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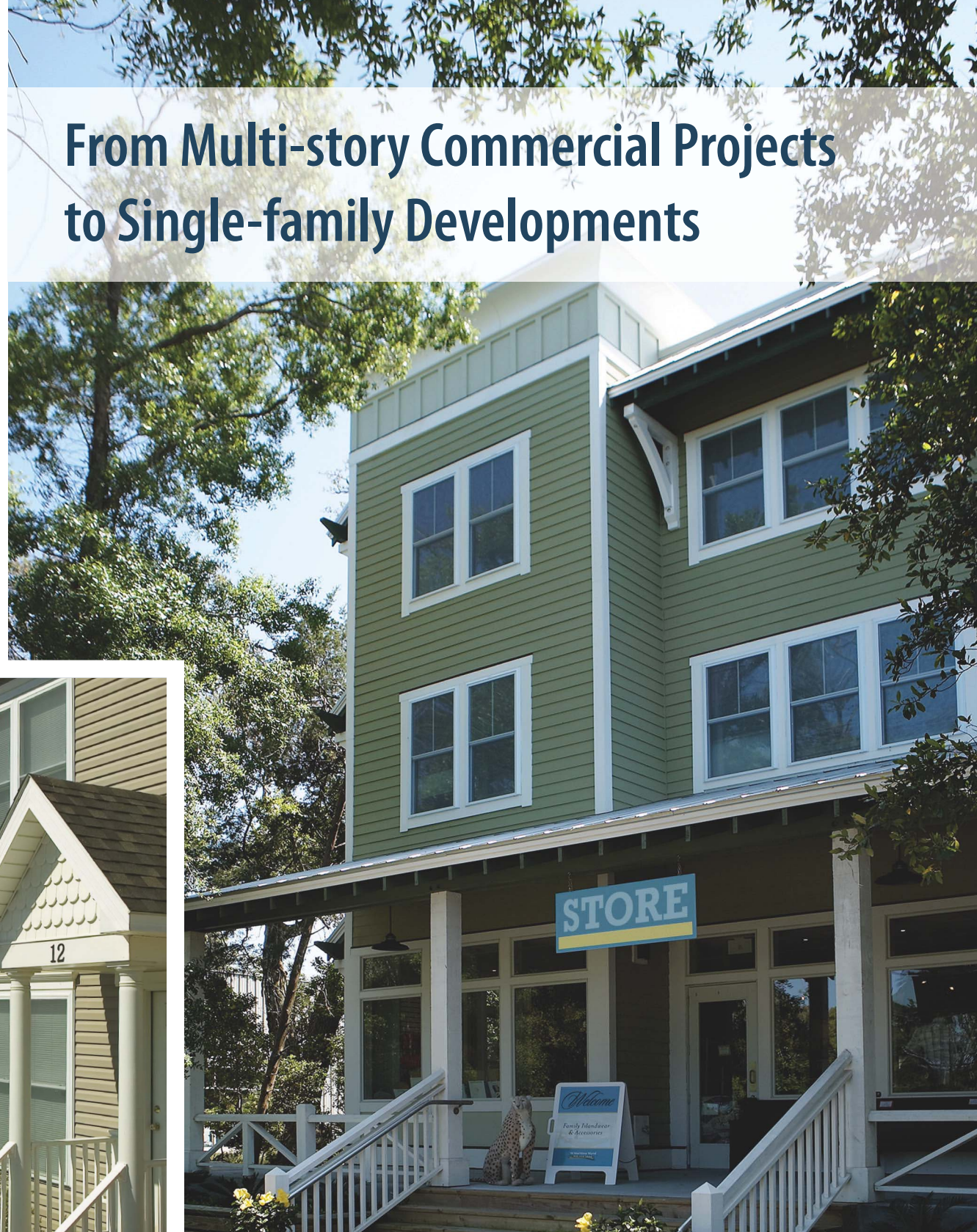
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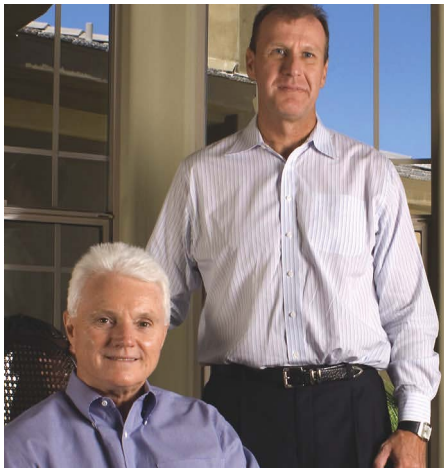


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october

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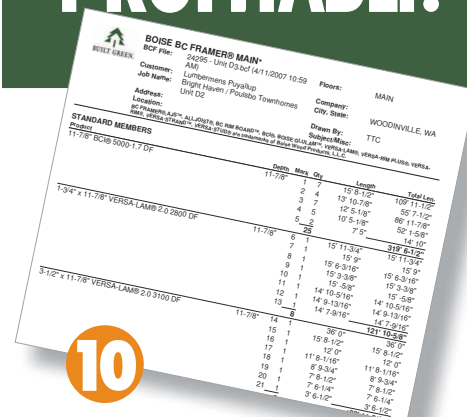
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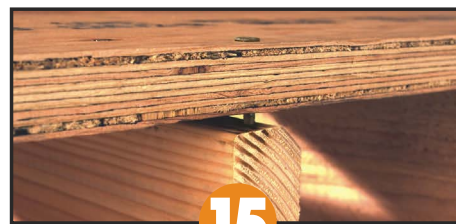
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True to the Core

Core values and a shared mission are essential for builders to excel and, in turn, be profitable.

At the heart of every business is a set of values that decide the company's direction. The values are the philosophy that underlies all decisions and allows owners, managers and employees to make choices with clarity.

But if a company does not articulate and communicate those values, then everyone infers what they think the values are, and they might be wrong. Consider a company with no mission statement. It might repeatedly send the message that employees need to control costs and that salespeople need to increase revenue. If that message is not leavened with any other principal, such as customer service or a focus on excellence, the result might be employees who believe the company core value is to make money.

In this issue, we recognize T.W. Lewis of Tempe, Ariz., for earning a National Housing Quality Gold Award. The most significant reason the team garnered this recognition is that the company had the strength to hold true to its core values both during the run-up in the industry and the downturn. That strength of character came from a leadership team that was focused on their values and mission statement, and they communicated the focus throughout the organization. Nobody at T.W. Lewis doubts that the company "cares more about quality than quantity," is "guided by specific values," and is "customer friendly."

T.W. Lewis employees know the mission is to "become the best home building organization in America, as measured by product quality, customer satisfaction and profitability." That is as clear an articulation of the vision for a home building company as I have ever seen, and it comes directly from the founder, Tom Lewis. This is his vision, and he makes sure everyone at the company understands it. That's leadership.

Because of those decisions and the leadership team's discipline in following its core values, the company resisted the inclination to increase production during the run-up. They refused to sacrifice quality for quantity. T.W. Lewis is fulfilling its mission and, perhaps

most importantly, it is profitable even during this downturn.

Thanks to its profitability, it can continue employing great people, serve its customers and provide a strong economic backbone to its community.

Maybe it seems ironic that a company with such clarity and discipline is doing a better job of making money than some Wall Street companies that focus solely on making money. But it isn't ironic.

All American businesses can learn a lesson from T.W. Lewis and reassert the central values of excellence, sustainable growth, customer loyalty and profitability.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Deffenbaugh".

Paul Deffenbaugh, *Editorial Director*
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That's a lot of names, huh? These companies are a mere sampling of past gold winners of the National

Housing Quality Awards, who, along with the many silver award winners and those who received honorable mentions, achieve home building excellence.

We feature this year's recipients on page 16. And once again, we're impressed.

