



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS



# Taking giant steps for our customers



## Intelligent Distribution



# WELCOME TO THIS SPECIAL CELEBRATION OF SPACE AIR'S 30<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY



Acknowledging significant milestones - from our first £1 million + turnover year to the first £1 million order, our first purpose built offices, the 10th, 20th and

25th Anniversaries, achieving a £30 million turnover year, to this our 30th anniversary. All are part of maintaining the excitement, enthusiasm and passion that Space Air has to succeed in the highly competitive world of air conditioning technology.

As a distributor for Daikin, manufacturers of arguably the world's most extensive, innovative and energy efficient range of air conditioning and heat pump products,

Space Air has grown to a position of significant strength and influence in the industry through a combination of technical knowledge, experience, sound financial management and the most advanced business operation systems. Offering national coverage from its Guildford, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds and Manchester offices, Space Air also offers the support of a network of over 400 loyal and fully qualified, approved installation companies, many of which have worked with us for decades.

Space Air can proudly boast an impressive, award-winning track record, having supplied Daikin equipment for a huge number of highly prestigious projects throughout the UK and achieved high

status as the largest of Daikin Europe's network of independent distributors.

Always developing, always improving and forward planning for even greater success in the future, Space Air is confident it will continue to provide unparalleled customer services and support for many years to come.

This celebratory publication features an in-depth interview with Space Air's founder and Managing Director, Neil Afram, by one of the industry's best known commentators, Neil Everitt, Editor of ACR News. Also featured are commemorative tributes, recollections and anecdotes from various people and organisations who or which have played a part in Space Air's 30-year history.

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**ACR News**

**HVR**  
HEATING & VENTILATING REVIEW

REFRIGERATION AND AIR CONDITIONING MAGAZINE  
**rac**  
**H&Vnews**

# COMMENT

I can remember no big press announcements or launch parties when Space Airconditioning was inaugurated 30 years ago. I guess there wasn't much to shout about at the time. Well there is now.

Thirty years down the line from that first prestigious (sounding) address in the King's Road

(Guildford), Space Air remains as probably the longest surviving independent single product distributor in the UK.

The fact that so many other distributors from that era have fallen by the wayside, been bought out or succumbed to financial overtures from its suppliers, is



testament to the determination and belief in the company and the Daikin

## 'THE COMPANY NAME IS SYNONYMOUS WITH NEIL AFRAM'

product range by the owners and staff of Space Air (and Daikin Europe).

The company name is synonymous with Neil Afram – and with good reason – but it is easy to forget that he has gathered around him some highly competent and professional staff. And that is another of Space Air's strengths. Neil Afram's reputation for being "difficult" by some in the industry is certainly not borne out by the large number of long serving staff at Space Air, some

of them in their second spell with the company.

But it is hard to sideline Neil's influence. He has had the imagination and foresight to identify and invest in any new technology that could benefit the business (Space Air was one of the first companies to become computerised), and it is his passion for the industry that has ultimately made Space Air such an influence at association and government levels.

The company's professionalism, competence and attention to detail is clearly appreciated by customers and is reflected in the fact that Space Air has been a regular winner of the ACR News Distributor of the Year Award.

This magazine has followed Space Airconditioning's progress over the years with interest and we hope to continue doing so for many years to come.

Congratulations Space Air, the air conditioning industry would have been a less interesting sector without your presence over the last 30 years.

**Neil Everitt**, Editor ACR News



**Masatsugu Minaka**,  
President, Daikin  
Europe N.V.

"Space Air started small in the 1980s. With the devaluation of the British pound, they went through a difficult period and had to struggle to stay afloat. What probably saved them was their sense of conviction and their professionalism. We learned and continue to learn a lot from them with respect to sales and after-sales support. They after all are one of our most professional and important distributors and can rightly be proud of their 30th anniversary."



**Cedric Sloan**  
Director General  
FETA.

The overall contribution of Space Air to the HEVAC Air Conditioning Group, the Heat Pump Association and the sector in general would be difficult to exaggerate. Much of this is down to the personal enthusiasm and individual effort of Space Air's original founder – Neil Afram.

Neil has served the associations and the industry at all levels: from participating in technical working groups to being Chairman of the FETA Board. He has been actively

engaged in every consultation of any significance to HVACR, whether national or European in origin, and was an outspoken and passionate defender of his company's and his colleagues interests.

Yet, at the same time, he was able to build Space Air into the largest independent distributor of Daikin products in the UK.

It is fitting to reflect on 30 years of personal and corporate achievement at this important anniversary in Space Air's history. The fact that it would be hard to imagine our industry bodies or trade shows, sector journals or the RAC market, without Space Air, says it all: they are at the heart of this industry and we are better for it. Thank you to all at Space Air for your willing support over several decades, and every success in your future ventures.

