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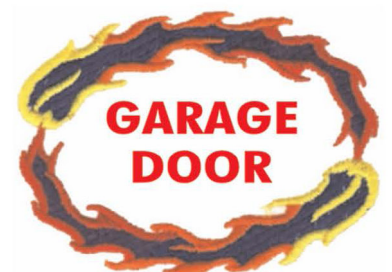


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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Giselle Bernard
Publisher

If you recall, last month I included an article entitled "Ratna's Seasonal Art Features Botanical Art on Ceramic Tiles." It was an article introducing Ratna Dalal and her beautiful botanical design collection. I learned that the link to the company's store address and Instagram account was incorrect. Please make note that you may view Ratan's Seasonal Art at https://www.zazzle.com/ratnas_seasonal_art or <https://www.instagram.com/ratnadala/>

I would like to also draw your attention to our Business Directory on page 20. Please note that I personally endorse these businesses. All listed in this directory have been either endorsed by builders that have been referred to me by those in the industry or they have been vetted by having passed a background check.

Also, I am looking to invite and recruit outstanding companies that serve the builders in the industry to join us as a team member in our monthly, category-exclusive



networking group meeting. If interested, don't hesitate to give me a call. This is an awesome opportunity for businesses looking to grow.

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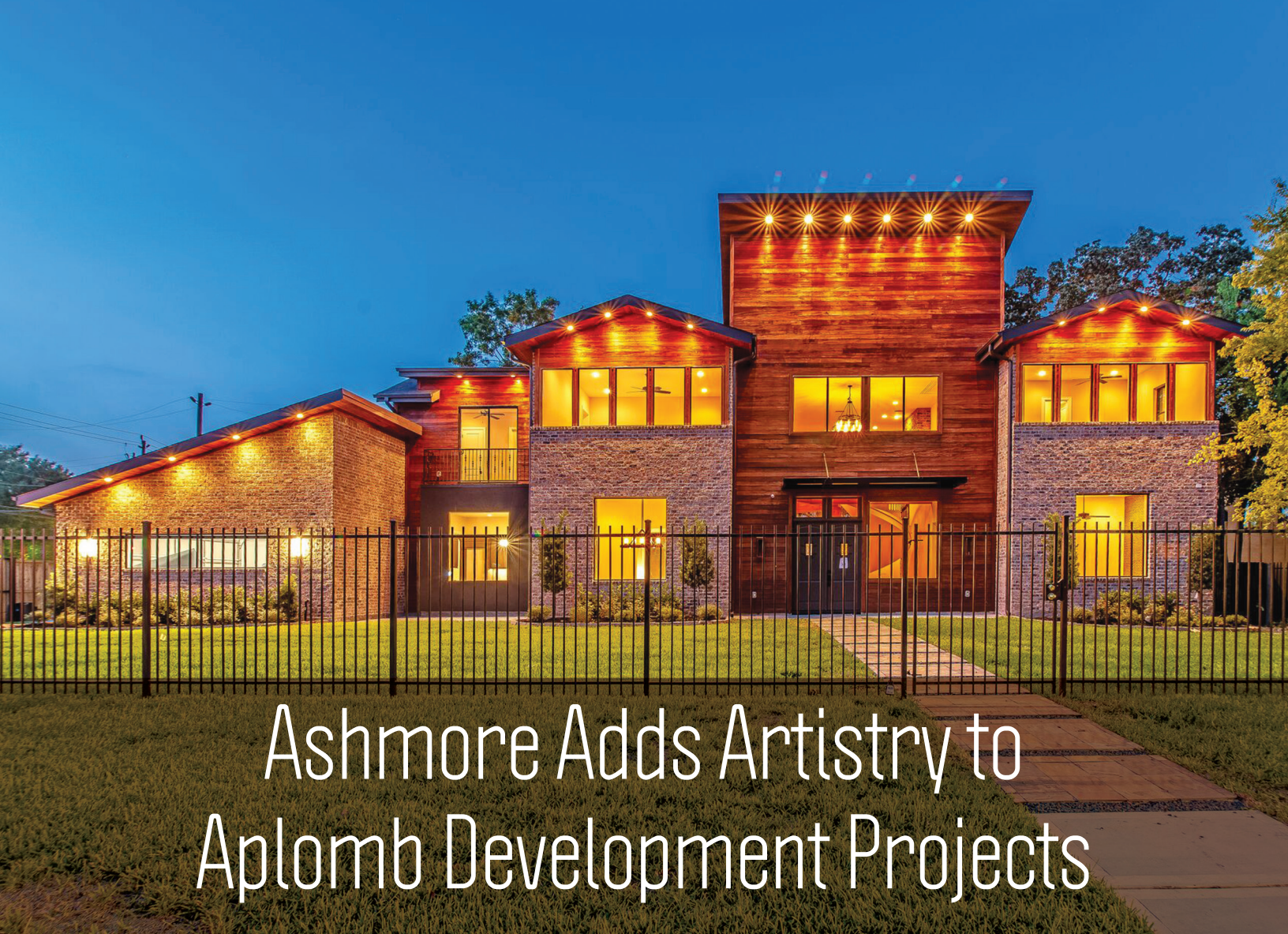
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Ashmore Adds Artistry to Aplomb Development Projects

