

OCTOBER 2007

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Giving Back

REMODELERS
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AND BEYOND TO
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COMMUNITY / 22

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How to Improve Your Job Site Etiquette / 12

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Allan Lutes of Alpha Remodeling (second from right) started the Labor of Love program in Ann Arbor, Mich.

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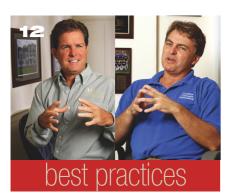
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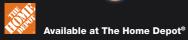
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staff

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Michael R. Morris

630/288-8057; michael.morris@reedbusiness.com

SENIOR EDITOR

Jonathan Sweet

630/288-8170; jonathan.sweet@reedbusiness.com

MANAGING EDITOR

Judi Damm

630/288-8193; judi.damm@reedbusiness.com

COPY EDITOR

Sara Zailskas

630/288-8197; sara.zailskas@reedbusiness.com

PRODUCTS EDITOR

Nick Bajzek

630/288-8187; nicholas.bajzek@reedbusiness.com

SENIOR EDITOR, E-MEDIA

Mark Jarasek

630/288-8171; mark.jarasek@reedbusiness.com

SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Wendy A. Jordan, Ann Matesi

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Doug Dwyer, Scott Sevon, Jud Motsenbocker, **Tom Swartz**

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

Customer Service, Reed Business Information 8778 S. Barrons Blvd., Highlands Ranch, CO 80126

Phone: 800/446-6551, Fax: 303/470-4280 subsmail@reedbusiness.com

CEO, REED BUSINESS INFORMATION

Tad Smith

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

have never been more proud of my daughter, Jackie, than when she joined her high school Key Club freshman year and made it a priority in her life to give back to her community through personal service.

To put this in perspective, Jackie has always given me plenty of reasons to be proud. She is an A-average honor student (13th in her class of over 600); a talented and committed athlete; and a selfless individual who has always surrounded herself with good friends and done the right thing.

But when she decided to join Key Club last year and volunteered some of her extremely precious and limited free time to helping make other people's lives a little bit better, it raised my sense of pride in her to a new level, knowing she had grown into such a conscientious young adult.

I'm sure Allan Lutes can relate to this feeling. Lutes, who owns Alpha Remodeling in Ann Arbor, Mich., started a community service program called Labor of Love three years ago that has grown beyond his company to include hundreds of volunteers, local churches and organizations working to provide help to the elderly, disabled and needy.

It's one thing to do a good deed yourself and experience the euphoria that comes from committing a selfless and charitable act.

It's quite another to witness those around you become inspired to carry the torch of goodwill on their own.

This month's cover story ("Giving Back," page 22) highlights some of the things remodelers, including Lutes, are doing in their communities that have a positive impact on the lives of those less fortunate.

It's not the type of story we write every month, as our mission is to help remodelers improve their businesses with best practices and solutions to



Michael R. Morris Editor in Chief 630/288-8057 michael.morris@reedbusiness.com

problems common to remodeling firm owners. But I'm sure you'll agree after reading this story that the companies we've featured have improved their businesses by the good deeds they're doing in their communities.

A cynic might say they're only doing these things to garner attention for their companies as good Samaritans so they can profit from the positive press they receive. While I can be prone to a cynical thought or two myself, I am certain this is not the case with these remodelers. In fact, if they do get any jobs because of the good that they do, I think it's a fitting and proper reward for their actions. And when good things happen to good people, it only serves as an example to the rest of us that doing a good deed or a kind act is the right thing to do.

If your company gives back to your community in some way, no matter how big or how small, I applaud you and thank you. Please take a moment to tell us what you're doing by using the Talkback function on the online version of this month's cover story at www.ProRemodeler.com. PR

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Taking it to the airwaves

hen a local radio host bad-mouthed vinyl siding, Amazing Siding, based in Tomball, Texas, decided to take matters into its own hands.

"He was telling people that vinyl would ruin their house, that there were all these problems," says Bob Birner, vice president of the Houston-area company. "What people didn't know was that this guy was a paid spokesman for fiber cement."

So Amazing Siding started its own weekly radio show and hired a local radio personality to host it. Over the last few years, the program has evolved to Birner's hosting it with the local talent. He also now partners with another local remodeler, Michael Strong of Brothers Strong. The program, now known as the Remodeling Pro Radio Show, is broadcast on the second-strongest AM station in the Houston area for

Although the program gives Birner a chance to defend vinyl siding, a successful radio show can't be self-promotional.

four hours every Sunday.

"We have to talk about more

than siding and windows," he says. "We can't just talk about ourselves, because then people will turn it off after five minutes."

The show's format includes Birner and Strong answering questions from callers, as well

as frequent guest experts on various topics.

"The biggest thing
we try to do is educate
the consumer about the
importance of using a
professional," Birner says.
"We try to break them
from that stigma of going
with the lowest bid. Our
big thing is, we're not here
to help you do it cheaply,
we're here to help you do
it right."

officer with NAHB
Remodelers,
has also
recorded a promo for
the NAHB Remodelers that
he airs during the broadcast.

Birner, a national

The company now about breaks even on the show by selling advertising time to other sponsors during the four-hour block, Birner says. But that doesn't include the marketing benefits the show brings to the company.

"From time to time, someone will come to us because they

heard me on the radio, but it helps us more from a branding standpoint," he says. "People hear us on the air every week, and they know that someone could call me on the radio to complain about my service, and that's never happened."

Even though there are some obvious benefits, Birner cautions that remodelers should plan carefully before jumping on the air. First of all, he recommends starting with a small time slot. His show had grown from one hour to two hours before making the recent change to the four-hour format.

"You have to be prepared to talk, intelligently, for as long as the show is on," he says. "You also don't know what the questions are going to be each week, so you have to know your stuff."

For Birner, whose knowledge was strongest in the siding and windows market, that meant studying up on all aspects of the remodeling industry. Having a partner on the air also helps, because Strong not only has different areas of exper-

tise, but also makes it easier to fill the time, Birner says.

>> If you have a **Trade Secret** you would like to share, e-mail Senior Editor
Jonathan Sweet at *jonathan*.
sweet@reedbusiness.com.

You oughta be in pictures

ost people remember faces better than names. That's the theory behind Pro/Craft Painting and Contracting's business cards.

All of the Gurnee, Ill., remodeler's 13 employees have business cards and all the business cards have the employee's photo on them.

"It's different; it creates a unique connection," says President Mark Lewis. "People remember who we are."



Lewis uses photos
of the company's employees on all
of Pro/Craft's marketing materials,
an idea he brought with him from
his background as a real-estate
agent.

"If you look at that industry, they've got their photos on their cards, on their signs, everywhere," he says. "It just seemed like a natural idea for us."

ONLINE POLL QUESTION

How are you giving back to your community?

To participate in this month's poll and view the results as they are tabulated, visit www.ProRemodeler.com.

Look like a hero, without all the heroic effort.

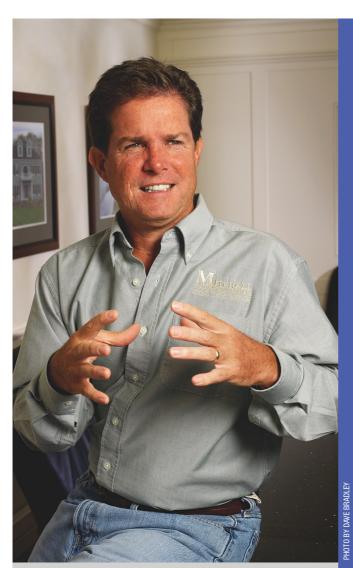
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JOB SITE ETIQUETTE

Your employees' behavior reflects your company's values and culture



Tom Mitchell, Owner Mitchell Construction Group

Medfield, Mass.-based Mitchell Construction Group is a 20-year-old design/ build firm. The company focuses on medium to large jobs. Its 16 employees, seven of whom are in the field, concentrate on customer satisfaction and highquality workmanship. They expect to do between 15 and 20 jobs this year. www.mitchcogroup.com



Steve Klitsch, Owner Creative Concepts Remodeling

Creative Concepts is a design/build firm that has been in business for 25 years. The firm, located outside Washington, D.C., in Germantown, Md., focuses on smaller projects such as kitchens and baths, and it also provides handyman services. With four key players, the firm will do about 90 projects this year. Their CAPS certification helps them work with senior citizens and special needs individuals by offering universal design.

How your employees and subcontractors behave on a job site can be a deal-breaker or maker for future business.

Jud: First of all I want to start out by asking: Where does job site etiquette start, in your opinions? Tom, go ahead.

Tom: Job site etiquette starts with me! In how our values and culture trickle down to our employees.

Jud: That's really were I want to go. It really starts at the top. Steve, do you agree

Steve: I agree with that. To add to what Tom said, I think job site etiquette also begins with the sales process. There are things that can be said with the salesperson in someone's home, initially, to help set the expectations for what that etiquette can or can't be with any company.

Jud: And probably what it should be. Would that be a good comment, Steve? Steve: Yes. I think the salesman's got to say we're going to clean up or whatever it might be.

Jud: That's the idea guys, OK? Do we have a set of rules that are written, published, etc., Steve?

Steve: There is a short list of rules. We have a small business; it's easy for us to add to that. I try to visit my job sites at least every day, if not talk to someone on that job, to make sure that we are following our rules for job site etiquette and to make very clear what the expectations are for each project. With that, if I need to, I can add a daily meeting that could be 5-10 minutes just to make sure we're following good job site etiquette procedures with our crew.

Jud: Tom?

Tom: We have a short list also.

Because it's pretty unpredictable what can happen from job to job. Certain things like don't smoke at the home, don't swear, don't have radios playing loudly. It really comes back to a good set of values and culture that people really buy into and believe in that will guide decisions to etiquette.

Jud: Tom, continue on with your list.

You mentioned smoking and radios. What else can you think of right off the top that might be on your list?

Tom: No foul language. No arguing among ourselves within earshot of the client. Show up on time. Don't be late. Things like that automatically come to mind.

Jud: Maybe even based around something more common like good customer service if nothing else?

Tom: Absolutely.

Jud: Steve, what about your list and what you might have.

Steve: We have a list. I've got it with me here. We're covering everything from trash and debris and even placement of the job site signs. That could be a daily maintenance thing. We'll put a job site sign out there, but then once in a while it gets

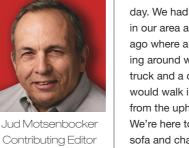
moved because the homeowner's cutting his grass or the yard crew is cutting the grass. They pick it up and then it's not placed correctly, or looks skewed. That's a statement or could be an indictment against our company if it's not set the right way. That's a daily routine to check that. We go over with the client about what we call a "material staging area;"

sometimes it could be their garage, basement, an empty room or a corner of the property. All of that is discussed ahead of time. Also the deliveries. Can we bring a truck onto the property? Some of these trucks bring concrete, for example. Very heavy. Is the driveway going to withstand that? There are some variables there where we can protect the property if we're doing something of that sort. The bathroom. As basic as that is, do we have permission to use the bathroom, or do we need to bring in a portable toilet? There are details that have to be gone over with the client in that regard. Children and pets. Some people leave for work; we're in the house working and cats are roaming all over the place, and it can be a nuisance and safety hazard. When we're working with miter saws, I've

learned from a veterinarian that caged birds go out of control because of the sound of the miter saws. It's the high-pitched sound of the saws, even though we're wearing eye and ear protection, the pets were going crazy, and we had to move them to another part of the house. That was on-the-job training! Now we're aware of that. And when people have pets, we say, "Look folks, here's the situation with the saws. Veterinarians tell us these things; this is what we know. Can you put your pets in another part of the house or locate them differently so we can perform our work in this area?"

