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Stratford Homes is expanding its reach

Thu., Nov. 1, 2007



Vice president and general manager John M. Davis of Stratford Homes in Rathdrum gives a tour of one of the houses. (Kathy Plonka / The Spokesman-Review)

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RATHDRUM – Every 14 days, Stratford Homes in Rathdrum ships a new home to destinations like Riggins, Idaho; Alberta, Canada, or even Kodiak Island, Alaska. About 80 modular homes were trucked out of the 65,000-square-foot production plant last year, according to John Davis, vice president and general manager.

Each custom designed home is “stick-built” inside the assembly-line production plant, then hauled to the construction site where it is assembled, and final construction is

completed by an independent, authorized builder. Homes headed to Alaska are trucked to Seattle, loaded onto barges and travel north via the Inland Passage.

According to Davis, Stratford Homes has grown steadily since Jobs Plus helped bring them to the area in 1995. The Boekel Road facility, one of three owned by the Stratford Building Corp. of Connecticut, is now one of Rathdrum's biggest employers, building and shipping the pre-fabricated modular homes in a sales area that includes Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and Canada. The homes are sold through a network of builders and the local sales facility in Rathdrum.

Qualifying to sell homes across the international border had long been a goal of the company, and meant jumping through a lot of bureaucratic hoops, said Davis. With all paperwork completed and a system of builders established, sales in Canada began earlier this spring. "We have been very well received," he said. "We already have three homes ordered for customers in Alberta, and six more will be heading to British Columbia."

There are many advantages to modular construction, according to Davis. The homes are constructed to meet or exceed state building code requirements in a climate-controlled environment. Job delays usually associated with new home construction, such as weather, subcontractor problems and damaged or missing materials, are eliminated.

Davis said the crew of licensed craftsmen and skilled builders at the plant take pride in their work, and quality remains high due to their ability to work as a well-synchronized team and regular quality assurance inspections.

The process typically takes four months, from the time a customer chooses the home they want, to move-in date. Once the home has been scheduled for construction, the builder obtains permits and begins site and foundation preparation. Once construction is started in the Rathdrum plant, it takes about 14 days until the completed modules roll out, ready to be lifted onto trucks for delivery to the home site.

With such a short build time, changes are nearly impossible to make once building has begun. That's not a problem, according to Davis. He says the many detailed preconstruction conferences held with home buyers eliminate the need for last-minute changes, and lead to a less stressful building experience for the buyer. Buyers, he

contends, choose to build modular homes after careful consideration. “Our customers have done their homework, researched our product and know what they want.”

Company research has found the average customer buying a Stratford Home is over age 40, is not a first-time home buyer, has often gone through the home-building process before, and is often looking for a way to build a custom home with fewer hassles. Many customers choose Stratford when building recreation homes, and others choose modular construction where accessibility or difficulty in finding contractors in outlying areas are issues.

The typical Stratford Home is a 1,600- to 6,000-square-foot custom home, built with quality fixtures and materials. Stratford’s in-house architects and draftsmen help home buyers choose one of their 60 home plans and designs, and then customize it to fit their lifestyle, using the latest technology. Homes come in many styles, including ranchers, bi-levels, tri-levels, chalets and Cape Cod cottages. Once roofed and sided, there is nothing to distinguish a modular home from a stick-built home, according to Davis.

Stratford Homes is still looking to grow, Davis said. Not long ago they began working on increasing sales in the local area by building a sales center, featuring two display homes. Since the sales center opened in June of 2006, six homes have been built locally, and two more are in line for construction. Stratford is also involved in building some spec homes for the first time. The new homes are in the Spirit Lake area.

“There is no home-building slump at Stratford Homes,” Davis said. Although sales are strong, he guarantees he can get a home under construction within 30 to 60 days from when it is ordered. He says Stratford’s year-round workers are busy turning out homes every four days, and encourages prospective buyers and those interested in their building process, to stop by for a tour.

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