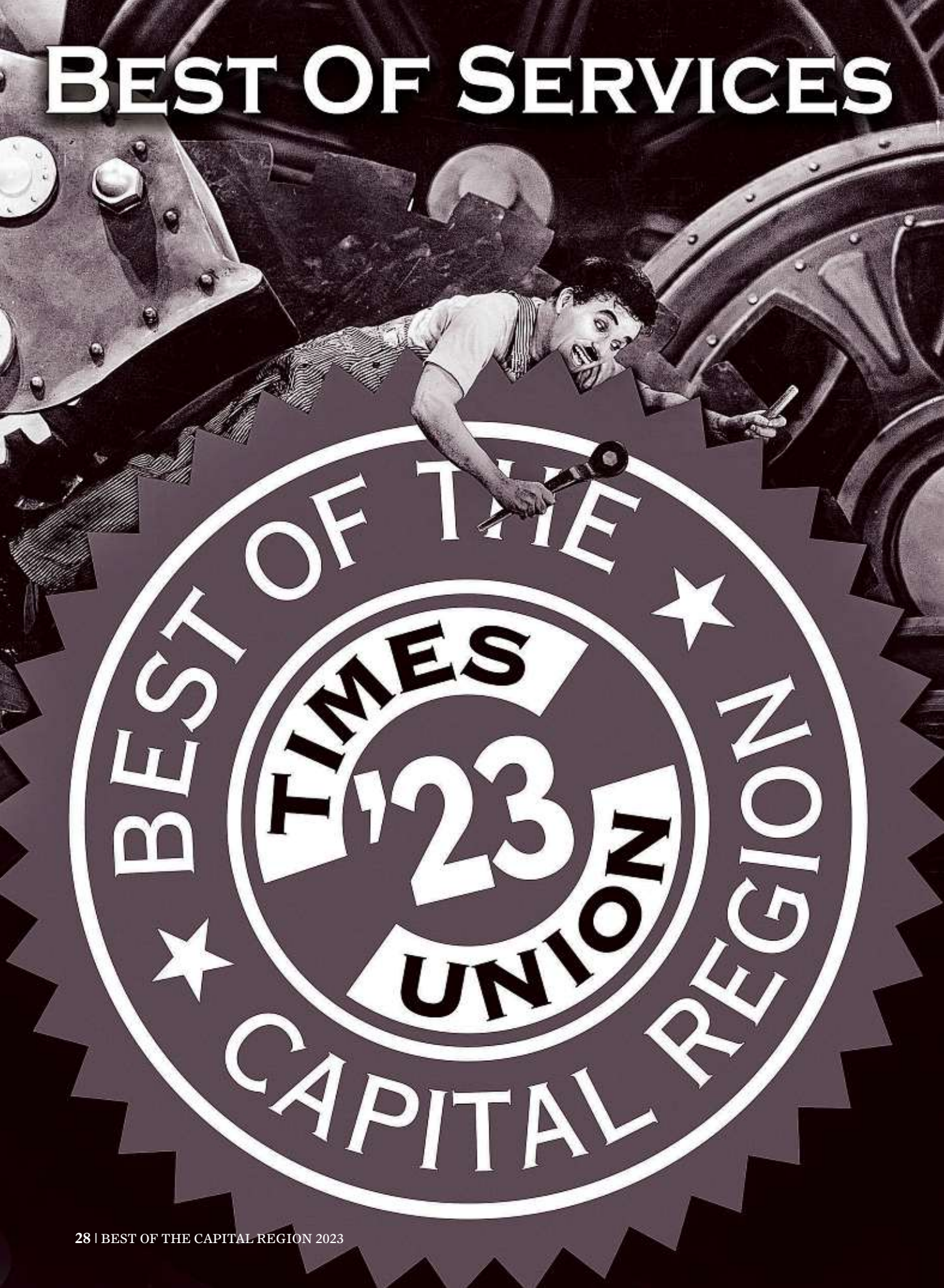


# BEST OF SERVICES





# Pest control shop carries family legacy

By Sara Tracey

Thomas Pest Services started in 2010 with Sarah Thomas-Clarke and her husband, Bill, taking calls from the basement of their Clifton Park home and going out to service jobs in the region. Today, the company has grown to 40 employees with a geographic reach from parts of Warren and Washington counties, south to Ulster and Dutchess counties, and places in between. We spoke with Sarah Thomas-Clark about her family's legacy in pest control and how they're doing things different with her and her husband's company. Thomas Pest Services won the new Best Pest Control Company category in this year's Best of the Capital Region poll.