Also with security. Once we've been invited to someone's home, we're responsible when they go for the security of that property. We've got to have the door locked

> or windows sealed up when we're done at the end of the day. We had a scam here in our area a couple years ago where a crew was driving around with a big empty truck and a clipboard. They would walk in and say "We're from the upholstery shop. We're here to pick up the sofa and chair." The contractor didn't know any different, so off they went with



Contributing Editor

furniture! The homeowner comes home and says, "Where's my furniture?" "Well, the upholstery crew picked it up." "We didn't hire any upholstery company!" We make sure with the homeowner, as another part of our policies, to tell us who's coming in and out. Do you have a maid service coming? Do you have a pet sitter? Who's coming in and out while we're working? We need to know that so we can take responsibility for the security of the home. Of course safety is a big issue. We have a first aid kit on site. We need to make sure not only that the crews are safe working with eye and ear protection, gloves, etc. The homeowner must be aware that they don't need to be snooping around and looking at our stuff. If we're given permission to store tools on their property, can we secure those

best practices

behind a locked door? We'll make sure air hoses are disconnected and nail guns are put away. Kids are curious! If you've been in the business more than 10 years, you've probably had some kid go through your tool box looking at your "cool" stuff. Those are some of the things on our list that we make them aware of. We also introduce ourselves to the neighbors. The neighbors, I think, are part of the remodeling process. I think it's fair to let them know, through our job site etiquette, who's going to be working, what

kind of vehicles they'll see in the driveway, so they're not calling the police because someone on our staff might have an unmarked pickup truck. They go back and forth one morning — carrying some things in, carrying some things out.

Jud: In talking with the neighbors, that wouldn't include marketing in any way, would it?

Steve: Of course it does! I personally do it. I own the business, and I also get involved in the field sometimes as a carpenter, laborer or whatever it may be. I introduce myself to the neighbors. I ring the bell, say "Hi, folks!" and hand them my business card. "My name's Steve. I own this remodeling business. We're going to be working for your neighbor across the street. We're going to start in about 3 weeks. I just wanted to let you know you'll see some of our vehicles around. As careful and clean as we can be, sometimes trash blows across the street. If there's any concern you have at all about anything we're doing, please call me directly and I'll take care of it, whatever it might be." I've gotten new business because of that.

Jud: Tom, tell me how you handle cell phones on the job site.

Tom: We have no rules for cell phones on the job site other than the necessity of doing the job. Our guys all carry PDAs. The carpenters don't, though we don't have a lot of carpenters. For our project managers, it's their link to the world. Our values — you don't answer the phone when you're at a

meeting with a client. You shut it off.

Jud: Steve? How do you handle the cell

Jud: Steve? How do you handle the cell phones?

Steve: If the client's not around, I feel comfortable with my crew having cell phones. We have a gentlemen's agreement on a handshake that they may need to receive personal calls during the day. All my crews are married and have children, so once in a while they need to communicate to their families for one reason or another. I think that's fine. It keeps them in touch with

phones!" We've talked about the etiquette and about items in the etiquette and things we want our employees to do. Where does this go with the subcontractors? How do they fit into this? Tom?

Tom: That's a good point. I think this ties in, too; it kind of cuts both ways. You're sitting there talking, and they'll get a call from their boss. On more than one occasion, I've felt like telling someone to throw their phone away. We don't necessarily have a rule for that. I'm not as big into rules as I

"I introduce myself to the neighbors. I ring the bell, say 'Hi, folks!' and hand them my business card. 'My name's Steve. I own this remodeling business.'"

> their families. In the old days, we had pagers and then had to go somewhere to get a phone. Before the pagers, it was, "Excuse me Mr. Homeowner, can I use your phone? I've got to call home." And sometimes that was an embarrassment and inconvenience. We're not abusing the phone system. However, like Tom was alluding to, if you're in a client meeting, I leave my cell phone in my car; it's not even on my person at that point. I don't want anything buzzing, vibrating, toning to let them know I've got incoming business. I want to give the client my undivided attention at that moment because we have a scheduled meeting. My crews will do the same thing. My work crews - regular guys, take their cell phones with them to the job, but they usually set them aside on a work table and don't carry them on their person. We've banged them, nicked them, covered them with joint compound; they've been painted over, been dropped in wet concrete. It's safer if we keep them on a work table. They check them periodically as they come by to get tools and materials. Jud: It's an interesting scenario, because

> Jud: It's an interesting scenario, because it certainly is the new modern technology. I taught a class yesterday and my comment to them was, "We still built houses and remodeled before we had cell

am into personal recognizance.

Jud: Tom, with all of the things that you have, for instance, you don't want them to smoke on the job site. How do you relay that to your trade contractors?

Tom: We have meetings with them on a regular basis. That's done verbally and then in a letter. We'll have a meeting with the owner of the company to discuss it.

Jud: Steve, how about you?

Steve: We do a similar thing like Tom. I visit my subcontractor's office from time to time. I make sure that he is clued in on our etiquette and what our expectations are with our clients. I have to have them buy into our rules for it to work. For example, the plumbing firm I use has eight plumbers on staff, which is convenient for me. If we have any kind of emergency, we call them and we can get a plumber out the same day. That's the kind of rapport we have with them. We had a situation where they sent a plumber out and the guy was a twopack-a-day smoker. We're in a bathroom doing a \$30,000 remodeling job - to give you some idea of the details of what we're doing here - that's a good size bathroom for us. Every 10 minutes the man's outside with a cigarette. I called the plumbing contractor and said he's a nice guy, doing good PLUMBING.

LIGHTING.

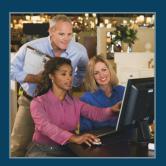
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Remodelers' Exchange best practices

work, but we're losing time here! We have what we call a "new homebuilder plumber." He can smoke on the job site because it's a new home. But don't send him back to my projects because we're in someone's home and I'm paying this man to smoke cigarettes every 10 minutes. He understood that, and I haven't seen that man on my jobs since then. That's what you've got to do, step up and say it doesn't fit what we're doing with our work process. So, our heating and air conditioning sub, our electricians, roofer, all of them, understand that. It's an education process and constantly reminding them of our process and what our clients are like, their personalities, so we can make sure we get a good match for the expectations of the project.

Another important thing with job site etiquette is when the subcontractors are there, and there are days when we have a sub on our job and our field people - our employees - are not there actually representing us. That client that is ours would go to that subcontractor - let's say it's an electrician - and say, "Oh, I see you're hooking up for the addition, that's great! By the way, we have some lighting in the basement that needs attention. Can you look at that?" My subcontractors know that, when they're on my job, that is my client. I've done the marketing, I've earned that right to own that client. They, in turn, will say to the client, "Yes, we'll be happy to look at that situation. We need to get Steve involved, because this is his project." People will do that some-times to test the integrity of your staff. My employees have been asked to do a side job on the weekend. They know, "You've got to go through Steve. This is Steve's job, and he'll price it up for you, and we can do this extra thing, but it's going to go through Steve. Please call him."

Jud: Tom, how do you handle that?

Tom: Well, if I jump to the end of that, I'd say that I would go right to the client and let them know that under no circumstances should they solicit people within the company to do work. It's basically a lack of integrity. I wouldn't say that to them, but that's what I would be thinking. I would

have set that up in the beginning of the meeting, that we're working for clients who have similar values and are looking for a company like ours for a specific reason. It's a one stop shop and they shouldn't be going behind anyone's back. I think when people do that, they know when they're doing that. We respect the people we work with. We respect the people we work for. And, they respect us or we don't work for them.

Jud: Tom, do you have a written subcontractor agreement with all of your subs?

Tom: We absolutely do. Although we have a written agreement, we don't enforce it with punishment; we use love, for lack of a better term. We have a three-strike rule where they'll learn quick that if they screw up three times, that particular guy, like Steve said, can't come to the job. On the other hand, when we find a guy we really like, we reward his good behavior with praise and small rewards to build incentive. Now, when those guys come into a job, they ask to work for us, they want to work for us. They realize that we expect more, but there's a reward for that.

Jud: Steve, do you have a written agreement with your subcontractors?

Steve: I do not, to give you an honest answer. As I said before, I'm visiting with these people in their office or I'm seeing them on a regular basis, that is the proprietor or owner of that subcontracting business. We've had relationships for years now. We understand what the expectations are. Nothing's perfect; there are some concerns and issues that come up, constantly reminding plumbers and electricians that they need to clean up their stuff. We have trash cans or dumpsters on site. They are responsible for their work site debris. We charge them in that process so they do that. My electrician once teased me a couple years ago. He said I was the only contractor that asked them to clean up. But that's our process, that's what we do and the homeowners expect it. PR

>> For the rest of the discussion on this topic and more Best Practices, visit www.ProRemodeler.com/bestpractices



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THE DESIGN PROCESS

The steps you take are crucial to your budget

EVERY REMODELER TAKES a different approach to managing the design process. So is it really all that surprising when two similar jobs in two similar markets handled by two different remodelers end up with drastically different profits?

Catering to the same type of customer doesn't guarantee ending up with the same type of business success. But the problem isn't how these jobs ended. Rather, it's how they began. I believe that profitability in any good remodeling project begins with managing the design process. And nobody — client or remodeler — is going to reach a happy ending without a happy beginning.

Welcome to the "Organization"

In truth, maximizing profitability and owning the design process begins when the customer walks in the door.

First impressions should leave lasting impressions. Your organization (or lack, thereof) at your place of business translates into the organization someone can expect if he lets you into his home. The cleanliness of your showroom (if you have one), the dress code of your team, and the time you take to meet with that potential client set the stage to set the budget.

This first meeting can weed out those customers who aren't serious about paying for good design the way you are serious about running a smart business. And if you design your operation to look professional, the design process should be priced accordingly. It's a low-pressure or no-pressure approach that positions the remodeler as the expert in this relationship. And experts get to lead the process.

Time Is Money

You remodel for a living but your client has to live through it. Education is key. Explaining how your business handles a remodeling project start to finish sets expectations and eliminates unnecessary surprises. How you present each step also helps your business get top dollar and your client get top design.

Once you've established those parameters, you've developed a rapport with the client. Together, you will get a feel for whether or not you have similar objectives for the job and the budget it will take to reach them.

Then it's time to get every bit of what you're worth. And that means charging a design retainer up front. This fee communicates that you are 100 percent committed to your client and your client is 100 percent committed to your process.

It automatically positions

the drawings and visuals for the space. You define a realistic timeline for the makeover. And you put your masterpiece before your client to reach agreements on all of these important ingredients in an overall big puzzle.

Your design process is the window through which you and your client begin to discover the possibilities of the end product. It also serves as insurance that each

party is getting exactly what it wants out of the process: strong profits for your business and reputable work for your client. This collaboration answers questions up front rather than costly change orders down the line. Then from demolition day to final reveal, the picture comes to life.



Doug Dwyer Contributing Editor

"You don't want to be the firm that throws out the lowest number. You want to be the firm that commands a certain price."

your business above competitors that waste countless hours giving out free estimates and crossing their fingers. You don't want to be the firm that throws out the lowest number. You want to be the firm that commands a certain price. And with a design retainer, you can do real work for a real client instead of guesswork for somebody on the fence.