# THE INTERVIEW



Above: Neil Afram presented with Distributor of the Year award by Neil Everitt 2001

## BLAZING THE TRAIL

**DAIKIN and its VRV (variable refrigerant volume) system undoubtedly led the commercial air conditioning “gold rush” in the 1980s/90s.**

This - then new technology, propelled Daikin from a company considered as just another chiller manufacturer to being recognised as the premier air conditioning company – and it was the UK that blazed the trail for Daikin’s VRV launch. Many will remember its awesome presence at the H&V Shows

at the time .

While Daikin backed the UK launch with a huge promotional investment, it was Daikin’s committed, hungry and highly professional distributors who ensured its success. Unencumbered by any designated sales regions the quintet of Coolair, Cooling Services, Pillinger, McQueen and Space Air sold - and sold hard.

The other big Japanese manufacturers reacted by bringing in their own systems and even the smaller manufacturers benefited from the market that Daikin and its

UK distributors had created. Daikin, however, had already stolen a march on everyone else as far as VRV was concerned. So synonymous had VRV become with Daikin that it managed to trade mark the name, leaving its competitors to adopt another term VRF – variable refrigerant flow.

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**VRV III**



# Daikin Europe N.V.

Working  
With Space Air  
Since 1980



Above: Daikin Europe N.V. Belgium Head Quarters

Space Air was established by Neil Afram on the 1st August 1980. From the outset Space Air was to be exclusively dedicated to the supply of products manufactured by Daikin Industries and was enthusiastically supported in this endeavour by Mr Ali Rashidi, a man who was to become well known in the UK as the driving force behind the market dominance of Daikin in Europe.

Since Mr Rashidi's retirement, Space Air has enjoyed the continued support of Daikin Europe's top management and has been acknowledged as the largest of their Europe-wide network of independent distributors.

## Ali Ashfaq Rashidi,

Former Sales Director of Daikin Europe N.V



"I am so excited about the news of Space Air's 30th anniversary. The memories of various events are vivid and it is difficult for me to express my sentiments in a way that is appropriate for this occasion. However an idea flashed through my mind:

**Question:** What do Neil Afram & Neil Armstrong have in common?

**Answer:** "Space"

Neil Afram knows no boundaries when it comes to expanding Space Air. Many congratulations to Neil & his "Space team" on their wonderful achievements".

→ **1980** – Space Air is formed by Neil Afram

→ **1986** – Moves offices to Woodbridge Road, Guildford (7100sq ft)

Space Air enjoys the full support of the manufacturer Daikin Europe N.V. as their sole independent Daikin distributor in the UK. Daikin Europe's senior management wished to add their comments:-



**Frans Hoorelbeke,**  
Chairman, Daikin  
Europe N.V.

"By successfully adapting its business model from an exporter of large roof top packages and water-cooled chillers in the early days to a versatile, dynamic HVAC company, Space Air has become a respected player in its home market. This is no doubt due to Neil Afram's dedication and passion, which he has successfully conveyed to his team and to Daikin Europe as well."



**Wim Vangeenberghe,**  
Director, General  
Manager Sales,  
Daikin Europe N.V.

"I first became acquainted with Space Air some twenty years ago. At the time, they were based in a small office, and were trying hard to gain a foothold in their home market. My first visit immediately reassured me as to the stability and sustainability of the company. Throughout these last thirty years, Space Air has provided strong support to Daikin as a brand, with a dynamism equal to that of its CEO, Neil Afram."



**Jan Cluyse,**  
Assistant Director,  
Deputy General  
Manager Sales,  
Daikin Europe N.V.

"In the early 90's, I was asked to work with Space Air on a prototype VRV control system. I became well acquainted with Space Air and especially Neil Afram at this time. We had numerous technical discussions and were immediately on the same wavelength. We literally worked day

and night on that project. I came to admire Neil's technical know-how, his drive, business acumen and leadership, all of which have contributed to making Space Air a true pioneer in our industry."



**Martin Dieryckx,**  
Assistant Director,  
ERC Department,  
Daikin Europe N.V.

"Space Air is largely an extension of Neil Afram. He has many creative ideas and the passion to realise them in both the short and long term. Its independent status as a Daikin distributor is important to Space Air in accomplishing its many ideas with the flexibility of an SME."



**Paul Dergeloo,**  
Manager Daikin  
Europe Applied  
Sales.

"I first became involved with Space Air in 1990. It was not an easy time; the day the Daikin Europe office was opened in the UK the pound was devalued overnight and the distributors had a very tough time. Years later Daikin Europe acquired all the UK Daikin distributors except Space Air. Space Air has continued to demonstrate an enormous internal strength based on the power and enthusiasm of the people working there and maintained an admirable growth and progress over the years, led of course by Neil Afram."

After 20 years working for Daikin Europe, several of which were spent in the UK, I have always had a good feeling about the strength of Space Air. Their drive for business excellence, their engineering expertise but most importantly, the people and their enthusiasm, that are key to their success. Also I will always remember the words of Roger Taylor, who so sadly passed away earlier this year, "Space Air has no problems, only solutions."

"I congratulate Space Air on their 30th anniversary and wish them a very prosperous future".



