

CREATING QUALITY CUSTOM HOMES, REMODELS AND COMMERCIAL WORKS

By Gordon Weeks, Editor



A custom home in Anacortes, with windows seven feet tall and 14 feet wide, facing south.

Piazza Construction built the 101,000-square-foot Oak Harbor Retirement Community and constructs palatial estates on golf courses, but on this day, company president John Piazza, Jr. is slicing a door into a woman's garage. "People think we just do these big custom homes," said Piazza, whose father John launched the Mount Vernon company in 1973. He points out photos of a recent project, a 900-square-foot beach house for a single occupant. The one thing the company doesn't create is duplication. "We don't do tract homes," Piazza said. "We do one of a kind."

Piazza also tackles large commercial projects, including the 75,650-square-foot \$ave on

Storage facility in Mount Vernon, the 35,000-square-foot assisted care facility Parkside Manor in Sedro-Woolley, and the 49,400-square-foot La Conner Retirement Inn. The company also creates multi-unit facilities, including the 204-unit Heritage Place Apartments in Burlington and the 184-unit Maple Park Apartment complex in Bellingham, as well as duplexes, triplexes and fourplexes.

John Piazza, Sr. worked in the aircraft industry in New York before moving to the Seattle area to work for Boeing. Piazza lost his job during the waves of layoffs in the late 1960s and worked odd jobs and in home building before launching Piazza Construction, Inc. in 1973, building his first home at the Skagit Golf

and Country Club. That same year, he turned to land development by purchasing plats at the country club.

Piazza helped launch Skagit Island County Builders Association in 1979, and served as its president in 1987. In 1982, he and wife Dottie established Coldwell Banker Piazza Realty. John Sr. is one of 12 builders chosen by the president of the National Association of Home Builders to work on a task force requested by the Bush administration and funded by the Department of Energy called "Zero Energy Homes."

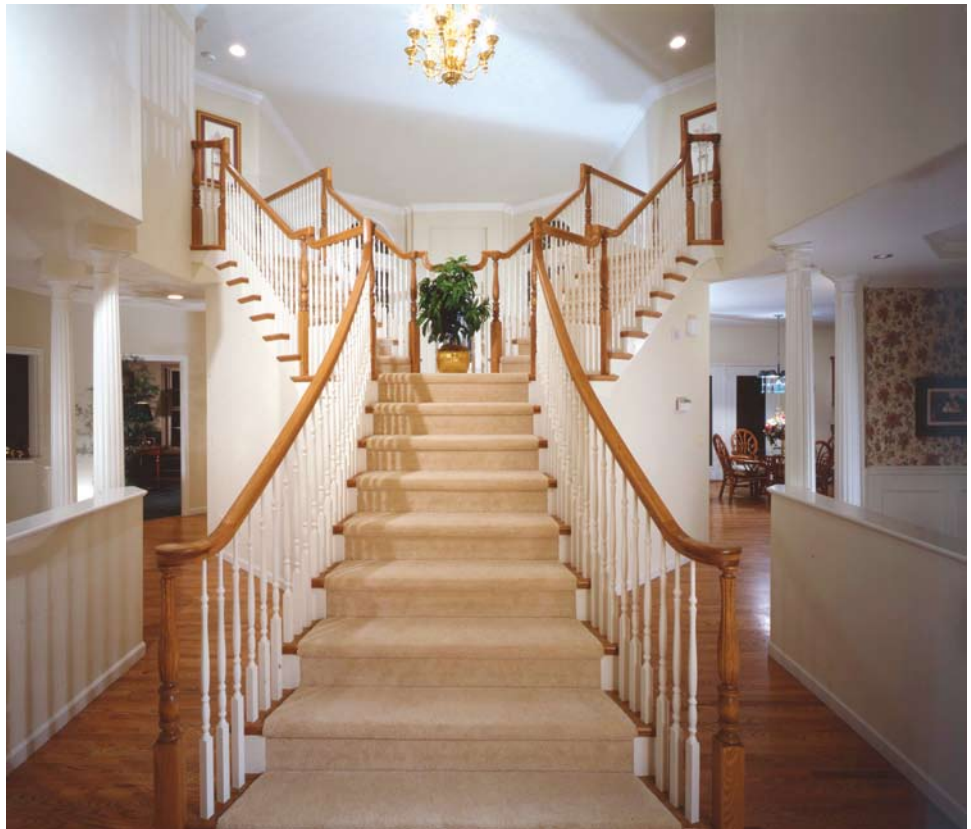
Dottie has an active real estate license and heads the property management division of the company. Her impressive resume includes four stints as SICBA

treasurer, and as the group's president in 1990. In 2002, she was the first woman to serve as president of the Building Industry Association of Washington. She serves as vice president on the board of directors for the Northwest Rental Owners Association.

Piazza, Jr. began working full-time for his father in 1989. "My first tools were a broom and a dustpan. I said (to my father), 'What am I supposed to build with these?' And he said, 'You'll build a reputation, and build yourself from the ground up, just like a house.'"

Piazza, Jr. took over as corporation president in January 2001. He was the key onsite contractor for the Oak Harbor Retirement Community, and also oversaw the 61 cottage home development at the Wildlife Development in Sedro-Woolley.

Among the company's many SICBA awards are the 2001 "Project of the Year" for a single family residence more than 3,000 square foot, for a home in Anacortes; the 1999 "Project of the Year" for area enhancement for the La Conner Retirement Inn; the 1998 award for area enhancement for Parkside Special Care in Sedro-Woolley; and the 1994 best area enhancement for the company's own warehouse complex at 2301 Market St. in Mount Vernon. Piazza Construction is housed in an 18,000-square-foot office, warehouse complex it built and owns on Stewart Road in Mount Vernon.



The stairway in a house in Eaglemont.



The theater room inside the home of Bill Inman, Piazza Construction's project manager for custom homes.

Although renowned for larger structures, Piazza also builds smaller dwellings, Piazza points out. "I wouldn't call us a high-end

builder," he said. "We're an upper/middle range builder." The price per square foot ranges from \$135 to

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A master bathroom constructed in a second floor addition over a garage.



Piazza Construction also specializes in remodels.



\$316, and the company produces estimates. Piazza Construction these days creates about three new homes a year - a few years ago, it would have been five or six a year. Less land is being annexed for building. "The hard part is getting the financing," said Piazza, who points out financing is easier for remodels. The company has increasingly worked on remodels since 2000. "The market tanked and we were scrambling to do anything," Piazza said.

The most popular remodels are kitchens and bathrooms, as well as adding skylights and doors. One project found the company ripping the roof off the space over a three-car garage and creating a 1,080-square-foot master bedroom and bathroom. After reroofing, even the owner couldn't remember where the workers had entered. "That's important, that it seems to blend seamlessly," Piazza said.

Kitchen remodels can be disruptive to families, who have to spend days eating takeout or using the microwave to prepare meals. "We try to least inconvenience the clients as we can," Piazza said. Venturing behind the walls and floors of old houses can be in adventure, discovering things built before codes. "You're amazed even that some stuff even stands," said Piazza.

The company also helps clients find building lots. Sometimes, people chose the wrong piece of land and end up paying for a \$30,000 foundation, Piazza said.

Bill Inman, the project manager for the custom home division, has worked for Piazza Construction for 30 years. Last year, the home he built for himself was entered in the SICBA Home Tour for Skagit and Island counties, and won nine awards. Among the features is a movie room. ■