Fulfilling Dreams

Money in hand, you now can justify the time and the team it takes to create the vision for this project. You find the best materials to meet the budget. You create How your firm manages this process also shapes the ultimate vehicle for referrals. Because rather than people talking about how they got your services for a steal, you want customers to drive more business your way for the same quality work at a very deserving price. **PR**

Doug Dwyer is president and chief stewarding officer of DreamMaker Bath & Kitchen by Worldwide, one of the nation's largest remodeling franchises. He can be reached at doug.dwyer@dwyergroup.com.

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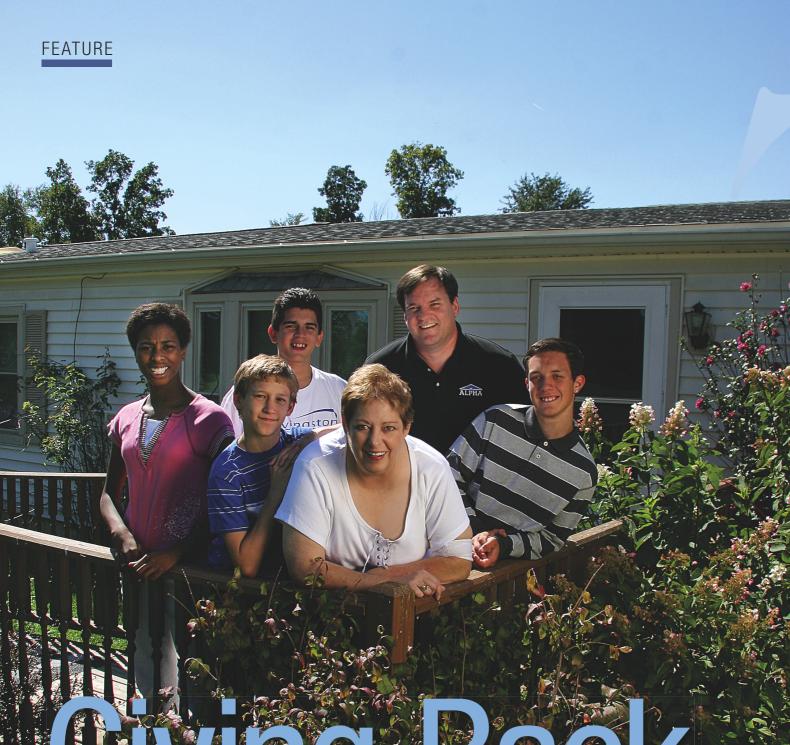
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Giving Back

THESE REMODELERS GO ABOVE AND BEYOND IN SUPPORTING THEIR COMMUNITIES AND EMPLOYEES By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

THE REMODELING INDUSTRY IS OFTEN PORTRAYED as a bunch of criminals preying on unsuspecting homeowners. While the industry certainly has its share of miscreants, the truth is a lot of remodelers spend a good portion of their time giving back to the industry and community.

Whether it's association leadership, volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, sending employees to New Orleans in the wake of Katrina or supporting myriad local programs, remodelers are involved in all types of charitable causes. Although being a good corporate citizen is rewarding, it also raises your profile in the community and can only help from a business standpoint, too.

Here are just a few remodelers that are going the extra mile. Add your input to the discussion at www.ProRemodeler.com.

ANSWERING A NEED

Allan Lutes, president of Alpha Remodeling in Ann Arbor, Mich., has been involved in community organizations for years, including church groups, the Salvation Army and more.

But he still felt he wanted to do more, which led him to create Labor of Love, a program designed to help the elderly, disabled and financially challenged in the Ann Arbor area take care of their homes.

"It was a way to fulfill a need I saw in our community that wasn't being addressed," he says. "We live in a fairly affluent community and these people are effectively invisible. Just because they're not standing out on a street corner with a tin cup doesn't mean there aren't needs."

The program consists of two parts; an annual Project Day each spring and emergency repair services throughout the year.

Labor of Love started out supported largely by the volunteer efforts of Lutes and his employees but has now been expanded to work with several local churches and other community organizations. The beneficiaries of the program are referred to it by the local social services agency.

On the annual Project Day, projects range from simple landscaping work and leaf raking to major projects, such as building handicap ramps and other remodeling projects. This year, 175 volunteers worked on 30 homes. This spring, Lutes is expecting more than 400 volunteers for the program he started only three years ago.

Beyond that, Lutes has created a database of skilled workers

Volunteers for the Labor of Love program, started by Allan Lutes (second from right), made this home wheelchair accessible and also made several other remodels and repairs for this family of nine adopted and foster children with special needs.

who can make emergency repairs during the rest of the year. When people volunteer for the program, they fill out a skills assessment form, and Lutes also reaches out to professionals through local trade associations.

"Say a roof leak comes in. We'll check the database and shoot an e-mail out to the 20 people on our list who have the skills to do that repair," he says. "Some of the contractors provide materials themselves. We're also able to get some donated, and we provide some."

Labor of Love only asks for one day a year from the volunteers for the emergency repair program to make sure they don't feel overwhelmed.

"We keep track of who is asked to do a repair and then we don't call them again for a year," Lutes says.

Although the program has now spread beyond the company, Alpha Remodeling and Lutes are still heavily involved. Up to \$10,000 a year is included in Alpha's budget to help pay for the database work and buy materials. Although he doesn't require his employees to participate, Lutes estimates that about 75 percent do.

Lutes spends about five hours a week working on Labor of Love, but that number goes up to 20 hours a week leading up to the Project Day. He recently hired someone to work 10 hours a week on coordinating the program to free up some of his time.

"That's a better use of my funds than taking me away from the business," he says.

To Lutes, volunteering is something that just makes good sense for any remodeling firm.

"There are only good reasons to do work like this," he says. "It's good for your company because of how you're perceived in the community; it's good for your employees because they can feel proud of what they do; and it's good for the recipients. It's win-win in every way.

"The more of this we do, the more successful our company becomes. I have to believe there's a correlation there."

PROMOTING OWNERSHIP

They say charity begins at home. That's what drives John McCloskey, president of J. Francis Co., to help his employees by assisting them in becoming property owners.

"I view my company as a partnership between me and my employees," he says. "As part of my responsibility for my end of that partnership, I want them to be successful."

That's why McCloskey has helped those employees of his Pittsburgh remodeling firm that couldn't otherwise buy homes

23



Dave and Margie Kulesza are two of the employees John McCloskey has helped buy a home. Promoting homeownership with his staff makes them better employees and encourages loyalty to the company, McCloskey says.

do so. Typically, these employees couldn't get a mortgage on their own, so McCloskey buys a fixer-upper, then sells it to the employee at no additional cost and holds the note. He sets up a mortgage payment schedule that matches the every-other-week pay periods for ease of budgeting and keeps the payments about the same as the rent the employee was previously paying.

"I really feel like if you spend all day fixing up people's homes, you shouldn't have to go home at night to a place you rent," he says. "This allows them to use their skills to improve their own homes."

He also allows the employees to use materials salvaged from other company projects.

"We'll redo a two-year-old kitchen with perfectly good cabinets, and this way we can find another use for them," he says. "They can rehab their homes with just sweat equity and most of the materials being provided."

Three employees have purchased homes this way, and McClosky helps employees who already own homes invest in

rental properties. He's also mentored several subcontractors and helped them get started. For 20 years, he has owned a separate business where he buys, restores and rents properties. He now owns 20 rental properties, worth about \$4 million.

"I've helped them become business owners by investing in rental properties," he says. "I'll walk them through the first deal and help them get going as investors."

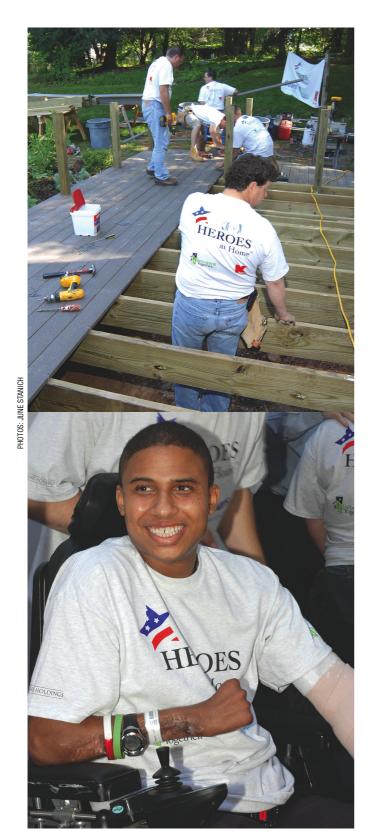
Several of those he's mentored have become quite successful at it. His business development manager has purchased five properties and now manages a \$1.5 million portfolio. One of his former carpentry subs has become so successful that he shut down his business to focus on managing his properties.

"Now I've got to find a new carpenter, but that's OK," McCloskey says. "I'm thrilled to see him building a really good financial situation for himself."

Helping his employees helps the business, McCloskey says. "It's a real win-win situation for me," he says. "I can help people that I feel the debt of gratitude to, and it creates a lot of



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More than 20 remodeling firms helped renovate the home of Army Specialist Ryan C. Major in preparation for his return from service in Iraq.

loyalty. People want to stick around because they're grateful that they've been able to do this kind of stuff."

HELPING RETURNING SOLDIERS

A group of remodelers in Montgomery County, Md., recently completed the first project under Rebuilding Together's new Heroes at Home program. Heroes at Home, sponsored by Sears Holding Management Corp., is a program that provides repairs or renovations to homes of soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For this project, the local chapter of NARI was heavily involved, with more than 20 members participating, says David Merrick, president of Merrick Design and Build in Kensington, Md. Merrick was the "house captain" and oversaw all aspects of the remodel.

The space being remodeled was a family room over a garage that needed to be converted into a bedroom for Army Specialist Ryan C. Major. Major was injured in November 2006 when an improvised explosive device detonated while he was on foot patrol with his unit in Ramadi, Iraq. Major had both legs amputated and suffered damage to both arms, internal injuries and a brain injury.

The room in his mother's home needed to be updated to allow wheelchair access. The remodelers added an elevator so Major could reach street level, then built an accessible bathroom and added on to the existing deck to provide access to the backyard. After all the repairs were done, the team discovered the air conditioning and heating system needed to be updated, so they retrofitted that, Merrick says.

Throughout the project, the remodelers were trying to finish it as quickly as possible so it would be ready whenever Major came home.

"He had a very tough time and was in rehab for eight months," Merrick says. "We never knew when he was going to be coming home, so we wanted to be ready."

Major moved in in August, about a month after the project was completed.

It's important that other remodelers volunteer for the program, because there are many more soldiers in need across the country, Merrick says.

"Most of these people wouldn't have survived in the past," he says. "Troops are coming home more severely injured than in earlier wars because we have the technology to save them, but that means they need our help here at home more than ever."

On their own, most military families can't afford necessary renovations, Merrick says.

"Take his case: he gets a \$50,000 one-time payment and \$2,500 a year in disability payments," he says. "We did probably \$130,000 worth of remodeling on this house."

