

Building New Housing With Old-School Values

Miller Builders Inc.

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After more than 30 years in the construction industry, Denny Miller has a plethora of loyal relationships with subcontractors and clients in a 50-mile radius surrounding Mishawaka, Ind. These relationships have helped to foster business for Denny's construction and development company, Miller Builders Inc., throughout the recession. "We're doing the best we can and try to stay on top of things," Denny says. "And the thing we've got going for us is our years of experience."

Customized Experience

Prior to founding Miller Builders, Denny was working in wholesale pharmaceuticals, but he had a strong desire "to do what I wanted to do," he shares. This desire was the inspiration behind Miller Builders, where Denny remains president, sharing a tight-knit office with three employees. Together, this team walks clients through decisions focused "in the more affordable housing, mostly start-up, first-time move-up housing," Denny explains.

And Denny has no regrets regarding his career change. "Most people have trouble understanding why I work so much, morning noon and night, but it's because I enjoy it," he says.

Part of the excitement in the construction industry is the opportunity to add special details to complete the job. For example, Miller Builders uses high-efficiency furnaces and water heaters to bring a sustainable aspect to new homes. These sustainable details can also be installed in the renovations Miller Builders handles.



The company has remodeling experience on kitchens, basements, patios, porches, bathrooms, sunrooms, windows and siding. Miller Builders primarily offers new construction services, however. The company has 14 pre-set floor plans of three- and four-bedroom homes from which clients can choose (and in which it offers all its energy-efficient services). Or, Miller Builders can work with a client to build a custom home suited to individual preferences, plus the company does commercial offices.

Sticking with its Signature

Miller Builders just completed several projects typical of its usual work. “We’ve been building senior housing, apartments, a few hundred of those,” Denny explains. “They’re for totally independent living, but come equipped with emergency pull strings in the bedroom and bathrooms, and handrails throughout the interior hallways, so residents can walk about a quarter-mile inside without going outside. And they have mail facilities inside, not outside. But it’s independent, so it doesn’t cost a lot and still has the extra safety features that make residents feel more secure.”

When completing projects, like the senior housing apartments, Denny looks for one particular key performance indicator that measures the success of his company’s work: referrals or repeat work. “Our single biggest advantage is that most of our business is referrals,” Denny shares. “For instance, a big project I’m finishing here is my third one for a guy I met when I was 5 years old in kindergarten. He’s already given me two referrals. And I’ve done three generations of families before. I have some people who have come back so much they apologize for changing. By then we’re old friends and we laugh about it.”

Another key performance indicator at the end of a job is the continued loyalty from subcontractors. “My subcontractors have been here for 20 to 25 years. I’ve built for them, their kids, sometimes they build things on their own and I will help them out, do what I can. If they have anything to do with housing, they call me,” Denny says.

Relationships with clients and subcontractors have been extremely important for Miller Builders during the last two years, after the economy began dropping. “It bottomed out about a year ago and is starting to pick up now,” Denny says. “This is the worst I’ve seen, even worse than the other recession in early 1980s. We’re fairly steady in our area; we don’t get big ups and downs.”

Although the economy is slowly returning, Denny has unexpected plans for the future of Miller Builders. “We’re going in the other direction, getting ready to slow down construction and do more developing, mainly apartment building,” he shares.

When the day finally comes and Denny does retire from the business, he will be sorely missed by Indiana’s construction industry. His clients will struggle to find a new contractor that offers the same high-quality product, and his subcontractors will search for a new partner company as loyal and skilled as Denny’s. Until then, Miller Builders will continue to provide its services in its current sectors, putting in the details that support the company’s motto: Your Home is Where Our Heart Is. ■

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Tuesley Hall Konopa, Partner, Mick Tuesley, is proud to have served as general legal counsel to Miller Builders, Inc. for over 30 years.

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