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

An artist's eye. A builder's skill. A psychologist's insight. An out-of-the-box thinker. That's the description of Mike Ashmore, president of Aplomb Development Co., a design/build firm.

Ashmore, who focuses his work on new construction and remodeling projects in The Houston Heights, is fascinated by design. He said local builders don't pay enough attention to design in general, waiting for new design trends to filter from New York and California to Texas. He believes it is critical to stay at the forefront of design to have the greatest impact on potential home buyers.

Current design trends include using exotic woods from rain forests and Africa on elevations, exposing brick and finishing floors in concrete. He noted that a "steampunk aesthetic" with elements that could have been in a castle will help sell a house in Houston quickly.

A realtor in addition to being a builder for more than 20 years, Mike has learned that a property must check five boxes to sell. The first is curb appeal, the second is the front

door entry, the third is the kitchen, the fourth is the master suite, and the fifth is more nebulous, "where the savvy thrive and the lazy stave." Mike said it can be a great use of the outside space or an elongated, collapsing glass door, or a sexy pool or three-dimension interior walls. It can also be "hitting a home run at integrated design." Good design is a factor in checking all five of these boxes.

"A house is a two-dimensional space. But the third dimension, impacted by artistry and design, are those elements that make someone laugh and cry and get emotionally invested in a house."

But emotions can also become a factor in a new construction or remodeling project. Ashmore keeps the clients on track. "I'm fairly adept on my feet. I do really well with people by keeping everybody calm, cool and collected."

Ashmore especially enjoys speculative development because he can put his special touch on those projects. "I take pleasure in design; it's a way to separate myself from



the competition.” He typically creates the plans in CAD (computer-assisted design) software, then turns them over to Cecilia Gerber, an architect also based in The Heights. He makes all of the finish selections on these projects, but he works with Missy Stewart, an interior designer in The

Heights, on other projects.

Aplomb Development completes 20-25 projects a year between speculative development, remodels and

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Dialogue with a Designer

Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID

International Flooring knows that dreams, reality and inspiration make a house a home. It also knows that an interior designer or interior design firm often becomes an integral part of this process. As a National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA)-certified company, International Flooring takes great pride in working with some of the finest professionals in the Houston market, providing the best quality wood flooring and carpets available and superb customer service. International Flooring offers its clients a private showroom full of exotic wood floors not found in retail showrooms. This month International Flooring speaks with Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID.

*Mary Lynn Mabray was raised in the Texas Panhandle, the daughter of a rancher/farmer and a housewife. She has written a cookbook based on her mother's storied recipes, entitled *Mama's Made in Texas Desserts and Mama's Treasured Recipes* on Facebook. Mary Lynn graduated from the Art Institute of Houston in interior design and from the University of California Los Angeles's professional program in screenwriting. She ascribes to her own design theory that "less is more but 'more' certainly doesn't hurt unless it's in poor taste." She has one daughter, an accomplished acupuncturist, a wonderful son-in-law and two hilarious grandsons that make her life and that of her sister's, a true joy.*

International Flooring: *What motivated you to go into the interior design field?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: My mother was a very talented

woman. She was the Martha Stewart of our farming and ranching town in the Texas Panhandle. My love of interior design came from her admiration and study of beautiful yet simple things. There was literally nothing she couldn't do –

from designing two still-timeless homes to gardening and cooking. She was an amazing woman that I greatly admired and wanted to follow in her footsteps. She made people happy. I wanted to do the same.

International Flooring: *How has the field of interior design changed since you graduated?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: Technology and the advent of the internet has changed design. In many ways, it has elevated the profession, giving us thousands of options, and in other ways it has made it impersonal to the point that many people with little training and a modicum of taste or exposure now call themselves designers.