For more information on Heroes at Home or other Rebuilding Together programs, visit www.rebuildingtogether.org. **PR**

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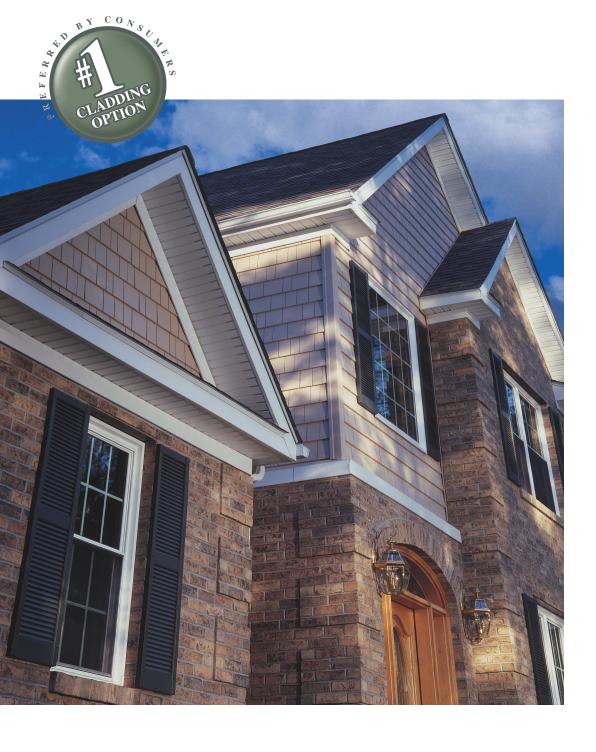


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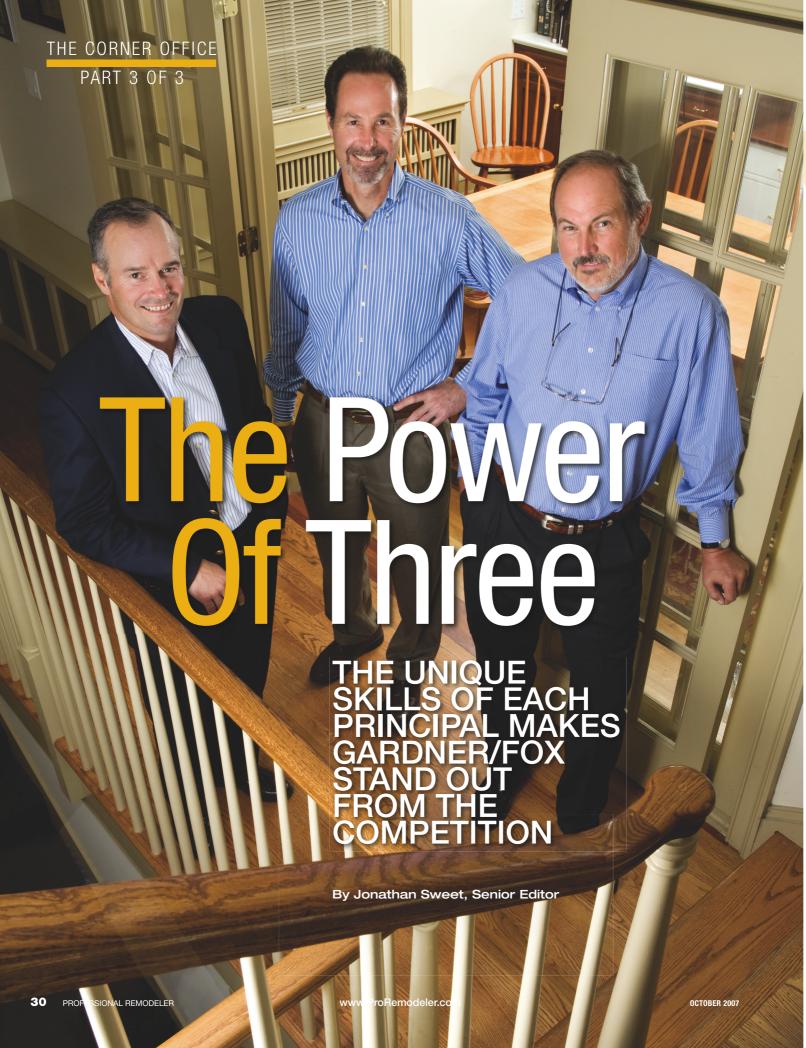






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"The Corner Office" is a look at the top executives at large remodeling firms. This is the third of three features profiling industry leaders and examining their unique business issues.

WHETHER IT'S FATE OR CHANCE, sometimes things just seem to work themselves out. For Gardner/Fox Associates, one of the largest design/build remodelers in the country, the fact that the company's three principals came together from different backgrounds has been the key to the company's success.

"The best thing that ever happened to us was partnering up," says Mark Fox, the Bryn Mawr, Pa., firm's vice president. "We got lucky falling into that."

Ask the three — president Brook Gardner, secretary/treasurer Mark Pennington and Fox — the biggest reason they've been able to grow annual volume above \$40 million and they'll point to their partnership.

"A one-man operation, you can only grow it to a certain level and that's that," Gardner says. "There are three of us sharing the decisions and headaches."

The three all met in the mid-1980s when their careers brought them to the Philadelphia area. Gardner, a civil structural engineer, had moved there to work for the Navy in the local shipyards. Fox, a Louisville, Ky., native, moved to the area after graduating from the University of Kentucky's architecture school and accepting a job with GBQC Architects, one's of Philadelphia's leading firms. Pennington came to Philadelphia to work for General Electric's financial management program after earning a degree in economics from the College of William & Mary in Virginia.

Gardner and Fox ended up buying decrepit shells of town homes down the street from each other in central Philadelphia with the intention of renovating them. They became friends and eventually coworkers when Fox joined Gardner at Historic Landmarks, a historic renovation company he had moved to in 1985.

It was just a short time later, in March 1987, that they left Historic Landmarks to start Gardner/Fox. Pennington, who was working with Gardner's wife at GE, helped with the finances on a part-time basis. For that first year's worth of effort, Pennington received a bike from Gardner and Fox. ("But it was a really nice bike," Fox is quick to point out.) Pennington came on-board full time in 1988, and the three are now the majority owners.

"Mark (Pennington) handled everything from a corporate standpoint," Fox says. "He was the glue that held everything

(Left to right) Brook Gardner, Mark Pennington and Mark Fox have succeeded by dividing management responsibilities based on each principal's interests.

together as we were getting started."

Pennington's addition allowed Gardner and Fox to focus on selling the jobs and ensuring quality work without having to manage the day-to-day operations of the company.

"The commonality you're going to see across successful companies is somebody to run the business side of things," Pennington says. "A remodeler who wants to succeed needs to take that step of adding a partner or at least a highly compensated individual to take care of those things."

AN EVOLVING STRUCTURE

Originally, Gardner and Fox envisioned becoming a construction management firm and leaving the labor to somebody else. After a few bad experiences with projects, they decided to take a hands-on approach.

"We had to get out there and put our tool belts on," Pennington says. "We also started making some of our own hires because we weren't happy with what we got from subcontractors."

By 1991, Gardner/Fox was established as a quality residential design/build firm in the Philadelphia area and the principals had left field work behind. That year the company landed its first commercial projects, remodeling a series of mental health clinics for a client whose home Gardner/Fox had previously renovated. Gardner wanted to work with commercial clients and Fox preferred homeowners, so they quickly decided that each would focus on the area he wanted to. The company was reorganized into two divisions with dedicated staff for each and a shared overhead structure, run by Pennington.

"The diversification is a strength," Gardner says. "Every year, one of us is doing fabulously. They mutually support each other."

The commercial side of the business has grown so much that this year it will account for about \$30 million of the company's expected \$45 million volume, even though it's only a little more than half of the jobs. The average residential job is about \$250,000, while the commercial projects usually fall between \$500,000 and \$2 million — which is small for commercial work.

"It's nothing compared to what the big guys do," Gardner says.
"We're not taking on gigantic, expensive projects. We're a big residential contractor, but we're small for a commercial contractor."

Gardner/Fox's high-end residential clientele often run their own businesses or are at least high-ranking executives, helping the company land high profile commercial work. Gardner estimates he gets about a dozen referrals a year from the residential side of the business.

"The residential work is what opened the door for commercial," Pennington says. "It gave us the recognition to get business."

Competing for large commercial work is very different than the residential arena. While price is very important, companies

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are coming at the project from a level playing field.

"Typically, there's an approved list of bidders and everybody's going to put a good number in on the job," Gardner says. "About half our work is straight low bid, but we're dealing with a knowledgeable consumer who understands the remodeling process."

The decision makers in commercial remodeling are usually people who have been through several remodels before, unlike a homeowner who may experience only one or two major projects in their lifetimes. The scale of the projects makes it nearly impossible for a small company to get into the process.

"In residential, you've got all the pick-up truck contractors, and that changes the way you do business," Gardner says.

On the residential side, Gardner/Fox doesn't even try to compete on price, because there will always be someone with less overhead who can deliver a cheaper project. Instead, it's about selling service and quality.

While Gardner/Fox will sometimes work with outside architects on commercial projects, the company's in-house architects design all of the residential jobs. Clients have to sign a design agreement and pay a fee that varies based on the size of the project for the design services. If the clients hire Gardner/Fox, the fee is credited back to them during the construction phase.

"We also use that design process to weed out some people," Fox says. "There are some people we know we don't want to work with. If they're price conscious, we know we're probably not going to get the job."

With a design process that can take as long as six months, Gardner/Fox has plenty of time to show clients the benefits of working with the company.

"Our business model is for the designers to get them so addicted to the quality of our service that they'll stay with us," Fox says. "Half of the clients don't even go look for other bids. Of those that do, half are just checking our price and the rest are out looking for the price deal."

SMART GROWTH

While luck, fate or whatever may have brought Gardner, Fox and Pennington together, the company didn't get where it is without some smart planning.

"We were always aggressive; we always wanted to grow," Gardner says. "We just wanted it to be as manageable as possible."

Having experience outside the construction field was crucial to their success.

"None of us were contractors," Gardner says. "We came from corporate environments, so we're really interested in the next 10 years, not just the next week."

That meant implementing systems and three-, five- and 10year business plans that look at where they want the company

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gardner/Fox Associates, Bryn Mawr, Pa.

Principals: Brook Gardner, president; Mark Fox, vice president; Mark Pennington, secretary/treasurer

2006 projects: 644

2006 volume: \$36,418,357

Projected 2007 volume: \$45 million

Employees: 106 Founded: 1987

Biggest challenge: Preparing the company to live

beyond the three principals **Web site:** www.gardnerfox.com

to be down the road. This has also given the company value as they face their biggest challenge: a future without the principals.

"That's a very personal challenge. We don't want this to dryup and die if Brook and I quit," Fox says. "We're looking at how we can bring in new partners, because our systems and technology give us value to an outside investor."

At the same time, they want to make sure Gardner/Fox continues to provide the quality work for which it is known.

"You have to produce a good service," Pennington says. "There's got to be that foundation."

That's why Fox has changed his focus on the residential side. Until recently, he was concentrating on meeting clients and supervising the design stage. Now, he is putting his efforts into managing the construction.

"The hardest part of this business is construction, and that's where all the money is," he says.

