

COOLMAN COMMUNITIES, INC. STILL CHANGING, GROWING

New name for Coolman & Coolman reflects community focus

by Julia Versau

It is possible for a builder to build a house and to confine his worries to the footprint of the residence and all that falls within it. It's probably not possible for Bob Coolman. The president of Coolman & Coolman, Inc., Bob has built homes for three decades, but always with the larger picture in focus: how much house does a family need? What makes a house a home? How does the house fit into the larger context of community?

Bob is a builder - and a thinking man. And one thing he has thought for some time is that communities are extremely important. Building a house in isolation from the bigger issue of how a neighborhood will work and what it will look like is not something he's apt to do. Holistic by nature, as well as in his approach to housing, Bob has created a cadre of loyal customers by building both quality homes and quintessential communities.

That's why Bob's company will soon change its name to Coolman Communities, Inc. The new name reflects the wider focus the company has always taken, from the time it built Sylvan Manor in the 1970s to later years when it masterminded such communities as Heritage Hills, Walden, the Village neighborhood at Aberdeen, and Essex Park.

Focus on Community

"We're just owning up to the fact that we never just built houses," Bob explained. "Our focus has always been on creating good places for people to live and raise families - which includes the homes and the whole area around them."

Coolman Communities, Inc. will retain its interest in all things forward-thinking. The company has earned a reputation for successfully analyzing the marketplace and building the kind of homes people really want to live in, and for pursuing open space and environmental strategies that make wise use of land and resources.

Keeping up with the marketplace is a full time job. Bob and his staff spend a lot of time talking with customers, reading the literature, and visiting groundbreaking communities. This kind of study leads to successes like Coolman's "Amberleigh" model in the recent Parade of Homes. The house, Bob said, "was really cute, with something going on no matter what direction you turned." It satisfied what the company had identified as key needs in the marketplace: a reasonable and affordable amount of square footage that nonetheless did not skimp on character and amenities. The 2200 s.f. cottage home sold just days after it was introduced to the public.

"The bigger challenge today is not building the huge home - where mistakes and miscues can be hidden in the larger expanse of square footage," he said. "The toughest nut to crack is the smaller home - where careful design and visually interesting details are critical."

Studying the Marketplace

Bob recommends books he has read to customers and associates that explicate his philosophy. Lately, he's been digesting books by Sarah Susanka, the author of the best-selling "The Not So Big House" and "Creating the Not So Big House."

"People don't use tons and tons of space, and they don't actually want to be apart from a community mowing an acre or two of land," he said. "In order to build houses that work, we study the way people really want to live and what kind of features they need."

That's why, in the same breath that Bob describes himself as a builder, he's liable to add that he's really a problem solver.

"That's my niche, really. I'm a problem solver," he said. "I am interested in analyzing situations, addressing needs, coming up with solutions. I have found it extremely interesting, as well as important to our success, to look at the overall housing needs of Valparaiso and find ways to address them."

Coolman Communities, Inc. will employ its brand of building when it works on four major projects in the new year. In addition to its ongoing communities (like Essex Park), the company will break ground on Rockwell Corners, Flint Lake Village, and The Prairie at Aberdeen. It will also work with Pines Village Retirement Communities on the Meridian Woods neighborhood.

Rockwell Corners

The Rockwell Corners project, an enclave of 15 bungalows near a soon-to-be-constructed Episcopal Church, will be its own little village. Located near the intersection of Burlington Beach Road and Valparaiso Street, Rockwell Corners will be designed so that homes are clustered around a village green and served by walkways within the neighborhood and from the homes to the church. Bob said the neighborhood may be ideal for empty nesters who love living in Center Township, but have outgrown their large, 2-story homes. The company's preliminary plans call for homes in the 1400 to 2200 square foot range with deep earth tone exteriors. Enclosed and secluded, Rockwell Corners also will offer the benefit of being close to the action.

Flint Lake Village

Coolman Communities, Inc. will have an opportunity to build another family-focused neighborhood when it starts on Flint Lake Village. Plans now call for about 75 starter homes in a planned community adjacent to the Flint Lake Elementary School yard and with commercial frontage along Calumet Avenue. The single-family homes will be designed to serve young families just starting out. Bob said the houses will be affordable (in the low \$100,000's) but flexible, providing the layouts to accommodate future expansions like finished basements or bonus rooms.

The Prairie at Aberdeen

The Prairie at Aberdeen will be a special community of approximately 55 homes laid out in a serpentine pattern that gives 90 percent a view to open space out the front windows and all a view of open space out the back. Built around three separate village greens, The Prairie homes should appeal to people who desire country living without the lack of access and maintenance hassles. The Prairie should also be attractive to buyers with a conservation ethic who appreciate the wise use of the land to maximize green space. The company envisions the community as a quaint little neighborhood of pretty story-and-a-half and 2-story homes with the kind of interior and exterior detailing that creates distinct character. The neighborhood has a natural backdrop of oak, walnut, and cherry trees, and is bisected by Lawson's Creek, an intermittent stream that courses its way throughout Aberdeen. Lush landscaping in commons areas, as well as the meadow prairie behind each home, will create a garden atmosphere. Slated for property on the western edge of the Aberdeen community, The Prairie will get underway early in 2004.

Meridian Woods

Coolman Communities, Inc. will joint venture with Pines Village Retirement Communities on the Meridian Woods development just off Campbell Street north of Valparaiso High School. The

independent living community will have special amenities for seniors and is ideally located for empty nesters who desire a quiet and secluded neighborhood close to shopping, services, and entertainment. It's also near schools and parks, making participation in school programs and get-togethers with grandchildren easily accommodated.

DETAILS

For more information about Coolman & Coolman, Inc. - soon to officially be Coolman Communities, Inc. - visit www.coolmanandcoolman.com or stop by the Essex Park model home on State Road 2 in Valparaiso (464-7510). The model is closed for the Thanksgiving weekend, but will reopen on Monday, December 1. The Essex Park office's regular hours are 1 to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday.

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