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## Stonewood LLC

FOURTH-GENERATION LEADERSHIP ADDS WEB-BASED CUSTOMER SERVICE TO FIRM'S PROVEN MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

by Sandra Guy

Stonewood LLC has developed its reputation as a detail-oriented and customer-service-driven luxury-home builder, built on four generations of building experience. Its systems-based approach to building homes incorporates transparent budgeting of projects, extensive job-site quality control, and Web-based information-management systems to give clients real-time updates on the progress of their dream home.

This Web savvy comes thanks to Sven Gustafson, the fourth-generation owner whose great-grandfather

started the family construction heritage by hand building barns in Wisconsin. Sven's grandfather, Harry, and father, Jeffrey—both entrepreneurs, land developers, and builders—built their businesses in Edina, Minnesota, and in the process developed the Gustafson family reputation as artisan homebuilders, resulting in Stonewood LLC and its reputation.

Before following in the family tradition of building homes, Sven worked as a software developer, creating accounting software and providing

business and management consulting. But Sven found he needed to pursue his passion for building, and he realized that he could apply his talents to help his father run the family business. He brought to Stonewood his knack for developing software and creating efficient and meaningful business systems and processes. The result is a Web-based system that lets Stonewood clients log in; see the project budget, drawings, blueprints, and schedule; approve or reject change orders; see their selections of paint colors, flooring, and other materials in a virtual setting; and e-mail questions and

### SOPHISTICATED HOMES

Brazilian cherry-stained plank flooring was used throughout this Stonewood-built home. The kitchen and dining-room ceilings feature enameled beams and crown molding that change direction from one room to the next, creating a sense of subtle separation.



### Lake Harriet

The renovation of this home in Minneapolis, MN, built in 1890, included a 3,500-square-foot addition that utilized elements from the home's original design, like clay tile glazed in a green color for the roof, and stone quarried from the original source for the exterior. Inside, Stonewood removed out-of-character contemporary details—clean line cabinetry, bright colors, track lighting—and replaced them with the original details of rich millwork, custom cabinetry, ironwork, authentic divided-light windows, and hand-carved fireplace surrounds.

comments simultaneously to project managers and others working on the design.

"Clients have full access to all of their project information, blueprints, specifications, change prodders, and communication," Sven says. "When clients are empowered with information, they understand and trust the building process. It's more fun, and clients understand the impact their decisions will have on the budget and the schedule. We start by having a completely open process with clients. We share all of our actual costs with them, and we've built our processes around that philosophy." He adds that clients get to see bids and invoices from subcontractors, if they desire to do so.

After Stonewood finishes a job, the client e-mails any items that need attention, such as a paint



touch-up. The Web system sends the client an e-mail notification when the work is completed, and the item gets checked off of a list. "I realized that the big difference between high-end-home builders is the client experience," Sven says. "We all build very nice homes. The difference comes when it's over and the client answers these questions: Did the client enjoy the experience? Did he or she know what the homebuilder was doing? Did the homebuilder stay on schedule? How did it go?"

He continues, stating, "It's expected that we'll build a quality home. Our point of difference is

that, when the home is complete, our clients have enjoyed the process, felt that they were always informed regarding the budget, the schedule, and the state of their project."

The philosophy and ethical practices have fostered success. Even in a down economy, the firm will celebrate a profitable year and will continue to grow into 2011, as it completes new and remodeled homes. For example, at Stonewood's 2010 Spring Preview Parade of Homes Model, a 7,800-square-foot, five-bedroom farmhouse-style home set on six acres of wooded acreage, features a

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SVEN GUSTAFSON, OWNER

steeped, pitched feeder roof, board-and-batten siding, Alder wood throughout the interior, 1¾-inch-thick interior doors, and floors made of reclaimed, wide-plank hickory with knots, imperfections, and a French-bleed edge to create a rustic, comfortable farmhouse style. The interior includes a paneled study with a coffered ceiling and built-in bookcases; a great room with floor-to-ceiling windows, Adlerwood floor-to-ceiling bookcases, and a hand-carved wood-burning fireplace; a formal dining room with 54-inch-tall enameled wainscoting; and a front porch with flagstone flooring that runs most of the length of the front of the house.

A home-restoration project on Lake Harriet in Minneapolis, one-half block off of the lake, doubled the size of an 1890-era, 3,500-square-foot home and added features such as redoing the exterior in locally quarried stone to recreate the original look, and adding millwork detail in finishes and cabinetry, installing a study, butler’s pantry, kitchen, informal dining space, a child’s bedroom, and a master-bedroom suite, to make the transformed historic space into a comfortable home.

“We build within our client’s desired architectural style—from French provincial to modern with full-on stainless-steel cabinetry and bright blue enamel and concrete countertops,” Sven says. “Yet we have a passion for authenticity in whatever we do, are fanatical about quality, and strive to work with only those craftsmen that share these philosophies.”

Stonewood is a leader in the use of cutting-edge building technologies and practices—ensuring the energy efficiency of its homes by incorporating green technologies, ICF wall construction, and industry-leading insulation and heating technologies, including geothermal heating systems that result in lasting value for the homeowner. “We want to continue to build 8–10 homes a year and do half-a-dozen renovations,” Gustafson says. “We maintain that number so we can provide the level of service, quality, project management, and customer service that our clients deserve.” ■



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