I'm "old school." I still work with a T-square and drafting board. I find that "old school" approach causes one to really think about the project, the flow of traffic in the residence and, most especially, the actual function of the home. When one is using a drafting pencil, one is forced to actually use one's imagination. A residence comes alive for me when I have a drafting pencil in hand.

International Flooring: *How can an experienced interior designer help a custom home builders or remodeling contractors with their building or remodeling projects?*

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Mary Lynn Mabray: It's always my intention to bring light, life and happiness into a project and help the builder's clients see their space in a new and inviting way. I love to create the unexpected. That's what makes a project truly special. I enjoy being part of a team whose mission it is to make the client's life easier.

I recently had a "Harvey" client tell me that she and her husband were so happy with the renovation of their home after such a devastating disaster that they never wanted to leave. They were truly happy. I think that was one of the nicest compliments I've ever received as a designer. It made my efforts, and that of a talented builder, worthwhile.



International Flooring: What sets you apart from other designers?

Mary Lynn Mabray: I listen to the clients' hopes and dreams. Really listen. I study how they interact with their family or lifestyle. I give them what they want...not what I think they need. I don't ascribe to a particular style for that very reason because every person is different and doesn't deserve to live in a "cookie cutter" environment. They deserve to live their life in an environment that makes them happy, gives them joy and peace. In my view, that's what interior design is all about, creating peace and happiness.

International Flooring: What has been your most challenging project and why?

Mary Lynn Mabray: Many years ago, it was my privilege to be the designer to a very young widow and her children and help them recover from the loss of the most important man in their lives, her husband and their father. I helped guide them through the grieving process by involving the entire family in the selection of materials, fabric and furnishings as we rebuilt their lives during the building process of a 7,500-sq.-ft. house near Kemah. The house was an Old South, Louisiana-style home. I listened to each of their preferences and chose color, practicality and comfort as my allies. I wanted the house to feel relaxed and safe, but most importantly, I wanted that house to be a place of sanctuary and hope.



There are many times, throughout the course of a project, that a designer becomes a friend, a psychologist and a surrogate parent. The residence took almost a year to build, and in that time it was wonderful to see spirits lifted and laughter return. The most exciting moment came when I installed a custom portrait with the entire family, including the deceased husband and father that had been painstakingly drawn and created by renowned artist and sculptor Willy Wang. This was a very special charcoal drawing as the family didn't have a formal memory of the man they loved so much. There wasn't a dry eye in

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Builders Post-Tension Offers 'Mom and Pop' Customer Service

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

“Big company expertise with mom and pop customer service” is the way Greg Tomlinson, president of Builders Post-Tension (BPT), explains his company’s approach since its founding in 2001. “We’re the kind of operation where a construction superintendent can call the guy who owns the company to solve a problem,” said Tomlinson. “We know there are going to be issues in any construction project, it is just the nature of this business. We strive to solve problems as quickly as possible to avoid jobsite slow-downs. BPT always has the materials and services our customers need.”

Builders Post-Tension extrudes and fabricates its cable from raw strand. Its certified plants have been PTI-certified since its founding, Tomlinson noted proudly. “We not only meet but exceed the guidelines from the Post-Tensioning Institute.”

In addition to PT cable, the company’s inventory includes rebar, wire mesh, stirrups, corner bars, tape, poly, mastic, anchor bolts, mudsills, and most other tie-down

products. In addition to PT slabs, it also sells materials for conventionally reinforced slabs. BPT’s field services include coordinating stressing operations with partnering engineering companies. They also track pour dates daily to ensure cables get stressed according to the engineer’s specifications. BPT’s experienced staff can install post tension slabs and perform post tension repairs for highrise and slab-on-ground projects. They will even calibrate other companies’ stressing equipment.

BPT has offices in Houston and Dallas/Ft. Worth. The company serves the state of Texas and beyond and is able to ship across the continental United States and into Mexico. “BPT’s shipments include all of the necessary concrete reinforcement materials to get the customer’s foundation completed in a timely manner,” Tomlinson said.

Much of the company’s business comes from singlefamily and multi-family home construction, but it also provides

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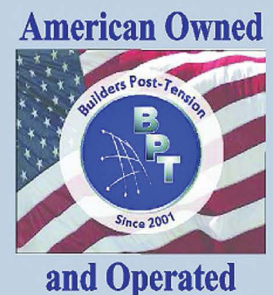
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commercial work. About 80 percent of the work is on residential projects, which range from \$900,000 to \$1.3 million and 3,000 to 4,000 sq. ft. Aplomb works on a lot of tear-downs, but it also tackles historical renovations and other remodeling projects, which are always part of the demand among The Heights' homeowners.