Above: Daikin Europe N.V. Factory

"I came to admire Neil's technical know-how, his drive, business acumen and leadership, all of which have contributed to making Space Air a true pioneer in our industry."



**Saidja Geirnaert,**  
Assistant Manager  
Consulting Sales  
Support, Daikin  
Europe N.V.

"Space Air has always stood behind Daikin products, in terms of sales but also with respect to its technical know-how."

As a former sales manager of Daikin Europe's UK branch office, I personally experienced situations where Neil Afram and his team came up with strong customised engineering solutions. Neil has always succeeded in surrounding himself with excellent people, thus earning Space Air much respect in the market for bringing technically difficult projects to a good conclusion."



# Space Airconditioning plc



Above: Space Airconditioning plc HQ Guildford

'Many superior and unique customer services differentiate Space Air from other product distributors.'

Part of Space Air's success is down to the fact that many of the 100+ strong employees have been with the company a long time. "Our customers can gain much greater confidence from the fact that they are dealing with people who can offer them the benefit of significant experience and expertise. They are not only very familiar with Daikin equipment and all aspects of the workings of the company, but are proud to give their best at all times."

This impressive staff stability and experience applies to all departments - from reception to internal sales/applications, sales & marketing to after sales support, accessories manufacture to spare parts,

logistics and deliveries to accounts.

Space Air's development and success since 1980 has been based on understanding the technology and the customer's needs. Many superior and unique customer services differentiate Space Air from other product distributors.

## Fully Networked

The company was the first distributor to introduce a computer network serving all branches, enabling nationwide access to product information, quotes, availability and order progressing.

## Care for Quality & the Environment

Space Air was one of the first companies in the industry to be registered to ISO 9001 standards and one of only a few in the industry to also be registered to the ISO 14001 environmental standard.

## Equipment Showrooms & Training Suites

In 1986 Space Air opened its first purpose-built head quarters in Guildford and became the first Daikin Distributor to have fully equipped customer showrooms and installer training facilities.

## Mechanical and Electrical Accessories

Space Air developed a comprehensive range of mechanical and electrical accessories so that, as far as Daikin systems are concerned Space Air is the one stop shop! The accessories are all made to highly exacting standards and can represent significant time and cost savings for the customer and protect the integrity of the system.

## Solutions for the Home

Space Air was the first UK air conditioning distributor to set up a division dedicated to serving the residential market - Space Air Solutions Ltd. Literature is designed with the residential consumer in mind. Marketing campaigns aimed at the home owner/housing developer have included exhibiting at events such as The Ideal Home Show and Ecobuild.

One Stop  
(Daikin)  
Shop





Top Left: Celebrating the 1st £1 million Top Right: Training and show room facilities Above: Space Air's distribution fleet

### Top selling Heat Pumps

Today, Daikin Altherma, the first heat pump of its type to be awarded the Ecolabel, is Space Air Solutions' core product.

### Expert After-Sales Support

Space Air offers after-sales support where a team of highly experienced technicians respond rapidly to any product specific enquiry relating to equipment we have supplied. All enquiries and responses are computer recorded, developing a history that may assist in any diagnosis.

### Efficient Spare Parts Service

A dedicated and experienced team ensures that any required Daikin component is correctly identified and promptly despatched. Over 2,500 competitively priced, genuine parts and accessories are stocked at any one time.

### Unsurpassed Stock Control & Logistics

Critical for any distributor is the efficiency with which it is able to react to market demand. This is another area where Space Air always excels. Order processing, stock control, logistics and transport play key roles in the company's success.

### R22 Replacement Advisory Team

Space Air was probably the first company in the UK to produce customer guidance on the implications of the HCFC (R22) phase-out programme. Space Air also established a dedicated "R22 Replacement Advisory Service", offering information on cost effective replacement options, updates on regulation and legislation, finance schemes and incentives.

### In-house Marketing

All Space Air's marketing is handled in-house and the team's work can even extend to assisting regular customers with their marketing needs.

It is not possible to detail all the "industry firsts", initiatives and advantages that Space Air has introduced or developed to elevate their industry standing in 30 years as a Daikin Distributor; it is perhaps sufficient to say that this brief overview may explain why repeat business represents such a high proportion of the company's turnover and so many customers agree with Space Air - in the words of our advertising strap-line - **"We keep business simple."**

## THE BEGINNING



Above: Where it all began, Space Air 1980 (450sq ft).



Above: Space Air's second HQ 1986 (7100sq ft) first prefabricated commercial building in Guildford - (no bricks!).



Above: Space Air's third HQ 1991 (25,000sq ft).



Above: Space Air's current Guildford HQ since 2002 (50,000sq ft).



# CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

## ON THE DIXIE QUEEN



For the first event to formally celebrate Space Air's 30th Anniversary, founder and Managing Director, Neil Afram particularly wanted to bring together as many people as possible who have played their part in the company's success.