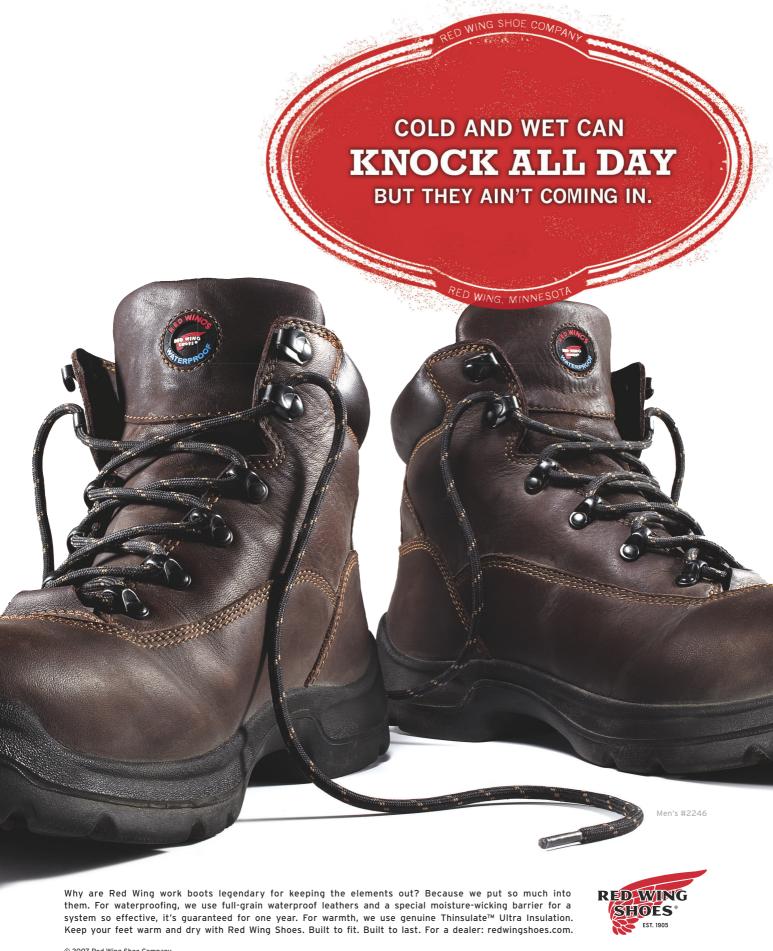
Fox now spends his time attending weekly project management meetings, job kickoff meetings with the client and a lot of the punchlist meetings at the end of the job. Those visits make a big impression on clients and have the most impact on the bottom line, Fox says.

"I used to meet all the clients at the beginning, but it was a brief superficial thing — probably a negative, actually, because it was such a short amount of time," he says. "Now I meet them later on in the project, and it has the potential to really make a difference."

He's also spending more time examining job costs and issues like how much work is done in-house and how much is subcontracted to make sure the company is spending its money wisely.

"Nothing I do now is the stuff that feels productive, honestly," Fox says. "Now it's all overhead, but it's important for me to do that if we're going to continue to be successful." **PR**

>> For more on how the principals divide responsibilities, visit www.ProRemodeler.com.



Upgrade Below Grade

STRUCTURAL RETROFITS AND HIGH-END FINISHES COMPLETE A LUXURY BASEMENT REMODEL

By Wendy A. Jordan
Senior Contributing Editor

THE BERK HOME REMODEL WOULD HAVE RAISED red flags for some contractors. Crane Builders saw flags waving but, to David Crane and his team, those flags looked decidedly green.

Crane knew this would be no routine project. Jim and Amy
Berk wanted to transform their 1,200 square-foot walkout basement — unfinished except for a small, never-used den — into a
high-tech theater room and a luxurious entertainment space.
The remodel would mean relocating plumbing and HVAC equipment, removing obtrusive load-bearing columns and a central
beam, and replacing those supports with a massive steel I-beam.



That alone would be tough enough, but the change in structural support had to be accomplished without disturbing the 5,000-square-foot, three-story house above the basement. And the Berks had a rule: No more than four consecutive hours of down time for any utility.

Crane saw the project as a major challenge, but one he was confident taking on.



A row of load-bearing columns cut through the center of the original walkout basement, which was unfinished except for a dull den the Berks never used. Crane replaced the columns with an I-beam and in-wall posts, then built out the open space with a high-tech media room and a game/entertainment room. State-of-the-art audiovisual equipment hides behind a smooth sweep of custom touch-latch, African mahogany cabinetry in the media room. Crane layered drywall and soundboard for maximal soundproofing.

PRODUCTS LIST

Cooktop, wall hood: Wolf Dishwasher: Fisher & Paykel HVAC: Trane Lighting: Titan Ovens, warming drawer, trash compactor: GE Paint: Benjamin Moore Plumbing fixtures: Kohler Refrigerator, freezer drawers: Sub-Zero Security system: Security Pro Whole house water filter: Aqua-Pure Windows: Pella

35



The focal point of the entertainment room is a curved bar with granite top, African mahogany veneer and a stainless steel foot rail that has no visible supports. Built-in mahogany display cases match the bar. The waterproof slate floor is well suited for the room, which opens to the pool deck.

Jim Berk himself represented a potential challenge, too. Both he and Amy were pleasant, trusting and supportive. But Jim is meticulous and an avid Internet researcher. Would he be unreasonably demanding? Crane didn't think so. In initial meetings to discuss the homeowners' plans, he saw that Berk expected top quality workmanship and wanted to incorporate the best new designs and products in his project. Again, what might have been a red flag for another contractor was a green flag for Crane. He shared Berk's standards and was amenable to trying worthy new methods. "I love people to say, 'Here's what I want you to do

and here's how I want the final product to look," Crane says.

Crane's eagerness to please impressed the Berks. "It was obvious that he wanted us to be happy with what was done," says Amy. Crane's can-do attitude plus his work style — "He's open, not rigid; has pride in his work; and is very professional," says Amy — made it easy for the Berks to choose Crane over the three or four other contractors in contention for their project.

BASEMENT OPERATION

Architect Mark Harrison of Adkisson/Harrison & Associates in Nashville designed an open, inviting basement space, hiring an engineer to devise a system to move the structural supports out of the way. Lead carpenter Randy Roberts figured out how to execute the plan. "The engineer said, 'I wouldn't dare give you a means and methods clause,'" says Roberts with a laugh.

"Randy came to me with his plan on how to extract the spine of this house and replace it," says Production Manager John Petrucelli, who was on site daily to monitor the sensitive operation. Installing rented support posts, Crane's subcontractors built temporary supporting walls on both sides of the columns that were to come out, and then removed the columns. They cut the slab, poured new large footings, embedded three four-inch columns inside walls, and removed the parallam beam. After cutting and blocking the I-joists to make space for the 42-foot steel beam, they lifted it into place on jacks. Finally they removed the temporary walls and posts. Throughout the three-week process and afterward, the upper floors never moved.

THE FINANCIALS

ike a lot of Nashville
contractors, Crane Builders
uses cost-plus contracts. "It's
the most honest way to deal
with clients that we've come up with,"
says David Crane. "The homeowners
pay for what they get, nothing more
and nothing less. We get paid for what
we do, nothing more and nothing less."

How it works: The firm starts out with a specific budget, broken down by categories, Crane said. The budget includes allowances for anything that hasn't been selected before work begins. Each itemized bill for clients ties back to that budget. Crane's contracts authorize him to bill twice a month, but

Initial estimate	\$484,876
Change orders: (mainly upgrades, including	\$146,358 \$25.686 for
cabinets, \$21,824 for windows, \$8,012	
for appliances, \$7,940 for counter tops, \$41,900 for new air conditioning system)	
Cost plus overage	\$5,159
Final price of job:	\$636,393
Cost to produce:	\$497,182
Gross profit:	\$139,211
Budgeted gross profit:	22 %

Budget History

Actual gross profit:

he almost always bills monthly. "I generate the bill around the 10th to the 15th of the month, after the bills from my larger subs are in, and ask the clients to pay within seven days," he says. "We

22 %

can charge interest after seven days and stop work after the seventh day," but Crane has never had to do either.

To gain a firm commitment from clients and to help cover initial expenses, Crane takes a \$10,000 deposit up front. The Berks, like other Crane clients, received a \$2,000 credit with each of the first three invoices, and the final \$4,000 credit with the final invoice. Crane delayed the Berks' last invoice somewhat to make sure he had received bills from all vendors and subcontractors. The last bill came to \$35,942. To ease collection, "We attempt to make the final bill as small as it can be," Crane says.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Basement: 2003	Stage of Project
Payment: June 18	
June 19	Start demolition
July 1	Replace beam
Payment: July 21	
July 30	Begin framing
Payment: August 15	
August 21	Rough-in inspections
September 2	Begin drywall
September 17	Begin cabinet installation
Payment: September 19	
October 14	Begin interior trim and painting
Payment: October 23	
Payment: November 21	
December 8	Install countertops
December 17	Final inspections
Payment: December 19	
Upstairs: 2004	Stage of Project
Payment: January 23	
March 12	Start demolition
Payment: March 14	
April 1	Begin framing
April 19	Install stair rails
April 28	Rough-in inspections
Payment: April 28	
May 17	Begin drywall
May 29	Begin cabinet installation
June 24	Begin painting
July 26	Install countertops
August 27	Final job site cleanup
September 6	Final inspections
Payment: September 8	

Some ducts had to be rerouted out of the path of the beam. To limit down time, the workers ran temporary ducts, coming back after the beam was in place to finalize the system. Water lines also had to be moved. The plumber installed new lines, disconnecting existing lines after the family's morning showers each day and reattaching them before four hours had passed. When all the new lines were in place, he quickly cut the old lines and activated the new system.

All the old air conditioning units and water heaters were splayed across a large area. The Berks replaced them with new, high-efficiency equipment Roberts consolidated in out-of-theway corners, staging the process to avoid lengthy down time.

Having built sound studios for Nashville's music pros, Crane brought expertise to construction of the theater room. The remodeler placed soundboard above strategically layered half-inch and ¾-inch drywall for optimum soundproofing. Berk con-

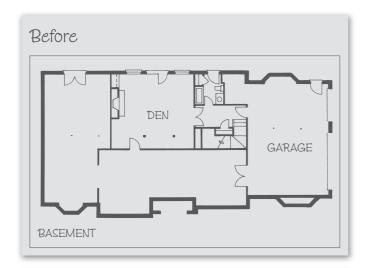


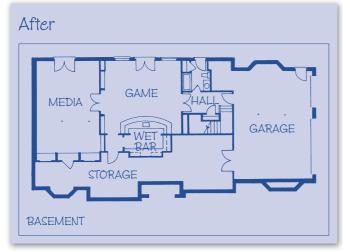
By replacing the straight steps at the bottom of the staircase with a gently curved run, and installing custom wrought iron and Brazilian cherry stair and balcony rails, Crane turned the entry from standard to standout. Continuous, cherry flooring adds contemporary character to the first floor spaces.



Crane removed a stem wall and island that separated cooking and eating areas, creating an open kitchen with new cabinets, lighting, and appliances. The long, granite-top island doubles as food prep surface and eating bar.

PROFESSIONAL REMODELER





tributed good ideas himself, including maintenance access to the audiovisual equipment via rear cabinet doors.

Nashville interior designer Landy Gardner recommended finish products and designed distinctive features, such as the cabinetry and details of the curved wet bar. Many of his creations, such as the seemingly unsupported stainless steel bar foot rail, were tricky to construct. Roberts took the challenge in stride. "He always said, 'Yes, we'll try to do it this way,'" recalls Amy. His solution here was to integrate custom-fabricated support brackets into the cabinetry.