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Blogging for business [page 13]

Web sites help builders reach homeowners [page 15]

2009 NHQ winners [page 16]



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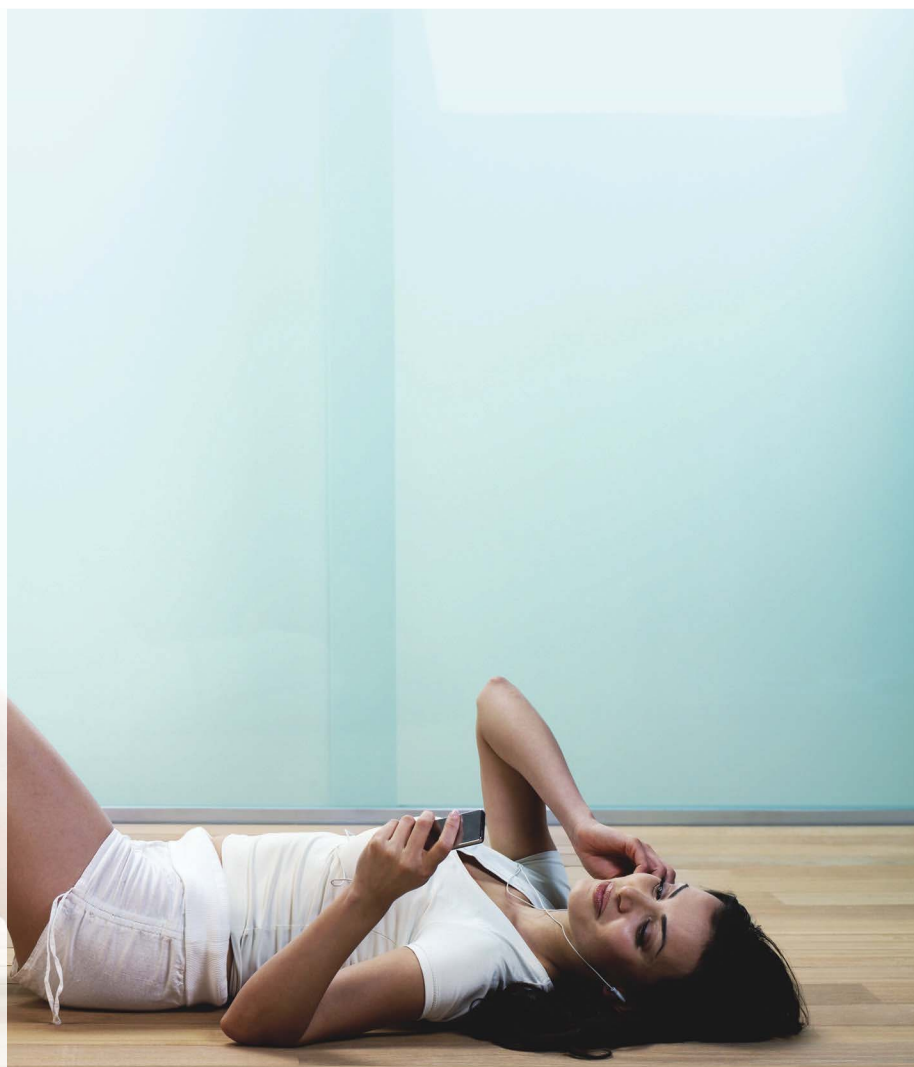
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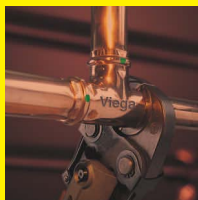
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[CUSTOMER SATISFACTION]

Blogging for Business



For home builders, blogging can create strong communities and boost customer delight.

By Paul Cardis, CEO, Avid Ratings

Increasingly, businesses have been blogging as a way to stay connected with both existing and prospective customers. So it's no surprise that some home builders have embraced blogging as a way to bolster their relationship with home buyers.

Monte Hewett Homes in Atlanta uses its blog (blogs.montehevetthomes.com) to highlight company news, showcase the builder's expertise, offer homeowner tips and draw prospective homebuyers to the main Web site. The blog became so popular that the builder had to move it in July to a server that could better handle the increased traffic.

money, making it possible to launch a blog with no Web programming skills.

Whereas blogging is an easy way to show home buyers the personal side of your corporate culture, it is also a useful way to:

- **Create a sense of community.** For example, Schiavi Home Builders in Oxford, Maine, has a blog (www.schiavihomes.com/blog) that covers a variety of topics. Recent posts address the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008, how to build a bat house, green building and creative ways to incorporate an office into owners' homes.

sonal maintenance needs, building schedules, social functions and community events, says Carol Flammer, president of Flammer Relations in Atlanta. Flammer also manages Top-BuilderBlogs.com, a blog designed to help builders develop blogs.

- **Strengthen your brand.** A blog can help you optimize search engine results, thereby driving more traffic to your site. There is potential to develop stronger relationships and brand loyalty with your customers as they interact.
- **Increase referral business.** If a happy customer doesn't have friends or family in the area to refer, their online testimonials might convince others.

If you can master the relatively new art of blogging, you could enjoy greater brand awareness, customer delight, home buyer loyalty and referrals.

Paul Cardis is CEO of Avid Ratings, a research and consulting firm specializing in customer satisfaction for the home building industry. You can reach him at paul.cardis@avidratings.com.

A blog is an ideal way to **communicate your building philosophy** and to attract home buyers with similar interests.

Short for Web log, a blog typically consists of journal entries in reverse chronological order, with many entries containing links to other Web sites. Most blogs allow readers to post comments, making them a great way to "dialogue" with readers. Blog services (such as TypePad.com, Blogger.com and WordPress.com) are available for free or little

- **Develop your value proposition.** Let's say you have a passion for green building, which is the unique value you offer home buyers. Use your blog to attract buyers with similar interests.
- **Keep customers informed.** A blog is an easy and efficient way to keep home buyers abreast of sea-

Cardis' Tips

BE TIMELY

Nothing kills a blog faster than outdated postings.

CALL ON THE PROS

A poorly run blog can cause more harm than good. Seek professional help as needed.

MODERATE IT

Encourage honest dialogue, but not at the risk of harming your mission.

BE INCLUSIVE

To target key market segments, consider launching a blog in another language.

Check out these links to get started on your own blog:

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[ONLINE COMMUNITIES]

New Ways to Connect Builders, Homeowners

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor, Design

Looking for a better way to establish an online community with your customers? The Web now has options catering to builders, including LifeAt, a virtual communication platform, or iAccess, a Web portal that allows builders to upload warranty documents and communicate directly with homeowners via customized Web sites.

The key difference: LifeAt allows residents

to talk to each other; iAccess doesn't. That's probably because LifeAt was originally designed for apartment and condominium buildings in big cities where residents were looking for ways to connect. But LifeAt CEO Matthew Goldstein believes his business model can be applied to any

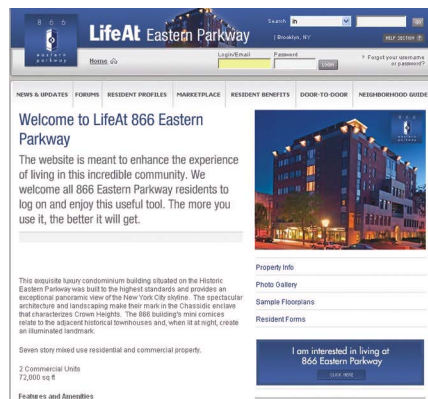
BUT WAIT — THERE'S MORE

DEVELOPERS, property owners and investors around the world can now make deals and raise capital through an online business social network, www.gpdlink.com. Global Property Database launched the GPDLink service, which is free. Members can also use the online deal-making exchange and connection systems of the sister site, www.gpddeal.com.

residential community (visit www.lifeat.com). "We've started to expand into the suburbs, and it's working as well there as it is in the high-rises," says Goldstein.

The iAccess portal was developed by Professional Community Management of California, one of the nation's largest managers of homeowner associations (www.pcminternet.com/iaccess). "The cost-effective way to communicate with homeowners is through iAccess," says Donny Disbro, PCM's vice president of new business and marketing.

THE LIFEAT WEB SITE (top) allows residents to communicate with their neighbors. Using iAccess (right), each community can set up an exclusive site that quickly delivers vital information to homeowners.



At a Glance

LifeAt	iAccess
Sites created for 460 properties in 12 states and three countries (60% condol/40% rental)	Sites created for 150 communities in Southern California (all for-sale housing)
Each site is custom-designed	Each site is custom-designed
Private and password-protected except for certain listings that target prospective residents	Private and password-protected except for some sections that target prospective buyers
Cost: \$1 per unit per month; first three months free (no sign-up fee)	Cost: \$100 per community per month for hosting and maintenance
Message board for resident-to-resident chats; they can also post personal profiles and photos of themselves	No homeowner-to-homeowner interaction
No video capability	Can stream video for property tours
Property managers can post announcements and updates about maintenance work and vacancies	Builders, developers and HOAs can upload warranty manuals and post announcements about maintenance work, board meetings, events, etc.
Primary benefits to residents: social networking; ratings and reviews of neighborhood businesses and services; free classified ad postings; ability to communicate with property manager about repairs	Primary benefits to residents: notification of meetings, events, maintenance work and community guidelines; documentation of maintenance and service requests



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Steady Gold



Photo: Martin Klimek/Getty Images

The 2009 National Housing Quality Award winners fought the market successfully through focused implementation of quality best practices. All of them did so by executing the mundane and keeping tight to their mission statements.

