

HOME

Relax . . . buy the pool



NOT FLOATING ALONE: Older brother Joshua Giglietti, 21, acts as lifeguard for Annie Silvester, Gina Silvester, Hall Giglietti, 3, and Jenna Giglietti, 6, in their new swimming pool.

Above-ground pools aren't over your head

By Laura Meade Kirk
Journal Staff Writer

When the Giglietti family moved from Cowesett to Coventry two years ago, they left behind the above-ground pool they'd bought 16 years before- when their twin sons were 5 years old.

They were moving to the shores of Johnson's Pond, where their daughters- now 6 1/2, 6, and 3 - would be able to swim, kayak and explore the gorgeous freshwater pond that's easily as big as any lake.



COOL SOLUTION: Above -ground pools are more economical, and, some parents say safer for youngsters like Jenna Guglietti, 6, of Coventry

“But when the little ones went in the water and the fish swam by, they said, ‘I don’t want to go in there,’” said their mom, Lee Giglietti. “Then they saw the turtles and said, ‘I don’t want to swim with the turtles.’ Then they saw what we thought was an otter, and they didn’t want to swim there ever again.”

So the Gigliettis recently spent about \$5,000 to install a 20-foot above-ground pool, complete with fencing around the top, that will keep their girls and their friends entertained for years to come.

The Gigliettis, like many Rhode Islanders, didn’t want the expense or worry of having an in-ground pool installed in their yard, especially with young children.

Above-ground pools are simply safer, Mrs. Giglietti said, especially because she bought one with a fence around the top and a ladder that can be flipped up and locked.

They also cost a lot less than in-ground pools. Prices range from as little as \$300 for a 15-foot round blow-up pool with a filter and ladder to \$12,000 or more for an aluminum or resin pool with deck and fencing.

That’s a far cry from \$25,000 or more for an in-ground pool.

Al Psilopoulos, of Cranston, who recently replaced the above-ground pool his children swam in with another above-ground pool for his grandchildren, noted that there’s also a tax savings in buying an above-ground pool—they’re not considered a permanent fixture to your property, so they’re not included in your property tax. They’re also cheaper and easier to maintain than built-in pools, he said.

No wonder many families consider above-ground pools an affordable alternative when looking for fun in the sun.

Above-ground pools come in a variety of sizes, shapes and prices, so there is something for just about everyone and every budget. “It really depends on what people want,” said Jack Cergoi, a spokesman for the National Spa and Pool Institute, in Alexandria, Va.

It’s also wise to shop around, Cergoi said. “It’s like buying a car. You wouldn’t go buy the first car you look at. Really shop around.”

Cergoi recommends looking for reputable pool dealerships with proven track records in their communities. Most will install and service the pools, and will help if there’s a problem with

installation or one that falls under the product’s warranty.

Some companies sell pool packages, complete with pools and a variety of optional equipment at discount prices, but don’t offer installation or service after the sale.

“Selling the pool is easy,” said Ken Stockley of the Pool & Patio Center of Coventry. “It’s getting it installed properly that’s the problem.”

“A lot of the above-ground pool businesses subcontract their work, and they ship the pool to the homeowner’s driveway,” said Stephen Daigle, sales manager of Lakeside Swimming Pool & Supply in North Smithfield. The pool may sit there for weeks, while consumers struggle to find someone qualified to install it— which is tough this time of year.

The good thing about buying from a reputable full-service pool company, Daigle said, is that they can probably have the pool installed and running in plenty of time for lots of swimming this summer. (That said, many dealers report that they’re running several weeks behind in installations because of the cold, wet start of summer this year.)

Many of the distributors who simply sell pool packages also won’t help if there’s a problem with the installation, nor will they provide service after the sale— which can be a hassle for consumers if there’s a problem while the pool is under warranty, Daigle noted.

Reasons to be wary

Stockley said to also be wary of companies that don’t have local showrooms, where you can see the pool you’re thinking of buying. They may not offer the customer support of local companies. He also warned consumers to beware of companies that offer discounts for “discontinued” models. “Manufacturers don’t change models that frequently,” he said.

Also, beware of “bait and switch” advertising, Stockley and others advised. Some companies may advertise a particular pool, then tell consumers that the model is no longer available, or it’s of inferior quality, to try to persuade consumers to buy a much more costly model.

The bottom line, he said, is to “be cautious.”

“If something sounds too good to be true, that usually is the case,” said Charlie German of Cut Price Pools in Warwick and Johnston.

Stockley, like many local pool dealers, said the best way to find a pool company is to ask friends and neighbors where they bought their pool, and whether they were pleased with the company and the service that was provided. Or ask a local pool dealership for a list of references of past customers.