Neil wished to show his appreciation to customers, industry associates, the media, staff, friends and colleagues, past and present, from whom he has drawn inspiration, those who have influenced the growth of Space Air and shown true friendship, loyalty and support in the challenging as well as the good times.

By chartering the 'Dixie Queen', recently the subject of a \$10 million conversion into a stunning 3-tier Mississippi Paddle Steamer, Neil's special guests were treated to a champagne reception, a leisurely lunch and a cruise from the Pool of London, through Greenwich to the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge and back.

The Dixie Queen sets new standards for sheer size and Tower Bridge actually has to be raised to allow the vessel through, a rare sight these days and one which Space Air's guests were able to experience twice in one day!

The occasion was blessed with good weather and, followed by a staff party on board, was a perfect way to celebrate Space Air's 30th Anniversary.





## Guests enjoy an afternoon on the Thames



# INSPIRATION, INFLUENCE & ACHIEVEMENT...

## Roger Taylor



"Space Air has no problems, only solutions".

Roger Taylor sold Space Air their first Apple Computer in 1984, which still enjoys pride of place in the Guildford Boardroom! At



that time Roger worked for County Business and in the years that followed he continued to work closely with Space Air helping to set up their Apple systems network and

with direct support from Apple Computers to develop a bespoke version of Apples Filemaker Pro database.

In 1991 Roger was offered and accepted the position of Operations and IT Director.

Roger had in essence been the architect of the company's IT Network and in the process had become an expert in the operational processes that the computer network drove and tracked. Over the next few years, under Roger's expert management, the business of forecasting, handling and delivery of Space Air's substantial stocks of Daikin finished products and spare parts were continually refined. It became a matter of pride for Roger's team that from goods ordered to goods delivered, the logistics/operations department ran with military precision, so



much so, that this was acknowledged when the company first won the ACR News Product Distributor Award.

In 1993 Mr Hosokawa, then President of Daikin Europe, personally asked Roger to demonstrate the efficiency benefits of the Filemaker system to his staff in Ostend. Apple even published a feature article about how Space Air (Roger & Neil) had explored the potential of filemaker to unprecedented levels.

Roger also became the author of the various procedures that were to form the basis of meeting the demanding requirements for the ISO 9001 (quality) Standard. Space Air has maintained this Standard registration since 1998.

Roger Taylor was very much Neil Afram's right-hand man and this was to be extended outside of the working environment. Golf became an important escape from daily business pressures. Neil and Roger actively participated in the industry based BTU Golfing Society (Thames Valley region).

Tragically and unexpectedly, Roger passed away in March 2010, following a stroke at his desk; this was recorded by Neil Afram as "the saddest time in our 30 year history." Roger's legacy has been to leave the company with fond memories of a highly respected and popular colleague and friend, but perhaps more importantly, IT and Operations systems which are second to none in the world of product distribution and which have helped to set Space Air apart from its UK and European contemporaries.



**Mike Tolhurst** was instrumental in establishing Space Air's regional office in Bristol and dominant presence in the Channel Islands. Mike retired from

Space Air 5 years ago, but regularly remains in touch and is still held in high regard by his ex-colleagues.

Neil Afram and Mike Tolhurst first met and became friends in 1978. Mike joined Space Air in 1991 and stayed well beyond normal retirement age, finally bowing out at the age of 72 having notched up an impressive 59 years of continuous employment in the industry!

Neil commented. "Mike played an important role on our road to success and I am pleased to pay tribute to this in our 30th Anniversary celebrations. I believe he set an example to our industry's younger sales engineers in terms of diligence, customer care and enthusiasm for his profession. The West Country and the Channel Islands continue to produce strong results and this is, in no small measure, to Mike's efforts.







**Mike Wearn** joined Space Air in 1993. His technical expertise enabled him to mentor many Space Air engineers as they progressed from internal to field sales.

He also assisted Neil with the development of several sophisticated system design program's, such as - VRV Energy calculation, VRVQ costings and the Daikin VRV install tool, which is now used by Daikin America, to name but one.

Another of Mike's claims to fame was to be the first Space Air sales engineer to achieve over £5 million in both sales orders and invoices in one year! Mike has always been a very keen traveler and recently took early retirement at the young age of 62.

Below: A happy Neil Afram (left) recently reunited with two people that he credits as having provided great inspiration and influence (centre) Dennis Samorathne, Neil's first UK boss and mentor (right)

Ray Bright, Space Air's bank manager in the early years who supported and encouraged Neil as Space Air expanded.



## THE INTERVIEW

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### THE FIRST WAVE

It was during those exciting times that I first encountered Neil Afram, the founder and head of Space Airconditioning plc.

Neil is one of those people who might be described as forthright. He calls a spade, a spade or, perhaps more often in Neil's case, a @!!&!! spade.

He was also well-equipped for the highly competitive sales atmosphere that existed amongst Daikin's distributors having been involved in the "first wave" of air conditioning in the 60s and 70s. Then it was Carrier, or more accurately at the time Carlyle, who gave the UK its first taste of A/C through distributors like Weathermaker, DES, Walkers, Climate and, in Neil's case, Alger.