By Paul Deffenbaugh, Editorial Director

Some builders deride the National Housing Quality Awards concepts of mission statements and core values. They don't have much influence, they argue, in the daily management and execution of a home building company. But it is exactly these attributes combined with definitive leadership that allowed T.W. Lewis to be a solid survivor in the toughest home building market since the 1930s, while others fall to the wayside. In the process the company also earned the National Housing Quality Gold Award.

On a mission

It's no surprise that Tom Lewis, founder of the Tempe, Ariz.-based move-up builder, has led his company to this achievement. "The day we started the company [in 1991], our focus was to be the best home building company in America as measured by product quality, customer satisfaction and profitability." Lewis is quoting the company mission statement, and that is something the leadership team does regularly. The mission statement is top of mind and a driving, living force that directs them in their decisions.

"That was a big vision for a start-up company," he says, "but it spoke to the history I had in home building. Product quality was a differentiator. Customer Satisfaction? I'd spent way too much time talking to unhappy customers. Profitability? We virtually had no equity, so a strong company had to come through profitability. I also saw in that something that would inspire people." Lewis also likes the tension among these three goals. You can't sacrifice profitability with total devotion to over-the-top quality, for example.

Kevin Egan, who took the role of president and COO four years ago, echoes Lewis. When Egan arrived, he found a company with a great backbone. "The reason we've been successful is it starts with our mission and our vision," he says. "We're

NHQ JUDGES

David Caligaris
The Green Companies
Newton Centre, Mass.

Tom Gillespie
Rolling Meadows, Ill.

Dan Gorski
Veridian Homes
Madison, Wis.

Dan Green
The Green Companies
Newton Centre, Mass.

Frank Alexander
Actus Lend Lease
Nashville, Tenn.

Serge Ogranovitch
The Potomack Group
Locust Grove, Va.

Chip Pennington
Shea Homes
Walnut, Calif.

Dean Potter
K. Hovnanian Homes
Red Bank, N.J.

Bill Saint
Simonini Builders
Charlotte, N.C.

Kevin Estes
Estes Builders
Sequim, Wash.

Charlie Scott
Woodland, O'Brien &
Scott
Carmel, Ind.

Paul Cardis
Avid Ratings
Madison, Wis.

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Quality Awards
are sponsored by
Professional Builder
and the NAHB
Research Center.

Photo: David Holloway/Getty Images



TOP LEFT:

Sean Larsson, director of
quality for K. Hovnanian
– Northern California

CENTER:

Tom Lewis (left), owner
and CEO, T.W. Lewis, and
Kevin Egan, president
and COO

TOP RIGHT:

Gary Chandler (left),
Virginia division president,
and Paul Huff, Mid-Atlantic
Director of Quality, K.
Hovnanian Homes



Photo: Reed Rahn/Getty Images

disciplined in our processes and operations, setting goals and objectives and tracking Key Performance Indicators and communicating that information.”

In spite of that strength, Egan found room for improvement in processes. For example, he focused on customer satisfaction. “The biggest thing that has improved is how we serve our customer. We’re much better at serving customers with the right attitude and consistently between our departments. Our customers hear the same thing, get the same level of service and follow-through and teamwork.”

Pat Adler is vice president for purchasing, acquisitions and development. He provides the measurement that proves the increased focus on consistent communication with customers pays off. “We have a 33 percent referral rate,” he says. “People may not be our customers now, but in their minds they are our customers.”

How does T.W. Lewis deliver loyalty to their customers and their future customers? Adler explains. “One of our first rules is: ‘If it’s wrong, we’ll fix it. If it’s right, we’ll explain it. If it’s in the gray area, we’ll talk about it.’”

Continuing, he says, “We resolve all customer issues individually. There are different circumstances around different customers, so many builders fall in the trap that if they do it for one, they have to do it for all.”

That flexibility allows the team to deliver customized satisfaction, meeting the buyer’s needs. Combined with consistent communication, such a loyalty program delivers big bonuses.

Core values

A mission statement can provide a guiding light for a company, but it doesn’t ensure success. Many companies with specific and dynamic mission statements are sitting on the sidelines now because they lacked the core values to see them through the good times and the bad.

The lesson from T.W. Lewis is that those core values are probably more necessary in the good times than in the bad. The company defines its core values as honesty, hard work, integrity, achievement, reliability and compassion. Many com-

panies adopt similar values, but T.W. Lewis differentiates in a couple of ways. The most significant, says Lewis, “Is we care more about quality than quantity.”

During the upturn in the housing industry, all of those values and beliefs were tested by market pressures. “One of our most brilliant decisions,” says Adler, “was to pace sales. If everybody had done the



THE T.W. LEWIS LEADERSHIP TEAM kept true to its core values, and today the company is still running strong. (From left) Pat Adler, vice president purchasing, acquisitions, development; Gina Self, vice president and CFO; Tom Lewis, owner and CEO; Joe Gilian, vice president, sales; and Kevin Egan, president and COO.

COMPANY PROFILE

T.W. Lewis
Tempe, Ariz.
Founded in 1991
Serves move-up buyer in
Phoenix market

2007 closings: 271

2008 closing goal: 160

Tagline: “Homes for Particular People”

same, things would have been a lot better.”

Egan explains that in 2005, when the company closed about 300 homes per year, the pressure to sell more homes and, consequently, increase production was substantial. “We had a master-planned community called Valencia that opened in 2005,” he says. “We had four product lines and a trailer. We had a hundred people in almost every one of those communities wanting to buy houses. We couldn’t build that many and still maintain quality. It’s tempting when you’re raising prices \$10,000 per month and more and more people keep showing up. At the end of the day, we still have to operate. We still have to execute.”

That discipline to hold to their core values had a significant impact. The last land acquisition the company made was in 2004. “It’s one of the smartest things we’ve done,” says Egan. “And has made the most significant impact financially and given us the ability to withstand this downturn.” Land prices skyrocketed, and Adler continued to evaluate deals, but they never made sense in the equation the company had. Since they didn’t exceed their capacity during the run up, Egan explains, “We had a pretty good stockpile of land and lots. We tried to pace ourselves through our land inventory.” Egan credits Lewis for that vision — that leadership.

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Generac | Generator
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Icynene | Insulation
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ThyssenKrupp Access | Elevators
TimberTech | Decking and Railings
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www.pbshowvillage.com

Foundation for all

Lewis also exhibited leadership outside the company and within the community. In 2001, he established the T.W. Lewis Foundation, which impressed all the NHQ judges. The company contributes 10 percent of its pre-tax profits, and today the foundation has close to a \$15 million endowment with a goal to reach \$20 million. “It throws off about a million dollars per year in funds to make charitable gifts,” Lewis says.

Among those gifts are a large contribution to the University of Kentucky, where Lewis received his undergraduate degree and an endowed chair at the University of North Carolina where he completed graduate work.

But what gets he and his wife excited is the local scholarship program. Every year, they select about 10 students

from the best and the brightest in the Phoenix area. Their goal is to give lower middle-class kids an opportunity at the highest level of education. With scholarships that run approximately \$5,000 per year, the program has helped about 70 kids make the leap to the best schools. “Our scholarships,” Lewis says, “helps them make the difference between an average school and a great school. We have 4 or 5 at Harvard. One at Brown. One at Penn. One at Stanford. One at Duke.”

The foundation will continue because of the discipline, leadership and focus Lewis and his management team exert over the day-to-day operations of T.W. Lewis. The result is an excellent company surviving the downturn, employee pride in their product and their place in the community, and a National Housing Quality Gold Award.

Raving Trades

K. Hovnanian's Virginia division has cultivated an enviable partnership with its subcontractors from which nearly all home builders could benefit.

By Felicia Oliver, Senior Editor

Builders strive for raving fans — customers who can't stop singing the praises of a home builder that has gone the extra mile to make their home purchasing experience phenomenal. But you don't hear a lot about home builders making raving fans of their trades, the folks they hire to build homes that make their clients swoon.

K. Hovnanian's Virginia Division's ability to produce “raving trades” played a huge role in its being selected as an National Housing Quality Award Silver Award winner this year.

“They have the most amazing trade partner relationships I've seen in all my years of judging the NHQ awards,” says judge Dan Green, vice president of Newton Centre, Mass.-based The Green Company, a former NHQ Silver Winner. “The support, closeness and dedication of the relationship is unprecedented in my view. It would be beneficial for other builders to replicate this.”