Cergoi noted that the NSPI provides a list of active members on its Web site, www.nspi.org. “They keep up with the technology, and the industry.”

Consumers also should check with references supplied by the pool company, as well as the Better Business Bureau, to make sure there are no outstanding complaints against the company. And make sure the company will stand behind the product—including the installation and warranty—in the event of any problems, Cergoi said.

Choosing a pool

Even after you’ve found a reputable pool dealer, it can be tough to decide which pool is best, Cergoi said. Some people go for size—the 24-foot round pool is still the most popular size, but many people like the look of an oblong or square pool instead.

“The major thing is aesthetics,” German said.

His company offers seven styles of pools and each comes in at least 12 shapes and sizes to appeal to virtually everyone.

German said the most popular pool his company sells is the 24-foot round, 52-inch deep aluminum pool that costs about \$2,500— not including another \$600 or so for installation on a level piece of ground, and other fees.

(In reality, most yards aren’t “level”— if you can see even a hint of a slope it’s going to require additional excavation and will increase installation costs.)

Popular models

Stockley of the Pool & Patio Center also offers a wide variety of pools, starting with about \$2,675 for a 15-foot round pool installed to \$12,000 or more for a large oval pool, with a walk-around deck and fencing. His most popular pool is also the 24-foot round pool, which generally sells for \$3,750, including installation.

Daigle, sales manager of Lakeside Pool & Supply Co., said his best seller right now is a 24-foot round resin pool that costs about \$4,900, installed.

Tom Castrignano, manager of

Modern Pool Supply Co. Inc. in North Providence, said the most popular 18 to 24-foot round pools sell for \$3,500 to \$5,000, “soup to nuts.”

Even packages that include installation may not include additional fees, such as construction permits, electrical work and water to fill the pool. So make sure of the bottom line costs with any deal.

Ultimately, it’s important to go for quality over price, said Debbi Leclerc, co-owner of The Pool Doctor of Rhode Island in Coventry. “Don’t look for the cheapest pool you can buy, because the cheapest is going to be just that - the cheapest in quality, as well.”

Knowing the difference

Many pool companies may offer similar pools and packages, but it’s important for consumers to make sure they’re comparing similar types of pools when shopping for the best deal, Cergol said.

Generally, steel pools are the least expensive – but they’re also most prone to problems, especially rust, Cergol said. Aluminum and resin pools are considered among the best.

“The top-of-the-line pool is an extruded interlocking panel wall of extruded aluminum,” said Daigle, of Lakeside. “It’s not our best seller, but it’s the best pool made in the industry.”

Another popular alternative for a high quality is the resin pool, he said. “The selling feature is that the track that goes into the ground is resin,” which makes it a long-lasting, rust-free option.

But the most popular pools sold by local dealers tend to be regular aluminum pools, that come in a wide variety of prices and styles.

It’s often tough to compare these pools from one dealer to the next, because most manufacturers use the same basic materials to produce different makes and models.

That’s why it’s important to find the dealership that will offer the best service, as well as the best price, many dealers said.

Deciding on options

Consumers also need to consider the many options and packages available to them – from filters and pool covers to vacuums, skimmers and chemicals needed to keep the pool running properly.

Some pool dealers will include some or all of these in the price of the pool, while others will charge separately.

Consumers also may want to consider adding a fence or deck to the pool. In fact, many cities and towns require some type of fence, either

around the pool or around the yard, so make sure to check your local building code.

Having a fence around the top of the pool can provide added safety, especially if the pool comes with a flip-up ladder that can be locked when the pool isn’t in use, Cergol said. But some people don’t like fences around the top of the pool because it gives the feeling of “swimming in a shark cage,” one dealer noted. So those consumers may want to hire a fence company to install a fence around the yard or pool area instead.

Decks are also nice to have, especially because they allow adults to sit next to the pool to supervise young children, many dealers said. But the deck packages offered with many pools can also add significantly to the cost, so it may be cheaper to hire a local builder to simply build a deck next to the pool after it’s installed.

Regardless of the pool and options you choose, the good news is that today’s pools are of a much higher quality than in the past, and will probably last at least 15 to 20 years, Cergol and others said.

And that’s important to folks like the Gigliettis. Even though they live a stone’s throw from the lake and a quick drive to the beaches, it’s still nice to have a pool in the backyard, Lee Giglietti said.

“You get to enjoy the best of three worlds – the beautiful coast of Rhode Island, Johnson’s Pond and the pool. We think we’re so fortunate.”



Pool & Patio Center, Inc.