During the six-month basement remodel, Roberts was on-site every morning to coordinate the subcontractors and touch base with Jim. Roberts and Petrucelli met with the Berks weekly to discuss job progress and solicit homeowner decisions. The amount of information to cover in these meetings was unusually large, says Petrucelli, because of Berk's meticulousness. "We'd have a list of

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Crane Builders

Owner: David and Cilla Crane

Location: Nashville, Tenn. **2006 volume:** \$2.48 million

Projected 2007 volume: \$3.8 million

Web site: www.cranebuilders.com

Project challenge: Replacing a row of steel columns in the basement with a long, steel I-beam and three columns buried in walls, causing no more than four consecutive hours of utility down time.

25 or 30 items to go over each week. But he asked informed questions, and we were happy to get the answers for him."

MOVING UPSTAIRS

Pleased with how the basement was taking shape, the Berks decided to spiff up the rest of the house and asked Crane to stay on to do the work.

To create a more open, contemporary kitchen, Crane removed a structural stem wall and island, installing structural steel braces and building a large new central island. The radius end of the island's granite top is cantilevered, supported by hidden angle brackets Roberts designed. Crane installed Brazilian cherry pre-finished flooring here and in most of the main floor, finishing the kitchen with new cabinets and lighting.

Flared stairs with custom wrought iron and Brazilian cherry rails add panache to the entry hall. Crane installed sleek cabinetry, a marble fireplace surround, a flat-screen television and a remote-control blackout shade in the master bedroom. The contractor remodeled the powder room and pantry; retiled the master bath floor; and updated much of the interior with fresh paint and new lighting. Crane's subcontractors installed insulated glass windows and doors across the rear of the house, replacing sun-damaged units that were losing their seal. Where they removed rotted frames, they had to replace areas of brick, and that called for tinting the new grout to match the old.

"I can't tell you how pleased we are" with the remodeled house, Amy says. "It's totally transformed. We love every room of the house." David Crane thinks it came out well too. He's sorry about just one thing: "Unfortunately, there's nothing else there for us to do." PR

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Efficient design, upscale materials and space to display art extend the homeowners' main living area to the basement

BASEMENT REMODEL

REMODELER AND ARCHITECT: Carnemark Systems & Design, Bethesda, Md.
PROJECT LOCATION: Potomac, Md.
AGE OF HOME: Approximately 20 years old
SCOPE OF WORK: Create a new living area for work, play and storage as well as an extensive art and music collection

By Ann Matesi Senior Contributing Editor

ALTHOUGH THEIR BASEMENT WAS

bright and spacious, the owners of this contemporary colonial house in Potomac, Md., had grown weary of its generic appearance and poor layout. Instead, they wanted a more exciting and efficiently planned lower level that would boost the home's recreational opportunities for the entire family.

Jonas Carnemark, head of the Bethesda, Md.-based design/build firm Carnemark Systems & Design, was able to give his clients everything they were looking for and then some, transforming the 1,347-square-foot below-grade space from ordinary to extraordinary during the six-month project. In addition to the original guest room, full bath and game area, their new basement includes an exhibition vestibule designed to showcase the husband's treasured collection of Australian art, a family computer center, spectacular home theater and even a 1,500-bottle, climate-controlled wine cellar.

The use of upscale materials such as maple cabinetry, bamboo flooring and custom concrete countertops gives the lower level's former run-of-the-mill appearance a modern, Scandinavian-inspired style that

Sleek maple cabinetry and concrete counters provide space for the art collection and lend a contemporary feel.

the homeowners plan to gradually integrate into their main living areas upstairs as well.

"This project was all about re-addressing the configuration of space in the basement to improve the flow and make better use of what was already there," says Carnemark, who is both a certified remodeler and a certified kitchen designer.

For example, the unfinished and mechanical areas in the basement were redesigned to better accommodate the homeowners' storage requirements, which included everything from pet food to luggage and even several harps. The result: although storage space has been reduced by nearly half, the remainder actually functions much more efficiently for the family.



PRODUCTS LIST

Cabinets: Beckerman **HVAC:** Lennox **Countertops:** custom concrete **Flooring:** bamboo

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The new staircase to the basement is wider and provides more headroom than its predecessor. Modern cable detailing accents the maple handrail. In the new computer center, remodeler Jonas Carnemark came up with a clever solution to concealing wall-mounted meters without restricting access to them: a moveable wall above the built-in desk. Bamboo flooring compliments the lower level's modern aesthetic.

Carnemark says the most challenging element of this project was the improvement of the transition between levels. "It was very important to the homeowners that we create a more sensible flow from the upper floor to the lower one so that it felt like they were moving from one finished space to the next. We accomplished this by re-working the stairs to give the entry to the basement a more gracious feel."

The wood door at the top of the staircase that provides access to the basement was replaced with a French-door style, glasspanel one. "This allows natural light to permeate the lower level even when the door is closed to prevent noise transmission between the two floors," he says.

Another big change was the conversion

of the basement's former play room into a sleek home theater with a full wall of cabinetry and display shelving that frames a niche for a 50-inch plasma television. Originally, a vertical support column bisected the opening between the game area and the future home theater. Carnemark removed the single, ill-positioned bearing point and replaced it with two columns that were then incorporated into new walls designed to define the transition between the rooms. "We used a temporary wall to provide structural support while we excavated and poured footings for the new posts," he says.

While it looks rounded, the cabinet wall in the new home theater is not. The perception of a radius wall is actually an optical illusion,

A Fresh Approach

o make the transition between the first floor and the basement more appealing, Carnemark Systems & Design stepped up the drama of the lower staircase by widening it and removing an upper bulkhead that restricted ceiling height. He also incorporated a mid-level "window" in the wall between the stairwell and the computer area that provides a view into that room from the top of the stairs.

Widening the lower section of staircase required care. The remodeler used a temporary wall to support the center-bearing sections of the house and removed the existing supporting tubular steel column in the stairwell. Next, an 18-inch section from the main bearing steel beam was cut using a torch. After digging and pouring a new footing, the team welded a new column in place under the end of the beam.

The ceiling height within the staircase was increased by cutting back the joists, which were perpendicular to the base of the stairs, and installing a second temporary wall, remodeler Jonas Carnemark says. Two microlam beams now run flush inside the ceiling to pick up the load of the shortened joists. One beam ran from a welded joist hanger on the steel beam to the opposite foundation wall. The cut joists were then joined to a second microlam that attached, mid-span, to the first and ran to a second new column and footing in the end of the stair wall partition.

"The end result," says Carnemark, "was a tall ceiling space all the way down the stairs that afforded good lines of sight and ample head room all the way past the last step.

the remodeler says. A curved plinth was constructed to serve as the base for the conventional square cabinet components that were stepped back along the perimeter of the elevated platform.

In addition to addressing flow of space, room function and storage requirements for this project, Carnemark says he kept in mind his client's strong desire to have a place to display artwork. The new lobby at the base of the staircase features built-in, library-style shelves with flat wall space above them. He also made sure the walls in

MEASURE UP





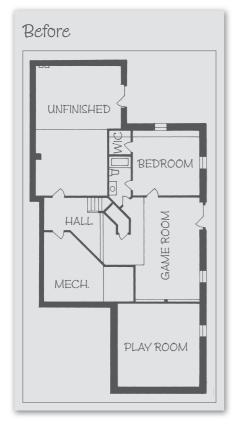
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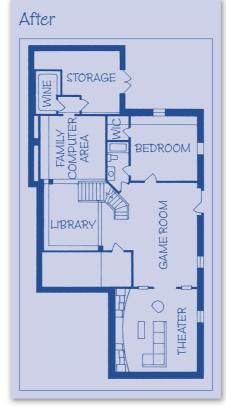
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INTERIOR







A custom-built pedestal in the new home theater gives the illusion that the media wall curves.

other sections of the basement would accommodate oversized paintings, including a 12- by 7-foot piece that hangs in the home theater.

The remodeler gave the ceiling on this level a more pleasing aesthetic by reorganizing the ductwork and pipes so they could be embedded inside coffers. To hide the wall-mounted utility meters in the basement's new computer center, a movable false wall was installed above the built-in work center. Mounted on a specially-designed cleat system, the upper wall can be shifted out of the way so the meters can be accessed when necessary.

Says Carnemark: "Rationalizing the way these necessary elements come together ultimately gives the entire space a much better and more finished look." **PR**

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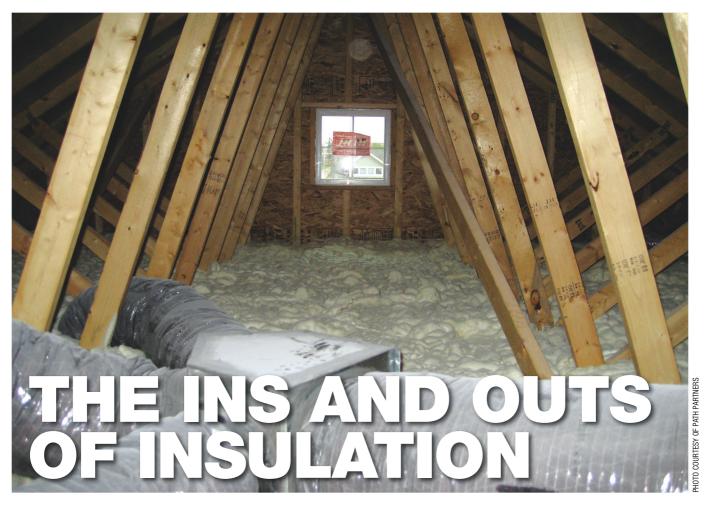
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An overview of how to choose the best insulation for the job

By Scott T. Shepherd PATH Partners

YOUR CLIENTS MAY NOT SEE insulation, but they sure feel it. In this age of energy efficiency, more customers are demanding better insulated homes.

Heating and cooling costs comprise more than 50 percent of the energy consumed in a single-family home. Adding the recommended levels of insulation will save energy, reduce utility costs and improve comfort.

But do you find yourself standing at the store staring at bags of pink cotton candy, blue patches of fur, and rigid pink, white and beige boards wondering which one is right for your project?

The Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing offers some simple guidance on choosing insulation, including some popular green alternatives.

To Insulate or Not to Insulate

That is the question remodelers should consider in practically every project.

When you remodel a kitchen or bathroom, it's easy to get wrapped up in the aesthetics. But if you are ripping out drywall, it's also an opportunity to add Bio-based spray foam insulation contains no harmful or irritating micro fibers or organic dust particulates. The continuous air barrier that it creates around the home not only insulates but also blocks harmful outside irritants, such as mold, pollen, and other allergens, from entering the home.

insulation, which not only improves energy efficiency but also reduces noise and increases fire resistance.

Before you can decide if you need to add insulation, you have to determine the

Form	Insulation Materials	Where Applicable	Installation Method(s)	Advantages
Blanket: batts and rolls	Fiberglass Mineral (rock or slag) Wool Plastic fibers Natural fibers	Unfinished walls, including foundation walls and floors and ceilings	Fitted between studs, joists and beams	Do-it-yourself; suited for standard stud and joist spacing, which is relatively free from obstructions
Foam board or rigid foam	Polystyrene Polyisocyanurate or Polyiso Polyurethane	Unfinished walls, including foundation walls; floors and ceilings; unvented low-slope roofs	Interior applications: must be covered with ½-inch gypsum board or other building-code approved material for fire safety. Exterior applications: must be covered with weatherproof facing	High insulating value for relatively little thickness; can block thermal short circuits when installed continuously over frames or joists.
Loose fill	Cellulose Fiberglass Mineral (rock or slag) Wool	Enclosed existing wall or open new wall cavities; unfinished attic floors; hard-to-reach places	Blown into place using special equipment; sometimes poured in	Good for adding insulation to existing finished areas, irregularly shaped areas and around obstructions
Sprayed foam and foamed-in-place	Cementitious Phenolic Polyisocyanurate Polyurethane	Enclosed existing wall or open new wall cavities; unfinished attic floors	Applied using small spray containers or in larger quantities as a pressure-sprayed (foamed-in-place) product	Good for adding insulation to existing finished areas, irregularly shaped areas and around obstructions

current level of insulation in the home and then compare that to recommended insulation levels. In many older homes, insulation levels are nonexistent, or woefully low and often poorly installed. Improper installation can completely negate the thermal resistance of the product.