His clients are often young professionals between the ages of 35 and 50. He said he is just as likely to pick and choose his clients as they are to pick and choose their contractor. He wants his clients to share his artistic and design aesthetic so they will be satisfied with his work. "My clients come through referral from trusted sources in my network."

Ashmore also spends about 20 percent of his time on commercial projects, such as the recently completed 10,000-sq.-ft. strip center that contains a bicycle shop, two restaurants and a gym. That too is in The Heights.

Although he grew up in The Woodlands, Mike appreciates The Heights, an area he knows well because he also lives there with his wife. He especially enjoys the walkability of the compact neighborhood, running on the streets. Because he is out in the neighborhood daily, he said he doesn't need to advertise. "I have enough work because of [Hurricane]

Harvey. I can pick and choose my projects."

But Ashmore did not set out to be a builder and realtor. While he was in college studying film, he planned to write and direct movies. However, a weekend rendezvous on a trip back home resulted in his becoming a father unexpectedly. He left college and worked in several jobs, including a stint at Enron. "That job was never what I was meant to do. I was doing the Devil's work."

Eventually Mike became a project manager with a production builder. Realizing that he wanted to become a builder himself, he knew he needed someone with greater expertise and took his trainer, Craig, with him when he started Aplomb Development. He chose the name Aplomb because it means grace under pressure, an attitude he appreciates and always tries to adopt.

Ashmore anticipates a massive slowdown in the luxury home market within five to 10 years because interest rates are rising, building materials' costs are skyrocketing because of the recently imposed tariffs and inventory of unsold houses is stacking up to a 14-month supply. "I must be incredibly selective in price and location of future projects."

Mike learned several lessons during the 2008 economic downturn. "I took my arrogance right into the collapse.



The risk can be tremendous with speculative projects. I had \$13-14 million in debt. I was accepting any random project, what I call 'mailbox money' to keep afloat."

One of those projects was flipping a bed-and-breakfast in the Caribbean. He learned to diversify his assets, however, and plans to return to the Caribbean to sell boats and planes in five or six years. "I think retirement is highly underrated. I have enough passions to keep from getting bored."

However, it's hard to believe that Mike will immediately kick back and enjoy the slower pace of the Caribbean. He calls himself a "grinder," currently working from 7 in the morning to 8 or 9 at night, seven days a week. But he's reinvented himself before. The next version of Mike Ashmore may simply be a simpler life.

To learn more about Aplomb Development Co., contact Mike Ashmore at 1234MikeAshmore@gmail.com or call 713-997-9433.

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Anyone Up for a Game of Whack-a-Mole?

By Burk Moreland

Have you noticed that we live in a world full of reactions? In fact, in this digital world where everyone has instant access to information, sometimes it seems that “over-reaction” is becoming the norm.

It doesn't matter if the information is true, untrue or half-true; we often over-react as if it's all true. There are so many opinions and new ideas coming at us from the moment we open our eyes in the morning that by the time we are finally able to go to bed, half the time we can't sleep because we are so overwhelmed with all of the data we process in a single day.

It seems to me that this constant – and unavoidable – data feed creates a situation similar to the old carnival game of “whack-a-mole.” This old game begins with about six empty holes. Once the game begins, a little mole starts popping out of different holes at random times. The object of the game is to “whack” the mole on the head with a mallet so he will disappear again. However, as soon as you whack one, another one pops up, and the game continues.

Watching people participate in this game provides an interesting study on how our brains deal with stress and pressure. For example, some people start screaming and feverishly pound on the top of the machine with the little mallet without paying any attention to what they are hitting. Instead, they just swing as fast as they can, and they hit whatever they hit.

Other players get very quiet and wait patiently for each mole to pop up. These more patient players only swing at known targets.

Either approach can yield results, but there are disadvantages to both. Wildly swinging at things can waste energy and cause collateral damage to everything and everyone around you! On the other hand, while waiting for each mole to pop up is a more efficient use of energy and not as dangerous to your surroundings, it can seem very slow and frustrating because you must wait for the mole to appear.

Does anyone out there feel like I just described what you do all day, every day? It seems like for many of us, each

workday is one long frustrating game. Everyday we are asked to do more. Everyday there are more moles popping up at random intervals. We don't know when they will appear, and we don't know where.

