

Housing starts hinge on basics

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church picnic held on the property.

BUT THE area and its zoning regulations and sewage facilities were still focused on a rural lifestyle. Troy wanted you to have two acres to a lot. When we finished we had one unit to an acre. We had 89 acres and 89 lots." Sewers weren't installed until 1987. "A lot of bonds issued to build sewers had gone belly up. It was a very difficult job to get sewers financed," he said. Four builders and a nearby Roman Catholic convent contributed money toward the construction of the first leg of the Evergreen Interceptor. Under the arrangement, they didn't pay any tapping fees for several years until the city had repaid the debt.

"We were just paying our tapping fees in advance," Robertson Sr. said. CONSUMER TRENDS gradually changed. The "Leave It to Beaver" style families for whom the firm originally had built were evolving. Empty nesters were rattling around in those big family houses. In the late '60s/early '70s, the company, under the urging of the elder Robertson, began to consider condominiums as the wave of its future.

Marketing appeals began to talk about lifestyles instead of room for the children to grow. "There's more to selling real estate than just putting a house on it," the younger Robertson said. "We're buying a lifestyle. They didn't want to take another leaf. We're selling lifestyle. We still feel that way today."

WHILE THE sales pitch remains the same, the listeners are younger. "They used to be 54. Maybe five years younger or five years older," Robertson said. Now, the market includes younger two-career couples and one-child families. They've found they have no more time nor the inclination to tend to a big home and a large yard.

Building business grew suddenly

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boom continued, they built four-bedroom colonials in Troy and Bloomfield Hills. But the elder Robertson, who jokingly agreed with his sons that they built for his generation, recognized the baby boom was going bust. The market was changing from families to couples whose grown children had struck out on their own.

In 1972, under the urging of the elder Robertson, the firm went into the then-new condo business by beginning a 359-unit project, Adams Woods in Bloomfield. That project, completed in 1980, helped make the firm's reputation.

Not only did condos appeal to the over-54 crowd anxious to be freed of home chores, but it also attracted younger, dual-career families who lacked the enthusiasm to putter around the yard.

It also threw the business into the corporate equivalent of the awkward age. As business grew the staff increased to about 15 people and moved to an office on Square Lake Road, Troy. Eventually they expanded again, moving their office on Telegraph in Bloomfield Hills. There it started a decade of corporate adjustment.

"We were still entrepreneurial but we needed policies and procedures," said Robertson Jr.

They didn't have the time, means or personnel to develop those policies. Instead problems were tackled on an emergency basis. "That would depend on which fire we had to put out," Robertson said.

About six years ago, the real estate business experienced a downturn. In 1981, the firm had racked up about \$11 million. The following year, that figure fell to \$7 million.

He used that downtime to reorganize the firm. "I can't do it anymore," he said. He began working toward making the concern a professionally managed one, hiring an analyst to reorganize the company and define responsibilities.

Robertson made an effort so others in the company could tackle tasks he once did. "I stood back and let them do it. It wasn't easy for me," he said.

When business rose again, Robertson said he found "a real sense of satisfaction. Before it was too hectic for me to get that sense."

Now, he hires outside expertise to help solve problems. Faced with working around a wetlands in his new condo project, the Heathers in Bloomfield Hills, Robertson hired an

environmental specialist, Donald Tilton of Johnson, Johnson & Roy. Another firm, Total Golf, will man-

age the project's golf course and club, which will be open to non-residents.

Software helps detect ailments

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appeal lies in Lundin's pricing strategy. When it was originally released in local markets, the software sold for \$180. That price was cut to \$99 when the program didn't sell as anticipated. It became apparent that it was more profitable to sell the software at the lower price.

The software is available for Macintosh and IBM personal computers.

"Software's like books. Some take 10 years to write, some take six months, but they both sell at the same price," Lundin said.

Lundin advertised the software in about six magazines geared toward parents or computer owners, including Working Parents and Rodale's Children magazines.

Although the software is available through mail order, Lundin's working to make it available to software dealerships. "People have to look at it first," he said. "They feel more comfortable when they purchase it in a store."

"We're working with several distributors but it's a long process to establish good relationships," he said.

Family Care is available in English in 55 countries. "Frequently people (in non-English speaking coun-

tries) with medical knowledge and those who are affluent do speak English," Wolf said.

Missionary groups have purchased it but Lundin admits there are some drawbacks to using the program overseas. In cases of minor complaints, the software recommends over-the-counter medicines. In most cases these products are unavailable outside the United States and Canada.

Translating the software into other languages brings other problems into play. "Translation is difficult because the translator needs to have medical knowledge and be familiar with English language medical terms," Wolf said.

Mail and phone orders carry a 30-day money back guarantee. Phone orders can be taken at 1-800-426-8426.

"We've had a few returns from people who didn't have children and from doctors — people who wanted to take a look at the software," Lundin said.

In addition buyers who register are eligible for free updated programs incorporating new medical findings, according to Lundin.

"We're working on a second version which includes improvements and suggestions from customers," he said.

datebook

● BUY A FRANCHISE

Saturday, July 9 — "How to Buy a Franchise" offered 7-9 p.m. in Troy. Fee: \$50. Information: Start A Business Store, 649-8646.

● LOTUS 1-2-3

Mondays, July 11 through Aug. 1 — "Lotus 1-2-3 Beginner on the IBM PC . . . Spreadsheets for Use in Home or Business" offered 7-9 p.m. in Bloomfield Hills. Fee: \$75. Information: 645-3635. Sponsor: Cranbrook P.M.

● START A BUSINESS

Tuesday, July 12 — "Whole Braining" seminar offered 7-9 p.m. in Troy. Fee: \$25. Information: Margaret Hiltz, 649-8646. Sponsor: Start A Business Store.

● COMPUTER ARBITRATION

Thursday, July 14 — "Whole Braining" seminar offered 7-9 p.m. in Detroit. Fee: \$25. Information: Margaret Hiltz, 649-8646. Sponsor: Start A Business Store.

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