Remember that thermal and air barriers must be continuous and in contact with each other. If there is a gap between the insulation and the back of the wall or ceiling drywall, the insulation is doing very little, if anything, to reduce heat loss.

The Thermal Bypass Inspection Checklist from Energy Star provides valuable guidance on all the steps needed to ensure proper installation at www.energystar.gov.

Start your inspection in the attic, then proceed to the walls and floors adjacent to unheated spaces. In older structures, structural frame elements such as the ceiling and floor joists are often exposed, allowing for easier examination. To check for wall insulation, look behind the electrical outlets, being sure to turn the power to the outlets off first. Remove the cover plate and shine a flashlight into the crack around the outlet box.

The Right R-Value for Your Project

If you find insulation, how do you know it's enough?

There is no "one-size-fits-all" recommendation. The appropriate amount depends on the climate; the type and efficiency of the heating and cooling systems; where in the home you are planning to add insulation; and how much cavity space is available to fill.

To assist you with this determination, the U.S. Department of Energy and Oak Ridge National Laboratory have developed ZIP-Code (www.ornl.gov/~roofs/Zip/ZipHome. html), which calculates insulation recommendations for your area. The program includes local weather and cost information and allows the user to add building data to improve the accuracy of the calculation.

But remember, if the insulation is poorly installed, the results mean nothing. Only proper installation ensures optimal performance. Follow manufacturer instructions to the letter, and visit the "Air Seal and Insulation" section of www.energystar. gov for more information on installation techniques.

The Right Insulation for the Job

Which insulation is best for your project?

First, familiarize yourself with the four types of insulation and their R-values before installation. Fiberglass batts and blankets have about 3.33 R-value per inch; loose fiberglass, rock wool, etc. about 3.09; blown cellulose about 3.75; open-cell foam about 4; and closed-cell foam 6 to 7 per inch. The R-value of rigid board varies with its thickness, ranging anywhere from 4 to 8 R per inch.

Batt and blanket insulation. This is the form that you're probably most familiar with. It's fairly easy to work with and is generally the least expensive. However, it doesn't air seal as well as other types and requires careful installation to insulate effectively.

Batt insulation usually consists of mineral fiber, either fiberglass or rock wool. It's used to insulate below floors, above ceilings and within walls and is best suited for standard stud and joist spacing that is relatively free of obstructions.

When installing, be sure that electrical wires; boxes for receptacle or light switches; plumbing pipes; and ducts do not compress

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R-value Per Inch of Thickness
2.9 to 3.8 (use 3.2 in calculations)
3.7 to 4.3 (use 3.8)
2.3 to 2.7 (use 2.5)
2.7 to 3.0 (use 2.8)
3.4 to 3.7 (use 3.5)
2.4 to 3.7 (use 2.7)
3.6 to 4 (use 3.8)
4.5 to 5 (use 4.8)
5.6 to 6.3 (use 5.8)
7
5.6 to 6.3 (use 5.9)

batts. Slice the batts so the insulation can be formed around these obstructions uncompressed. Cut the insulation so it fits neatly around electrical boxes. Stuff spare insulation between the back of electrical boxes and the wall sheathing.

During installation, staple flanges to the face of the wall studs that face the living space, not to the inside. Most insulators "side staple" to leave the studs uncovered. Face stapling also makes it impossible to glue the drywall to the studs or joist. Doing it right takes lots of coordination between the two trades.

Don't leave voids. Voids of as little as 5 percent can reduce the overall R-value of the wall or ceiling by up to 50 percent.

Loose-fill insulation. Loose fibers of rock wool, fiberglass or cellulose can be blown

into building cavities or attics using special equipment. Generally, it costs more than batts, but, especially in the case of cellulose, it reduces air leakage in wall cavities if blown in at sufficient density and has better sound reduction qualities. Also, it is well-suited for areas that are hard to reach or have notable obstructions.

Cellulose fiber, made from recycled newspapers, is chemically treated for fire and insect resistance. It can be installed in walls, floors or attics using a dry-pack process or a moist-spray technique. If you're doing it yourself, be sure that the bags are clearly labeled to indicate federal specifications for fire resistance.

When blowing into open wall cavities that are not covered by wallboard, use a Blow-in Blanket System (BIBS) to keep the insulation in place.

Rigid board insulation. Made from fiberglass, polystyrene and polyurethane, rigid insulation is used for reroofing work on flat roofs, on basement walls, as perimeter insulation at concrete slab edges and in cathedral ceilings. Interior applications must be covered with ½-inch gypsum board or other building-code approved material for fire safety. When rigid foam board is used to insulate the interior of masonry walls, it does not require extra vapor retarder treatment. Exterior applications must be covered with weatherproof facing. Check local codes to determine other requirements.

Spray foam. Spray foam insulation is a two-part liquid containing a polymer, such as polyurethane or modified urethane, and a foaming agent. The liquid is sprayed through a nozzle into wall, ceiling and floor cavities. It expands into a solid cellular plastic with millions of tiny air-filled cells that fill every nook and cranny.

Spray foam insulation should only be applied by professionals, and materials and installation cost more than traditional batt insulation. However, spray foam acts as both insulation and an air barrier; it eliminates the usual air-tightness detailing steps, such as caulking; applying housewrap and vapor barriers; and taping joints. This can make spray foam cost-competitive with batt insulation. Spray foam in small containers may be appropriate when replacing windows or for other jobs. For windows and doors, use products that remain soft and don't bow the frames.

For a more detailed description of these insulation types, visit PATH's Technology Inventory at www.toolbase.org.

Scott T. Shepherd writes about better building practices on behalf of the Partnership for Advancing Technology in Housing (PATH). PATH is administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Learn more at www.pathnet.org

Insulation's Green Side

ny insulation can be viewed as green because it improves the home's energy efficiency. But in determining insulation's green characteristics, there are several issues you may want to consider, including resources used in production, manufacturing processes, durability, recyclability and impact on indoor air quality.

Several green resources, including GreenBuilding.com and TreeHugger.com, evaluate these characteristics. Manufacturers often provide data on these topics as well.

These Web sites are also good resources for information on new green insulation alternatives, including insulation made from soybeans, cotton, recycled paper, used denim and even hemp. Note the PATH Concept Home in Omaha used a soy-based foam insulation for the above-ground walls. Learn more at www.pathnet.org/concepthome.

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For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-127



COPPER MOON WOODWORKS

Constructed of solid African Mahogany or Spanish Cedar with wrought iron, copper and pewter hardware, shutters from Cooper Moon Woodworks now include the Avalon and Peapack. The company's design themes range from conservative textures to avant-garde. The company also has the ability to apply their shutters graphically on a digital image of the home for the remodeler to see.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-126



CHIEF

Side and center channel speaker adapters from Chief include the new PACLR1 Left/Right Speaker adapter and PACCC1 Center Channel Speaker adapter. Both are designed for easy integration into flat-panel wall installations and both ship pre-assembled and include cable management clips. The adapters fit flat-panel TVs up to 50 inches.

NEW PRODUCTS



STONE FOREST

Taking its design cues from the Orient, Stone Forest's renewable-source Moso Bamboo Sink is fashioned for minimalist-themed bathrooms. The rectangular sink is crafted only from the hard outer core of the bamboo and is finished with a wood sealer and a wax coating to ensure no VOCs or harsh toxins will off-gas.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-129



PROTECTO WRAP

The BT25XL Building Tape from Protecto Wrap is a tough-faced, self-adhering air/vapor barrier and water-proofing membrane for above-grade substrates. The BT25XL seals window perimeters to building substrates to create an impenetrable barrier. It is also suitable for other applications, including sealing joints in stucco insulation systems and wallboard joints in roof assemblies. For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-131



KOLBE

New features found on the Classic and Ultra Series Garden-Aire doors from Kolbe include a redesigned interlock with a stationary, exterior meeting stile cover of extruded aluminum. On the interior, a wood meeting stile filler runs the entire length of the active panel edge from top to bottom and conceals the interlocks.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-130



HANSGROHE

Going forward with the minimalist trend, the Focus line of single-hole faucets by Hansgrohe has a smaller handle style and a solid brass construction. Aerators equipped with Hansgrohe's quick-cleaning Rubit ensure longevity. The series also features the company's Raindance S 100 AIR shower products.

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HOME AUTOMATION



EATON

According to third-party research conducted by Parks Associates, structured wiring was included in about 50 percent of all new homes in 2006. Eaton's Structured Wiring Solutions wing answers the call with the Multi-Room Audio Solution, which handles four audio source inputs and up to eight zone outputs. The system runs on standard Cat-5 wiring.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-133



HAI

The OmniTouch 5.7 from HAI allows homeowners to control lights and small appliances; security and temperature settings; pool and spa temperatures; ventilation; decorative lighting; Whole Home Audio Systems; surveillance video; and other items linked to an HAI Home Control system. In addition, it features a larger 5.7-inch LCD display using TFT technology for rich colors and better viewing angles.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-134



AUTON

Allowing users to control their PCs through a flat-panel TV screen, the Multi-Function Controller from Auton can also receive RF, infrared, RS232 and low-voltage remote signals all in one unit. Previous models required separate units for each type of signal. The company also provides a line of automated lifts for heavy flat panel TVs.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-135

ELECTROGRAPH SYSTEMS/AVOCENT

As part of a cooperative effort with the Avocent Corp. Electrograph System's Emerge MPX 1000 is the first wireless high-definition media extender that provides both wired and wireless capabilities in one package. The IN76 projector also fits in the home theater, is fully HD-capable and supports gaming consoles.





HD COMMUNICATIONS CORP.

Creating one point for wireless access is the HD24613 from HD Communications Corp. The port runs on a standard Cat-5 Ethernet cable for power and data. It installs in a single-gang box, and the company offers a low-voltage install ring as an option. The HD24613 has an RJ-45 connector on the front of the unit so users will not lose their wired connection while obtaining a wireless connection.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-138



JBL

The JBL Cinema Sound CS480 compact 5.1-channel home theater loudspeaker system combines a distinctive high-gloss appearance with natural high-resolution sound. The system has four wall-mountable satellite speakers, a wall-mountable center channel and a powered subwoofer, as well as swivel and fixed wall-mount brackets and cables.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-137



LIFEWARE

Four new packages from Lifeware allow builders to offer complete digital entertainment and home automation upgrades. Options include essential, deluxe and premium levels of equipment and sophistication. The company also offers its Lifeware 2.0 Windows Vista-capable interface that manages the home's subsystems through Vista Media Center.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-139



VANTAGE/LEGRAND

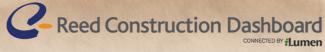
Designed with full system integration in mind, the Vantage Controls' Axium 450 series multi-room amplifier is designed to work with keypad controllers or the company's InFusion automation system. The amplifier provides four zones of independent control with seven stereo sources at 50 watts RMS per channel.

