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BEST IN THEIR CLASS

Tuckahoe Creek

Starting out in the business of banking, Tuckahoe owner Gray Stettinius is proud of his construction company's top-quality product and "Best of Class" designation.

Best in their Class:

Tuckahoe Creek Construction delivers top-quality work in every aspect from customer service to end results.

by Joan Tuppence

“Best of Class” is a designation that Gray Stettinius, owner of Tuckahoe Creek Construction, treasures.

“Our clients expect us to deliver a top-quality product,” he explains. “but we also strive to communicate with them and address their needs in a ‘Best of Class’ manner.”

Stettinius founded the Virginia business with a partner in 1990 as a diversified residential new construction company. Prior to opening the business, Stettinius worked in the financial industry, calling on small-to-medium size commercial accounts.

“I became more interested in the businesses than in the business of banking,” he said. Stettinius gravitated toward residential construction because he “wanted something that was focused on creating or manufacturing. I wanted a company that produced something.”

The company started slowly with one small house project.

“We immersed ourselves in everything about the house as we learned the business.”

Over the last 20 years, the company has worked with a variety of construction projects, from light commercial and first-time move up to empty-nester and semi-custom building. The company’s specialty in high-end construction evolved over time. For the first eight years, Stettinius and his partner were opportunistic, completing projects in a variety of categories.

“If there was an empty-nester neighborhood, we would develop empty-nester plans. If it was a starter home, we’d do a starter home and so forth,” Stettinius said.

In 1998, Stettinius bought out his partner’s interest in the business in

order to focus predominately on luxury new construction.

“I like the challenges and creativity of custom building,” he explained. Today, Tuckahoe Creek still specializes in luxury residential construction in the Central Virginia area, but has added high-end remodeling and renovation to the mix.

He finds great rewards in perfecting the customer service aspect of the business. “That’s everything,” he said. “In the lower price points you are selling price and product. It’s hard to sell customer service because it is product driven. In custom building, whether it is new construction, a new addition or a kitchen remodel, you are concentrating on quality and service. I think that is what we do well. It’s how we try to differentiate our business.”

That customer-centric focus is the



OPPOSITE PAGE: (LEFT) Livingroom with wood-mold firebrick and granite surrounding. Custom home, Goochland County, Va.

(MIDDLE) Slate sink with old-fashioned spicket. Custom home, Goochland County, Va.

(RIGHT) Family room with arched stone fireplace. Custom home, Goochland County, Va.

THIS PAGE: (ABOVE) Master Bedroom with panel molding and tray ceiling. Custom home, Richmond, Va.

(BOTTOM LEFT) Informal powder room with scalloped edge bowl on wood top. Custom home, Richmond, Va.

(MIDDLE) Pet niche nestled in a kitchen island. Custom home, Goochland County, Va.

(RIGHT) Custom carved limestone mantle. Custom home, Goochland County, Va. Photos by Kip Dawkins.





main reason that Stettinius became a member of GuildQuality, a third-party company that interviews customers about their experience. In 2010 and 2011, Tuckahoe Creek received the Guildmaster with Highest Distinction recognition, an award that is given out yearly.

“You have to hit certain thresholds for customer service to get the award,” Stettinius said.

Stettinius has made it his goal is to make sure that he has “every client as a referral because happy clients are our best advertising.”

He is a proponent of ongoing education.

He is one of only a handful of Master Builders in the Richmond, Va. market and he has earned the designations of Certified Graduate Builder, Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist and Certified Green Professional.

“Being a Certified Green Professional is helpful to us because it gives us the knowledge to advise our clients on green products and processes,” say Stettinius who notes that Tuckahoe Creek is an Earthcraft Certified Builder that focuses on continually improving environmental performance.

Stettinius believes that having the industry designations shows professional commitment.

“We compete with just a handful of other builders in this marketplace,” he said. “These designations are yet one more way we differentiate ourselves.”



OPPOSITE PAGE: Baker’s island painted black with wood top and knotty alder cabinets and cast stone range hood. Custom home, Goochland County, Va. Photo by Kip Dawkins.

ABOVE: Front elevation. Custom home, Goochland County, Va. Photo by Roger Spence.

LEFT: Timber frame porch, bluestone patio and pool addition. Custom renovation, Richmond, Va. Photo by Kip Dawkins.



Like other areas of the construction industry, the high-end new construction market has taken a hit from the economy. "Right now people are being careful," said Stettinius who is past president of The Home Building Association of Richmond and currently serves as a director of The Home Building Association of Richmond as well as a director of The National Association of Home Builders.

Before the economic decline, Tuckahoe Creek was building homes that ranged from \$1.5 to \$2.5 million with anywhere from 5,000 to 12,000 sq. ft. of space. "That market was very active locally," he said.

Today there are fewer homes being built at the price point.

"We are still seeing \$1 to \$1.5 million homes but people are still a little cautious," Stettinius said, although that has begun to change.

Homes topping the \$1 million mark can take up to one to two years to construct which was one reason Tuckahoe Creek didn't feel any type of pinch until 2009.

"We didn't see the pipeline start to dry up until early 2008," Stettinius said. "2009 was very slow but 2010 loosened up a little. In 2011, we have a chance of filling the pipeline again."

Stettinius used some of the company's downtime to increase its marketing efforts and focus on high-end remodeling and repair and maintenance services. One of the exciting things to come out

of the recent down-turn has been our move into additions, remodeling, and renovations. Historically, this market has been controlled by just a handful of remodeling contractors specializing in the type of high-end work that is the norm for us. We have been very pleased, and a little surprised, with the reception we have received by the market. It's as though the luxury remodeling client has been waiting for an alternative.

"We have also taken advantage of the slowdown to evaluate our processes," he said. "We have done things internally to help efficiencies."

For example, the company replaced its 15-year-old software with state-of-the-art construction management software and improved its change order management process. "The software allows us to do things more time efficiently and more accurately. We have streamlined our accounts payable processes achieving both greater efficiency and improved accuracy and oversight," Stettinius said.

The company has also re-examined its field processes.

"In some cases we are self performing items that were previously subbed out," Stettinius said. "We have also invested in digital take-off technology to improve the efficiency and accuracy of our estimating processes."

The photos of architectural details that line the walls of Stettinius' office show

off the company's mastery in building. Each house Tuckahoe Creek builds has its own unique characteristics.

"We learn something from every project we do," Stettinius said. In one case, Stettinius suggested to his clients that they consider a timber-frame porch addition instead of a Tudor-style porch to complement their home. "We had recently completed another timber frame project, and the client was thrilled with the idea," he said.

His take on custom building goes back to his commitment to customer service.

"Every client is different and we have to help our clients execute the construction of their home by involving them in whatever manner they want," he explains. "Some clients are very confident in both the process and in their decisions, while others require some hand holding."

Stettinius believes that for someone who has the money and desire to build, this is a wonderful time to build or renovate a house.

"I can't imagine costs getting any better than they are at the moment," he said. "Twenty-four months from now a lot of people will be saying 'I wish I had done this last year.'" CLT

OPPOSITE PAGE: Lady's vanity and dressing area with radiant heat marble floor. Custom home, Henrico County. Photo by Kip Dawkins.



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