The margins were good in those days but the knowledge and experience he gleaned from the competitiveness of Carlyle's distributors stood him in good stead for the Daikin campaign a decade or so later. It also brought him into contact with some of the fledgling UK air conditioning industry's leading lights.

### TOP OF THE CLASS

...Neil was born in Iraq of professional, middle class, Christian parents, in a predominantly moslem country. Doctor or engineer was the main choice of profession.

Then, as now, it was important to study hard and get a good job, but Neil's high school grades were not good enough to get him an engineering place at university. Like most kids in the 60s, however, Neil Afram had a yen to go to America.

"You never think of going anywhere

else," he told me as we were putting this special issue together.

"All you see is the American films, the colour, the Beach Boys, the razzamatazz." The draw was too much. He successfully applied for a place at the University of Nebraska and was due to leave when the first of a number of life changing events occurred.

Just before leaving for the US he heard of a university in Iraq which was offering an HND in engineering. It was due to close the course but decided to keep it going for another year. After some persuasion they agreed to take on a keen Neil Afram. "It was probably a good thing because I don't think I could have resisted the razzamatazz," he now admits. "I was really going to be all engines and mechanics but in the third year you had to specialise." A subject called air conditioning was put forward as a possibility, but its significance was initially lost on Neil Afram: "I said oh yeah what's that?" The teacher, however, an English-speaking Iraqi, all RAF 'tache and bow-tie, was a major influence: "He described air conditioning as being like the human body: your heart is the compressor and your veins the condenser and evaporator."

It made an impression. Neil Afram came top of the class.

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# WHAT THE PAPERS SAY



**Andrew Bailey,**  
Former editor of  
RAC magazine.

“Neil Afram has made a significant contribution to the industry over many years. He is a determined and articulate champion of the industry’s cause, and has never failed to take a strong and principled stand when government or EU policy appeared to threaten the industry’s interests. He is hard to ignore, energetic, persuasive and passionate - values reflected in the company he formed and runs to this day.”



**Adam Northcroft,**  
Former Associate  
Publisher & Editor  
of H&V News.

“Space Air is one of the industry’s dynamic companies. It is an organisation that has always wanted to push forward and make a

difference, remaining consistently hungry for development both technically and for the industry as a whole. It rightly has a profile that makes it one of the best known distributor names in the HVAC industry today.”



**Ewen Rose,**  
Former editor-in-  
chief of H&V News  
and HAC. Now  
managing director of  
McGowen Rose  
Associates.

I would describe Neil as one of the most colourful characters I came across in my time on H&V News and HAC Journal.

I loved his straight talking and strong sense of loyalty. He could be a most charming and generous host, but if he felt you had let him down, he would let you know.

I remember a story we published about the future of refrigerants. He rang me up to tell me he felt we hadn’t argued the industry’s case, but had sided with the environmentalists - not exactly how he expressed his feelings, but those of you who know Neil might realise that I couldn’t reproduce the exact words he used!

I respected the fact that he felt strongly enough about it to call me up and tell me. This in no way damaged our relationship and the next time I saw him he was as cordial as ever.

I am delighted that the company he has shaped in his own image has been such a success and wish him all best wishes for another 30 years!



**Keith Sutton,**  
Former editor of  
H&V News, ACR  
News, ACR Today &  
currently editor of  
Heat Pump News.

When Space Airconditioning came onto the A/C scene I had been writing about the industry for a mere couple of years but it became apparent that here was a company that was going to make its mark.

Neil Afram, was full of limitless energy and enthusiasm for doing everything as professionally as possible.

I remember when visiting the Space Air offices many years ago, Neil said that he was determined to try to help create the highest standards the industry could achieve.

Seems to me he and Space Air are still doing that!





**Ken Sharpe,**  
Editor of Modern  
Building Services.

It is no accident that Space Airconditioning has become synonymous with Daikin air-conditioning products over the last 30 years. The technical advice and support to consultants, contractors, end users and anyone else who needs it. Space Air provide outstanding support for Daikin's product range that has become part of the experience of dealing with the company.

Managing director Neil Afram and his team don't just talk about customer service and support, they deliver it - and the proof is Space Air's standing and reputation in the UK air-conditioning industry today.

I wish the company well for the future.



**Phil Creaney,**  
Editor of ACR  
Today.

Space Airconditioning was one of the first companies that I visited, on becoming editor of ACR Today in 2005. I was immediately impressed by the passion which its founder and Managing Director Neil Afram readily shows for his company, the products and services that it provides and for the UK air conditioning industry overall. That drive for excellence has set high standards in customer service, earning the company respect from across the industry. On behalf of the team at ACR Today, Consulting Engineer and Heat Pumps Today, I congratulate Space Air on its 30th anniversary and extend our best wishes for the next 30 years.



