

McLean Remodeling Firm Reacts to Slowdown

BOWA Builders recruits expand geographic reach.

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In a year when housing resales have slowed, credit is tight and investment portfolios are typically smaller, it would be reasonable to suppose that custom home builders and remodelers are just holding steady or even cutting back — anything but expanding. New home construction unemployment has been rising for 19 months and many remodelers are confronting lower demand and smaller projects.

Such metrics do not, however, apply to the McLean-based BOWA Builders, a nationally-recognized residential building firm that recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. At BOWA, the scope and number of new projects has actually increased in the past 12 months, and, more significantly, the 80-employee firm is still adding top managers while expanding its geographic reach.

THE FIRM'S REPUTATION is certainly part of what underlines this counter-trending success: BOWA has won every major award for remodeling excellence offered at the local, regional and national levels. Moreover, its renovations and custom homes are often trumpeted in the nation's top shelter magazines.

The back story to BOWA's growth stems from a decision by the company's founding principals almost a decade back to offer partnerships to top managers, a career option usually associated with law firms, accounting practices and other professional service businesses. The idea is that senior managers, "team leaders" in BOWA-speak, are given general management control over their own geographic territories, and incentives to both increase client lists and manage profitably. After seven years, they can participate in the company's stock ownership program, an option no eligible manager has so far failed to exercise.

"What BOWA's doing is attracting talent," said Michael Morris, who edits the Professional Remodeler Magazine. "It's a smart idea. There are lots of so-so remodelers. But gifted managers who have mastered all the skill-sets needed to produce distinguished work are rare."

Noting that his magazine selected BOWA "National Remodeler of the Year" two years ago on the strength of their high-performance service model, Morris says the firm continues to be a recognized standard-setter.

BOWA'S TEAM LEADERS — there are now five heading up company business in District, Fairfax County, Montgomery County, Arlington/Alexandria, Loudoun and Fuaquier Counties — particularly like the fact that the non-traditional organizational chart allows them to concentrate on projects, design solutions and clients.

Patricia Tetro and George Hodges-Fulton manage assignments in two parts of Fairfax County — Tetro in McLean and environs; Hodges-Fulton concentrating on Great Falls, Reston and Herndon. Tetro, an architect who has managed high-rise condo and office construction projects, disrupted a 16-year career to be at home with a newborn before joining BOWA five years ago. Hodges-Fulton relocated from Colorado in 2003, having run the custom building division for a major developer.

"We are able to produce highest quality work, yet manage the process with an emphasis on value," Tetro said. As an example, Tetro cites a recent assignment that entailed relocating a log cabin to a site in McLean where it was converted into a component of a larger renovation.

"My BOWA projects often change the traditional ways of living in a house ... and clients find that freeing."

Adds George Hodges-Fulton:

"It's empowering to have absolute confidence that you can help your clients realize their dream house. That's what this business is about."



Contributed
Patricia Tetro



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George Hodges-Fulton

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