In it together to win

During the NHQ site visit, trade representatives for K. Hovnanian Virginia told judges such things as, “I'd be more inclined to help them than the majority of other builders I work for,” “We work together with K. Hovnanian so that the homeowner doesn't have to incur the cost of the replacements,” and “I have

KEEPING THE M.A.G.I.C. ALIVE

Like many home builders, the Virginia Division of K. Hovnanian has had to let staff go.

But the company had a bit of M.A.G.I.C. up its sleeve to help guard against low morale. Make a Great Impression on the Customer, or M.A.G.I.C. training, is a K. Hovnanian corporate initiative that the division takes seriously. It has made associates aware of how all communication with customers — internal and external — makes a difference.

“It made everybody stop and think about how their actions affect other associates and our customers,” says Chandler.

A result is an ongoing program to encourage and reward “M.A.G.I.C.” behavior. Any employee that observes it in a coworker can nominate him or her. Recognitions are made weekly, and winning employees receive four-hours paid leave; a free lunch or breakfast; or a special parking space for a month. There are also quarterly and yearly winners who earn a \$250 and \$500 gift certificate respectively.

“There's an e-mail almost every day that says, ‘Today we had Joe Smith who was nominated, and here's the reason why,’” says Huff. “Every other day you see this e-mail, and it really raises spirits and morale.”

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Built to Perform

given price concessions ... because of the partnering I feel with them.”

Gary Chandler, president of the Virginia Division, says the company recognizes the tangible benefits of partnering with trades and of looking for ways to help each other. They have open discussions about how their subs can run a more efficient operation and build more quality into their product and processes.

“They are a highly motivated group,” says Chandler. “Our fate is tied, obviously. They really get the fact that without them sharpening their pencil as much as they can, we’re not going to be able to sell houses, and that will limit the amount of business they have.”

To that end, the company encourages all of its key trade partners to become NHQ Certified.

“Working with trades who are [NHQ] certified allows us to talk the same language,” says Paul Huff, director of quality for the Mid-Atlantic region (Maryland and Virginia) of K. Hovnanian, in the division’s written application. “Our discussions with trades are different now. They are no longer, ‘Do you have a quality system?’ but ‘How can we better support your in-process inspections?’”

CULTIVATED LOYALTY: Gary Chandler (left), Paul Huff and K. Hovnanian Virginia’s management take care of their trades, and those subs are willing to go to the mat for them.



K. Hovnanian Virginia has it right when it comes to:

What really matters

“Even in the down time, even with less people, we really want to focus on getting back to the strategic plan and vision of the company, and that is to be the best. We are still going to focus on all our processes. We are still going to focus on our all procedures and policies. The goal isn’t to be the biggest company or the most profitable, but the best that we can be.” — Gary Chandler, president, K. Hovnanian Virginia Division.

Peer relationships

“There’s a pretty small network of other builders around here. We’ll get together with Centex, Beazer. We might want to go into a deal together. We might just want to get together for lunch and pry each other about the market. I sat down with one of the presidents from Centex and we talked about customer satisfaction.” — Gary Chandler, K. Hovnanian Virginia.

First-time quality

“Quality and satisfaction save money. You save a lot of money getting it right the first time. Make one trip [to the site], and you don’t have to go back.” — Michael Marlovitz, vice president of finance, K. Hovnanian Virginia.

Employee Satisfaction

A tough economy hasn't dampened K. Hovnanian – Northern California employees' spirit to satisfy customers and better themselves.

By Sara Zailskas, Assistant Managing Editor

You'd expect a company following a year of high attrition to miss the mark when it comes to employees' respect for human resources. Not the case with K. Hovnanian – Northern California. The division boasts what the judges called "superb HR processes and systems at all levels of the operation." That, coupled with strong marks in customer service, earned the Sacramento, Calif.-based K. Hovnanian division an Honorable Mention in the 2009 National Housing Quality Awards.

Layoffs have employee workloads increasing, and perks such as summer barbecues are nearly out of the question. But the randomly chosen employees judges spoke with still praised support employees received and a company culture that has endured.

Amid the cuts, employee training programs haven't suffered — an amazing feat. That's primarily because education takes place in so many ways: cross-training, online and in day-to-day life. Cross-training, where coworkers from different department swap jobs to get a better understanding of the business, isn't as common within the division during the current market, but that's where extensive online programs kick in. Employees complete tutorials in topics from construction to business. Walking around the office, you can see certificates of completion pinned up in employee cubicles.

The variety of training is part of the Leadership Development Program, and one employee said managers are "adamant" about it — which several workers credited with boosting loyalty. And the group the judges spoke with also noted senior leadership's relationship with employees. "Larry [Young, the division president] has kept in tune with people and managers," said one employee. Added another: "I get a sense of them knowing me personally."

The division sticks to its annual performance review schedules, and the feedback is comprehensive; it takes into account both an employee's self evaluation and manager remarks. And to help workers meet their career goals, which they identify throughout the year and specifically during evaluations, managers work in opportunities to train prepare them, with the goal being an eventual in-house promotion.

Judges also applauded the company's attention to customer satisfaction. Sean Larsson, director of quality, links that suc-

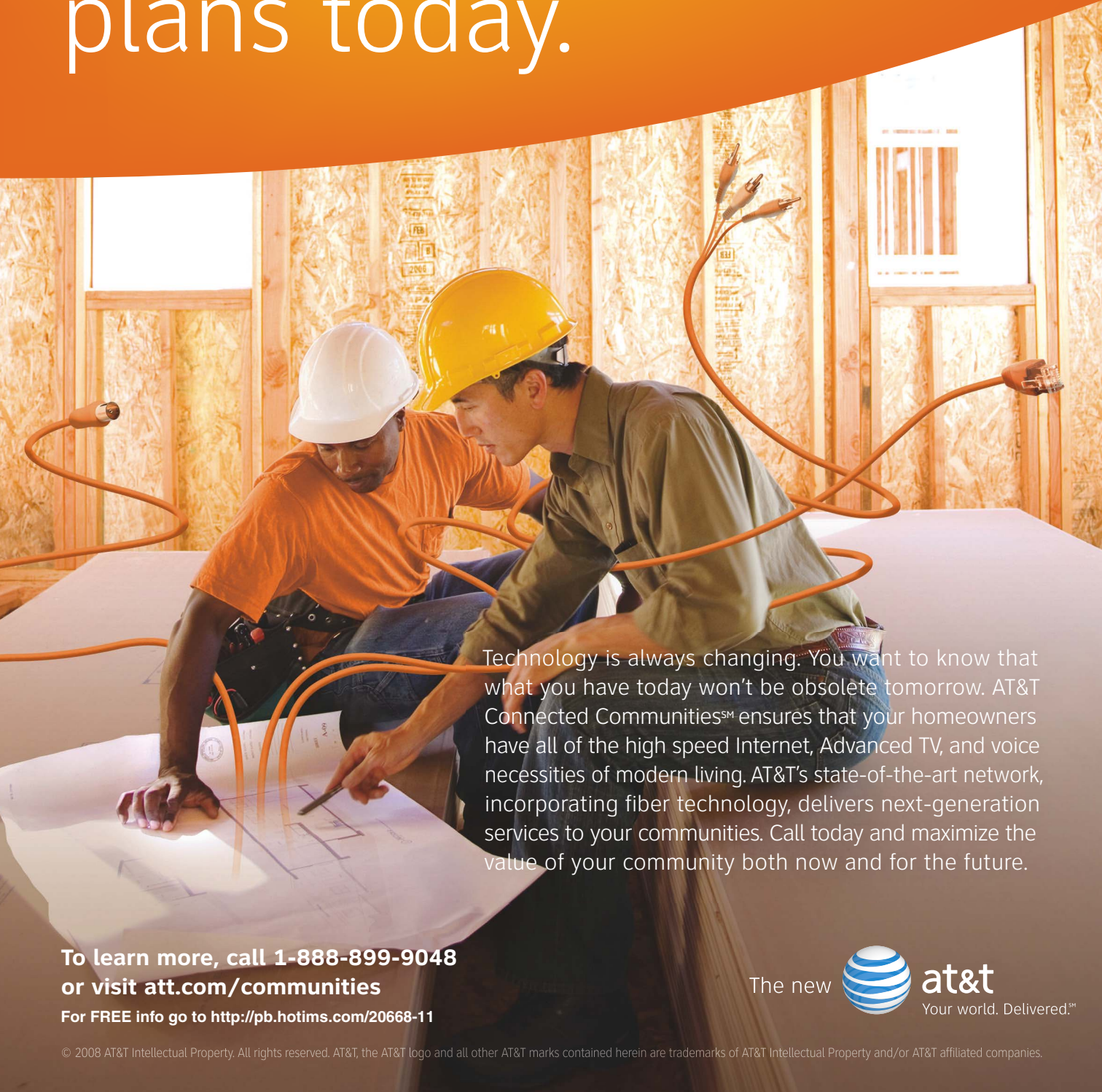


"OUR LEADERS recognize the link between associate satisfaction and engagement to successful business results," says Sean Larsson.

cess directly to workforce development and performance management, which, he says, "reinforce the skills and competencies needed to achieve customer satisfaction, quality and other business goals." The division also employs M.A.G.I.C. training ("Making A Great Impression on Customers"), and lives and breathes its 1-2-3 Program, which drives employees to respond to home buyer service requests in one day, schedule an appointment within two days and complete the service request within three weeks.

