

- 2008 – Article – Northern Ontario Business – “Bay Builders erecting innovative business”
As a former area resident, Neff has returned from southern Ontario to the place she views as her home in order to become the North Bay area's licensed distributor of Guildcrest houses, which are constructed section by section in a 75,000 square-foot facility located in Morewood, Ontario. In this factory environment, workers are assigned to build specific sections of a home. The segments are then gathered, mounted on trucks, and transported to the target site. The various sections are then carefully assembled and sealed on the foundation by on-site workers. Following three to five weeks of utility hookups and various other final details, the customer can move in.

Guildcrest distributors are also found in Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie, leaving Neff's coverage area to reach towards Temagami, Mattawa and Verner to the west, and Sundridge to the south.

While the housing market in the North Bay area continues to grow, the lack of available skilled trades workers poses a problem and sometimes stifles the ability to keep up with demand, says Neff. In this way, Guildcrest's streamlined, factory-style approach helps to speed things along. After having signed off the finalized blueprints, customers can expect to be living in their new home within three months, or four if it falls within the busy summer period.

"What's great about it is that when once it's at the factory, you can get started on your foundation," she says. "You don't have to wait and won't have any delays that way."

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Neff describes the process as being virtually hands-free for the client, as Bay Builders will handle the construction of the foundation and will even meet with contractors to get quotes for whatever work needs to be done. This leaves the customer to give final approval to said quotes, as well as to whatever septic and well issues may be involved.

With this regimented approach and the construction of the house's components in a climate-controlled environment, delivery tends to fall within the designated scheduled times, she says.

"You know exactly when the house is being delivered," says Neff. "We'll tell you that on November 13, it's coming, and so you just set up for it and within three hours, the house is 80 per cent complete."

Customers can choose from more than 50 designs, and although there is a limitation on the level of customization that can be done, Neff says this is balanced out nicely by the fact this allows for set costs which will not fluctuate as construction moves forward. Although costs are similar, she is not competing with custom builders, who allow for a much broader range of flexible design and represent a different segment of the market.

Despite having been officially open for only a month or two, local interest has been so high that Neff says that she'll need to hire additional staff to keep up with demand. Three homes remain to be built by the end of the year, and bookings have already begun for the spring.

"I knew there was going to be interest, but I didn't realize how many people are looking for homes," she says.

www.baybuilders.ca

By NICK STEWART