

2009 Custom Home

Pacesetter Awards

What have you done to improve your business this year? If you focused simply on survival, it's certain you haven't done enough. The go-go years, when anyone could build anything and make money, are long gone. Now everyone who's serious about staying in the profession must ensure at least one area of their company is setting the pace for others to follow.

This is the climate in which we chose this year's annual Pacesetter Award winners.

So perhaps it's no surprise we have just eight winners instead of our usual double digits. We selected from entries in seven aspects of custom home building: management, marketing, customer service, design, innovation, production, and community service. No award was given in the production category. But our other winners have established benchmarks all would do well to use as a measure of accomplishment. They are committed to constant reassessment and improvement of their businesses at every level. For them, the status quo is a no-go.

Read their stories and take your own measure. Are you doing even better?

Enter your company next year.

By Bruce D. Snider, Cheryl Weber,
Marla Misek Clark, and Meghan Drueding

2009 Pacesetter Awards Management

After he finished business school, Gus Rubio worked as a quality control manager at a large manufacturing plant. He and his colleagues implemented a new quality assurance system for the company, with dramatically positive results. This happened years ago, but Rubio vividly recalls the sense of satisfaction it brought him. "Ever since I left [that job], I've wanted to have the time to implement a quality control program in my business," he says. ■ Rubio now has his own custom building company, Gabriel Builders in Greer, S.C. And while his current workload isn't as light as many builders'—he has four high-end houses under way—he has finally found time to accomplish his goal. He recently hired a full-time quality assurance manager. Through the NAHB Research Center's National Housing Quality Program, he also engaged consultant Ken Clayman to help put together a company quality manual. "We're now tracking things we never did before," Rubio explains. The new system encompasses regular meetings, periodic reviews, surveys, and other documentation. Taken together, these methods provide a concrete way to measure customer satisfaction, jobsite safety, employee performance, and adherence to established time frames and budgets. For example, "job-ready" forms provide a written record of the building process, detailing when each part of the project is set for work by the appropriate subcontractor. And "scope of work" contracts prevent miscommunication between Rubio's staff and the subs. ■ Now, Rubio feels, is a good time for builders to make these kinds of changes. "When the economy turns around, you're ready to go and in much better shape than before," he points out. And he believes a quantifiable system of quality control can do wonders for morale and motivation. "I saw what it did at the manufacturing plant," he says. "It's relevant to custom builders too."—M.D.



Gus Rubio

Gabriel Builders
Greer, S.C.
www.gabrielbuilders.com
Type of business: Design/build
Years in business: 25
Employees: 10
2008 volume: Approximately \$10 million
2008 starts: 3