Processes such as these abound and are reflected in employee conversations; you can't talk to an employee about his or her job without hearing about that person's drive for customer satisfaction. "Employees feel responsible for the customer satisfaction," the judges' report noted, "and are an integral part of making the customer satisfied." **PB**

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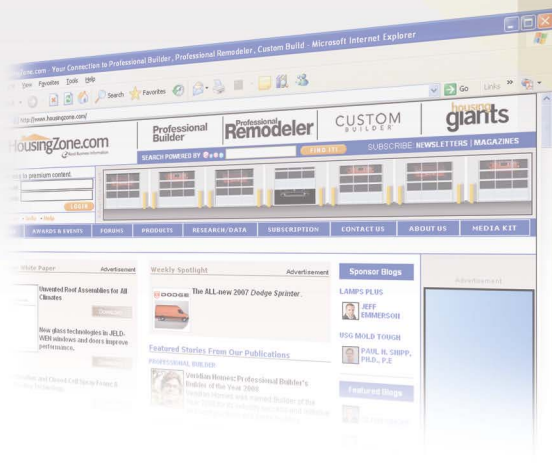
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Photo: Newland Life

INSIDE

Do you know your homes' fair price?
[page 29]

Weak follow-ups wreak havoc
[page 31]

Sales secrets from the all-stars
[page 32]

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[SALES & MARKETING]

The Road to Fair-Share Pricing



Not knowing the market price of your home is costing you. Knowing enough about your competitors can help.

By John Rymer, New Home Knowledge

One of the consequences of the current housing market is the lack of transparency in new home pricing and sales absorptions. The problem is not with macro-market statistics such as those in the S&P/Case-Shiller Home Price Indices or the local housing monthly permits data, but rather with inaccurate sales information on your prime competitors — those projects you compete against for buyers and sales.

With low internal sales activity and poor or incorrect information on competitors, many home builders don't really know the current market

the market.

There are a bunch of reasons for difficulty in gaining accurate competitor information in today's environment. Deep discounts not shown on the price sheet make advertised prices meaningless. High turnover among sales agents makes accurate exchanges of information between sales agents unreliable. And the embarrassment about the lack of sales makes builders unwilling to share information, or they might provide exaggerated results. Meanwhile, having accurate information on your competitors is more important today than ever before.

With low internal sales activity and poor or incorrect information on competitors, many home builders don't really know the current market price of their homes.

price of their homes. When I ask about the market price, I often hear, "It's tough; nothing's moving," or the even more generic, "Everyone's just giving homes away." The result is pricing strategies that often result in long periods with little or no sales followed by heavily discounted "fire-sale" promotions that move homes at prices below

So where do you start? Track your lost sales. It will show important trends among your potential buyers. A weekly lost-sales report compiled by your sales team will accomplish the following:

- Detail actual sales activity in your sub-market.
- Provide specifics on why you are losing sales (i.e., is it price or something else?).

- Require your sales professionals to follow up with prospects until they buy with you or a competitor.

- Give you a chance to go back to your lost-sale customers with a counter offer.

Next, perform on-site competitor shops no less than once per month. The old days of relying on Web sites for updates on competitors are over. Personal visits give you the best intelligence on the condition of the community, the level of professionalism of the sales staff, the variety of available home sites, the number of completed homes for sale and more. Talk to the sales agent, but rely on changes since your last visit as a gauge for sales activity.

As tough as it may be to learn that the market price for your homes may be below where you want them, it far more important to have current, accurate information to gauge the success of your sales team and maximize the profitability of your homes.

John Rymer is the founder of New Home Knowledge, which offers sales training for new home builders and real-estate professionals. You can reach him at john@newhomeknowledge.com.

Rymer's Rules

FOCUS ON WHAT'S SELLING, NOT WHAT'S SITTING

If no one is buying the competitor's home next door, it's really not a serious competitor.

KEEP TRACK OF LOST SALES

It's not a shame to lose a sale. It's a shame to lose a sale and not know it or why it happened.

SHOPPING YOUR COMPETITORS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Don't fall prey to "they're giving them away" impressions. Go to your competitors' sites and get the real story.



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[SALES FOLLOW-UP]



Don't Drop the Ball

A survey finds sales teams are weak on follow-ups.

By Nick Bajzek, Products Editor

We're spending millions on our model homes, on landscaping and on the sales center. Yet a recent study from two Denver-area marketing services finds builders are attracting customers, only to essentially ignore them after they visit the sales center.

The study used secret shoppers to visit 50 model home communities in the greater Denver area in late 2007. The firms conducting the research — database marketing and lead generation firm Qgenisys and marketing company Red Tree Marketing — closely monitored how the builders in those communities reacted and followed through with the shoppers who perused their homes.

"What we learned shocked us," said Qgenisys President Peter Kowalchuck. "With falling home sales and a nationwide decline in new home prices amidst high inventories, we thought home builders would become more aggressive marketers." The result of the 18-page study: Colorado home builders are losing millions on advertising investments and in lost sales.

Take a look at a sample of the findings.

Only **14 percent** of on-site agents followed up with potential buyers with relevant information. 64 percent didn't follow up at all.

57 percent of shoppers were asked to complete a registration card. Of those, only 46 percent of the shoppers reported follow-up of any kind.

Of those who did receive a follow-up, only **23 percent** received information or pitches on the homes they discussed at length with the builders' representatives.

In several instances, the shoppers received **postcard mailings** that were blank except for the mailing label.

THESE DAYS, some developers spend \$500,000 and up on sales centers, says Bryon Ziegler, developer representative for Williams Marketing, which represents various residential projects in the greater Seattle area.

Photo: Craftmark Homes



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The Secrets of My Sales Success

32

Award-winning sales professionals share tips for moving product in any market.

By Felicia Oliver, Senior Editor

Photos: David Holloway/Getty Images

New home sales is not for the faint of heart these days. To get a step ahead, many sales professionals are looking for something new to up their game by tapping into the latest book or piece of advice from their favorite sales guru. But there's a lot to be said for going back to basics – doing what you know, but with passion and a willingness to go the extra mile.

That's the story we got from three new home sales experts: National Sales & Marketing Awards Gold Winners who shared their "secrets" of how to sell successfully year after year.

Find your motivation

Why did you get into home sales? What drives you?

"The biggest thing that a sales achiever needs is a passion for this business," says Rich Rudnicki, division sales manager at Winchester Homes, Bethesda, Md. "[You need] a passion for helping people, a passion for solving a customer's problems, a passion to learn."

You need to love what you do and want to give it your all.

"A lot of sales people are complacent," says Charlie Hatter, a sales manager with Pulte's Washington, D.C., division based in Fairfax, Va. "They are happy if they only sell one [home] a month. ... You've got to have the drive to always succeed and be the best at what you're doing."

If you lead a sales team, think about ways to motivate them. Angela Ferrara, director and vice president of sales for the Marketing Directors' New York office, makes a point to visit all of her sites once a week.

"It's meaningful when you have face to face meetings," says Ferrara, a Nationals 2006 gold winner for Sales Manager of the Year. "It's helpful to have a buffer to bounce ideas to

S

WHAT'S THE SECRET?
The drive to succeed
and be the best is key,
says Charlie Hatter.

and from and also an ear to listen, because it can be a frustrating time.”

Believe the words coming out of your mouth

Rudnicki, Nationals 2007 gold winner for Sales Manager of the Year, says there are only three things a buyer wants to know about their salesperson: Can I trust you? Are you and your company committed to excellence? And will you take care of me? What these three questions address is the authenticity of the salesperson with whom a buyer is dealing.

“You have to know that you are working for the best company in that particular market area,” says Rudnicki. “You’ve got to believe in the product and in yourself without developing arrogance or a cockiness about it.”

“You have to know that you are working for the best company in that particular market area,” says Rudnicki. “You’ve got to believe in the product and in yourself without developing arrogance or a cockiness about it.”

And be on guard against the nay-saying of the mainstream media with regard to home sales. Ferrara says it’s important to deal with that psychological mindset and reverse it.