**Andrew Gaved,**  
Editor of RAC.

In my time on RAC, I have always enjoyed my dealings with Space Air. Editors are always grateful to be able to talk to people who 'know their stuff' - not only how the technology works and how it will benefit my readers, but also how it sits in the context of legislation and wider industry matters. And we are doubly grateful when those people are willing to speak candidly on the issues that matter, often venturing where others fear to tread. For me, working with Messrs Afram, Nankivell and their colleagues has been both a professional and a personal pleasure. Congratulations to one-and-all!

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## THE GUINNESS INFLUENCE

After National Service, and at the age of just 22, Neil found himself appointed in charge of 28 engineers in the main dairy factory in Iraq. "That was one of the lucky things that came my way and one of the best experiences I had," he now reveals.

"While I was there someone told me about the National College at the Elephant & Castle. I applied and got a place."

He struggled to get out of Iraq but eventually arrived on these shores full of preconceived ideas that England was all fog, rain and black and white movies. He was not to be disappointed in that respect, but it was to become his home.

His studies for a diploma in refrigeration included visits to applications across the country. One in particular he remembers is seeing cascade refrigeration systems at the Guinness brewery. He was in his element. "Application design has

always intrigued me," he says.

Having passed his City & Guilds exams as well, he didn't know what to do and even thought about returning to Iraq. It was his college lecturer, Mr Webb, who persuaded a very reluctant Neil Afram to apply for a job at Metropolitan Refrigeration.

## SPEEDY GONZALEZ

His general indifference to the position combined with the effects of the mother of all hangovers meant Neil Afram would have been far from the ideal interviewee.

His eyes lit up, however, when asked to explain the Carnot cycle. His enthusiasm for the principles of refrigeration even then must have been self-evident because two days later he got a letter informing him he had got the job at a starting salary of £1,100

"And I loved it, it was really fantastic," Neil now admits. "My boss Dennis Somarathne was the best. He was very precise and meticulous, you had to do everything right to the letter."

It was an ideal grounding for him in

refrigeration. "I worked hard and reached a peak where I could complete 20 coldroom quotes per day." And this was with just a slide rule, no electronic calculators then, let alone computers.

"I learnt my trade in refrigeration which is to me the most important thing if you want to do air conditioning. You need to go back to basics every time you design a job."

The enthusiasm that Neil possesses today was evident even then. "I was Speedy Gonzalez on the phone. I never let anyone else answer it and I was even offloading delivery trucks."

Neil admits that in a later employment he was once asked to let someone else answer the phone first. You get the feeling that this may have happened more than once.

Then came his move into air conditioning with Carlyle distributor Alger in Bristol. The general manager at Alger was Dick Counsell, someone who later, as boss of Cooling Services, would be one of Neil's main Daikin distribution rivals.

> THE INTERVIEW - continued on page 17



Above: Neil Afram meets with The Duke of Edinburgh

The work of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award inspired Neil Afram as a young man making his home in England so much so that, years later, he decided Space Air should regularly support the charity in some way. Space Air became a "Charter for Business" member company in 1998 and today is one of the longest serving Charter members of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.



## THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD



The Duke of Edinburgh's Award would like to thank Space Air for their long standing and generous support for young people. Over the last 12 years their charitable donations have enabled thousands of young people to develop new skills, experience personal challenge and achieve recognition.

There are currently 275,000 young people working towards a DofE Award in the UK.

They come from all backgrounds and with nearly 1 million young people now unemployed, the skills they gain from the programme are more important than ever.

As an employer, Space Air values the Teamwork, Leadership, Confidence and Decision making ability that the DofE inspires in young people.

I wish Space Air well in their 30th Anniversary celebrations.

**Peter Westgarth**  
Chief Executive



Being Guildford based from the time of its origin, Space Air has been generous in its support for local charities and worthy causes. The biggest local benefactor has been Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud Theatre. Space Air contributes each year to the excellent programme of plays and entertainment that this fine theatre produces.



We would like to take this opportunity to wish Space Air our best wishes for their 30th Anniversary.

The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre is proud to have Space Air as one of its

longest standing corporate supporters and to have worked with one of Guildford's most prestigious companies for the last ten years.

Space Air first joined us as Business Consortium members in January 2000 and sponsored the Reduced Shakespeare Company's production of The Complete Millennium Musical. The success of our partnership was quickly acknowledged as we were awarded an Arts and Business Pairing Scheme Award, which enabled us to offer Space Air additional theatre tickets, programmes and discounts for staff members, encouraging interest from a much younger age group within the company.

Since then our partnership has gone from strength to strength, with Space Air sponsoring a number of shows, many of which have been Alan Ayckbourn productions. Earlier this year they sponsored the very popular 'Wife After Death' starring Tom Conti.

We are enormously grateful to Space Air for their continued and loyal support of Guildford's Yvonne Arnaud Theatre and hope that our association will continue to grow for many more years to come.

We wish Space Air many more successful years ahead.

**James Barber**, Theatre Director  
**Madeline Coleman**, Funding Executive

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## THE CUT & THRUST

"Carrier were the best. I'm grateful to them for helping me learn the basics. Mike Johnson, design engineer at Alger, taught me the principle that there is no such thing as 'we can't design.'"

