



Modern Homes builds character into each subdivision

By Jean Murphy | Daily Herald Correspondent

Published: 5/15/2010 11:11 PM

The Lolmaugh family and construction in northern Lake County have been synonymous for more than 60 years.

Wayman Lolmaugh founded the company, originally called Hometown Construction, in Waukegan in 1948. In the early 1950s Wayman's son, Gerald, joined the firm and they changed the name to Modern Home Builders, the name it has operated under ever since.

Today Beth Lolmaugh Van Dyke, Brian Lolmaugh and Christina Lolmaugh Langford are the fourth generation of the family running Modern Homes Inc. Their parents, Guy and Patricia Lolmaugh, are still involved, as well.

Based in Lake Villa, the company builds new semi-custom and custom homes in subdivisions on both sides of the Illinois and Wisconsin border, as well as on scattered sites as far south as Palatine. It now has four active communities: Amber Shores in Lake Villa, Meadows of Kellogg Ravine in Winthrop Harbor, Creekside Cove in Trevor, Wis., and Rock Lake Meadows, also in Trevor, Wis.

Modern Homes is also very active in the home remodeling business, building additions and remodeling kitchens, baths and basements. This portion of the business is active all over Lake County, as well as into northern Cook County, said Beth Van Dyke, sales manager.

The firm has built as many as 75 homes in a year, if the projects they were working on were small homes for first-time buyers. But in recent years, Van Dyke said, the company has been building primarily larger, more complex homes so it has built between 20 and 25 per year and has remodeled another 25 to 30 per year, using a well-established crew of subcontractors.

"In the past two or three years, we have been doing lots of remodeling," Van Dyke said. "People have been choosing to keep the homes they have and improve them through remodeling. Many have been drawn out to look at our new home models and have seen the quality of our construction, but then have hired us to remodel their current homes instead of building them a new one."

Van Dyke said the family is very proud of the quality of their construction and appreciate when buyers notice that.

"We don't spend a fortune decorating our models because we feel that builders sometimes do that to disguise the quality of their workmanship," she said. "We concentrate on quality construction and energy efficiency and appreciate when knowledgeable buyers compliment us on the perfection of our miter cuts, for instance. That is why so many people hire us to remodel their existing homes."

Van Dyke's background and her family:

"I joined my family company about 20 years ago, right out of school. I had been working there during high school, doing odd jobs, as well."

Van Dyke said she always knew she would work with her father and enjoyed being trained by him. Twelve

years ago she took on the position of sales manager.

Her husband, Jon, joined the firm shortly thereafter and now handles the project management, while her brother, Brian, and sister, Christina, joined in 1999. Christina is the firm's bookkeeper and Brian handles land development and estimating.

Their parents, Guy and Patricia, still oversee the entire company and manage the office, respectively.

Their company philosophy:

"We try to really listen to our clients and make sure that they get what they want without being overwhelmed with the details. So we work together as a team to provide them with the best possible expertise."

The company also strives to design a living environment for each client that combines functionality with beautiful architectural details and energy efficiency, she added.

What is your dream house?

"My husband and I love to hike in the great outdoors. So I would love to build a house in the desert of Arizona. It would be a small and cozy Craftsman-style home that would be easy to maintain."

What is your favorite amenity?

"I love sunrooms. I have one on my house and I love to put them on other people's houses. It is a small investment that pays off tremendously because the family doesn't have to retreat inside once the bugs come out."

What is the best part about being a builder?

"My whole family loves to see the end result of a project and get that hug from the client. We are happy to make the project exactly what they wanted and give them their dream."

What is the biggest change you have seen in the business?

"Buyers are so knowledgeable about products today, thanks to the Internet. They know everything about sinks, faucets, everything when they come to us."

What is the biggest problem you face as a builder/remodeling contractor?

"With new homes, we have had a few problems with people selling their homes to buy one of ours. They have sold their homes, but then those sales have not 'appraised out' with the bank, so it has taken time to work that out."

On the remodeling side of the business, their problem, according to Van Dyke, is competing against pickup truck remodelers who don't offer insurance and who "try to do all of the trades even when they are not licensed to do so."

The details:

Van Dyke estimates half of their new construction is done in far northern Lake County, Illinois and the other half is done just over the border in Kenosha County, Wis. Their remodeling work, on the other hand, is almost entirely conducted in Illinois.

Modern Homes subdivisions are known for being cute and small with lots of character and only 30 to 60 homes each. They generally feature homes set well back from the road, sidewalks, winding roads, cute streetlights and unique homes, Van Dyke said. Whenever possible, they purchase land adjacent to a conservation area upon which nothing will ever be built, she added.

Most of their new construction clients are first-time buyers or empty-nesters, while their remodeling customers are "well-established homeowners who have the money to invest and want to stay in their houses

and enjoy them."

The semi-custom homes that Modern Homes is building at Amber Shores in Lake Villa range from \$197,400 to the low \$300,000s, while the more custom homes on larger lots that they are building at Rockland Meadows, immediately across the state line from Antioch, range from the mid \$200,000s to the \$400,000s.

"Every home we build is at least semi-custom. We don't want to build tract houses where everything looks the same, so we encourage people to make changes and we have our own monotony code, not allowing the same houses to be built too close to each other."

Future plans:

Van Dyke said the company plans to continue on the same course it has been following, with a mixture of remodeling work throughout Lake County and new construction on either side of the Illinois/Wisconsin border.