The question is, how are you dealing with the pressure that increases with every new task, every new request, every new idea? Are you wildly swinging at everything as fast as you can so that you can complete everything, or are you completing only a handful of tasks that land on your desk because that handful was all you had time to hit? Either approach can cause problems.

The good news about most of our personal “whack-a-mole” games is that if you invest a little time studying them, there are patterns in what we do. If you learn the patterns, you can become the player that knows which “mole” is going to pop up next and actually whack it while it's on the way up. You can stop reacting to the job and become proactive instead.

But, you may ask, how do I figure out the pattern?

They say experience is the best teacher—the more you do certain tasks, for example, the more likely you will be to figure out some of the patterns inherent in those tasks. Similarly, the more you work with certain people, the more likely you will be to figure out the most successful ways of interacting with them.

But some of your success at managing these random “moles” that keep popping up can actually be achieved with good time management skills. Example: If you know you are going to get a call from particular clients every day at some random time, take control of that situation so that it is no longer random. Call the clients early when you are ready for the call and have your information in front of you. Give the clients the info they want before they ask instead of waiting for them to ask for it. Do it on your schedule so you are not resetting and restarting constantly due to interruptions.

Set appointments for yourself to take care of certain tasks at certain times so that you control more of your time

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Continued from Page 8

the house when the portrait was hung over the fireplace. Happiness reigned high on the agenda that day.

International Flooring: *How do you begin the materials selection process when working with builders' and remodelers' clients?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: I listen to the clients. I listen to the builder, and only then, after I am certain I understand all their needs, do I begin the process of creating their dream.

International Flooring: *What are some common mistakes made by builders and homeowners?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: The single most common mistake is misunderstanding history and rushing the process. I've been a designer for almost 30 years. Design has changed a lot during that time frame; but what has not changed is the history of architecture, good taste, timelessness and the marriage of the three. It is possible to mix styles. It is not practical to not understand how and why styles go together...what works and what doesn't. I see that particular element or lack thereof in many new homes. Builders and or architects don't take history into account.

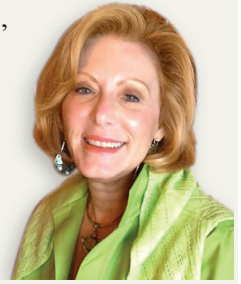
International Flooring: *Speaking about staying current, how to you keep yourself up to date with all the design trends happening in the industry today?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: I love to watch HGTV and see how a particular designer might deal with a design problem and think about ways I might have met the same challenge. In the end, though, I always go back to history and books about design. In those pages, there is true wisdom. The older books are the best. I do my best to stay away from trendy styles because they don't last. They aren't timeless and they won't be standing in another 100 years.

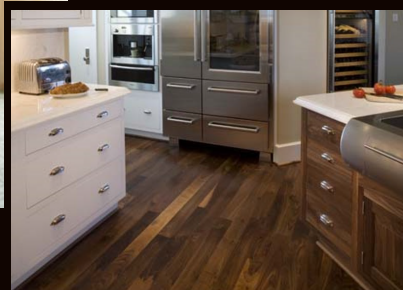
International Flooring: *What is your favorite design style?*

Mary Lynn Mabray: My favorite style is an eclectic mixture of French Country, Italian, English, American Indian, Texas Primitives, Modern and Funk – things that are unexpected in an interior. They are timeless in nature and rooted in history.

To contact Mary Lynn Mabray, ASID, visit MaryLynnInteriorDesign.com, call 713-203-4047 or email marylynnmabray@me.com. Mary Lynn Interior Design is located at 2822 Briarhurst, No. 36, Houston, TX 77057.



