

Jacobson: satisfaction in building homes

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homes a year in the \$150,000 to \$175,000 range.

Unlike some builders, Jacobson remains optimistic the boom times of the past decade will return. "There are certainly some nice growth areas (remaining),"

JACOBSON SAID while new home sales are down, there has been less than a 5 percent decrease from last year — hardly, he says, a brick to the wall.

"We're sitting back a bit," he acknowledged, pointing to uncertain-

ties in the economy and in the Middle East, but closing up shop would be a mistake.

Interest rates are expected to drop, he said, and just because housing values have dropped in the East and West, doesn't mean the Midwest will suffer as well.

There is not one housing market in the country, but many, Jacobson said. What is happening in the East and West, where property values have been overvalued, does not have to spell doom for other areas of the country.

Jacobson said building has

changed since he chose it as a career more than 15 years ago.

From the deep recession in the early part of the decade to the boom time as the decade ended, from a time when communities welcomed growth with open arms because of the tax revenues, prestige and jobs to a time when the slow-growth/no-growth communities shut the doors, builders have been on a roller coaster of a ride.

Such a tumultuous decade would have been impossible to predict, Jacobson said.

Builders are no longer the rulers

of their own destinies, he said. Instead their projects are subject to the sometimes capricious whims of public opinion.

AND HE BELIEVES that most of these changes are unnecessary.

People fail to realize builders are much better at what they do than they were a decade ago, Jacobson said. Wetlands restrictions, woodland protection, low density — most of the rules communities develop are unnecessary.

Ten years ago, it wouldn't be unusual for a builder to strip a lot of its

trees and squeeze every square foot of home possible on it, Jacobson said. "(Today) you'd be foolish to do that."

Builders are more sensitive than they were in the past," he said. People want natural settings, they want wetlands and woodlands — the less a site is disturbed, the more the home can be sold for, Jacobson said.

When it comes down to what's good for an area, builders are a pretty savvy group of people and they know how to do their job, Jacobson said. Certainly some builders are careless, perhaps even reckless, but

all builders should not be judged — and restricted — because of a few bad apples.

The pendulum has swung from "come here and build" to "go away," he said, and that doesn't benefit anyone. Jacobson predicted the slow-growth/no-growth movement itself will yield to a more accepting time once people realize that no growth means no jobs, no tax base, and most importantly, the end of aspirations of owning a home.

"Without builders, you're cutting out the American dream," Jacobson said.

Van Every defends today's 'better' builders

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A FULL-SCALE subdivision development, he added, will take up to two years after planning begins until the final home is built.

Van Every said nothing good has come from the regulations and controls. "It's all bad — it loads front end costs."

Minimum lot sizes increases the value of land, building regulations inflate the cost of building and the permit process magnifies the time spent per project, he said.

"What we've done is created a sit-

uation where affordable housing can't be built," Van Every said. People have to ask whether the tradeoff is worth it, he said.

True, housing is better today, but when all is said and done, the buildings of yesterday are still providing excellent homes.

"All the subdivisions of 45 years ago are still good, they're still functional."

Beyond their impact on new development, the increased regulations also impact existing housing. The high-cost new housing increases the value of property in a community,

which then increases the assessments on all homes.

"It looks nice on a personal balance sheet to say I bought my house for \$125,000 and now it's worth \$250,000, but wait until the tax bill comes."

BUILDERS ARE combating an unjustified image problem, Van Every said. They're considered the bad guys in the development process. (No-growth proponents) have the

feeling they're dragging people out to the developments.

"But we don't create the people or the market — we satisfy the need that's there," he said. "If we build a subdivision and no one moved there, all we could do is sit there and look at it."

Van Every said his induction into the hall of fame is an honor — because it shows his colleagues think highly of him — and a responsibility

— because it casts him as a role model for younger builders.

Although not something he has sought over the years, Van Every said he has accepted the mantle of role model. Even before he won the award, he said he has always been approachable to the younger mem-

bers of the organization.

But being a reputable builder means more than being a role model for young builders — it also means talking to community groups about building interests and young people about building and business in general.

From lawyer to builder

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builders may seek him out more, but then Nossan said he hopes he has always been approachable.

"If people want to talk about something, I've always been an open book," he said. "I would hope they would come to me regardless."

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