“We’re teaching our team to believe that this is truly the



CAN I TRUST YOU? Are you and your company committed to excellence? Will you take care of me? Winchester Homes’ Sales Director Rich Rudnicki says these are the only three things potential buyers want to know about their salesperson.

time to buy,” says Ferrara. “If the confidence is there from the salesperson’s perspective, it translates to the buyers walking in the door, and if it’s not there, the opposite happens.”

Engage your prospect from the beginning

Be willing to engage your customers from the moment they walk in the door.

“It sounds so simple, but it’s hard to do in [this] market,” Rudnicki says. “That excitement and energy will set you apart from all those other sales people out there.”

It’s true. A recent marketing firm study revealed that even now many potential buyers are being allowed to walk out of sales offices without being greeted by a salesperson and without any salesperson’s attempt made to follow up with them.

“When those people come in the door, you’ve got to be up and on stage,” says Rudnicki.

Once you’re talking with them, ask your prospect detailed, open-ended questions about what they are looking for and then — this is important — listen to what they have to say.

“You have two ears and one mouth,” says Ferrara. “There’s a reason for that. Listening is one of the most critical things. When we do sales training, we find that people sometimes are so caught up in the sales process that they don’t listen well.”

Know your price is right

Rudnicki says that next to rejection, the biggest fear many home sales professionals have today is price.

“If you don’t believe in the pricing today with the market situation, you can’t sell,” says Rudnicki. “You have to ... believe deep down, as I have seen for the last 30 years, that every 10 years market value doubles. It doesn’t matter what market you are in.”

The secret here, he says, is lifestyle selling. Listen and find out what your prospect needs and wants and how your product addresses those things. Understand the unique selling proposition of your community compared to the competition.

“When you figure in amenities or size of the home site or that particular location it becomes a very unique, one-of-a-kind product,” says Rudnicki.

Back to the Basics for Home Sales Staff

Culled from the advice of our sales all stars, this is what you need to do:

- Have a positive attitude.
- Know your numbers: how much traffic, how many appointments you need to get to one closing.
- Listen to your prospect.
- Sell based on value, not price.
- Know your unique selling proposition.
- Follow up, follow up, follow up!
- Do competitive research, and be prepared to overcome objections.
- Ask for the close. And be prepared to ask more than once (Rich Rudnicki says you need to ask five times in today’s environment!).
- At the end of the process, make sure the client is happy. Then ask for referrals — even if you didn’t sell them a home. Presumably they were pleased with the sales experience and wouldn’t mind referring you to their friends for whom you may be able to find the right home.
- Get up the next morning and repeat the process.



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Keep on top of what the competition is doing

The better you know your competition, the better prepared you are to outsell them. Competitive mystery shopping in person or by phone remains a great way to get the scoop. But sometimes the best way to know how your competition is doing is to simply ask them.

"We ask our sales teams to contact the competition on Sunday evening, trade information and form a relationship," says Rudnicki. "I'll give you an idea of what my traffic has been and my sales for the week if you share that information with me."

"I've tried to befriend all my competitors," says Hatter, Nationals 2008 gold winner for Sales Person of the Year. "The more friends you have, the more information you get. ... Some competitors, you kind of fight back and forth and you never get the information

WOOLING BROKERS: Angela Ferrara offers brokers the chance to experience communities first-hand.



you need. But we're all in this together to an extent. We might be working with different companies, but in today's market its good to have a shoulder to lean on."

And get out there and take a look yourself.

"We drive through an area," says Rudnicki. "We count the number of starts, we count the number of sold signs and how they change from week to week. They say they settled three houses, but two of those houses look like they were never moved into. What's happening?"

Excel at broker outreach

One of Hatter's strengths is his ability to befriend real-estate agents and get them to send their prospects his way.

"Once you gain a Realtor's trust, they will bring every client to you," Hatter says. "Even if it's not quite their price point, they will at least call me and ask if there's something I can do or anywhere else I can recommend."

Hatter says he's done the typical presentation at a brokers' office, but what really works for him is sponsoring a breakfast at his com-

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FOLLOW UP: "I send e-mails, text messages and handwritten cards," says Pulte's Hatter.



munity every three weeks.

"You're getting everybody's [business] card," says Hatter. "Once there, you walk them through all your models. You have a home-of-the-week board where you zone in on one particular home. When I have 35, 40 realtors eating breakfast, getting gift cards and looking at this one home, I get a lot of follow up from it. It's a very easy way to try to sell a home."

Marketing Directors' "Live at ..." program gives brokers an opportunity to stay at one of their communities. "This shows a tremendous amount of confidence in our community," says Ferrara.

Be fervent in follow-up

Hatter says too many sales people follow up once, leave a message and never hear back,

or they get someone who says they are still looking and they never follow up again.

"I follow up numerous times with phone calls," says Hatter, "I send e-mails, text messages and handwritten cards. I try to get an e-mail dialogue started. ... Throughout the day when you're emailing back and forth, you can put in writing exactly what you can do."

Some sales professionals worry that an unsolicited follow-up call will not be welcome. Rudnicki has a simple solution.

"When you first meet someone, ask for permission to contact them," he says. "May I follow up with you, and if so, what is a good phone number to call you back on?"

"Five-star follow-up includes a minimum of three phone calls. Today we all have call waiting and voicemail, and if you don't have permission, you're going to be leaving message after message and it's not going to go anywhere."

You can do it!

All three Nationals sales all-stars show that a positive attitude will take you far.

"Just because you don't have any customers that you're currently working with and don't have any leads," says Hatter.

"There's always that person that walks in the door that's ready to purchase. It's difficult in today's market, but I think people with the better attitude are the ones that succeed."

PB

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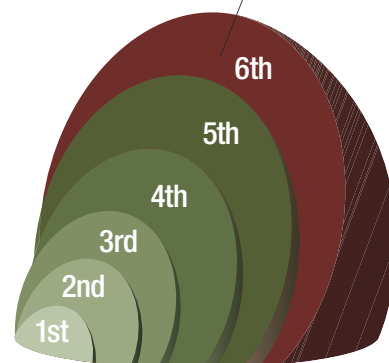
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Photo: PowerHouse

INSIDE

Reinventing Austin's old airport
[page 40]

[BEST ADDRESS]

AUSTIN'S

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GLASS ON THREE SIDES of the room and a corner fireplace offer this living room a warm, sunny welcome for visitors at the Armstrong, a single-family plan by Meritage Homes.

Photos: Robert McGee

NEW URBAN VILLAGE

An ambitious plan for a former airport site positions central Texas to gain thousands of new jobs and much-needed affordable housing.

By Susan Bady, Senior Editor, Design



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Like everything in Texas, the Mueller master plan is big. Its 711 acres will support 4,600 homes, 10,000 residents and 10,000 permanent jobs for the city of Austin. One of the country's first sustainable mixed-use communities, Mueller is pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented. Twenty-five percent of the homes will be affordable to low- and moderate-income families. And the location is unbeatable: three miles from downtown Austin and two miles from the University of Texas.

Mueller is a redevelopment of the Robert Mueller Municipal Airport, which has been closed since 1999. City leaders were particularly concerned about the deterioration of the neighborhoods surrounding the airport during its 63 years of service.

After nine years and hundreds of meetings with local residents, Catellus Development Group was selected as the master developer. "Our expertise in mixed-use, infill and brownfield development made it a natural fit for us," says Matt Whelan, senior vice president in Catellus' Austin office.

Mueller is expected to not only revitalize the area but also provide an alternative to outward expansion of the city. The housing mix ranges from single-family detached homes and garden court houses to attached row houses, live/work

units, condominiums and rental apartments. Whelan says home prices initially will range from \$120,000 to \$700,000; in subsequent phases, they could go as high as \$900,000.

The town center district will include street-level retail, restaurants and entertainment venues and upper-level office and multifamily units. Major employers include Dell Children's Medical Center of Central Texas, UT Academic Health Research Campus and Austin Studios.

Every structure must either be LEED-certified or comply with the guidelines of the Austin Energy Green Building Program. "All the homes will be rated a minimum of three stars in the Austin program, which is roughly equivalent to LEED silver," says Whelan. But Mueller will be green in other ways as well. More than 140 acres of open space are planned, including perimeter greenways with





STONE AND STUCCO wrap around the home for a three-dimensional look. Left, windows to the courtyard draw light into the dining room. As the Site plan illustrates, Mueller is pedestrian-friendly.



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THE LOFT THAT BISECTS the second floor adapts to many uses. Double doors lead to a balcony over the courtyard.

