

SOLD ON GUILDCREST

BY: Ken Sitter

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When Nicole Neff had a new home builder for her in Burk's Falls three years ago, she like it so much she decided to build similar homes for other people.

"I purchased a Guildcrest home and that's what sold me on the product," says Neff, a partner in Bay Builders, which specializes in selling and building modular, factory-built homes by Guildcrest Homes.

Neff was wrapping up the sale of the family business, Neff Kitchens, in Brampton and planning a move north when she purchased a home from J. Moffitt Construction in Burk's Falls and fell in love with the home's concept and quality.

So much so, she became good friends with co-owner Louisa Moffit and confided, "I would really love to get into this business.

"She took me under her wing and taught me the business," says Neff, who already had a background in the cabinetry business and formal education in the sales and marketing with a bachelor or commerce degree from the University of Guelph.

When the Guildcrest distributorship became available for North Bay and area, Neff with the enthusiastic support of Moffit didn't hesitate to go for it.

"Because of the quality of the product and because the North already embraces modular building, I knew it wouldn't be tough to sell," she says.

Neff teamed with builder Brent Rowley to establish Bay Builders in February 2006 and since the display home, west of Arnstein Industrial Equipment on Highway 17, was completed last September sales have been more than steady.

Thought the setting may do little to dispel the myth that modular homes are little more than glorified trailers, that's not the reaction would-be buyers have once they enter the home, she says.

"People do say, 'Wow,'" Neff says, and what is outside is forgotten.

The homes are well-built, well-insulated and well-designed and that shows, she says.

"A Guildcrest home is every bit as good and better than a traditional home."

Neff thanks several North Bay businesses for their support in outfitting the model home-the Green Store, Alger Appliances and Sears Flooring.

"If it wasn't for their contributions it would be very difficult to start up a business like this."

ENERGY STAR QUALIFIED

The homes are Energy Star qualified, meeting international environmental and energy-use standards, and are designed to easily add on alternate energy sources, including solar panels and ground-source heat.

“We’re building homes to the 2011 building standard,” she says. It’s a great program especially in the North where energy costs are so high.”

Buyers have up to 50 basic models from which to choose, as well as a range of options and upgrades.

“It’s impressive,” Neff says, allowing numerous permutations and flexibility in design.

“You can build something that is for a first-time buyer or something that is very upscale. We attract them all – new families, empty-nesters, retired people.”

People can bring their own blue-prints and Bay Builders will modularize them, she says.

Final price is based on the basic model, the number of modules and then add-on features. The only real question, “Neff says, is the cost of excavating the foundation.

“There is no guesswork. You can control 80 per cent of the cost.”

Costs are \$125 to \$140 per square foot, depending on the exterior and add-on features, Neff says, with final prices ranging from \$125,000 to \$300,000.

Do-it-yourselfers can have the option of turning into general contractors and doing or contracting a significant portion of the work themselves. Other buyers can choose Bay Builders’ turnkey option with the builder taking care of everything.

Much of the house is constructed at Guildcrest’s factory in Morewood, near Ottawa, and can take two to three months before it is shipped here, she says. Once on site, however, the final work can be done in three to five weeks.