This is where Neil also discovered the wonderful world of psychrometrics.

"What intrigued me about air conditioning was the psychrometric chart. Mike Johnson used to say if you cannot draw the cycle on the psychrometric chart then the system will never work.

I still keep a chart in my drawer, pulling it out even now if I am hesitant about a design."

Neil was also a great admirer of Trevor Gosling at rival distributor DES but he never let that get in the way of the fierce competition between them.

You can see that Neil Afram just loves the cut and thrust of business rivalry. Where Neil might describe the relationship with his competitors as just one big family, outsiders might see violent sibling rivalry, and Neil's "gentlemanly competition" would be someone else's street fight.

Revealing in his description of the rivalry between the Carlyle distributors as "lovely competition" but going on to admit: "We used to fight like cats and dogs."

This strange, some would say contradictory, view was later repeated when describing the rivalry between the Daikin distributors: "The beautiful thing about the whole experience was that we maintained the family attitude. We would shoot each other in the balls but not in the head."

Alger was to eventually lose the Carlyle distributorship but Neil's time with the company was marked by his first contact with someone who was to have a significant effect on his career and eventually lead to the creation of Space Airconditioning.

"When I was at Alger a guy phoned who wanted to talk about Daikin. Daikin? Who are they? I had never heard of them." That man was Ali

Rashidi.

"He sent me a brochure which I kept, in fact I still have it. It was beautifully produced. They only had about 20 models – roof top packages and water-cooled chillers, some air-cooled condensing units."

## SIZZLING HOT

Neil joined Dick Counsell at Cooling Services which had the Airtemp and Tempair agency in the UK. That was 1976, the year of the sizzling hot summer.

"Such was the demand, we couldn't get deliveries from Tempair. Dick Counsell found Riello to supply splits. I remembered Daikin."

Neil went with Dick Counsell to the Daikin HQ in Ostend and found Ali Rashidi most accommodating.

But the relationship was not without its early teething problems: "We had orders for nine rooftop packages for Algeria and the factory goes on strike."

Not to be thwarted, Ali Rashidi is credited with sneaking a couple of lorries into the factory and liberating the units from under the noses of the strikers.

What really opened Neil's eyes to Daikin's potential was revealed during his attendance at his first sales conference in Japan in 1977.

"I loved their work culture and everything was organised to the finest detail."

But it was their warranty expectations that really impressed. "Warranty claims were 20% on products we had been selling. Daikin were claiming 0.2% and looking for 0.1%"

In 1979 Neil helped form Artel Air Conditioning as a division of an established heating company. The Daikin connection continued with Ali Rashidi agreeing to supply direct.

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# The Directors



Neil Afram and his fellow Directors Barry Stone, Mervyn Burby, Mike Nankivell and Mark Houghton offer a total of 107 years service. The Space Air's 13 Line Managers, based in Guildford, Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester, have between them chalked up an average of 14 years service, 2 with over 23 years, 5 with over 15 years and 4 over 10 years. The tally of stability and experience across the whole company collectively amounts to over 650 years, which must arguably be some kind of record for this industry?

## & Line Managers



**Barry Stone**  
Technical Director

Barry Stone joined Neil Afram for the foundation of Space Air in 1980. In the early days Neil and Barry were a formidable double act. As Technical Director, Barry went on to be the driving force behind the highly efficient and comprehensive after-sales support service that Space Air provides and the design and development of their extensive and successful range of mechanical and electrical accessories. Barry claims to have been the calming influence on some of Neil's impulse engineering requests over the years, nevertheless if a special or bespoke solution has been required for any technical or engineered application – Barry has been the man to sort it out and get it done.



**Mervyn Burby**  
Finance Director

Mervyn Burby and Neil Afram were childhood friends in Iraq and when Neil first arrived in England, Mervyn (British by birth) was the only fellow countryman he knew to have also moved to the UK. Mervyn was there to support Neil when Space Air was formed and joined the company himself, as Financial Director, in 1983. The company then had various projects worth approximately £1 million in Iraq where Neil was spending a considerable amount of his time. Mervyn had to take care of the finances and keep the banks on the right side of the track. Mervyn says it has been his lifetime's work to be the voice of reason in relation to some of Neil's more ambitious projects!



**Mike Nankivell**  
Marketing Director

Mike recalls his first meeting with Neil Afram as being somewhat confrontational, at a time when Mike worked for the Carrier Corporation and there was a highly publicised dispute over which company was the bigger – Carrier or Daikin. You can imagine where Neil stood on that argument! A mutual respect developed based on similar passions for the industry and Mike joined Space Air at the end of 1999 to take up the dual role of Marketing and business development Manager. Mike's experience in marketing, combined with his engineering background ensures customers and the media are kept well informed. Mike became a Director of the company in August 2009.



