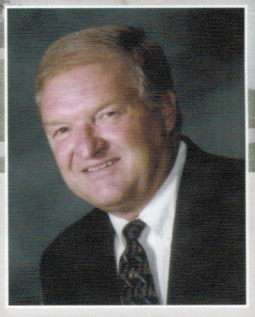
Bob Romenesko Construction, Inc.

Twist In Fate Pushes Appleton Builder to Take the Plunge and Go Into Business for Himself



Bob Romenesko didn't plan on starting his own business, however when the company he worked for closed its doors, Romenesko faced a choice: he could either set out to find a new employer or go out on his own. He chose to start Bob Romenesko Construction, Inc. — a decision Romenesko says he has never regretted since.

"It was a big decision for me," Romenesko said. "I had only worked for two companies in my career, and the last one I'd only been with for three years. However, I eased into my decision by taking a partner for the first three years, and then I was ready to do it on my own."

Starting Over

Romenesko's introduction into the construction business came pretty young, following his father at the age of six to building sites and watching him pour concrete. Romenesko, the oldest child of a large family, jokes that his father would bring him along pretty much to "stay out of my mother's hair." Later, Romenesko would work summers for his two uncles, learning the industry first hand from the contractors.

The years spent working with family shaped Romenesko and taught him many different areas of the business. He was content to find a solid employer after high school, and worked for one company for more than 12 years. It was the second company he worked for, however, that closed its doors and made Romensko rethink his career path and start his own business.

In the early days of his business, Romenesko says he served mostly as a subcontractor for other builders doing framing, siding and roofing to make connections and build his business. After about three years, however, Romenesko built his first home, and 20 years later he says he builds a small number of homes so that he can be personally involved through the whole process. About half of Romenesko's business involves remodeling. Additions, kitchen and bath updates are the most requested projects in which he gets involved.

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— Bob Romenesko, Bob Romenesko Construction

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As Romenesko's business has changed over the years, so have his staffing needs. At one time, Romenesko had five employees, however today he mostly uses subcontractors and employs only a part-time bookkeeper. "I find it more flexible this way," he said. "This way, I don't have to create work for employees when times are slow."

Customer Satisfaction a Guarantee

One thing that hasn't changed over the years for Romenesko, however, is his love of working with the customer. Being a one-man show allows customers to deal directly with Romenesko, which is his favorite part of the job.

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Romenesko has a group of subcontractors with which he has long working relationships. "By working with the same subs, they get to know you and what type of work you expect," Romenesko said. "All of my subs are people that I feel comfortable bringing into my own home at anytime. The customers appreciate that, because they have to also feel comfortable, especially on a remodeling project where you are in their home, and many times while they are at work."

At the beginning of a project, Romenesko's customers meet with a home designer. Together, they look at the lot they have and fit the house to the lot. Romenensko and his team assess the many aspects of the lot to determine if there are any views or exposures that should be designed into the plan. From there, the home is designed with the customer's lifestyle in mind, and the subs put together a price from the plans. Putting it all together at the end, the customer will make the decision of what features are within their budget.

"Many times, customers will ask how much per square foot does it cost for me to build a home," said Romenesko. "Much like purchasing an automobile, the price will vary on the options you choose. Each customer has different budgets to work with, and we get the home to fit their budget. Clients are asked to contact a banker in advance, so they can stay within their limits."

Facing the Competition

Romenesko is amazed at how many more builders there are in the Appleton

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area. "When I joined the builders association in the late 1980s, there were maybe 50 or 60 builder members. Today, there are more than 250," he said.

Although there is a lot more competition in the area, Romenesko feels it is good for business. It forces him to stay up to date on all the new products and services available and encourages him to network with others in the industry to remain competitive. To accomplish this, Romenesko counts on his membership through the local builders association, the Wisconsin Builders Association™ and the National Association of Home Builders.

"You have to stay informed on what's new, especially when it comes to the legal arena," Romenesko said. "Impact fees are a big issue for builders right now, and I count on the association to keep me informed and fight for my best interest."

Romenesko also believes strongly in giving back to the community, and he donates his time to Habitat for Humanity, Rebuilding Together projects as well as building projects for his church and a local children's museum.

And while Romenesko spends his time researching new and exciting building innovations such as Energy Star products, he says that, at the end of the day, building and running a business is all about the basics. He said, "You spend the right amount of time early on with your customers so they feel comfortable and are well educated on the process. Working together, we can achieve a beautiful home and happy customers, and that's what it's all about in the end."

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