

The Travises held events to introduce builders to Sturgill Estates.

Bucking the odds in homebuilding >

Executive Summary:

OK, we're smack in the middle of a downturn in the economy—and especially in the building trades. So why in the world would John Travis pick this time to go out on his own? Because he wanted to.

By Rachael Garrity

On a good day, a really good day in early 2009, a business owner who seems to ride outside the current economic crisis quietly states his case. He is less interested in proving he is brave than that he is solid; he is bold than that he is selective. He has chosen his business because he likes where he lives and wants to let other people know they, too, can live here without dropping the proverbial bundle to do so.

Meet John Travis. Originally from upstate New York, this 54-year-old developer came to the New River Valley to work for Pulaski Furniture, where he became plant manager. Then, with a prescience that still provides a bedrock for his decision-making, he realized that it was time to ask, "What next?"

By 2,000, John and his wife, Donna, had formed J and D Builders, complete with a design center in their basement. By last December, that center had morphed into a showroom in Christiansburg, but the business itself has stayed focused on its basic mission: provide quality homes at a good price, and make sure the process rewards other local businesses and creates a product both builder and owner point to with pride.

J and D began in Pulaski, where the Travis family lives. English Forest Estates, a project in that town initiated three years ago, focused on building 21 homes. The company's newest development, Sturgill Estates, is in Christiansburg, not far from New River Valley Mall.



John and Donna Travis of J&D Builders.



Construction is done in a rural setting.


In his characteristically understated manner, John explains that the land was originally a farm, owned by the father of the current owners, a man who very much wanted to see it developed. In working with the heirs, J and D has made that dream a reality, and also created a development that is at once affordable—under \$300,000 per home—and representative of construction that is both sound and environmentally friendly.

All homes constructed by J and D meet the test to become EarthCraft certified, which means the energy efficiencies inherent to that building approach are available, whether or not owners apply for the certification. (There is a cost for certification, but it carries with it tax credits.)

The first Sturgill Estates home was available in March, but before then J and D held a series of events at Bull and Bones Brewhaus and Grill in Blacksburg, to introduce selected realtors to their development concept, which

included ideas such as giving those realtors an incentive to sell new construction by paying them up front a part of the commission – specifically \$2,500.

John notes that the company's success has been helped too, by the talents of the couple's son, who built a Web site, and daughter, who used the skills she has gained working with an advertising agency to enhance the visibility of that site.

Obviously, it is a formula that works. The last week in January brought a contract to build a custom home—not exactly the order of the day during the nation's economic doldrums. 



A sign shows the plan for Sturgill Estates.



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