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Builder/Architect



**Renehan
Building Group**

Pursuing His Passion with Professionalism

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By Jessica Klarp

It has been said that when one door closes, another one opens. For James Renehan of Renehan Building Group, the door opened on a 1950s split-level on a gorgeous lot in Malvern, and when he was through, it was a 5,500-square-foot beauty filled with a substantial addition, stairs in the central hall, gourmet kitchen, stone fireplace and countless luxuries that the occupants absolutely adore. The door that closed, a 20-year career in the paint industry, offered him an opportunity to pursue his passion, and prepared him by giving him the business acumen to make his new venture a success.

In the paint industry, he had worked his way up the ladder to run a \$100-million business, ultimately as vice president of sales and operations for a small, family-owned company. When the family decided to sell, Renehan had a decision to make: Pursue a corporate career or branch out on his own. With the well-being of his own young family at the front of his mind, he made the only move he

felt comfortable and secure making. In 2007, Renehan Building Group was born.

“I knew that a transition back to a large corporation wasn’t right for me,” Renehan said. “I had always wanted to be a full-time home builder since I was a kid, so I decided to make the transition into it now.”

Given his background, one might reason it wasn’t that much of a risk. After all, he had been working on houses most of his adult life and has an entrepreneurial spirit inherited from his father. Prior to gutting and putting an addition on the rebuilt home in Malvern, Renehan had worked on a succession of homes.

Small projects led to more notable ones, with each venture getting more complex. There was the run-down but beautiful old lake home in West Hartford, CT, which he stripped to the bones before renovating, updating and regrooming the lot. There

The Malvern project





was a foreclosure in New London where the process was much the same. Next came a log cabin/post-and-beam hybrid in the mountains that now serves as a family retreat. In the process, Renehan started building contacts that helped prepare him for the next step.

Invaluable was paint industry associate Ted West, who provided home building contacts and who introduced Renehan to the membership of local home builders associations. After being involved mostly on a national level, Renehan is looking forward to becoming an active member of his local HBA. "So many people have been helpful," he said. "They have prepared me for the next step."

For RBG, the next step will be new homes built in two small subdivisions. The first, named The Woods at Flint Hill in Upper Saucon Township, is comprised of five 1-acre-plus wooded lots perfect for area families to settle down. The homes will be three to four bedrooms with a master suite, spacious kitchen with breakfast nook, large great room with fireplace, full basement and garage.

The second property is located in a 10-lot subdivision called The Estates at Cooks Creek in Springfield Township, Bucks County, that will support slightly more upscale homes on 2+ wooded acres. The additional square footage of these homes will offer families the luxury of Jacuzzi tubs, upgraded lighting, granite counter-tops, spacious foyers and coffered ceilings, to name just a few of the features Renehan has planned for the properties.

Within a month, the builder plans to

break ground on the first house in The Woods at Flint Hill, followed by a second home built on The Estates at Cooks Creek property. And he hopes that the pattern of consumer interest in his work that occurred in Malvern will transfer to these new subdivisions.

The Malvern project (as he likes to call it) was originally intended to become the Renehan family home; an oversized, detached garage would serve as equipment storage for RBG, and the office overhead would become RBG headquarters. It was a good plan — until he put the RBG sign in the yard just prior to the rough-in stage and the offers started pouring in. Ten days later, the house was under contract. As a result, the personal project shifted to a custom-home building job.

Dealing with the clients and the selection process offered further insight into custom home building, and Renehan knew that he had made the right choice. His many years at the paint company, focusing on good customer service, quality and integrity, parlayed nicely into the custom market, where service is just as important as a solidly built home.

"Once the family signed the contract," Renehan said, "we worked hand in hand on the project. They made all the finish selections based on the budget I had set. It was very much a daily working relationship. They were a fabulous family." At the family's request, the six-bedroom became a five-bedroom with finished basement, upgraded deluxe kitchen with commercial appliances, and large great room with stone fireplace, just one of three fireplaces in the





home. And then, of course, the garage, which was to be Renehan's company office, was now sold along with the house.

So he regrouped and adjusted the plan. Renehan Building Group now has an office on Lancaster Avenue in Malvern. His longtime administrative assistant at the paint company, Kathy Pavlovitch, made the jump into home building alongside Renehan. "It is very nice to trust someone as much as I do Kathy," he said. "I know she will handle clients with the appropriate level of professionalism in any situation that may arise."

During the Malvern project, Pavlovitch and Renehan perfected the company's job-costing software and all the financial systems; they consulted with lawyers and accountants; they planned and created contingencies; they had fun.

"It is the business side of things that will carry this to the next level," Renehan said. "It is critical to expect and deliver craftsmanship and attention to detail on the job. You can build the best house you want, but if you can't keep track of expenses, control costs and manage the business side of things, then you won't be in business very long."

Building an atmosphere of respect is also important for the newcomer, not only with clients, but with employees and subcontractors as well. He understands the importance of building good working relationships: "Without good subcontractors, we can't put out a good project. It has to be mutually respectful, because their workmanship is a direct reflection on the company. If you respect the job you are doing, the product will be a better one for it."

His enthusiasm for building is contagious, but that's how entrepreneurs are — they know it will work, so it does ... but not without unending effort and focus. "I am a very motivated person," he pointed out. "I am positive, very simply, because this is something I love and that I have always wanted to do. I keep myself on track, because I was raised to do whatever it takes to get the job done. And that's what I do."

So far, the "open door" has created a wealth of possibility for Renehan. He is keeping his ears open for opportunities closer to Malvern, where he realizes he will have to be flexible in a market full of opportunity in the form of potential teardowns and renovations. Until then, he is concentrating on excitement, building at The Woods at Flint Hill and The Estates at Cooks Creek projects, eager to get started building custom homes for happy families.

"My goal will be to concentrate as much personal attention not only on quality," he said, "but also on what the customer wants. We achieved that in Malvern. It's not always easy, because it often involves shifting gears midstream, but the end result is a satisfied customer, which is really the best reference anyone can have ... and the sense of accomplishment you feel when you put someone in a house that they love. It's fantastic." ■

For more information on Renehan Building Group, please call (610) 251-9333 or visit online at www.renehanbuildinggroup.com