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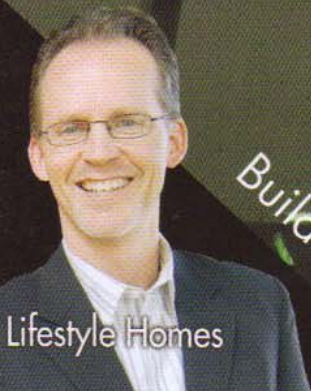


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Mike Arnett of Lifestyle Homes

Passionate Portland builder finds new ways to spark interest in the industry.

by Jennifer McDermitt

Some people are perfectly content getting up for work each day, doing the job and collecting a paycheck without considering whether or not the work they do means anything or brings some level of fulfillment. Mike Arnett of Lifestyle Homes, however, is not one of those people. Arnett, by contrast, is someone who needs to feel passionate about the job, and after 17 years in the building industry, Arnett is proud to say that he gets up every morning and still feels that spark of excitement that he first felt years ago.

"Everyone probably defines success in different ways," said Arnett. "For me, I feel successful when I enjoy being thoroughly involved in what I create, and when that enjoyment is shared by my homebuyers."

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PASSION DWINDLED

Arnett's drive to stay inspired most likely comes from his early career experience, where he found himself becoming disillusioned with not only a career, but also a lifestyle. Although Arnett grew up in the building industry — his father is a builder — his desire to follow that path hadn't been lit yet; instead, Mike earned a journalism degree from the University of Oregon in 1986.

Arnett then traveled to Chicago, where he spent the next five years in sales promotion and advertising with a Chicago agency. The luster of the big city soon faded, however, and while he gained valuable client relationship experience working with Fortune 500 accounts, Arnett found himself spending most of his time commuting and thinking about what he would rather be doing.

"It was a 90-minute commute, one way, so I had plenty of time to evaluate my life, my career and my priorities," said Arnett. "I would

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Builder Profile

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think about the kind of life I wanted to lead, the lifestyle I wanted, and my thoughts kept coming back to really controlling my own destiny. Many thoughts turned to what my father had done right before my eyes. I realized that my dad really valued his projects, his clients and his own time. I wanted the same thing. I wanted to build real value into what I did everyday."

Arnett was certainly no stranger to the industry. He not only grew up in a building family, but Arnett had spent plenty of time working for his father and had enjoyed the experience. Arnett decided to return to Portland to build his career in new home construction. His father offered him a place in his company, but, although flattered, Arnett knew this was something he would need to do on his own.

PASSION IGNITED

After returning to Portland in 1991, Arnett set his sights on starting his business. He secured financing for his first feature home, and things started falling into place. Unfortunately, the market in the early 1990s was tough, and Arnett's home took a while to sell. Arnett never questioned his decision to switch careers — he stayed positive and the home eventually sold. By 1992, the market started to pick up, and Arnett was on his way.

"Even when the market was hot, I knew I wanted to manage a smaller firm," said Arnett. "I believed I provided the best value for my clients, and received the most personal satisfaction, by staying personally involved in every project."

Arnett's business remained steady from 1992-2005, building about 10 custom homes a year. In 2006, after building 16 homes that year, Arnett surveyed the market and determined that the industry was too hot. Lot prices ran up to points that could not be sustained, home inventories were rising, and Arnett decided to take a well-timed sabbatical in 2007. He feared that continuing at that pace could return him to that old disillusioned feeling he experienced in Chicago years earlier.

"I just thought 'O.k.; let's take the time next year to regroup and do everything we didn't do last year because we were so busy,'" he said.

PASSION REKINDLED

The much-needed break also allowed Arnett to do some reflecting on the industry and his place in it. The slowing

market had made everything more competitive — locations, floor plans, materials and systems — and when Arnett returned to building, he not only wanted his product to have a competitive edge, but he also wanted to offer his customers something unique. During his research on green building concepts, he began linking what it meant to be environmentally conscious with the newest building technologies and methods. Arnett soon felt a renewed sense of passion and excitement for the industry.

"The more I read about the newest methods and possibilities, the more excited I got about turning standard houses into homes that would be more structurally sound and less expensive for my customers to operate," said Arnett. "I was excited to give my customers homes that are more than just 'green' — they are *high-performance* homes that address common problems with moisture control, indoor air quality and energy efficiency."

Arnett will demonstrate the high-performance concept with two houses that will be part of this year's Ultimate Open House in April, a tour of homes produced by the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland.

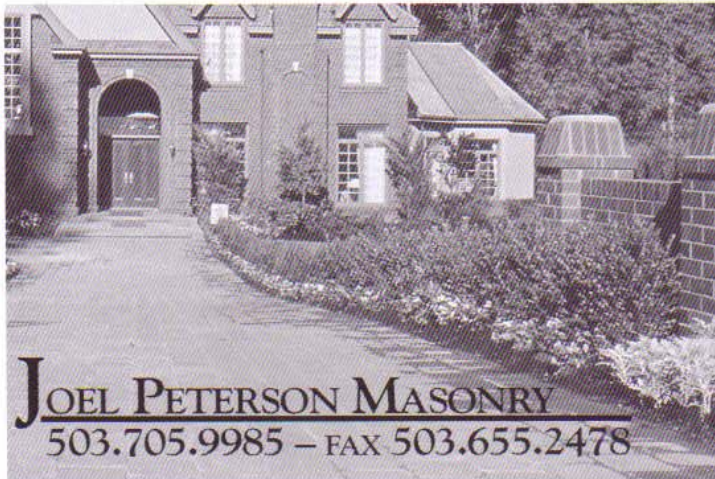
SHARING THE PASSION

Growing up with a builder father, Arnett learned early on the importance of belonging to the Home Builders Association. While his father is, and remains, a member, Arnett was recently installed as 2008 president of his local association, the Home Builders Association of Metropolitan Portland.

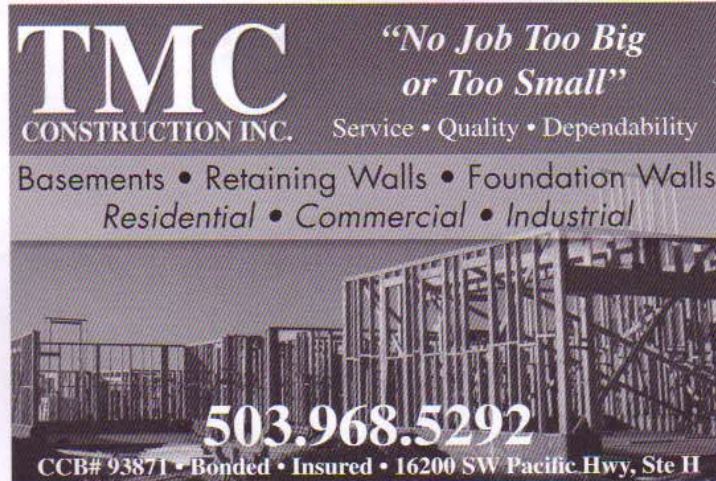
"In my opinion, anyone who generates a career in this industry needs to be a member — it's really a no-brainer," he said.

Due to the current market slowdown, Arnett knows many builders in the state who are struggling, but he offers them some advice. "Even though times are tough, now is when you need the association most," he said. "You are not alone, and together we can find solutions to common problems. From educational programs to networking opportunities, now is the time to regroup, and the association is a great place to do that."

From career choices to building methods to association involvement, Arnett's passion carries through in everything he does. "It's kind of ironic that I ended up in the home building world when I didn't plan for it in college; you could even say I took that industry and lifestyle for granted," he said. "I am so grateful that after all these years, I still love doing what I do." ///



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