PROJECT PROFILE

Community: Mueller
Location: Austin, Texas
Model: Armstrong
Size: 2,217 square feet
Builder: Meritage Homes, Austin, Texas
Architect: Kipp Flores Architects, Austin, Texas
Interior Designer: Mary DeWalt Design Group, Austin, Texas
Land planner: Roma Design Group, San Francisco
Developer: Catellus Development Group, Austin, Texas

PRODUCTS USED

Appliances: Whirlpool
Bathroom fixtures: Moen
Cabinetry: Kent Moore Cabinets
Carpeting: Shaw Industries
Door hardware: Kwikset
Insulation: Owens Corning
Interior doors: Masonite
Lighting: Progress Lighting
Manufactured stone: Cultured Stone
Structured wiring: On-Q/Legrand
Wall and floor tile: Dal-Tile

hiking and bike trails, a large central park and playing fields. There will be a new elementary school, three swimming pools and landscaped streets that encourage walking and biking.

“The site plan is based on New Urbanist principles; there’s not a single cul-de-sac on the whole property,” Whelan says. “Garages are rear-loaded from alleys, not the main street.”

Plans call for future commuter rail and rapid bus transit lines to connect Mueller to Austin’s urban core as well as its fast-growing suburbs.

More hope for homeownership

In Austin, as in many large metro areas, buyers are traveling farther and farther away from the city to find houses that fit their budget. High gas prices are only exacerbating the problem. According to John Burns Real Estate Consulting, as of August 2008 the median home price for the Austin metropolitan area was \$196,900.

That’s why the affordable homes at Mueller are generating

tremendous demand. Whelan says the 25 percent set-aside for affordable housing is “a very ambitious percentage for any market, and it will certainly shed the high-water mark in central Texas.”

Affordable for-sale homes range from \$120,000 to \$160,000, putting them within reach of households with incomes less than or equal to 80 percent of the median family income (MFI) for the Austin metro area. Affordable rental housing will be available to households earning no more than 60 percent of the Austin MFI. None of the homes will look “affordable,” and they’ll be interspersed with market-rate housing throughout the community.

Six builders were chosen to build the first homes at Mueller: David Weekley Homes, Meritage Homes, Standard Pacific Homes, The Muskin Co., Saldana Homes and Streetman Homes. Whelan says the number of people on the interest list for phase one exceeded availability. “We had to do a lottery program for the first 350 homes, and over 1,000 people participated in that. Three builders sold out even before they broke ground.”

Meritage, in fact, had people camp out the night before the grand opening of its phase-two homes. A maintenance man who showed up at 5 a.m. on opening day found 14 “campers” lined up at the sales office. “We had heard about campouts in California and Las Vegas and Florida [during the boom years], but never experienced one in Texas,” says Tom Grant, division president for Meritage.

MUELLER’S JET AGE

ROBERT MUELLER MUNICIPAL AIRPORT was Austin’s main airport from 1936 until it was decommissioned in 1999. Braniff, Continental and Trans Texas (later Texas International) were the principal air carriers until the late 1970s and early 1980s, when American, Delta, United and other airlines added routes to Austin.

By the mid-1980s, the city had begun searching for a site on which to build a new airport. Mueller Airport closed in March 1999, and all operations were transferred to Bergstrom Air Force Base, now Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.



This 1961 photo shows the viewing area atop the terminal building at Robert Mueller Municipal Airport and passengers boarding planes from the ground.

Photo: Austin History Center/Austin Public Library



GRANITE COUNTERTOPS and a stainless steel sink are standard features of the Armstrong's kitchen. The passthrough over the sink faces the courtyard, providing sunshine and an appealing view.

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The company is building both market-rate and affordable homes at Mueller. So far, it has sold 110 homes. Phase one sold out within a month of opening in 2007. In phase two, which opened this past April, 70 homes have been sold to date.

Detached homes are sited on 37-by-90-foot lots. Market-rate houses range from 1,664 to 2,217 square feet and are priced from \$219,900 to \$339,900. Affordable homes are 1,036 to 1,551 square feet and priced from \$142,900 to \$163,900.

Tall order

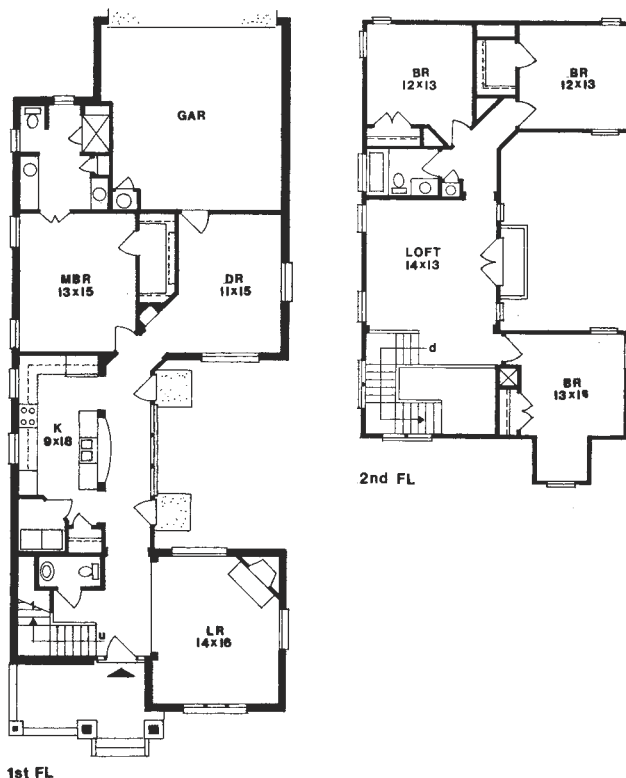
Constrained by the small footprint of a 37-foot lot, architect Sabas Flores of Kipp Flores Architects in Austin designed homes for Meritage with fenced side courtyards for privacy. Raised front porches convey a sense of community.

Ten-foot ceilings and vertical elements make the homes feel spacious. "No window is wider than it is tall," says Flores.

Meritage's furnished model, the 2,217-square-foot Armstrong, is a four-bedroom home with the kitchen, dining room and living room arranged around the courtyard. To comply with the city's visitability standards, the Armstrong has a ramp that runs from the front walkway to the side of the house, leading indoors via the courtyard.

Most buyers are young professional couples with children. "I think they're a little more switched onto trends, such as green building," Grant says. "They also like the community's proximity to the university and the central business district, and the [mass transit] component it will eventually have."

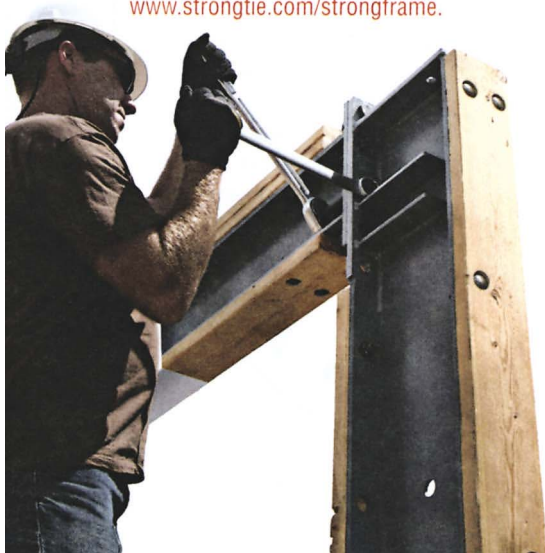
Catellus' Whelan says that so far, just over 160 families have closed on their homes at Mueller and are moving in at a rate of about 30 a month. "It's going very well," he says, adding wryly, "I'm knocking on wood right now." **PB**



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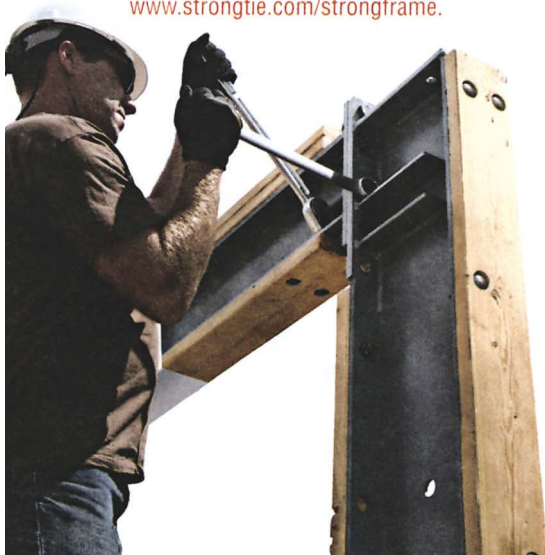
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Photo: Intermountain Soft Water