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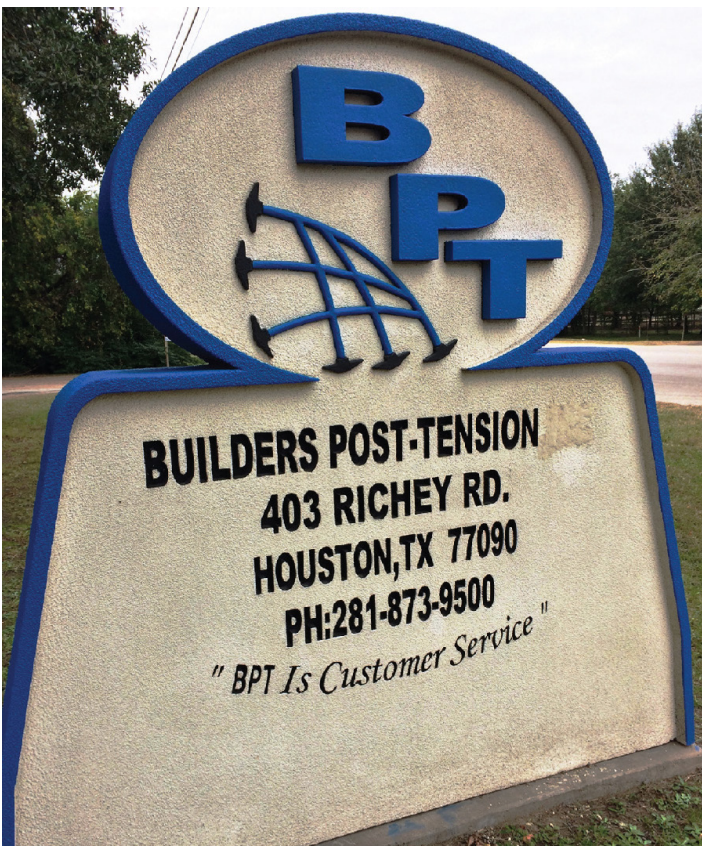
BPT's 2015 sales hit \$25 million in Houston and \$7 million in Dallas/Fort Worth. The average price of one of its packages is \$2500.

Brian Q. Conley, Tomlinson's business partner, oversees the company's sales operation while Tomlinson focuses on the day-to-day operations, and both worked together at another post-tension company. "It's a perfect marriage," said Tomlinson. "We share the same philosophy and the same goals but have different strengths." They each have almost 30 years of experience in the business and their Dallas office principals add even more.

BPT employs 50 people in the Houston office and another 15 in the Dallas office. Those employees work in accounting, inside sales, outside sales, estimating, fabricating and field services.

Tomlinson shared that 60-70 percent of the shop and office employees have been with Builders Post-Tension since Day 1. "We don't have a lot of turnover. We think the only way to make customers happy is to make employees happy. We don't micromanage. We believe in hiring the right people, giving them the tools they need to succeed and letting them do their jobs."

Builders Post-Tension also rewards all of its employees by paying them regular bonuses when the company is doing well. "It's the 'Circle of Life' for us. I'm a big believer in karma. Being honest, above board and doing things the right way will come back to you. Happy, contented employees will provide outstanding customer service





and make for happy customers,” Tomlinson said. And the company’s motto is “BPT is customer service.

In fact, what Tomlinson likes best about his job is taking care of customers and having happy employees. “I get a lot of satisfaction from that. I’m very proud of having happy, long-term employees. The employees have our back, and they take care of our customers. That’s a big deal to me.”

On the flip side, Tomlinson said it can be a challenge to keep up that high level of customer service, getting things done in a timely manner and making sure customers have what they need. “But this is our commitment and this is what defines us,” he added.

During the next five years, Builders Post-Tension plans to grow their market share in both of their locations. Dallas/Fort Worth is centrally located in the U.S. and is ideal for shipping its products all over the country. Tomlinson explained that the company just bought a rebar stirrup machine for its operations to better serve its customers all over the U.S.

Tomlinson concluded by touching on one of his favorite topics, charity. “Builders Post-Tension supports a lot of charities all over Texas,” he said, “but three of our favorites that we go out of our way to help in our local community are the Greater Houston Builders Association’s Adopt-a-Family, Operation Finally Home and Home Aid Houston. We are a big believer in giving back to our community.”

For more information, contact Greg Tomlinson of Builders Post-Tension at 403 Richey Road, Houston, TX 77090 or at 281-873-9500. The company website is www.builderspt.com.



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versus allowing others to do it for you. Just remember that in order to do this, you have to start anticipating what needs to happen next. In other words, you have to learn which “mole” is popping up next so you are no longer just reacting to someone else’s schedule or decision.

This skill, this ability to be proactive, is not easy. It will require commitment on your part, and, even when you master it, it will not make all of your problems go away. What it will do is give you the ability to handle more “moles” more efficiently and with less frustration.

We live in a world in which a 10-second response time from the internet is too long. We live in a world in which text messages and emails arrive in clusters of 20 and 30 an hour. Your coworkers and employees, customers and

friends, even and especially, your family, all want some of your time. They are constantly “popping up” to get your attention.

So when you begin to feel overwhelmed and find yourself swinging the proverbial mallet as fast as you can, hoping to hit something, take a breath and remember that you have a choice. With experience and careful planning, you don’t have to keep swinging as fast as you can. You can be in control and only swing when you decide it’s time—it’s up to you.



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