

# THE METROPOLITAN BUILDER

## INSIDE STORY



Greymark Construction Offers  
'Wow' Remodeling

Greymark Construction | Houston, Texas



# Greymark Construction Offers 'Wow' Remodeling

Refrigerators have special significance for Leslie King. As a college student selling (or leasing?) dormitory refrigerators, they gave Leslie her first “real” income. Now, as owner of Houston’s Greymark Construction, a design/build firm, refrigerators and their placement are a focal point for a business that specializes in kitchen, bathroom and whole house remodeling, improving the livability of a home.

King prefers remodeling “because we get to go in and do the fun stuff. We get to do the ‘wow’ that the homeowner couldn’t afford when they built the house.” Greymark does about 40 projects a year.

With the average cost of a kitchen at \$75,000 without appliances and the average cost of a bath at \$35,000 for a home that sells for \$500,000, homeowners get more than their money’s worth at re-sale with remodeling, she said. For example, Greymark just increased the value of a \$1.2 million home to at least \$1.4 million by renovating the kitchen and whole first floor for \$185,000.

Being a woman can be an advantage in the male-dominated construction industry, King said. “I understand how a kitchen should work because I cook. I ask things like if someone is right- or left-handed so we can place the dishwasher in the best spot. I also ask How many pairs of shoes, purses, belts or scarves do you have? (when doing a closet). Men don’t think of things like that.”

King said she is likely to get jobs when the wife makes the

decision on a remodeling project, but is likely to lose a job to a male competitor when it involves “engineering,” such as an addition to a house, when a man makes the decisions.

But King is comfortable competing against men because she’s been doing it for most of her professional life. After earning her degree in marketing from Sam Houston State University, Leslie determined that she wanted to earn \$1000 a month and be able to set her own hours. Her dad encouraged her to look to the oil fields for opportunity. With two job offers, she joined IMCO which was a division of Halliburton., in September 1979 where she was one of 10 women among a couple of thousand men on the payroll. She also sold recycled pipe thread protectors for a while and worked as a restaurant management trainee for Marriott Hotels for two years.

But it was her year selling real estate that really shaped her future. Divorced, with two small daughters to support, King started buying older homes in 1992 to remodel and resell while selling properties for others. She learned construction techniques from the “two old codgers” she hired as carpenters. Although some men presumed that she couldn’t understand technical elements of construction because she didn’t wear a tool belt, she asked a lot of questions and learned everything she could.

She said what really helped her improve her skills was joining the Remodelers Council in 1997 and a peer-review





groups, Remodelers Advantage. She now meets with 11 other remodelers from across the country twice a year to sharpen her skills.

Back when she started in 1995, she heard comments that she didn't know what she was doing, but those comments have disappeared over the years, she said.

No doubt Greymark's many awards have had something to do with those comments disappearing. Greymark Construction won the Greater Houston Builders Association Grand Remodeler prize from 2010 and 2015, in addition to the Chrysalis Award for the nation's best Universal Design. Greymark received a Texas Lone Star award for Best Historic Renovation.

Also, the Better Business Bureau gave Greymark its award for excellence from 2009 through 2019 in recognition of its A+ rating. Texas Association of Builders gave Greymark its Star Awards for Best Whole House Remodel over \$500,000 and Best Kitchen over \$100,000. Other national recognitions are being named one of Remodeling Magazine's Big 50 and Best Whole House Remodel from Professional Remodeler Magazine.

With so much crystal on the shelves, nowadays almost all of Greymark's clients ask if theirs will be an award-winning job! "Everybody wants to be award-winning," she adds.

Leslie King is now recognized as a leader in the construction

industry. Past president of the Remodelers Council of the Greater Houston Builders Association, Leslie was also president of the Greater Houston Builders Association in 2014, the second woman and the second remodeler to lead the organization long dominated by male custom builders.

King created Greymark Express in 2011 as a way to weather the economic downturn and to expand the company's market area beyond Houston's Inner Loop and I-10 West Corridor into the suburbs. Unique to the Houston market, Greymark Express promises to complete a bathroom remodel in two weeks if no plumbing fixtures or walls have to be moved. "In the down economy small projects were the only thing homeowners could afford. Greymark Express allowed us to get our foot in door with clients, which is huge." Those bath remodeling projects were \$15,000-\$20,000 and up. People are now spending more money, King said.

But when the economy soured in 2009, most custom builders became remodelers to keep their businesses afloat, she said. However, they didn't realize how different remodeling was from ground-up building. Suddenly their clients were around every corner, watching them as they worked, because they were living in the project, not viewing it from the street.

These custom builders asked King what was the secret to remodeling. "Communication is a huge part. That and listening."

While hearing has been something of a challenge for Leslie



who has life-long severe hearing loss, listening comes easily to her. King keeps Greymark focused on its clients' satisfaction. Its goal is to keep its customers happy every day. She said they do that by anticipating problems and eliminating surprises as well as finishing projects on time and on budget. She cites 90 percent of business coming from referrals and repeat customers.

She uses BuilderTrend software, updated by her field people, so that clients can track their projects' progress on-line. "Clients love it," she said, because people are becoming more technically focused.

Since 2009 she has used GuildQuality, an independent survey company, to track Greymark's customer satisfaction results. Greymark's website links viewers to the results so that they can read the comments for themselves.

"People hire us because we know what we're doing and they trust us. Those are huge things," she stated. "We're being hired for a service, for our expertise. We're able to establish trust from the beginning."

King refocused her business in 2004 from just building to design-build because she could control the costs that way. "If a client brings us architectural plans, it is usually outside the client's budget. For example, one project's budget was \$200,000, but came in at \$400,000. If we design it, it stays within the client's budget. We make sure we anticipate every

expense. It's a win-win for the client."

Leslie said she prefers design work but also does and sales. "My job is to give ideas and to anticipate the best operating function" to meet the homeowners' needs. There is an Architect on staff along with an estimator, interior designer, office manager and marketing person. Her oldest daughter who is a CPA has come on board as Vice-President and will be taking over the business in about 5 years. The rest of the staff is in the field.

One reason King chose Greymark as the company name back in 1994 is because it lent itself to succession, which is something she thinks about these days. She now has a succession plan in place with her daughter and looks forward to watching her take it to the next level of success.

Greymark and its founder, Leslie King, have made their mark on the Houston building scene. And it's an award-winning mark. Just look at all of the crystal on the shelves if you don't think so.



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