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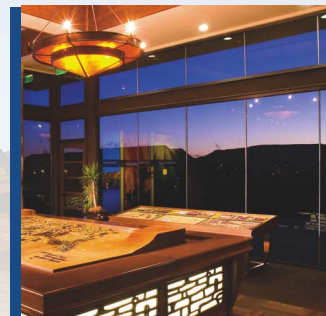
INSIDE

Open up to the great outdoors [page 51]

New millwork and molding for indoors and out [page 52]

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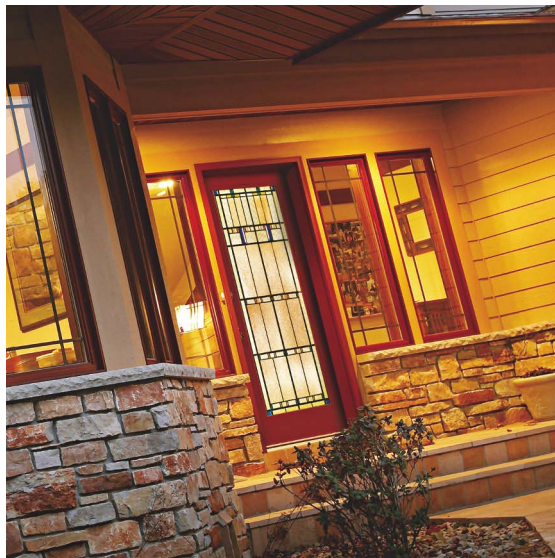
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A man with a beard is shown in profile, looking upwards. A small yellow toy excavator is balanced on his forehead, with its arm extended over his eye.

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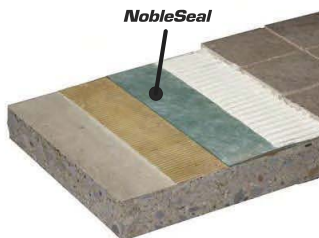
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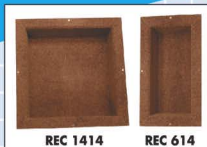
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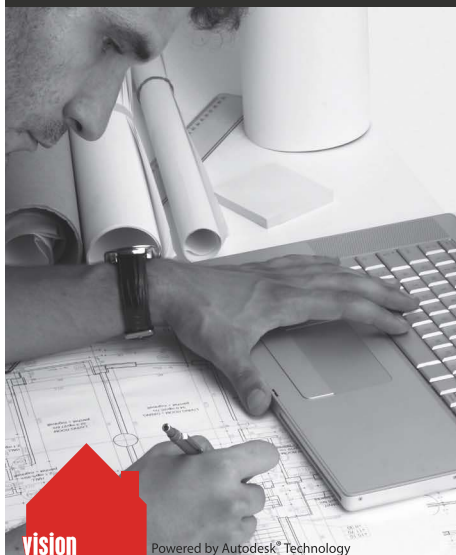
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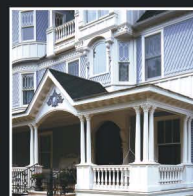
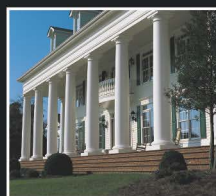
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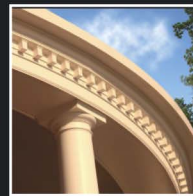
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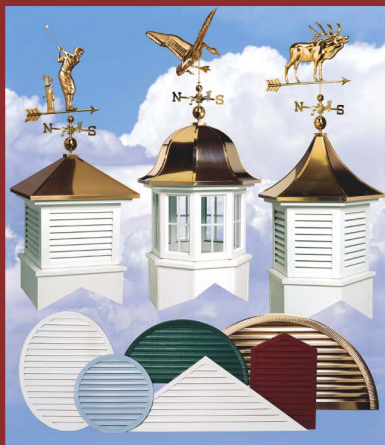
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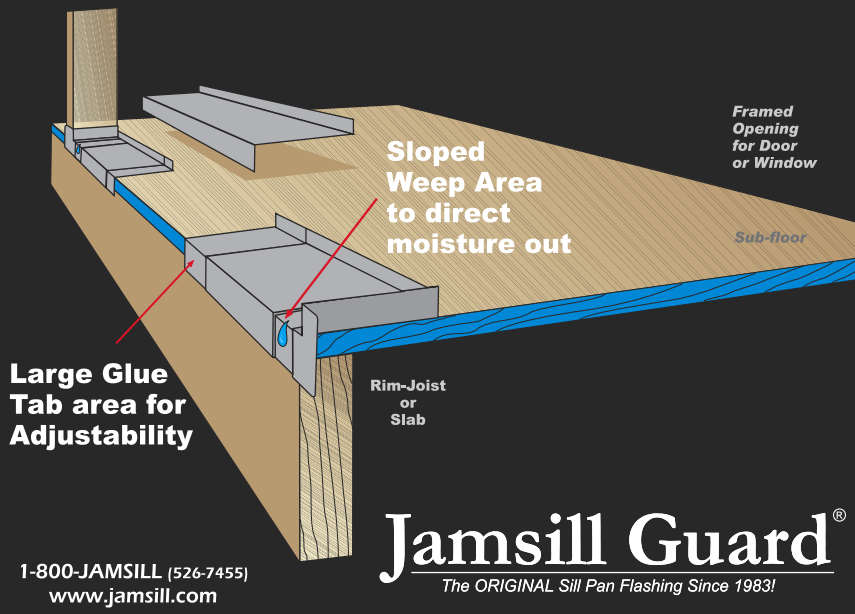
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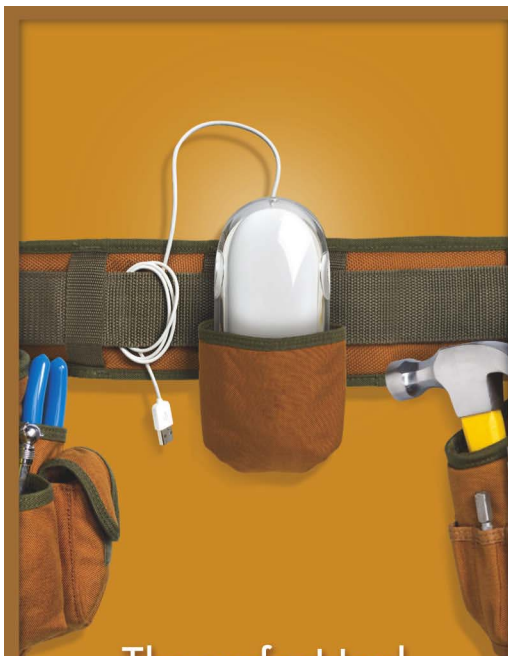
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Think about it

84,000

The New York Times reports that the economy lost 84,000 jobs in August, bringing the unemployment rate to 6.1 percent, the highest it's been in five years. The announcement marked the eighth straight month of job losses.

37%

American Standard did a survey on people's bathroom habits and found that 37 percent of women spend more than an hour in the bathroom in a day compared with 15 percent of men.



What are they doing? The survey showed that 88 percent are using at least one electronic device, while 3 percent watch television.

56% NAHB reported that in 2007, 56 percent of its members **offered incentives to homeowners to buy a home.** In 2006, it was only 45 percent of its members. What will 2008 bring?



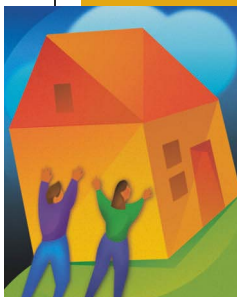
900 Senior citizens are camping out in their cars hoping to buy the lot of their choice in **Lennar's active-adult community, Greenbriar Oceanaire Country Club and Golf Course.** The new homes in the gated community are priced from \$369,950 to \$437,950. So far Lennar has sold **more than 900 homes** at the 1,400-home community.

3.1% According to the National Association of Realtors, sales of previously owned homes, which make up most of the nation's housing supply, rose 3.1 percent in July, **the biggest monthly increase since February 2007.**

15.9% The S&P/Case-Shiller index of real-estate values of 20 major metropolitan areas for June dropped 15.9 percent since June 2007. While it had dropped 15.8 percent the month before, **June's drop is a new record decline.** Yikes.



\$50,200 MarketWatch reports the **U.S. 2007 real median household income is up 1.3 percent,** to \$50,200. Although that might seem encouraging, the U.S. poverty rate is 12.5 percent.



16 million The mortgage crisis and the slow economy are taking its toll on people who are swimming in debt. Up to 16 million people reported **high levels of stress from debt and that they suffered from at least three stress-related illnesses,** results from an Associated Press-AOL Health poll show. We have an epidemic on our hands, and it's called the Slow Economy Virus.



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