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Building profits: BOWA's Larry Weinberg (left) and Josh Baker specialize in remodeling.

Small Business

Arlington design-builder constructs profitable niche

By DREW CLARK

While most area home builders have faced hard times in the downsized 1990s, BOWA Builders has boomed by capturing a lucrative market in remodeling.

The Arlington-based design/builder's revenues have grown more than 800 percent over the past five years through a cost-effective process that brings clients, architects and builders together in the earliest stages of remodeling.

"When an architect and a builder work hand-in-hand, the design will be done much more efficiently without sacrificing aesthetic intent," says Larry Weinberg, one of the \$1.62 million dollar company's two principals.

"With our method of bringing all the people to the table, there is 100 percent accountability and no surprises," says principal Josh Baker, a Great Falls native.

Baker and Weinberg met at the University of Virginia and started BOWA in 1988, when the local real estate market was hot.

Although they initially were interested in real estate developing, Baker and Weinberg decided to focus on remodeling when they saw the market for new homes dry up.

That strategy — and an emphasis on cost-cutting — has paid off. In fact, BOWA Builders takes cost containment so seriously that it never bought office furniture for its ramshackle Ballston office, relying instead on giveaways from clients and relatives.

Age when started: 24 (both Baker and Weinberg).

Start-up capital: \$5,000 borrowed from Baker's parents.

Worst moment: "In the winter of 1988, we were new and had lined up work to frame houses," says Baker. "The quality they were expecting was lower than what we normally do. We ended up losing a lot of money and freezing."

Best advice: "Whatever your product, realize that you are a customer-service business," says Baker.