**Mark Houghton**  
Commercial Director

Mark Houghton first joined Space Air in 1998 to help Neil set up a Space Air subsidiary company, Space Air Solutions Ltd., dedicated to supporting the small but more specialised residential market. A few years later Mark and his wife moved to Dorset to pursue other business interests. However, a change of circumstances saw them moving back to Surrey and Mark rejoined Space Air Solutions Ltd in 2008. Promoted to Commercial Director in August 2009, Mark has spearheaded the success of the Daikin "Altherma" air to water heat pump in the residential sector. Mark counts learning to ignore Neil's advice on the golf course as one of his major achievements!



**Bridgette Fernandez**  
PA/HR  
23 years service



**Jerry Hall**  
West sales  
15 years service



**Steve McGregor**  
Midlands sales  
11 years service



**Karl Kendall**  
North sales  
18 years service



**Tom McKenna**  
Logistics  
16 years service



**Sibat Butt**  
After sales  
17 years service



**Lynne Ford**  
Marketing  
11 years service



**Hannah Crawte**  
Finance  
2 years service



**Vincent Keen**  
South sales  
New appointment



**Dave Wickham**  
Warehouse  
23 years service



**Lyn Gillespie**  
Admin  
16 years service



**Edward Callaghan**  
IT  
9 years service



**Brian Sims**  
Works  
13 years service



**Katherine Spaven**  
Accounts  
4 years service



## No. 1 IN THE UK

A year later on the 1st August 1980, came the formation of Specialised Packaged Air Conditioning Equipment, better known as Space Air. With the help of Ray Bright (“a bank manager with vision”), an office was rented in Guildford for £5.25/week. Barry Stone joined from Artel and a part-time secretary was employed.

Space Air became an official Daikin distributor and much of the early work was through Neil’s contacts in Iraq. When the money there dried up, Space Air concentrated on the UK.

New premises were sought and the company expanded through the addition of regional offices.

“Mike Tolhurst came to me and said ‘do you want me to set up a Bristol office?’ I said fine get on with it, just make sure you make ends meet. Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester were the same. It wasn’t my entrepreneurial thinking, I just let people get on with it.”

The rest, as they say, is history. Space Air rapidly attained the no 1 position in

the UK and Daikin went on to conquer Europe.

That might have been the end of the story but in 2003 Daikin, as Carrier had done some 30 years previously, embarked on a series of acquisitions. Fellow distributors Pillinger and Cooling Services were the first to be absorbed into the new Daikin UK and, MacQueen followed a year later.

## STUBBORN & PROUD

Perhaps it was the stubborn streak he admits he inherited from his father, but few will be surprised to learn that Neil Afram resisted all overtures for Space Air. “I can’t work for someone else after 25 years running my own business. It wouldn’t have been fair on any of the parties involved.”

So, Space Air celebrates its 30th anniversary as strong, or stronger, than ever. As the sole remaining independent Daikin distributor in the UK many had expected Space Air to adopt a second line product but it has never happened.

“I had everyone knocking on my door at the time,” he admits, “but I wasn’t interested. I have no worries, nobody is going to take Daikin away from me. As far as I’m concerned I buy, I innovate, I pay. It’s not a free for all.”

Neil Afram became a British citizen in 1979 and his advice for any prospective importer reveals his deep seated admiration for the British.

“Any manufacturer who wants to be successful in Europe must break the UK.”

Something, of course, that Daikin did to such great effect.

“The British are more proud than any other nation, proud of what we are doing whether we are right or wrong.

“I love America, I love Spain but I would never ever live there. Britain gave me freedom, equality, you get what you deserve, you make what you deserve, the British fight for basic principles.”

“Make a name here and you’ll crack it.

“That’s what I love about Britain. That’s why I stayed.”



### CLOSING WORDS...

I would like to thank all the contributors to this 30th anniversary celebration supplement. The first of many things to come to mark our history. I’d also like to thank all colleagues, friends and loyal customers for the kind words and appreciation shown to me and my staff at Space Air throughout the years. I assure you that I and all my staff will continue to offer our friendship and support and hope to celebrate our Golden Anniversary with you! - **Neil Afram.**

Daikin answers to R22 Phase-out\*

# VRV Replacement from Space Air

Daikin's **VRV-IIIQ** is the answer to R22 phase-out.

- Designed to enable re-use of existing pipework
- Unique pipework de-contamination technology
- Increased system capacity
- 25% - 35% efficiency gains

With **30 years** experience **nobody**

knows **Daikin** better than **Space Air**



With Significant developments in technology, older forms of air conditioning and heat pumps run less efficiently than those available today. Daikin arguably the largest manufacturer in the field of air conditioning with over 2000 models covering Splits, VRV, Roof Top Packages, Air & Water cooled Chillers it is impossible not to find solutions to any equipment replacement.

Space Air's 30 years experience with Daikin equipment and over 650 years of experienced staff in technical, practical, commissioning, logistics, spare parts, management, complimented with over 500 in house manufactured sheet metal, electrical and mechanical accessories insures the most optimum replacement resulting in cost effective, energy efficient and longevity.

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