

BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS, CONSTRUCTING HOMES

Elliott focuses on relationships and craftsmanship

Written by Hope Brumbach Photography by Young Kwak



At a birthday party for his wife, Art Elliott looked at the gathered crowd and realized half the guests were clients of his.

In addition to constructing homes, the 64-year-old president of Coeur d'Alene-based Shelter Associates Inc. has built friendships through his general contracting company, which specializes in custom residential, commercial and remodeling projects.

"That's the thing that has meant the most to me is the friendships you develop in the process of creating someone an environment," Elliott says. "I like the process. I like seeing things finish well ... just seeing the smile on the client's face."

In the 30 years since Elliott began Shelter Associates, he has built a reputation of quality craftsmanship, high-performance buildings and dedication to the community. The firm has completed more than 500 homes, remodeling projects, tenant improvements and commercial buildings.

Elliott grew up in Michigan and graduated in 1966 with a bachelor's

degree in business administration from Wayne State University, in Detroit. After graduating, he moved to Florida to work at Sears, managing a toy department.

After two years, he moved back to Michigan to work with his father, a real estate agent who started building federal housing projects.

"I figured I could build a house if I could put together metal dollhouses without directions," Elliott says with a laugh.

On the personal side

Elliott and his wife, Trudy, have a blended family of six children and seven grandchildren. He enjoys playing tennis, racquetball, reading and the outdoors.

He's also known for his love of animals, and his yellow Labrador, Shine, has been coming to work with him for the last seven years.

In 1969, the father and son began Comfort Homes Inc., first constructing modular homes and then moving on to conventional, framed homes. From 1969 to 1976, they built and developed more than 350 homes.

He then split off from the family business to begin Shelter Associates, concentrating on semi-custom homes. In 1981, he moved to Coeur d'Alene, where he didn't intend to continue building.



He spent two years getting to know the community, and after a manufacturing venture didn't pan out, he began construction again with Shelter Associates in 1983. In the beginning, he employed only a bookkeeper, Elliott says.

Shelter now has about 10 employees and completes fewer than a dozen homes a year, taking on some custom remodels, tenant improvements and new commercial buildings as well.

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Today, Shelter stresses energy efficiency, quality of lifestyle and high-performance structures, Elliott says. It gives him a sense of satisfaction to see a complicated project come together, he says.

"They know when they give us plans it's going to be built the way they want," he says.

The firm was the first Registered Master Builder in North Idaho, recognized by the Idaho Building Contractors Association for superior legal and ethical standards and quality craftsmanship. Shelter also been named as one of the West's Best Builders by Sunset Magazine.

Elliott participates in a number of local boards and associations.

He's served as chairman of the Coeur d'Alene Chamber of Commerce and as president of both the North Idaho Building Contractors Association and the Idaho Building Contractors Association. The state association has named him Builder of the Year twice, and he's one of only three builders statewide to receive the honor multiple times.

In addition to involvement in associations, Elliott annually conducts custom-home-building seminars, and he helps prepare a monthly newsletter for local architects, insurance adjusters and real estate agents.

"He's well-connected in the community," says Sherry Delio, a neighbor and client of Elliott's. "He really does a lot of good work."

Elliott built the Delios' home in 2000 while they were still living in Phoenix.

Building codes required a tiny grassy swale, even though Delio's husband, Tony, hadn't planned on a yard. So Elliott surprised them with a small lawnmower. He also made sure the heat was turned on when they returned from Arizona, she says, describing such acts as "little things that were really nice."

"He kept us informed," Delio says. "It was a really good experience. We're glad we picked him as our builder. He built us a beautiful house. It was a house we wanted. It wasn't a house he wanted." ■

Hope Brumbach is a freelance writer who lives in Coeur d'Alene.