

# Northern Virginia remodeling firm BOWA thrives despite industry slowdown

BY JOHN BYRD

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In a year when housing resales have slowed, credit is tight and investment portfolios are smaller, it would be reasonable to conclude that custom home builders and remodelers are just holding steady or cutting back — anything but expanding.

After all, residential construction unemployment has been rising for 19 months, as many remodelers confront lower demand and smaller projects.

Such metrics do not, however, apply to **BOWA Builders**, a nationally recognized residential building firm with a large Loudoun County presence, which 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.

BOWA specializes in renovations, remodeling and custom homes. One of the firm's strengths is its employee-growth incentives, according to *Qualified Remodeler Magazine* editor Michael Morris. The incentives include offering partnerships to top managers.

"What BOWA's doing is attracting talent," he said.

Morris, whose magazine selected BOWA "National Remodeler of the Year" two years ago, said the firm received high marks largely on the strength of its high-performance service model.

"[BOWA] has built a culture that centers on customer satisfaction," he said.

The firm also has drawn strength and attracted talent through prudent administrative policies. Team leaders operate within a nontraditional organizational framework that frees them to concentrate on projects, design solutions and clients.

But the back story to BOWA's growth stems from a decision by the

company's founding principals almost a decade ago to offer partnerships to top managers, a career option usually associated with law firms, accounting practices and other professions. Senior managers — "team leaders" in BOWA-speak — are given unfettered general-managerial control over their own geographic territories, an incentive both to increase client lists and to manage profitably. After seven years, they can participate in the company's stock-ownership program.

BOWA has team leaders in Loudoun, Fauquier, Fairfax, Arlington/Alexandria and Montgomery counties, and Washington, D.C.

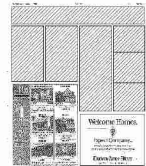
Joe Burke, who has a degree in architecture and heads BOWA's Loudoun and Fauquier County operations from an office in Middleburg, said he makes all budget decisions and that being a community fixture has been critical to success.

"No one here sees us as a franchise or a branch office," Burke said. "We're part of a corporate family, sure, but everyone on the local team lives within a few miles of the office and we're all visibly active in the community's social and cultural life."

Burke directs a group of seven who typically work on two to three large-scale projects at a time.

"Obviously, we get to know our client's requirements quite well. Mostly our job is about delivering inspired solutions for people with exceptional taste," he said.

Not far away, George Hodges-Fulton and Patricia Tetro manage assignments in Fairfax County. Hodges-Fulton concentrates on Great Falls, Reston and Herndon; Tetro concentrates in McLean. Hodges-Fulton relocated from Colorado in 2003, where he managed the custom-building division for a major developer. Tetro, who has an architecture degree, has managed high-rise condo and office construction projects. He disrupted a 16-year career to be at home with



a newborn before joining **BOWA** five years ago.

"The creative resources that I bring to my clients through BOWA has no local parallel," Hodges-Fulton said. "It's empowering to have absolute confidence that you can help your clients realize their dream house. That's what this business is about."

Tetro said team leaders aim to produce the highest quality work with an emphasis on value.

"When your clients are confident in your resources and integrity, fas-

cinating assignments naturally seem to follow," she said.

Tetro cites a recent assignment to relocate a log cabin to 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. The originality is apparent ... and clients find that freeing."

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