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Exterior Products

INSULATION/STRUCTURAL



TEMPLE-INLAND

The QuietBrace line from Temple-Inland offers sound-deadening sheathing in 4-foot widths and 8-, 9- and 10-foot lengths. The longer lengths increase installation efficiency by reducing piecing and fitting on 9- and 10-foot walls. Two thicknesses are available — $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{25}{32}$ -inch — and it can be installed with nails or staples.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-141



AINSWORTH

The 0.8E Durastand OSL 11/4" Rimboard from Ainsworth is engineered for flexible loads for short-span beams and headers and can be used in place of LVL or LSL over window and door openings up to 9 feet. It also provides a diaphragm attachment for sheathing and support and closures for joists and rafters. It meets ICC-ES building code standards and can also be used as part of an engineered floor system.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-143



GUARDIAN

New technology from Guardian is the Fatt Batt fiberglass insulation product. Designed to meet stricter energy codes and higher R-value recommendations by the Department of Energy, the Fatt Batt can provide an Rvalue of R-49 with its 15-inch-thick construction. It is available faced and un-faced.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-142



WEYERHAEUSER

Structurwood floor panels, made by Weyerhaeuser and a new part of the company's iLevel brand, are available in two performance levels: Edge and Gold. The floor panels are made to consistent specifications and thickness and use a wood-resin combination for durability and resistance to edge swell.

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Exterior Products

INSULATION/STRUCTURAL

KNAUF

Perimeter Plus Fiber Glass Blowing Insulation from Knauf is an un-bonded, virgin fibrous glass blowing insulation for use in new and existing structures as a blow-in blanket system for closed cavity applications in which ventilation is not required. It resists heat flow with an R-value of R-15 in 2 by 4 applications or R-23 in 2 by 6 structures.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-145





ACCELERATED BUILDING TECHNOLOGIES

Integrating light-gauge steel and EPS, the 3E Wall System consolidates the wall framing, sheathing, insulation and housewrap into one building component. According to the manufacturer, Accelerated Building Technologies, the system is 100 percent recyclable, and the walls will remain straight without shrinking and bending. The system is also a LEED point contributor.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-146



MITEK

The Posi-Strut metal web floor truss system developed by Mitek reportedly provides clear span flexibility and building design freedom. The company touts the open web configuration as cost-effective, labor reducing, easy-to-use and suitable for any conventional framing application, as well as ideal for floor joists and roof rafters.

For FREE information, visit http://pr.ims.ca/5350-147

UNIVERSAL FOREST PRODUCTS

Open Joist from Universal Forest Products is a new open web, all-wood floor truss product that allows mechanical systems such as plumbing, electrical and HVAC to be installed within the floor frame. It has top and bottom flanges of 2 by 3 and 2 by 4 for wider fastening and nailing surfaces. The joists do not require accessory pieces such as web stiffeners, squash blocks or web fillers.





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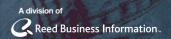
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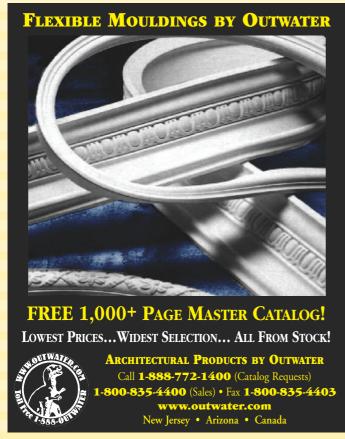
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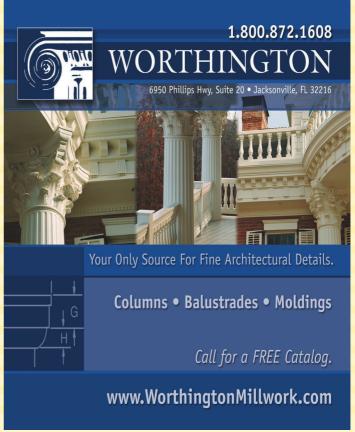
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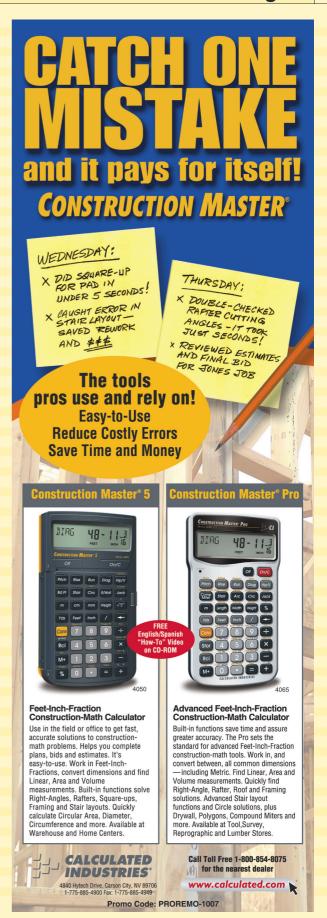


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Product and Literature Digest

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Weyerhaeuser

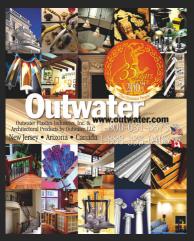
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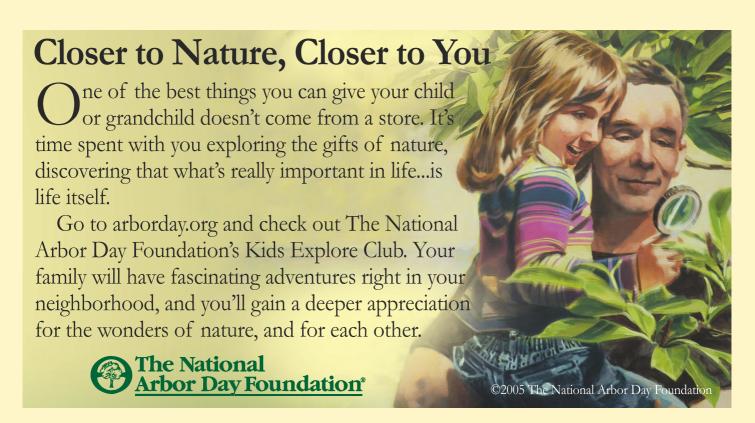
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CONTACT INFO:

Tony Mancini 610/205-1180, Fax 610/205-1183 armancini@reedbusiness.com

Associate Publisher

Jeff Elliott 616/846-4633, Fax 616/846-4802 jelliott@reedbusiness.com

E-media Solutions Manager

Shannon Darmody

630/288-7963, Fax 630/288-8145 shannon.darmody@reedbusiness.com

Regional Manager Northeast

CT, DC, DE, ME, MD, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT, VA, WV

630/288-8189, Fax 630/288-8145 john.huff@reedbusiness.com

Regional Manager Southeast

AL, FL, GA, MS, NC, SC, TN

Craig Coale 630/288-8161, Fax 630/288-8145 ccoale@reedbusiness.com

Regional Manager Great Lakes IN, KY, MI, OH, Eastern Canada

Jeff Elliott 616/846-4633, Fax 616/846-4802 jelliott@reedbusiness.com

Regional Manager Southwest

AZ, AR, Southern California, CO, HI, LA, NM, OK, TX

Jessica Elliott

651/290-7694, Fax 303/265-2064 jessica.elliott@reedbusiness.com

Regional Manager Midwest IA, IL, KS, MN, MO, NE, WI

630/288-8168, Fax 630/288-8145 tim.gillerlain@reedbusiness.com

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Emily Clay 503/675-3861

emily.clay@reedbusiness.com

Inside Sales

Shelley Perez

630/288-8022, Fax 630/288-8145 shelley.perez@reedbusiness.com

Director of Custom Solutions

KT McNamara 563/332-9231, Fax 630/288-8145 ktmcnamara@reedbusiness.com

Director of Events

Judy Brociek 630/288-8184, Fax 630/288-8145 jbrociek@reedbusiness.com

Administrative Support

Rebecca Breskman Administrative Assistant

610/205-1179

rebecca.breskman@reedbusiness.com

Cheryl Gatewood

Administrative Assistant 630/288-8183

cheryl.gatewood@reedbusiness.com

Advertising Production Manager Christopher Melody, 630/288-8423

Advertising Contracts

Stephanie West, 630/288-8419

stephanie.west@reedbusiness.com **Director of Electronic Media**

Karthi Gandhi, 630/288-8145

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Editorial & Publishing Office Professional Remodeler

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the Board Room

JOIN AN ASSOCIATION

oining a professional local and national association can be the start of great things for your company. With all the valuable contacts, classes, forms and staff available to members, you instantly have an edge over the other remodelers and builders who are not members.

The designation courses offered through the NAHB University of Housing are not only prepared well, they are taught by individuals who are industry experts. Their hands-on approach helps you in your everyday business dealings.

Once you have earned your designations, display them on all your stationery, business cards, company vehicles and agreements, and your Web site. Tell your customers, clients and friends about your certifi-cations.

Whenever you are asked to state your name at a meeting, always state any designations you have earned. Be proud of all your hard work. Be proud of your involvement in your association. All this will make

you a better remodeler and business person.

Another important benefit of belonging to an association is the variety of people who are always available to assist you. If you have a legal or contractual question, call NAHB. If you need help with codes, lead paint problems, or employment issues, call your national association.

You will have this same benefit at the local association level. There are always remodelers, builders and associates who are eager to share their wealth of knowledge with fellow members. By taking advantage of their expertise, my company has been able to dive into the Green movement with more knowledge than non-members or non-designees.

At our local association, we also have contracts, warranties and "Know Your Rights — Lead Paint — Right of Recision" forms. These forms were not available when I started my business 25 years ago. There are also many professional certifications offered. I know this because I have taken many classes myself and take great pride in being

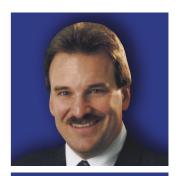
known as a CGR, CAPS, GMB and the NAHB 2006 GMB of the Year.

Attend national meetings. The NAHB has four major national meetings a year. The Spring Board of Directors legislation meeting is always held in Washington, D.C. This is an open meeting. If you have never attended, ask an attendee to be your chaperone. This is when Lobby Day at Capitol Hill takes place. We do make a difference.

After the Remodeling Show is the Fall Board of Directors meeting which takes place in a different city each year and includes several council meetings as well as the general session board meeting, and all are open meetings.

The last meeting is the International Builders' Show, the world's largest construction trade show, which also alternates cities every few years. Don't miss it! It has great seminars and great classes, and every product manufactured for the building industry is on display.

Join an association today and work hard to gain your designations. **PR**



Scott Sevon Advisory Board Columnist Born: June 17, 1955 **Company: Sevvonco Builders and** Remodelers Location: Palatine, III. **Best Advice I've Received: From** my father: Keep your mouth shut and your ears open! If I Weren't a Remodeler...: I'd be a professional hockey player who golfs on days off. I Drive A: Denali **Favorite Drink: A great red wine Favorite Family Activity: Travel**ing with my kids to their away tournaments **Most Embarrassing Moment:** When I was a child I went with dad to a job and watched him use a hand saw. So one day I went in the backyard and cut the section off above the top rail

of our heighbor's fence. See, I

remodeled at an early age.

Childhood Idol: My dad and

Bobby Hull

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