*This interview has been edited for clarity and space.*

**Q:** Tell me about the evolution of this business. It's really a family business in more ways than one.

**A:** My grandfather really was the pioneer for the family in a sense. He started his own company in 1949 in the Poughkeepsie area. His company was Mid-Hudson Pest Control. He ran that for several years, and he had to retire due to health issues. He planted the seed for my family. Then my father at the time, was actually was working for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (which is interesting to us, because that kind of governs our company). He did a 180 and started his own company in 1996, Craig Thomas Pest Control. I remember seeing him

working from the basement of the house until 9 or 10 p.m., writing contracts and agreements.

I worked for his company since I was probably not even legal to work. In a sense of it was a family affair. My mother did the accounting, my aunt was his general manager and did operations. (My aunt) would give me the task of stuffing envelopes. Kicking and screaming, I remember having to go in on my days off from school and spend time in the office. I look back on it that told me the hard work ethic I have today.

**Q:** So when did that shift for you?

**A:** Like every college student, I said, "I'm getting out of here. There's no way I'm going to work in the pest control business." I lasted one semester at the College of Saint Rose and started getting my associates degree in teaching (elsewhere). The turning point was when I was working with my father. I was his partner in crime going to conventions. I saw how cool his life was, and thought, "I



Thomas Pest Services co-owners Bill Clark and Sarah Thomas-Clark, the VP/CFO and president, respectively.

can't be a teacher." I changed my major to business communications and said, "Alright dad, I'm full time now." I worked for my father for a couple years doing marketing. Eventually, my father needed a sales team. That's when my husband came into the picture, that's how we met. He was my father's first salesman.

In 2010, my dad was thinking about his next steps, about what was retirement going to look like. He said, you can either stay (with my company) doing what you're doing, or if you want to find a new territory and start your own company, I can help you. In 2010, we moved to Clifton Park, and we

started (Thomas Pest Services) in the basement of our home. Account by account we started growing and working hard each and every day, from me internally taking the calls and marketing, and Bill would be running sales appointments, doing service work. That's how we got our start.

**Q:** There seem to be a lot built-on relationships here.

**A:** Pest control is more than just killing the bug and moving on. It's really about relationships. It's not just the relationships with your customers, but along with your employees and colleagues. I've always taken the approach that I don't have all the answers and sometimes I need to ask other people for their opinions.

**Q:** Looking back at your start in 2010, what's your perspective on your growth?

**A:** It's grown into something I never would have fathomed it to be. From the basement of our house, we moved to a little office on Central Avenue in Albany in 2012. In 2018, we moved to our current headquarters in Rotterdam, with a location in Hudson. We're blessed to have 40 teammates on our team



Bill Clark, left, Alberto Casale, director of operations, look over equipment at the company warehouse in Rotterdam.

right now. Probably by the time we get into season, we'll be approaching that 50-member mark.

**Q:** What are the company's core values?

**A:** We have six: "Be the part" — we want someone to have a positive attitude, great communication, and use safety first; "Service above all" — someone would be committed determined and loyal; "Forthright" — you act with integrity and are honest; "Humble" — be self aware, respectful and people-smart; "Better than yesterday" — obsessed with personal growth, you're motivated and hungry; "Resourceful" — work autonomously and be prepared.

**Q:** Let's talk about the gamut of pest control services you administer.

**A:** We do your basic control and wildlife services. Under the umbrella of pest control, you've got your ants your bed bugs, termites, bees and wasps, mosquitos, ticks, mice, centipedes, spiders, flies. And under the wildlife end of things, you've got bats squirrels and the larger animals, like woodchucks and skunks.

Our season doesn't have a kickoff date, it's more based on the weather. Let's say when we saw snow in the forecast (in mid-March) we weren't jumping for joy. Our season is weather dependent — April to November as a rule of thumb.

**Q:** In our area of New York, are there any particular pests you think you all specialize in?

**A:** The biggest pests in the area are carpenter ants, mice, we do a ton of tick and mosquito work. We have a speciality for bed bugs; we use heat to kill bed bugs. We raise the internal temperature of the space to 140 degrees; that will kill all life stages of bed bugs.

I love technology. The pest control industry is slow to adapt technology, compared to some industries. We have rodent monitor stations that we use at a specific account where a technician can get within a radius of the building and see if any of the animals are in the traps. It's newer technology. We use termite monitors; back in the day my father would have to drill holes around the house to find evidence of termites. A lot has changed since my grandfather was in business.

