

Building Scene

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A family tradition

Area builders are 'chips off the old block'

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Careers in building and development are a family tradition in a number of major contracting firms, with the company serving as a unique heirloom that is not a guaranteed treasure.

Some children entered the family business because it was something they had planned to do since toddlers while others tried other fields and then came "home" to construction. Still others had to prove they deserved a spot in the family firm.

Peter Burton, 35, and Robert Katzman, 44, are co-owners of a Birmingham development/building

company that combines their last names.

Burton's father, Lester, 76, built houses in partnership with Nathaniel Share. Katzman's father, Sidney, now deceased, built houses under the name of Prudential Investment Co.

Peter Burton is the only one of six siblings to go into the building business.

"I'm sure my father hoped one of us would get in," he said. "There was no pressure, but he always made it known the opportunity was there."

Burton said his career in development was accidental and that he would find work in the construction field when he was running low on cash for "adventures."

"By some accident about 15 years ago, I was in Los Angeles after a trip overseas. I needed some money, so I would do anything, being a handyman. The business grew into a large, thriving, general construction business."

"I didn't want anything handed to me," Burton continued. "After I was successful in construction, he (father) wanted me to return to manage his business. I felt I made it alone. He didn't have to hold my hand."

So Burton returned to Michigan, first working for his dad, then teaming with Katzman, founder of Abbey Homes.

"I grew up in the business," Robert Katzman said. "As a little kid, I

knew I would do it."

Katzman followed his father to different job sites when he was young, then started working by cleaning out crawl spaces when he was 14.

"IT WAS a matter of starting from the bottom up so when you own a business, when you tell someone to do something, you know what you're talking about because you've done it," Katzman said.

"My dad always encouraged, but didn't push," he said.

Lester Burton said his father, Barnett, ruled his family in an autocratic, old-country way.

"My father wanted me to be a

lawyer. I wasn't enthusiastic. I didn't know how to say no," Lester said.

So Lester worked for his father — dirty jobs like repairs and breaking concrete — and his dad paid for his education.

Then tragedy intervened.

"My father died a year before I graduated. When studying for the bar, I built my first house," Lester said.

HE EVENTUALLY became a lawyer, but made his mark in building.

Lester said he's seen several situations where fathers drove their sons away from criticism. He decided early on that it was better to work in separate offices, give Peter plenty of room and avoid second guessing.

Lester also was persuaded by his wife that he couldn't order his son into the business like his father had directed him to law a generation earlier.

Inter-generational rivalry here? Nope. "Peter is 10 times a better developer than I was," Lester said.

Paul Levine, president of the Irvine Group of Farmington Hills, started working for his father, Irving, at about 15 years of age.

"I don't think I was encouraged or discouraged," Paul said.

THE OPPORTUNITY to learn the business was made available, but not on a silver platter. Paul, 42, cleaned houses and worked with superintendents in the field.

"I learned everything from the outside in," he said.

Directions first. "Mostly to have something different," she said.

BONADEO EARNED a degree in business computer systems and worked in that field for five years before going into building.

She recalled spending many Saturdays on job sites as a young girl. She worked in the office as a teen.

Bonadeo said the expectation was always there that she would enter the family business, but she couldn't point to a specific incident that prompted the move when she did.

"I thought about it quite a while. It was always in the back of my mind," she said.

The dynamics is what's most

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BLAKE DISHER/staff photographer

Peter Burton and his dad, Lester, are one of the many father-son combinations in the building industry. Children of builders

who eventually ended up in the business generally said they weren't pushed to follow in dad's footsteps.

Ideal home for '90s geared to lifestyle change

The 'ideal' house for the 1990s is one that is designed for the 'thirty-something' generation and meets the changing needs of families, according to the Farmington Hills-based Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

The New American Home is an 'ideal' home that is built each year at the National Association of Home Builders convention, said James Bonadeo, president of the Michigan group.

This year's challenge, he said, was to create a feeling of uncluttered spaciousness and elegance within an affordable price range for young families.

"The house built in an Atlanta suburb for the 46th annual NAHB convention was designed for the 'thirty-something' market," Bonadeo said.

"THESE PEOPLE are raising young children, have a taste for luxury but are fundamentally budget-conscious. This market generally consists of the first or second time 'move-up' buyers."

The architectural firm of Claude Miquelle Associates of Wakefield, Mass., designed the award winning home, which featured a blend of old and new architectural features.

The firm began at the top with ceilings that are coffered, opened up or angled to follow the roofline. For example, the center entry has a traditional hipped roofline, balcony and vented pediment, hinting at classical Georgian motifs.

Next, they followed outdoor access from almost every room, which visually and physically opened up the house. Interior doors topped with

glass allow light to brighten every corner.

