

Oksenholt Construction Company has continued building despite the recession



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Integrity, innovation, quality.

Those are the first three words from local builder Jon Oksenholt when asked how best to describe his company's philosophy in these trying economic times.

"My basic philosophy is to build a quality home at a price point that offers real value to the customer," Oksenholt, owner of Oksenholt Construction Company (OCC) in Lincoln City, said.

As a broad-based builder, Oksenholt Construction offers a multitude of services related to all aspects of commercial and residential construction, including structure design and site planning, excavation and custom building.

"As the largest Oregon Coast builder, we are able to lower our margins and make up for it in total volume," he said. "We also really believe in communicating throughout the construction process and always being very clear and upfront with our customers."

In the realm of home construction, more and more contractors are building spec homes as compared to custom homes. A spec home is a home that is built according to predetermined specifications, set by the contractor, with the idea that the home will be sold once the house is built.

"In our spec home division we focus on acquiring or developing land at competitive prices so that we can offer a package at an affordable price," Oksenholt said. "For our custom home, remodeling and commercial division, we really focus on giving the customer what they want.

We also believe in presenting a very clear and fair bid up front so that there are no surprises down the road."

While Oksenholt Construction has always been known as a high-end builder of custom and spec homes, it also has grown while other builders have succumbed to the tough economic times. It has chipped away at its reputation as a builder only the elite can afford, Oksenholt said.

"In the past, some people thought maybe they could not afford OCC," he said. "However, through word of mouth and marketing, people increasingly realize that due to our scale and efficiency we are also the most economical option. Over the years, budget homes and small remodels have become an increasingly large part of our business and we are really focused on the custom home and remodeling markets."

A prime example of Oksenholt's success is the Belhaven project in Roads End, which was recently featured in Oregon Home Magazine.

"For our spec home division, Belhaven provides an excellent platform for us to be able to compete in a difficult economy," he said. "Belhaven homes are a niche product for which there is no real competition. In Belhaven, we are able to offer easy beach access, ocean views and a traditional style neighborhood within the Roads End area. We continue to sell everything we build there."

Oksenholt, who was born and raised in Lincoln City, "so I have deep roots here and really care about this town," gives a lot of credit to the company's architect, Duncan McRoberts, his brother-in-law, who is considered one of the top 40 traditional architects in the world.

"He has designed such beautiful and unique homes," Oksenholt said.

Oksenholt has a degree in business administration from Walla Walla (Wash.) University and a law degree from the University of Washington.

More important, he said, have been his supportive parents, who have encouraged him to think for himself.

"Thus, when people told me I was crazy when I took the Construction Contractors Board (CCB) exam rather than the bar exam, I didn't give it a second thought," he said. "When I was 19, I was very interested in investing in real estate so I took a challenge test and received my real estate license. Although I am not active with it, I still have it."

As assured as Oksenholt is about his company's prosperity from a business standpoint, he understands there are other reasons behind his success.

"I am a Christian," he said, "so if I am talking about reasons that OCC continues to be successful in this difficult economy the first credit I would give would be to God. I really believe I have had a lot of blessings and I don't take any of them for granted. During this downturn, we have all seen how quickly even the best of businesses can experience trouble."

Along with his wife, Meredith, and two boys, Denny and EJ, Oksenholt also credits his father, Erling, who has been a practicing physician here for almost 40 years. "Even though my wife is currently more focused on growing our hospitality group of businesses, she has been and remains a very important part of our spec home division," he said.

Family isn't the only key to Oksenholt's success, however. Quick to share credit, he says his employees and subcontractors also play a pivotal role.

"In our business, the most talented employees are recognized and given considerable authority," he said. "If they work hard, they can progress very quickly when times are good. In a difficult economy, they all appreciate job security. I really believe that, from top to bottom, we have the most talented employees in the industry. I always try to invest in talent."

"I believe in building a good team and giving them the authority and ability to succeed," he said. "Because I have a very good team that helps manage the day-to-day operations and customer service, I am able to focus on overall business strategy and the real estate side of the business."

Then, there's the conservative approach he takes to investing and running a business.

"My father always preached to me about not taking on too much debt and now, more than ever, I appreciate that advice," he said.

In addition, Oksenholt said that the sound reputation his company has established in the community attracts bank financing.

"We are one of few builders anywhere who can still get financing to build spec homes," he said. "Our bank, West Coast Bank, has been great to work with and they recognize and appreciate the success we've continued to have."

More than anything, it's his attention to detail that Oksenholt points to for allowing his company to keep building while others struggle to continue operations.

"We have developed a very good reputation," he said, "and we work hard to continue to further that reputation on every project we work on. I have learned a lot since the first home that I built, but every employee knows that I have always believed in quality and never ask anyone to cut any corners on a construction project."