**Q:** Any crazy/out-of-pocket stories of pest control that come to mind?

**A:** Early on, when my husband was more in the field, he went to a bed bug job. The bed bugs were so bad, the customer would smush them on the wall and drag them. When you walked in the door, it looked like a mural of bed bugs and red lines everywhere. Bed bugs were peeking at that point (in time). Bill and I, our first pet was a bed-bug sniffing dog, named Promise. We have a little bit of a love for some of these bugs.

**Q:** Anything else you want to tell folks about winning this category?

**A:** When I look at this award, I kept telling our team that I wanted to win so bad for them. The technicians are the ones with boots on the ground. My (administration) team are the ones taking the phone calls. It's not for my husband and me. Everyone's efforts encompass the whole circle, and makes it happen each day.

When it comes to just what makes us a little different. We have three uniques, as a company: One is, we treat little things like big things; it's plastered on our vehicles. We do little things like taking our shoes off if we go into your house if you asked. We do that even though it might not be meaningful to us, it's meaningful to you. Two: We tell you what you need to hear, not what you want to hear. It's about having an honest conversation with a customer. And then last but not least, giving back. March (was) Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month. Our daughter, Riley, has cerebral palsy. We (were) raising awareness through the month of March. Four members of our team have relatives with cerebral palsy. It's something we're really passionate about.



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The advertisement for Adams Heating &amp; Cooling Co. features the company logo in a blue and yellow shield shape. Below the logo, it says "Family Owned &amp; Operated" and "HEATING &amp; COOLING CO. SINCE 1968". A red award seal on the left says "BEST OF THE CAPITAL REGION TIMES 23 UNION FINALIST". The main text reads "Thank You for all of the Votes!". Below this is a photograph of the company's building and parking lot with several service vans. At the bottom, the address "2088 Curry Road, Rotterdam" and website "www.AdamsHVAC.net" are listed. Social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are shown, along with "Angie's List 2012 A+ Rating" and "ACCREDITED BUSINESS A+ Rating" logos. The footer text says "Emergency Service in Albany, Schenectady &amp; Saratoga Springs".





Anthony Lawless practiced for the 2022 Special Olympics at ABC Sports & Fitness, which topped an exercise category.

### Best Pest Control Company (NEW)

We all have our critter horror stories. The skunk-in-the-bedroom or bat-in-the-pantry tales are great to tell at dinner parties and family gatherings, but not so great when they are actually happening *chez toi*. So, make sure you have your trusted pest control company as one of your contact numbers, because when the chips (or chipmunks) are down, you want them there in a jiffy.

1. Thomas Pest Services, 2015 Hamburg St., Rotterdam
2. Meerkat, 12 Petra Lane, Albany
3. USX Pest Control, 13 Cornell Road, Latham
4. Northeast Pest Control, 1160 Broadway, Albany
5. Absolute Pest Control, 12 Wade Road, Latham

### Best Place to Get a Workout (single location)

Maybe it's the catchy, pump-up commercial jingle ("At ABC Sports and Fitness, yes you can!") or the enormous space the center houses in Latham, it's nice to see ABC Sports back on the list after not even reaching the top 5 last year. We're happy to see a nice mix from the nominated facilities here, from a local branch of the popular OTF brand to community centers and individual gyms and studios.

1. ABC Sports and Fitness, 3 Johnson Road, Latham
2. Orangetheory Fitness, 800 Loudon Road, Latham
3. CDPHP Fitness Connect at the Ciccotti Center, 30 Aviation Road, Colonie
4. WellNest Studios, 952 Troy-Schenectady Road, Latham
5. PWR, 21 Erie Blvd., Albany

### Best Plumber

It's Crisafulli's world and we're just jiggling the handle. For many years now, the plumbing and heating force has developed a loyal clientele by doing things their customers have come to expect from them: fast and dependable responses when the resident household "expert" is out of solutions.

1. Crisafulli Bros. Plumbing & Heating, 25 Industrial Park Road, Albany
2. Family Danz, 404 N. Pearl St., Albany
3. Pete the Plumber Sewer & Drain, Cohoes
4. Apex Sewer & Drain Cleaning, 872 Albany Shaker Road, Latham
5. E.W. Tompkins Plumbing Heating Cooling, 126 Sheridan Ave., Albany

Photo: Lori Van Buren

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