A new type of window treatment used—stepped window moldings finished with the same stucco that covers the walls, but in a contrasting color—adds depth and texture to the facade.

"THE NEW American Home '90 features an innovative floor plan that breaks some conventional rules," Bonadeo said. "The stairwell is located directly off the kitchen and family room, rather than the more public and formal foyer. Another architectural twist is a loft atop the stairwell, adding volume and dimension to the family's 'common ground' kitchen area."

The foyer, dining room and parlor can be maintained as a private area simply by closing the doors to the family and breakfast rooms. But simply swinging the doors open allows the rooms to flow together.

"As families increasingly use the dining room as an every day gathering place, as well as for formal entertaining, its design was balanced to accommodate both functions. The family room acts as the focus of the family's entertainment and therefore opens directly into the kitchen," Bonadeo said.

THE MASTER suite would not be complete without a double sink counter and spacious walk-in closet. But the uniqueness in the design is a short flight of steps that leads to a secluded spa area, equipped with a whirlpool tub and a view to the wooded backyard.

A multi-level deck links the indoor

living areas with the woodland view behind the house and adds a full 400-square foot of fair-weather living space to the home.

Other key areas of the ideal home for the 1990s include a 250 square foot bonus room above the garage with separate access and the basement

features glass block windows that bring in daylight.

Both areas can be adapted to use as extra bedrooms, hobby room or home office.

The house has 2,300 square feet of finished space and is priced under \$200,000.

Higher interest rates, lack of faith depress home sales

(AP) — High interest rates and declining consumer confidence somewhat depressed new home sales in February although they bounced back slightly from steep declines the previous two months, according to Commerce Department figures released last week.

The department said new single-family homes were sold at a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 607,000 units in February after plummeting 6.8 percent in January and a revised 8.8 percent in December.

But the February rate still was below the 649,000 homes sold in 1989 and, except for January, the lowest since 556,000 homes were sold on an annual basis last March. Sales totaled 589,000 in January.

"THE HOUSING industry has been adversely affected by the increase in mortgage rates in January and February," said economist Richard Peach of the Mortgage Bankers Association. "I don't see much of a decline in rates in the months ahead and there's substantial risk that they

will go higher in the second half of the year."

David Seiders, chief economist for the National Association of Home Builders, also pointed to weakness in the economy, including slower job growth, as contributing to a decline in consumer confidence and thus softer sales.

The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. said interest on fixed-rate mortgages rose from 10.17 percent at the beginning of February to 10.31 percent before falling to 10.23 percent at month's end.

Mark Obrinsky, an economist with the Federal National Mortgage Association, described the 10 percent level a "psychological barrier" that was keeping the housing market a little weaker than at the end of 1989 when rates dropped into single digits.

John Tuccillo, chief economist for the National Association of Realtors, also blamed high mortgage rates for a 2.3 percent decline in existing home sales last month.

I am a follower of your column and interested in the various new concepts which can be utilized in the

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Condo groups—leave legalities to lawyers

Our management company has suggested to the board of directors that it assist in the collection procedure, even after the matter has been turned over to the attorney for the association.

The management company is attempting to keep the costs down for the association, even though there are no lawyers on the staff of the management company. Do you think this is a good policy?

When the delinquency is first created by way of the agent following the collection policy, sending late notices and reminder letters to the delinquent co-owner.

However, once the matter has been turned over to the association's counsel for the filing of a lien and other legal action, the management company, while in a position to assist the attorney in gathering information, should not interject itself into the negotiations and/or prosecution of the delinquent co-owner without the advice and consent of the attorney.

Some management companies, unknowingly, undermine the association's best interests and compromise the association's claim.

I also have seen situations where management companies incorrectly have quoted pay-off figures to delinquent co-owners after the matter has been turned over to legal counsel which has caused both economic loss as well as embarrassment to the association.

Robert M. Meisner is a Birmingham attorney specializing in condominiums, real estate and corporate law. You are invited to submit topics which you would like to see discussed in this column, including questions about condominiums, by writing Robert M. Meisner, 3020 Telegraph Rd., Suite 407, Birmingham 35203.



condo queries
Robert M. Meisner

development of different kinds of condominiums. Have you got any "hot items" that you have observed recently concerning how one can "condominiumize" some space?

While this list is not exhaustive, one of the interesting ideas which I have had an opportunity to look at recently not only was a marina condominium with boat slips but with the dry dock facilities.

In short, the marina and the condominium provided a dry dock area where co-owners would have the right to store their boats during the winter.

Similarly, I am seeing "parking lot" condominiums both at commercial facilities as well as recreational facilities. No one has retained me yet, however, to consider any "galactical" condominiums but I would probably say that this idea is "out of this world."

This column provides general information and should not be construed as legal opinion.